

EXCERPTS (a draft)

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People

Books and Ideas

Death

Tradition

Politics

Reason and the Mind

Women, Gender, Sex

Morality

Superstition

PEOPLE

Religion, it is said, is like money: people who have it don't talk about it.

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David Hume¹, a remarkable intellect and a man of pristine moral integrity, was a quiet non-believer.² His friend, Adam Smith, the economist, noted that in character Hume was "nearly perfect." Another friend, the writer Boswell, was himself disturbed by Hume's Stoic acceptance of death.

Hume's death was the death of a philosopher, in the spirit of Marcus Aurelius, who counseled "to wait with good grace for the end, whether it be extinction or translation."

Christian upbringing did not prepare Boswell to understand this kind of death.

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Giacomo Leopardi,³ the pessimist of pessimists, the sickly hunchback, remarkable at once for his extraordinary intellect (by age 16 he had taught himself Greek and Latin and several modern languages) and for his loving, gentle and courteous nature. But his most distinguishing quality may have been his severe intellectual integrity.

"The human race," he wrote,⁴ which has believed and will go on believing so many idiocies, will never believe either that it knows nothing, or that it is nothing, or that it has nothing to hope for."

Leopardi is not for everyone.

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¹ Scottish philosopher and historian, 1711-1766

² At the urging of his friends, his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion was deliberately published posthumously.

³ Italian poet, scholar and philosopher (1798-1837)

⁴ in "Tristan and a Friend"

Uriel Acosta⁵, an intriguing figure, born into a Marrano⁶ family, returned to Judaism, fled to Amsterdam, became a rationalist, and was a precursor and inspirer of Spinoza. Shortly before shooting himself he wrote Exemplar Humanae Vitae, sketching his career.

Uriel - Hebrew - "the fire of God"

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Tasunko Witko, a true American hero, known to us wasichus⁷ as "Crazy Horse."⁸ "Crazy" in Dakota doesn't mean "insane" but rather "inspired" or "transported." He foresaw the cultural genocide already taking place against his people and refused to have anything to do with the whites, even refusing to have his photo taken. Eventually, he was treacherously assassinated by the whites, who feared his power, and his body was carried off by his parents to be buried in secret.

What more eloquent tribute can there be than Black Elk's tribute to Crazy Horse: "It does not matter where his body lies, for it is grass; but where his spirit is, it will be good to be." (Crazy Horse would have not been surprised to know that a century after his death some enterprising whites would seek to name a beer after him.)

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Andrei Sakharov, the Russian nuclear physicist, if we were living in the ancient world, would now have been elevated to divinity to take his place in the sparkling firmament. The man who once stood beside Brezhnev on the Kremlin rostrum ended up in exile. Such moral integrity is a gift of the gods.

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Yeshayahu Leibowitz, a very old Israeli and an outspoken critic of Israeli policy toward the Arabs. Early on he warned his countrymen against the occupation of Arab territories. It is of more than passing interest that Leibowitz' expertise is in the

⁵ 1585-1640

⁶ Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity to escape persecution

⁷ Dakota for "white man"

⁸ 1842? - 1877

sciences (biochemistry and neurophysiology) rather than the sacred books.

When the rabbis refuse to utter the name of "God," they obey the letter of the law. Leibowitz obeys the spirit of the law.

Epicurus, philosopher of Athens, died 270 B.C. We can be grateful that the books of Diogenes Laertius survived to give us this description of this great man, defamed first among the philosophers, then vilified by the Christians:

"For our philosopher has abundance of witnesses to attest to his unsurpassed goodwill to all men— his native land, which honored him with statues in bronze; his friends, so many in number that they could hardly be counted by whole cities."

Diogenes also writes of Epicurus' filial devotion, his piety toward the gods, his gentleness and generosity.

As for the libel that Epicurus and his followers were hedonists and sybarites, Diogenes writes:

"In his correspondence he himself mentions that he was content with plain bread and water. And again: 'Send me a little pot of cheese, that, when I like, I may fare sumptuously.'"

BOOKS AND IDEAS

Swedish proverb: A room without books is like a body without a soul.¹

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Are there that many books worth reading at all? In a novel of the Swede Sven Delblanc² there is an account of an 18th century battle between the Prussians and the Austrians. He portrays the comic/cretinoid generals, the absurd loss of life, the futility of it all. But if you've already read All Quiet on the Western Front, Delblanc has little new to teach. The same old tale is merely dressed up a little differently, in another language.

What can we possibly say about humanity that already hasn't been said more perceptively and elegantly by a dozen poets and philosophers? Namely, human beings are wretched and glorious, whose origin and end are shrouded in mystery. Punctum.

Nihil novi sub sole.³ If you're seeking insight, 99.9% of what you read is embellishment of the obvious.

"Of what value is a book," noted Nietzsche, "that doesn't take us beyond books?"

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Perhaps the sequence of wisdom runs like this: ignorance— many books— few books— no books.

Schopenhauer compares life to a tapestry. During the first half of our life, we see the normal outward side; during the second half we see the reverse side, which is not nearly so beautiful but all the more instructive since we see how all the threads are woven together.

The older you get, the more selective you become in what you read, the more difficult it is to find something new which is

¹ Ett rum utan böcker är som en kropp utan själ.

² Prästkappan

³ "Nothing new under the sun." Ecclesiastes 1:9

truly instructive. If we were to reach that ideal stage of true sagacity, we could abandon books altogether.

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Goethe: It makes a great deal of difference whether I read for pleasure and stimulation or for knowledge and instruction.⁴

A professor of literature of mine once noted, with wonderful self-irony, "We're strolling through the lovely flower garden of German literature."⁵

That is to say, we're smelling this and that theme, savoring this or that metaphor, marvelling at a happy turn of phrase. How delightful! How exquisite! How charming! The Latin word "florilegium" (culling flowers) expresses it.

Seneca writes of a certain scholar Didymus who wrote 4,000 books, investigating the birthplace of Homer, the mother of Aeneas, and other such questions, "the answers to which, if found, were forthwith to be forgotten." ⁶

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Petrarch: Any other pleasure than to learn I do not feel.⁷

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Above my Britannica hangs a poster of a golden statue of Gautama, smiling inwardly with compassion at my libido sciendi⁸.

⁴ Es ist ein grower Unterschied, ob ich lese zu Genuft und Belebung oder su Erkenntnis und Belehrung.

⁵ Wir spazieren durch den schonen Blumengarten der deutschen Literatur.

⁶ Moral Epistles, 88

⁷ Altro diletto, che 'mparar, non provo- Cited in Schopenhauer's Aphorismen

⁸ lust for knowledge

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A recent critique of Christianity⁹ burdens the readers with concepts like "Wittgensteinian fideism" and "classical foundationalism," comparing Authority A to Authority B and so forth. The author, as one might expect, is a university professor, one of those academic scribblers Nietzsche called "ant workers," those who do the spadework for the genuine philosophers.

None of the first-rate philosophical critiques of Christianity (Voltaire, Nietzsche) were written professorially. Nor is Bertrand Russell's¹⁰ second-rate critique academic in tone.

Schopenhauer's works are suffused by citations from modern and ancient authors, not to buttress an argument, however, but rather to adorn his exposition with poetic and literary illustrations. The lines he cites from Sophocles, the Spanish proverbs and all the rest are lovely gems which make his books all the more delightful.

The great Epicurus of Athens wrote "three hundred rolls," according to Diogenes Laertius, which "contain not a single citation from other authors." He was his own authority.

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Lichtenberg:

"The man was not a great light but a great candlestick. He dealt in the opinions of others."¹¹

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Are there any naive college freshmen who assume that the professors of philosophy and religion are more elevated in their personal lives than the chemists or linguists? If so, they will soon be disabused of their naivete. For most professors, of any field, lack what Schopenhauer calls "Ernst," that is, "seriousness."¹² They are not serious about the quest

⁹ The Case Against Christianity, by Michael Martin

¹⁰ Why I Am Not a Christian

¹¹ Ein grosses Licht war der Mann eben nicht, aber ein grosser Leuchter. Er handelt mit anderer Leute Meinungen.

¹² See his essay on "University Philosophy."

for truth and goodness. Ethical culture is not for them a priority.

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It was Mencken who wrote of men "free from the mental timorousness and conformity which go inevitably with school-teaching."

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Acquiring the reading knowledge of a new language requires a great deal of time which could be spent in reading many worthwhile things in translation. Life is short. In reading Aeschylus, for example, the small measure of additional insight possibly gained by reading the original over a good translation is hardly worth the time taken to learn Greek.

On the other hand, as Cervantes noted, a translation is the reverse side of a tapestry. This insight is clear to anyone who has acquired the ability to read a first-rate foreign author in the original. After such an experience, one will read any translation with a nagging feeling of dissatisfaction.

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The first semester student of Greek can easily discover how poor the Greek of the New Testament is, and right in the first chapter of the Gospel of John- which is standard fare for elementary Greek students. These grammatical errors can be easily explained to someone familiar with languages:

Students of German know that certain prepositions govern certain cases, depending on whether the preposition indicates motion (in die Stadt - accusative case - into the city) or indicates location (in der Stadt - dative - in[side] the city). In Greek it's the same; accusative case indicating motion towards, dative case showing location.

The author of John has problems with these prepositional objects. His use is not an idiosyncrasy of koine Greek as opposed to classical Greek. Nor is it apparently simply an "irregularity," as some Greek grammars may point out. It's simply bad Greek.

In the first chapter of John, two prepositional phrases with the preposition "in" [en] ("the only begotten son who is in the bosom of the father" and "the spirit descending like a dove, and it abode upon him") both have the accusative objects rather than the dative.

The verbs "to be" and "to abide" simply don't take an accusative object with "in," in either classical or koine Greek. Elsewhere with "abide" [menein] the Johannine author properly uses the dative object with "in."

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By modern standards, the historians of ancient Greece and Rome are clearly flawed. Herodotus, the "father of history," placed too much credibility in his sources. Xenophon, another Greek, simply chose to ignore information which didn't fit into his scheme. These men and their Roman counterparts, Livy and Tacitus, however, possessed a basic integrity and they laid the foundations for modern historiography.

It was not until the 5th century that a very different sort of historian stepped onto the world stage, a man the great Swiss historian of culture, Jakob Burckhardt, called "the first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity"¹³

Who was this man? Eusebius, the "Father of Church history." Eusebius was court historian to Constantine "the Great," the first Christian emperor.¹⁴

Voltaire tell us in his Dictionnaire that the early Christians concocted letters between Paul and Seneca. But the Latin of Seneca in these letters was, alas, God's Latin, so the forgery was obvious to any educated Latinist and the chicanery was per force abandoned.

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In Matthew 11:25 Jesus said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

In response, the 3rd century philosopher Porphyry asked whether we should therefore strive for irrationality and ignorance. Even to St. Augustine, Porphyry was "doctissimus philosophorum,"¹⁵, author of some 80 works. Today we have only

¹³ den ersten durch und durch unredlichen
Geschichtsschreiber des Altertums

¹⁴ Although Constantine was astute enough to postpone his baptism until he was on his deathbed.

¹⁵ the most learned of the philosophers

fragments. Copies of his Against the Christians were destroyed by order of the Emperor Constantine.

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The Apostle Paul wrote that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." (I Corinthians 3:19).

Goethe, in response: "If all the wisdom of the world were foolishness before God, it wouldn't be worthy the effort to become 70 years old."¹⁶

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The article on the ancient philosopher Democritus in the Oxford Classical Dictionary concludes as follows:

"Aristotle thought highly of Democritus, who approaches Aristotle himself in the volume of his writings and the breadth of his learning. The loss of his works is serious. Epicurean physics and modern materialism derive largely from him."

Indeed. Two giants of Antiquity of whose works we have virtually nothing: Democritus and Epicurus. The Stoics we can still read, all of Plato and Aristotle, but there aren't enough scraps left from Democritus or Epicurus to form a single volume in the Loeb Classical Library catalogue.

And the reason for this lamentable absence is clear: the advent of Christian emperors and the book-burnings of the 4th Century.

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Curiosity, knowledge, and intellectual development are absolutely and always in conflict with religious dogma. The more we learn, read, think and wonder, the more we question our own beliefs, the less we hold to be certain. At some point in personal growth, religious faith becomes a sacrificium intellectus¹⁷.

By virtue of his intellect and curiosity, Giordano Bruno could never remain true to the precepts of his Dominican teachers. In time his ideas threatened their view of the world and he was

¹⁶ Es ware nicht der Muhe wert, siebzig Jahre alt zu werden, wenn alle Weisheit der Welt Torheit ware vor Gott.

¹⁷ a sacrifice of the intellect

burned at the stake. This was in the year 1600, at the dawn of the modern era. He was not the only martyr to intellectual freedom.

Voltaire described his fictitious "theologian": The more he became truly wise, the more he distrusted everything he knew.¹⁸

In order to make way in the ancient world and in order to survive in the modern world, Christianity must impugn the mind. Only by defaming reason, learning and the use of the intellect can it survive.

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Luther's attitude toward "reason" was made clear in his final sermon in Wittenberg, shortly before his death, where he railed against "that damned whore reason."¹⁹

The more you read and learn, "get to the bottom of things" the more likely you are to...

"radical" from Latin "radix,, radicis" meaning root.

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Are you Christian? Read a book on Hinduism, by a Hindu. Are you American? Read a critique of America written by a German or Frenchman. Are you a white male? Read the autobiography of a black female. Are you straight? Read a book by a gay.

A good book, said Kafka., is an axe to break up the ice of the mind.²⁰

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We have Johann Gutenberg²¹ more than Martin Luther to thank for the Reformation.

¹⁸ Plus il flit veritablement savant, plus il se defia de tout ce qu'il savait.

¹⁹ "gegen die verfluchte Hure Vernunft" Pfaffenherschaft, II, 542

²⁰ Elsewhere he wrote that we should only read books which "bite and sting": Ich glaube, man sollte uberhaupt nur Bucher lesen, die einen beissen und stechen.

²¹ 15th Century inventor of moveable type

The testimony of a thousand biographies will clearly reveal that traditional religion will never survive any study which gets to the bottom of things: philosophy, psychology, cultural anthropology.

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How long would Christianity as we know it survive without confirmation classes, without the opportunity given to the official church to indoctrinate young minds before they have any experience of the larger world or the ability to reflect critically?

A sad realization: Most people evaporate like a drop of water in the palm of your hand.²² Christian Morgenstern

²² Die meisten Menschen verdunsten einem wie ein Wassertropfen in der flachen Hand

DEATH

There is some evidence for some kind of consciousness after death, at least initially. It's not something a critical person sets store on, but, if we are, at death, in some sense able to "look back" on our life we will no doubt wish we had been more adventuresome, less timid, taken more risks, not taken life so seriously.

If you arise early enough, it's a bracing tonic to step outside and to gaze up at, say, at the constellation Orion and to see Betelgeuse, whose light striking your eye has been in passage since the early 1700's. Then contemplate where you will be nearly 300 years from now. That will set your inner compass for the day. It will put everything into proper perspective.

Some people write to perpetuate themselves. Few are comfortable with the fact that within a few decades after their death no one alive will remember them. They will be, at most, a name in ink on a pedigree in a dusty box somewhere in somebody's attic.

The rage for immortality described by Unamuno¹ is another pathological manifestation of Christian culture. Unamuno mistook the disease for something innate. Christianity, as Nietzsche observed, offers the cure only after it has first created the disease.

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We are dust and a shadow.² Horace

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Leopardi:

"The time will come, when this universe, and nature herself, will be snuffed out. And as of many great kingdoms and empires of man, and their marvelous doings, that were most famous in other ages, there survives today no relic or report whatever; so of the whole world, and the infinite vicissitudes and calamities of created things, there will remain no sign; but a naked silence, and a most lofty clam, will fill the immensity of space. And so this wondrous and terrifying mystery of universal

¹Spanish philosopher, in The Tragic Sense of Life

²Pulvis et umbra sumus.

existence, ere ever it be declared or understood,, will perish and pass away."³

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From the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius:
Take a bird's eye view of the world...the vicissitudes of things coming into being, participating in being, ceasing to be. (IX, 30)

You will at once set your feet in a large room by embracing the whole Universe in your mind and including in your purview time everlasting, and by observing the rapid change in every part of everything, and the shortness of the span between birth and dissolution, and that the yawning immensity before birth is only matched by the infinity after our dissolution. (IX, 32)

Loss and change,"⁴ they are but one. Therein doth the Universal Nature take pleasure... (IX, 35)

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The Spanish cinematographer Bunuel wrote in his memoirs that his idea of paradise was to awake every ten years and read a newspaper.

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In Renaissance Italy, the Church labelled those who did not believe in an afterlife, "Epicureans." The priests were all too acquainted with the "siren charms"⁵ of Epicurus' doctrine.. Epicurus taught men not to fear death and extinction. Without the afterlife, with its rewards and terrors, what power does the Church hold over people?

³ in "Canticle of the Wild Cock"

⁴Greek; apobole, metabole

⁵ in Diogenes Laertius

TRADITION

Every tradition, even the most ancient, was at one time an innovation, resisted by those who clung to the previous tradition. But since change is the very nature of both the natural and human world, tradition in time becomes a hindrance to understanding and accepting a new state of affairs.

In religion, traditions are viewed as sacred, timeless, untouchable. But no tradition can resist change forever. Times change, societies change. As a result, much of the tension in the minds of religious people arises from the difficulty of squaring obsolete traditions with present reality.

When observable reality coincides with some aspect of their tradition, religious people trumpet the fact. When reality contradicts their tradition, they either deny the validity of the reality or they speak of "mystery" and "faith." As a last resort, they modify the tradition.

Fundamentalists, whether they be Christian, Jewish, Islamic, or Hindu, are least likely to modify the tradition. They are generally, therefore, among the most uneducated and the most dangerous of religious adherents. They are, fundamentally, at war with both their own senses and with the world at large.

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John Calvin, responding to the Copernican idea that the earth revolves around the sun, quoted from the Psalms, "...the world also is established, that it cannot be move," then went on to ask:

"Who will dare to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?"¹

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"If you fight against clear evidence," noted Epicurus, "you never can enjoy genuine peace of mind."

Genuine peace of mind. The Greek word also translates as "legitimate." Its opposite in Greek is bastard „":² There is a legitimate happiness and a bastard happiness. The legitimate happiness is one of curiosity and discovery, spirituality and

¹ in The Passion of the Western Mind, by Richard Tarnas, p 252

² qnesios and nothos, respectively

growth. The bastard happiness is founded on fear and doubt, religion and stasis. It is the happiness of the village idiot.

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"Perfect love;," said Jesus, "casts out fear." What did he mean by that, if he even said it? Whatever, Se non e vero e ben travato.³

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It was the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus (around 500 B.C.) who proposed that "All is flux, nothing stays still."⁴ This notion of continuous change and movement was adopted by the later Epicureans. A notion which is so utterly strange and threatening to us today was a commonplace among the ancient philosophers.

Marcus Aurelius, even as a Stoic philosopher, echoed Heraclitus: "The World-Cause is as a torrent, it sweeps everything along" .

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Opposed to the notion of all-pervasive change were the teachings of Plato⁵, who taught the eternal and unchanging nature of a "higher" world. In a broad sense, Christianity is the sanctification of Platonism, which ultimately triumphed (as neo-Platonism) even before Christianity came into the picture. Such is the human need for absolutes and certainties.

Christianity absorbed neo-Platonism while it fought Epicureanism tooth and nail, not so much because of the Epicurus' enthronement of pleasure as the summum bonum⁶ of this life but because of his radical embrace of total flux.

If there is a central theme of Nietzsche's philosophy, it is that everything is in the midst of change. He is a modern Heraclitus, You find this thought in the first pages of

³Ital.: If it's not the truth, it is a clever invention.

⁴Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

⁵There were three major schools among the ancient philosophers: Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Platonism

⁶"the highest good," a common philosophical expression among the ancients

Nietzsche's early work Human, All-too-human⁷ and the remainder of his writings is an elaboration of the consequences to the individual and society.

According to Rupert Sheldrake⁸, even physical "laws" are not fixed. they are merely "habits" of nature, evolved over time.

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Francis Bacon: "Truth is the daughter of Time,, not of Authority."

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It's impossible to imagine certain people poring over a religious text: Goethe, for example, or Einstein.

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A special feature of religious tradition is that it is held to be unique. The fundamentalist believes that his religion fell, as it were, from the sky and finds comparisons between his and other religions offensive.

The fundamentalist Jew never contemplates a comparison between King David and the Indian prince Asoka, or the remarkable similarity between the story of Eve and the Greek myth of Pandora. The true believer finds such comparisons first baffling, then threatening. He goes through life constantly adjusting his blinkers. Fundamentalism thrives on ignorance and isolation.

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Voltaire⁹ points out that human sacrifice was once condoned in the Hebrew tradition. He juxtaposes Lev. 27: 29-30 with the story of Jephthah in Judges 11: 29-31.

The fate of Jephthah, by the way, is remarkably similar to the misfortune experienced by King Idomeneus of Crete as he was returning home from the Trojan War* * * * *.

⁷Menschliches, Allzumenschliches

⁸The Presence of the Past Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature

⁹This and other citations from his Dictionnaire philosophique

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Voltaire also points out that the custom of circumcision was adopted by the Jews from the Egyptians during their long sojourn in Egypt. If circumcision, what else then? Logically -- but what does religion have to do with logic? -- much of Jewish belief and practice would have been borrowed from the Egyptians, whose ancient culture was far more sophisticated than that of the Hebrew nomads. The Scriptures, of course, are silent on this point.

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Christians are generally ignorant of the cultural world from which their religion arose. They have no idea, for example, that long before Christ it was the Greek god Dionysus who said "I am the true vine." Dionysus, the god of wine and intoxication, was a favorite divinity among the lower classes and among his miracles was the changing of water into wine.¹⁰

If Christians were familiar with Hellenistic religion and philosophy they would find almost nothing unique about their religion. They are ignorant even of obvious parallels, such as December 25 as the birthday of the god Mithras.

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It's easy to show that our seven-day week finds its origin in Babylonian astronomy. All the visible heavenly bodies move in a fixed pattern except for seven: the five visible planets and the sun and moon. These seven bodies give us the names for the days of the week, in a logical order determined by the respective speed with which these bodies move across the sky.

For some people, this simple information is subversive.

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Sacred religious traditions: the Hindu caste system, the Islamic suppression of women, the Christian war against the flesh.

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¹⁰ See John 15:1 and 2:1-11.

Georg Friedrich Lichtenberg: "The often ill-considered regard for old laws, old customs, and old religion is responsible for all the world's evils."¹¹

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The annual slaughter of the pilot whales in the Faroe Islands: the water full of blood, the whales thrash about and scream as the men hack and slash them to death. Even the young boys join in the massacre. It's a tradition.

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Two ancient stories. Guess which was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

"And he [Elisha, Hebrew prophet] went up from thence to Bethel, and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, though bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord, And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them."

"Thus he [Anaximander, Greek philosopher] flourished almost at the same time as Polycrates the tyrant of Samos. There is a story that the boys laughed at his singing, and that, when he heard of it, he rejoined, 'Then to please the boys I must improve my singing.'"

The former is from II Kings 2, the second from Diogenes Laertius' Lives of the Philosophers.

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Two more ancient stories:

The first is at the end of Book 23 of The Odyssey. It describes the goddess Athene's intervention on behalf of Ulysses, who had been separated from his wife Penelope for 20 years:

Once more Athene of the flashing eyes took thought on his [Ulysses's] behalf. Not till she was satisfied that he had had his fill of love and sleep in his wife's arms, did she arouse

¹¹Der oft unüberlegten Hochachtung gegen alte Gesetze, alte Gebräuche und alte Religion hat man alles übel in der Welt zu danken.

the lazy Dawn to leave her golden throne by Ocean Stream and to bring daylight to the world.

The second describes a similar intervention but for different purposes. It's from the book of Joshua, Chapter 10:

"Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon...And the sun stood still...until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

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The works of the Greek poet Homer served as the "Bible," as it were, of Greek civilization. Every schoolboy could cite from memory long passages from The Iliad and The Odyssey, which formed the basis of Greek cultural life. Questions of morality were often decided by a citation from one of these great epic poems. For some Greeks, a forthright answer to any and all of life's complexities and ambiguities could be had by allowing the "muses" to guide your finger to the right passage. Homer was the embodiment of all wisdom, human and divine.

Plato makes fun of one of these Homeric "fundamentalists" who claimed to be an expert in all things because he knew the works of Homer up and down, inside and out.

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Debate proposal: which scriptures have caused the most mischief over the ages? Here arts some candidates:

Romans 13:1-2: Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of Gods the powers that be 3.re ordained of God."

Luke 14:26: If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

I Timothy 2:11: Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

Matthew 17:25: Then answered all the people [the Jews to Pilate] and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

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Did Prince Gautama on his death bed indeed instruct his disciple Ananda that women were "full of passion," "envious" and "stupid" and therefore had no place in public assemblies or the professions? Did the Buddha not absorb with his mother's milk the patriarchal nature of Hinduism?

Christian Humphreys, an English Buddhist, writes (apparently oblivious to the irony):

"No philosophy, religion or system of spiritual training is born in a vacuum. In each case the spiritual experience of a man or group of men condenses into a tradition..."

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Yet another baleful legacy of the Christian Church is the defamation of homosexuality as "perverted." The human misery and tragedy this teaching has caused over the centuries is impossible to imagine.¹² As with Christian anti-Semitism., its culmination occurred during the Third Reich.

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Perhaps Satan fell to earth in the form of Achilles, the great warrior hero of Homer's Iliad. Alexander the Great¹³ modelled his life after Achilles, Julius Caesar after Alexander, and Caesar himself was emulated by a hundred subsequent European tyrants, great and small (Charlemagne¹⁴, Napoleon, Hitler).

Our parades down Madison Avenue welcoming home the returning troops are in the military tradition of the Roman "triumph," where the conquering general displayed his forces, plus prisoners and booty, in a parade through the streets of ancient Rome.

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¹² See John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality

¹³ "the violent, golden boy of antiquity," according to Michael Woods in "Legacy"

¹⁴ "der Sachsenschlachter" to the Germans, the "Saxon butcher" (one who butchers Saxons)

In an interview in "Die Zeit," Teddy Kollek, former mayor of Jerusalem, said that his city contained 2500 houses of prayer, synagogues, churches and mosques.¹⁵

Some etymologists say that the word "Jerusalem" means "city of peace," which would be a wonderful irony.

* * * * *

Shelley:
"How ludicrous the priest's dogmatic roar!
The weight of his exterminating curse
How light! and his affected charity,
To suit the pressure of the changing times,
What palpable deceit!"¹⁶

* * * * *

Where philosophy departs from religious tradition:

Marcus Aurelius: See things in all their naked reality.¹⁷

Leopardi: Did you perhaps imagine that the world was made for your benefit?¹⁸

Nietzsche? Here the ways of men part: if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire...¹⁹

Mankind's epitaph might read "Succumbed to tradition,"

¹⁵ Wir besitzen 2500 Bebetshäuser, Synagogen, Kirchen und Moscheen...

¹⁶ "Queen Mab," VI

¹⁷ Meditations Book IV

¹⁸ "Nature and an Icelander"

¹⁹ in a letter to his sister

POLITICS

Who can walk through a great European capital and look at the majestic edifices without recalling that all this great wealth was originally and essentially plunder and extortion.

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Whenever we are enticed by political indifference, the voice of Weimar Germany should whisper in our soul. We should recall that it was through indifference or purism that the Nazis were allowed to seize power.

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Politically we are under one imperative, that stated by Dr. Rieux in Camus' The Plague:

"All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences,, and there are victims, and it's up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences."

* * * * *

It's easier to feel politically at ease in a relatively small country like Sweden or Holland, than in a country like the U.S. Since we Americans are so much more powerful we have laden upon ourselves more guilt, whereas smaller countries lack the opportunities for large-scale evil-doing. When Sweden and Holland were powerful they too went about committing war crimes abroad.

Americans and Russians have more in common than they prefer to admit. As most Russians are unaware of the mischief and misery their government has caused abroad, so are most Americans.

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Some Americans are simply incapable of feeling shame for anything our country does overseas.

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It never occurs to most Americans that the word "imperialism" could in any way be associated with the United States. That 6% of the earth's people consumes the lion's share of its total resources, is not a fact they like to contemplate.

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Patriotism, says Simone Weil is yet another baleful legacy of ancient Rome. She writes:

"Our patriotism comes straight from the Romans...The Romans really were an atheistic and idolatrous people; not idolatrous with regard to images made of stone or bronze, but idolatrous with regard to themselves. It is this idolatry of self which they have bequeathed to us in the form of patriotism."¹

It is with socialism as with the Enlightenment. Its proponents placed too much faith in the goodness and reason of human nature. Capitalism and Christianity are better suited to our condition.

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In one passage of his Meditations., Marcus Aurelius writes of a man who "prizes a soul which is rational, universal, and civic."

One wonders if Aurelius didn't have the Christians in mind as a foil. Without the influence of the Enlightenment, today's Christian soul is the same today as it was in the second century: irrational, sectarian, and other-worldly.

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One of the striking features of Marcus Aurelius' Meditations is the prominence of the word "koinos" (common, communal) in its different forms. It occurs over 80 times in the book. He writes of "the natural law of neighborliness." "The intelligence of the universe is social." "This only is the harvest of earthly existence, a righteous disposition and social acts."

Also frequent is the word "politikos" (civic). He writes of "that good which is identical with reason and a civic spirit." "Do what is needful," he enjoins, "and what the reason of a living creature born for a civic life demands.."

To what degree is our modern self-absorption a legacy of Christianity, which emphasized personal salvation above all else? Nowhere do the Christian scriptures even hint at civic consciousness. When Jesus said that "One thing is needful," he wasn't speaking of the commonweal.

¹ in "Uprooted and Nationhood"

Nietzsche probably wasn't the first to equate Christianity with anarchy.

The Greek philosopher Kelsos in the 2nd century compared the Christians to "bats." They "take flight," he noted, "before educated people who are immune to their deceptions, and attempt to seduce the uneducated."

His primary criticism of Christians was their indifference to political life.

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Perhaps the Jehovah's Witnesses are right after all. Perhaps Satan did fall to earth in 1914.² After the bloodletting of World War I, Lucifer foiled Wilson's efforts to moderate the terms of the Versailles Treaty conference, thus creating the seeds of National Socialism.

Lucifer also allowed the Bolsheviks to steal the revolution from the Russian people, an unimaginably fateful turn of events. Along with the war frenzy of the day, the Russian Revolution also helped American reactionaries put an end to the progressive-socialist movement in this country. Now Americans have little idea who Jim Hill and Emma Goldman were, nor are we generally aware of radical thread in our tradition: Paine, Thoreau, Twain, Mencken, et al.

A distressing discovery of many young souls attracted by left-wing ideals is that so many of its adherents are what you might call "conflict junkies": activists who seemed to thrive on confrontation, as if carried along by some inner demon.

Among the more famous lines of Berthold Brecht are these:

"And we know: even hatred of depravity contorts the features.
And anger at injustice makes the voice hoarse. Ah, we who
wanted to lay the groundwork for amity could not ourselves be

²Revelation 12:9

amicable. But you, when it reaches the point that man is a helper to man, think of us with lenience."³

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The essence of politics is compromise, the essence of religion is strict adherence to "principle."

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In the first Book of his Meditations, Marcus Aurelius says he learned from his brother Severus...

"the conception of a state with one law for all, based upon individual equality and freedom of speech, and of a sovereignty which prizes above all things the liberty of the subject."

Such political sentiments, written in the mid-second century, are simply unimaginable from a Christian writer.

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Christian apologists, attempting to excuse the Bible's endorsement of absolutism, slavery and the subjection of women, speak of the "spirit of the age," that it's unreasonable to impose modern standards on ancient Christian writers. This excuse only works on those who know nothing of the ancient world.

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It is a great loss that we do not have recorded Spartacus' thoughts on the institution of slavery.

* * * * *

³Dabei wissen wir doch:
Auch der Haß gegen die Niedrigkeit
Verzerrt die Zge.
Auch der Zorn ber das Unrecht
Macht die Stimme heiser. Ach, wir
Die wir den Boden bereiten wollten fr Freundlichkeit
Konnten selber nicht freundlich sein.
Ihr aber, wenn es soweit sein wird
Daß der Mensch dem Menschen ein Helfer ist
Gedenkt unsrer
Mit Nachsicht. "An die Nachgeborenen"

Jozef Tiso, a Catholic priest, was the leader of the first Slovakian state in 11 centuries. The price? 60,000 Slovakian Jews, handed over to Hitler's SS. Like the fascists in Croatia, Tiso went about his business with holy zeal.

And, like Paul Tuvier, right-hand man to Klaus Barbie (the Butcher of Lyon), Tiso was found after the war hiding in a Catholic monastery.

Tiso was so nervous before his meeting with Hitler that, in order to settle his nerves, he ate a pound of ham.

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It was the collaboration of the Vatican with the Croatian fascists which is the great unreported war crime of the century.

After the Croatian state was created under Nazi auspices in 1941, its forces went about killing hundreds of thousands of Jews, Gypsies and Serbs, with the full support and active encouragement of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.⁴

The experience of Christians in the fascist dictatorships of this century reveals a simple fact which probably holds throughout the history of Christianity. Namely, that the "rank and file," the people in the pews, are usually better than their leaders,

Marcus Aurelius:

Live as on a mountain? for whether it be here or there matters not provided that, wherever a man live, he live as a citizen of the World-City.⁵

⁴Vladimir Dedijer, *Jasenovacs das juugoslawische Auschwitz und der Vatikan*

⁵*Meditations*, X, 15

REASON AND THE MIND

As human beings, our only way to the light is reason, mysteriously seated in that most sophisticated and complex physical structure on the planet: our cerebral cortex.

"We must make good," Sakharov said in his Nobel lecture, "the demands of reason and create a life worthy of ourselves and of the goals we only dimly perceive."

Dimly indeed. We are like Moses, peering across into the Promised Land, able to envision a world of peace but unable to realize it.¹ We are, as Pascal noted, "no longer animal and not yet angel." We are the tightrope walker of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, suspended between the ape and the overman.

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We are, to use Eiseley's expression, "cosmic orphans." Anthropology teaches us: "This is the way you came, these are your present dangers; somewhere, seen dimly beyond, lies your destiny. God help you, you are a cosmic orphan..."

* * * * *

Why do scientists make more reliable witnesses to our predicament than the majority of religionists and even philosophers? Because they have been trained in the use of observation and reason. That science has no say in investigating ultimate questions is religious propaganda.

Another scientist, the recently deceased Hoimar von Ditfurth, alluded to a famous formulation of von Clausewitz when he noted that, "Basic scientific research" is a "continuation of metaphysics by other means."

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The scientists (Carl Sagan, for example) note that the animal portion of our brain is still dominant, while the cerebral cortex is just beginning to assert itself. The lofty reflections of an Aurelius or the rigorous integrity of a Nietzsche are simply beyond the capacity of the average person.

¹Ditfurth, Innenansichten eines Artgenossen

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Seneca speaks of nature and "the most glorious part of it, the human mind that surveys and wonders at the firmament."²

* * * * *

The mind interferes with experience, as Krishnamurti observed. We stand on a ship observing a brilliant sunrise and the mind chatters away: should I take a picture of this? how will I write about this to my friend? am I enjoying this? my stomach just growled. is it time to run down for breakfast? where is my wife? this sunrise is about to pass. how sad that everything passes. sic transit... how smart I am to know latin! And on and on. You don't even see the sunrise!

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What is "pleasure"? Here are two views, remarkably similar:

Leopardi;

"..pleasure is a speculative thing, not a real one; a craving, not a fact; a feeling that man conceives in thought, but does not experience; or, to put it better, a concept, and not a feeling. Don't you realize that at the very instant of any pleasure...not being able to content yourself with the enjoyment you have in any one of those moments, you are for ever looking forward to a greater and truer enjoyment, in which that pleasure in fact consists; and always as it were running forward to the future moments of that same pleasure?"³

Krishnamurti:

"Pleasure, like fear, is engendered by thought. Yesterday you stood in the silent valley looking up at the marvel of the distant hills and at that particular moment there was great delight. Now thought comes in and says how nice it would be to repeat that experience of yesterday, so thinking about that experience of yesterday, whether it was gazing at the lovely tree, the sky and the hills, or your sexual enjoyment, is pleasure. ⁴

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²To Helvia on Consolation

³ in "Torquato Tasso"

⁴ from Talks with American Students

We suffer from a kind of teleological⁵ virus, believing in our bones that in really important things what is was meant to be, that what has survived is ipso facto superior.

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The farther a historic event recedes into the past, the more it appears to us as "inevitable." During the Gulf War the issue was in doubt until the war was actually under way. It's not difficult for us to imagine a scenario with a different outcome.

But, what if Hannibal had defeated the Romans in the Second Punic War (3rd Century B.C.)? At one point the issue of that war was very much in doubt., as Hannibal declined to march on the capital after the terrible Roman defeat at Cannae. A Semitic culture, with Semitic religion and a Semitic language, might have become dominant in Italy. All of European history would have turned out differently.

In retrospect, however, the issue of that long ago war seems fated, inevitable. It's simply too difficult to imagine any other outcome than what did in fact happen. For those at the time, however, the issue hung in the balance.

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What if, on the road to Damascus, Saul had been set upon by robbers and killed?

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Scientists tell us that the great asteroid which wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago landed along the northern edge of the Yucatan Peninsula. It was six miles across and travelling 22,000 miles per hour.

Had it been only slightly off course, perhaps the dinosaurs would still dominate the earth.

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Boredom, as Bertrand Russell observed, is a topic inadequately explored by philosophers. But Seneca writes of it, and so does Lucretius, also Schopenhauer at length and Nietzsche as well. Pascal addresses the question as acutely as anyone:

⁵ from Greek "telos," meaning "end" or "purpose"

"When I consider the diverse agitations of men, the dangers and the pains to which they expose themselves, at court, in war, whence arise such quarrels, passions, audacious enterprises and frequent evils, etc., I have discovered that all the unhappiness of man arises from a single source, which is not knowing how to remain at rest, in a room.⁶

One's view of human nature colors one's perspective on everything else. The teaching of the Church of original sin--largely a concoction of the neurotic St. Augustine--has had consequences for western culture difficult to appreciate. The contrast to the ancient philosophers is striking, as when Seneca, for example, writes that "The human soul is a great and noble thing," or "Man, naturally the gentlest class of being..."⁷

Nietzsche often referred to the "spirit of gravity," heaviness, seriousness, solemnity, as opposed to lightness, cheer, and gaiety.⁸ The notion that we are irretrievably corrupt and doomed to damnation without divine intervention--the heart of Christianity--is incompatible with an essentially optimistic, joyful embrace of existence.

Lightness didn't come naturally to Nietzsche, who was, after all, a product of 19th Century German Protestant culture. Yet when you read Nietzsche's works, and especially his letters, you realize how much he strove to overcome himself. The preposition "over" (über) is everywhere in his writings: übermut - pride, überfließen - overflow, überwinden - overcome. And he makes up "über" words, like überreich - more than rich, übermensch - superman.

⁶Tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre.

⁷Magna et generosa res est humanus animus. (Epistle 102) ..homines, mitissimum genus.. (Epistle 95)

⁸His Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft is usually translated as The Gay Science or Joyful Wisdom

WOMEN, GENDER, SEX

We all say that sex is normal and healthy but virtually none of us truly believes it, since even the least churchd among us has breathed in the air of a religious culture hostile to the flesh.

From today's pulpit, however, you'll hear the same message, that sex is normal and healthy. But that's the voice of the modern Church, leavened by secular values, in defiance of its own ancient tradition.

Even Luther, who enthusiastically endorsed marriage for all, was still the Augustinian monk when it came to sexual intercourse. His statement, "Conjugal duty [!] is not fulfilled without sin," is offensive to modern sensibilities and probably receives scant attention in today's seminaries.

A more recent German, Nietzsche, speaking of Eros, the ancient god of love, noted: "Christianity gave Eros poison to drink. Eros didn't die, of course, but degenerated into a vice."

After two millennia of defamation, Eros will not be rehabilitated overnight.

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"But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." the pseudo-Pauline I Timothy 2:12.

Not that Christianity originated the subjection of women: it merely sanctioned, sanctified Greek foolishness, in the literal meaning of the term sanctus ("holy").

The errors of philosophers are, at worst, ridiculous, the errors of religion dangerous, noted David Hume. Aristotle's assertion that women had fewer teeth than men was ridiculous. When many centuries later his disciple St. Thomas referred to women as homo deficiens, that was dangerous, and not merely dangerous, but a cultural calamity. St. Thomas is the patron saint of Catholic education.

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Can anyone imagine the mountain of suffering and sorrow caused to millions over the centuries by Pauline/Augustinian sexual neurosis? We simply lack the imagination to conceive of the horror in all its immensity.

Is not much of the violence in our culture attributable to sexual repression, to the relentless inner war between flesh and spirit in millions of lives?

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From Greek history it's now clear that the subjugation and defamation of women resulted in ambivalence towards sexual pleasure. The Indo-European, male dominated "sky-godders"¹ brutally suppressed the indigenous Mediterranean cultures centered on the earth and the female and justified their domination by an ideology of male superiority.

Forever after the Greeks never came to terms with the female, could never enjoy heterosexual sex with a clear conscience, since they held women to be inferior creatures. This conflict helps to explain not merely the widespread practice of homosexuality but also the ritual transvestitism, castration and androgynism which characterised Greek religious mythology and ritual.

Their contemptuous attitude toward women also helps to explain that powerful strand in Greek culture of hostility to pleasure in general which gave rise to Orphism and Pythagoreanism, and in time to Puritanism.

"Pleasure is in all circumstances bad; for we came here to be punished and we ought to be punished." From a Pythagorean² catechism, cited by Dodd (p. 152):

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Both Greece and Rome were warrior cultures. Although Roman women had it somewhat better, in both societies the place of the woman was in the home.

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It is only recently that scholar have begun to appreciate the brutality of ancient Greek suppression of woman. Eva Keuls' The Reign of the Phallus is a death-blow to the romantic view of Greek culture which was largely invented by the Germans.

¹ term used by Gore Vidal for monotheists

²Pythagoras, Greek philosopher of the 6th Century B.C., who heavily influenced Plato

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The classical and Christian attitude toward the female is summed up in four words by Seneca: Mulier nata est pati. Woman is born to be passive. (patior = to suffer, to endure)

Throughout the writings of Seneca the adjective "womanish"³ appears as a term of contempt.

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Contempt for the flesh and fear of women go hand in hand with exaltation of the "spiritual" in both Christian and pre-Christian classical culture. Who was it who wrote of "this poor body, the prison and fetter of the soul...But the soul itself is sacred and eternal..." The pagan Seneca or St. Augustine? Seneca.

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Little wonder that the Christians favored these Stoics over the Epicureans. Seneca occasionally reads like a papal encyclical, as the following:⁴

"..if you consider sexual desire to have been given to man, not for the gratification of pleasure, but for the continuance of the human race, when once you have escaped the violence of this secret destruction implanted in your very vitals, every other desire will pass you by unharmed."

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Elsewhere Seneca writes of vices, opining that one who pursues an "unjust war" is superior to one given to lust and drink, since the former vice is "more manly" (virilius peccant)⁵ To this stalwart Roman, it's better to burn crops, level villages and create widows and orphans than to overly indulge your animal appetites.

Certain Christians were outraged that an adulterer, Martin Luther King, should have a national holiday in his honor. The fact that he made the lives of millions of black people more

³ effeminatus

⁴ from "To Helvia on Consolation"

⁵ "On the Shortness of Life," 7,1.

tolerable and hopeful didn't matter nearly as much as that he cheated on his wife.

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Was it John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who was outraged by the language of the barracks but indifferent to what these same soldiers did while on duty?

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That violence and repressed sexuality go hand in hand is reinforced by contemplating the sundry instruments of interrogation used during the Catholic Inquisition. They were often directed against those very parts of the female anatomy which arouse male desire: the "breast ripper" and "the vaginal pear" for example.

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In the area, of Wormserbad in 1495 41 witches were burned, after having all the hair shaved off their body.⁶ Very carefully, no doubt. magna,cum cura.

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Is it too farfetched to assert that any culture which exalts the male over the female is bound to be very violent? Riane Eisler⁷ suggests we compare the Third Reich and today's Iran with the Scandinavian countries, where women commonly hold the highest offices and are prominent in the professions.

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The political dimension of sex is treated in Orwell's 1984. Sexual pleasure is explosive and spontaneous and defies control and is therefore inherently subversive.

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Is sexuality so universally problematical because it expresses the "animal" nature of a creature which fancies himself "above" nature? We are "gods who shit," to use Ernest Becker's lapidary

⁶Pfarrenherrschaft, II, 646

⁷The Chalice and the Blade

expression⁸ And the grunting and groaning, oozings and ejaculations of coitus remind us of our "carnal" nature.

Latin caro., carnis = meat

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In the Second Rule of his order, St. Francis prohibits his brethren from "either themselves, or through another, or by any other way, keeping a pet."⁹

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The study of ethics has moved beyond poring over the dead word of divine revelation is still primarily a masculine occupation, an attempt to reason out right and wrong. Morality may in the end be more of a "feminine" phenomenon, a consequence of intuition, imagination, and feeling.

And as stated by Richard Tarnas in the final words of his *Passion of the Western Mind*: "Man is something that must be overcome—and fulfilled, in the embrace of the feminine."

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We only come to truly understand something by seeing it in contrast to something else. By travelling abroad we see our native country in a new light, by learning another language we understand our own better, by studying Buddhism we gain a deeper insight into theism.

Is there a culture we can study to better understand by contrast the male-dominated cultures we know so well from history? Perhaps that of Bronze Age Crete, of the so-called "Minoans," was one such culture, a culture of peace and social equality, unique among the cultures of the ancient (and modern) world, with values "radically" different from those of other societies.¹⁰

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that Cretan women enjoyed equal social status with Minoan men is their dress. Women who walked about with exposed breasts and "closely sheathed buttocks" were not likely to be the chattel of males.¹¹

⁸ in The Denial of Death

⁹ Kreuz mit der Kirche, 132

¹⁰ Finley, Early Greece: The Bronze and Archaic Ages

¹¹ Ceram, Gods, Graves and Scholars

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The two most dreadful legacies of classical antiquity are the glorification of the warrior and the defamation of the female. Bronze Age Crete appears to have been free of both these ills.

There is no evidence from their society of warrior graves, fortifications, or even the glorification of hunting.¹²

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Hypatia, a pagan martyr, now virtually forgotten: daughter of a philosopher and a neo-Platonic philosopher herself, one of the most remarkable and admired women of antiquity. She was attacked by a mob of monks, incited by the fanatical Bishop of Alexandria, St. Cyril, who called her an "enchantress," dragged into a church, stripped and slashed to pieces with shards of glass, her physical remains publicly burned. This, in the early 5th Century, was the first witch execution.¹³

St. Cyril went on to lay the foundations at the Council of Ephesus for the special status of Mary in the Catholic Church.

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None of us can step outside our era. and our culture, no matter how hard we try--this is especially true in a "taboo" subject like sex, where we take in attitudes with our mother's milk.

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Many Catholics now see sexism as evil. Roman Catholicism is sexism. The writings of all their saints and doctors is permeated by contempt for women, homo imperfectus (St. Thomas).

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The Stoic philosopher Musonius (ca. 30-108) called for the equal education of girls and saw no reason why women couldn't be philosophers.

¹² See TimeFrame 5000-1500 BC: the Age of God-Kings in the Time-Life TimeFrame series, also Eisler's Chalice and the Blade

¹³ Deschner, Kriminalgeschichte, II

MORALITY

Voltaire blames priests for perverting the minds of young people, by presenting religion as superstition, which young people can easily see through and which leads them to reject religion altogether.

Christianity has monopolized the field of spirituality, so to speak, presenting itself, with all its primitive superstition, as the only option. Children of a delicate and thoughtful nature are enticed into an absurd religion which will eventually lead them, if they have integrity, into a cul-de-sac of intellectual self-mortification.

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Christian exclusivism: Aut Christus aut nihil.¹ The false choice between embracing superstition or hedonism/materialism or complete nihilism.

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Is it blasphemous to imagine Jesus reading poetry, watching a drama or strumming a lyre?

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Whence arises evil in the human soul? Here are the views of two first-rate minds:

Oscar Wilde: "Ordinary cruelty is simply stupidity. It is the entire want of imagination."

Percy Byshe Shelley: "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; ...the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination.."

If a) the source of morality is in the individual imagination, the power of empathy with other creatures, and b) religion, as an ideology, stifles the imagination by subjecting reality in all its diversity to an "ideal," then it should not surprise us that c) religion is capable of extraordinary cruelty.

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¹Either Christ or nothing

Goethe might have been speaking of religion when he noted that "General concepts and great self-conceit are always on the verge of creating terrible misfortune."²

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Leopardi on why some people are good and others bad (emphasis mine):

Good laws, and especially good upbringing, and education of manners and of the mind, preserve both justice and gentleness in human society: for spirits shaped and softened by a little culture, and accustomed to dwell on things a little, and somewhat to use the understanding; almost by necessity and almost always shrink, with horror from laying hands on people and steeping them in the blood of their fellow men...This good effect is by no means brought about by threatening fancies, and sad beliefs in things savage and terrifying.³

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Andre Gide:

Culture must comprehend that in its attempt to absorb Christianity it is absorbing something fatal» It is attempting to give entrance to something which denies it.⁴

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In western society, we live and breathe and move in violence, personal and communal. To what degree is our violence a function of our impossible ideals? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that he who looks upon a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery! Can warfare against our instincts do anything but project itself outward?

Thus the fluctuation between violence and idealism throughout western history.

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Alex Comfort:

²Allgemeine Begriffe und größer Dunkel sind immer auf dem Wege, entsetzliches Unglück anzurichten.

³"Plotinus and Porphyry"

⁴cited in Deschner, Kreuz

Our sexual drive is the healthiest and most important sport of humanity. Many prominent evildoers of history were remarkably chaste.⁵

(He might have added that many evildoers who were not chaste in all likelihood had a bad conscience.)

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Nietzsche, in his Nachlaß, calls ideals "the breath of poison over reality, the great seduction into the Nothing."⁶ The reality he writes of the reality of our instincts, senses, feelings, nature. As opposed to ideals. Not wrong ideals or false ideals or impossible ideals. Ideals.

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The Vatican's influence (both directly and indirectly) in keeping population control off the Rio Conference agenda is a crime against humanity. But the clerical logic is simple, if never directly stated: this life is nothing compared to heaven. In Christianity, as Nietzsche observed, "world" is a "dirty word" (Schimpfwort).

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La Mettrie, 18th Century French physician and philosopher, unburdened as he was by religious idealism, possessed an "attractively breezy kind of tolerance, a realism about human nature that, is untainted by edifying theory."⁷

La Mettrie came to the radical conclusion for his day that "criminals were sick and ought to be treated, rather than punished." Above all, however, it was La Mettrie's hedonism which was scandalous to religious authorities.

La Mettrie was an atheist.

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Another atheist, Nietzsche, advised us to "Beware of those whose instinct is to punish."

⁵ cited in Deschner, Kreuz

⁶ der Gifthauch über der Realität, die größte Verführung zum Nichts

⁷ Article in "New York Review of Books, 3/25/93.

Two thousand years of Christianity has hardened our hearts and wired our brains to think "punish!" We are determined to inflict public violence on criminal offenders. Texas recently passed a billion dollar bond issue to build prisons. They'll be hell-holes, no doubt. Since we no longer believe in hell below, we must create hells on earth.

The AIDS epidemic is another occasion to vent our religious sadism. This pandemic has, in fact, given clean-living Christians the opportunity to enjoy in this life a blessing otherwise promised (according to St. Thomas) to those in Paradise. That is, contemplating the sufferings of those below, "in order that they might be the more pleased by their blessedness."⁸

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In our need to believe in a personal God, our need to explain origins, is secondary to our longing for justice. There is no justice here, so we project justice in the beyond. We can't imagine the Josef Mengeles and Adolf Eichmanns of this world getting off "scott free." We want to see them punished.

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Krishnamurti:

It is fear that demands that you have an escape through ideals. It is only by seeing what is actually taking place in your life and observing it very closely, without any condemnation, or evaluation, that you will see it as it is. To see is the greatest miracle. Please see that.

Nietzsche said the same thing in his early work:

We must again become good neighbors of the things closest to us and not as before look with contempt beyond them toward clouds and nocturnal monstrosities.⁹

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⁸ "ut beatitudo illis magis complacet"

⁹ Wir müssen wieder gute Nachbarn der nächsten Dinge werden und nicht so verächtlich wie bisher über sie hinweg nach Wolken und Nachtunholden hinblicken. Menschliches, Allzumenschliches

The Polish Jew Solomon Morel had the opportunity after the War to run a camp for captured Nazis and collaborators. According to good evidence, many of these inmates he cruelly tortured.

There is no contradiction here. It merely shows that Solzhenitsyn was right when he wrote of that oscillating line between good and evil running through us all. One thinks of the symbol of ying and yang on the Korean flag, the black and white separated not by a straight but a wavy line.

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Reading through Hitler's Headquarters Monologues, you will find many sensible observations. You will also find a lot of foolishness in Nietzsche.

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Discipline is only one quality and probably not the most important to leading a good life. The most important quality is something deeper and indefinable and extremely rare. The ancients, of course, spoke of the "ingenium," or the "daimon" of each individual. They may have understood these things as well or even better than we do today with our magnificent, if teetery, edifice of social "science."

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Today's notion of ancient Roman morality seems to have been derived from the gossip-monger Suetonius, who delighted his Roman readers with tales of the scandalous conduct of the Julio-Claudian emperors, such as Caligula and Nero.

Hercules, the most popular hero of the ancient world, was indeed celebrated not only for his strength and courage but also for his insatiable gluttony and erotic exploits. He was the comic-book champion of the lower orders. Those, on the other hand, gifted by nature and circumstance to reflect more critically on life envisioned a contrary ideal of reason, self-mastery and inner serenity, a cultivation of precisely those qualities which distinguish us from the beasts.

It is this ethic of moderation and sobriety advocated by the philosophers, including (no, especially) Epicurus, which early Christian propagandists chose to ignore in their condemnation of paganism.

As Seneca observed, exercise as much as you want, you'll never develop the muscles of a prize bull. Or Aristippus, a disciple

of Socrates, who asked a man boasting of his diving abilities:
"Are you not ashamed to brag of that which a dolphin can do?"

But the "wisest of men," of course, was Socrates, who took pride in his plain living, who said that he was nearest to the gods in that he had the fewest wants, who said (was he the first?) while the rest of the world lived to eat, he himself ate to live.

Socrates, according to Diogenes Laertius, "took care to exercise his body and kept in good condition." In this he was not unique among the ancient philosophers. Even in his old age, Menedemus of Eretria was "as firm and sunburnt in appearance as any athlete.." The same was once invited to an extravagant feast and "rebuked his host tacitly by confining himself to olives."

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The Scandinavians have discovered something yet hidden to many Americans and other Europeans: there is no necessary connection between morality and religion.

There was a time when the preachers and priests could threaten us with threats of hell-fire. The metaphysical threat is now defunct, in our post-Enlightenment age.

So now Christians threaten us with social breakdown if we don't flock to their pews. But just as individuals can thrive without Christ, so can societies. Here is a key to Christian anti-Semitism.

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From Fatal Half-Measures, a collection of the recent speeches and articles of Yevgeny Yevtushenko, concerning Chernobyl:
"...are there really that many subtle villains in history, criminal masterminds from the movies? Instead, underdeveloped consciousness, stupidity, and stubbornness turn into villainy toward our contemporaries and descendants."

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Gisbert Haefs:¹⁰

Mommsen was not the last historian to confess respect for Roman "virtues" of the Republican period. In view of the deliberate aggression, expansion, totalitarian claim to world dominance, scorched earth strategy, massacres of civilian populations, terror, continuous violation of treaties and genocide, I confess rather that disrespectful and inadmissible parallels with events of recent history come to mind.

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Haef's savage critique of Roman imperialism is seconded by the stalwart Seneca, advisor to Nero and Stoic philosopher.

"We [Romans] are mad," he noted, "not only individually, but nationally. We check manslaughter and isolated murders; but what of war and the much-vaunted crime of slaughtering whole peoples? There are no limits to our greed, none to our cruelty. And as long as such crimes are committed by stealth and by individuals, they are less harmful and less portentous; but cruelties are practiced in accordance with acts of senate and popular assembly, and the public is bidden to do that which is forbidden to the individual. Deeds that would be punished by loss of life when committed in secret, are praised by us because uniformed generals have carried them out."¹¹

¹⁰ "Mommsen war nicht der letzte Historiker, der Respekt für römische "Tugenden" der republikanischen Zeit bekennt; ich bekenne, daß mir angesichts von planmäßiger Aggression, Expansion, totalitärem Weltherrschaftsanspruch, Strategie der verbrannten Erde, Massakern an der Zivilbevölkerung, Terror, fortgesetzten Vertragsbrüchen und Völkermord eher respektfreie und zweifellos unstatthafte Parallelen zu Vorkommnissen der jüngeren Vergangenheit in den Sinn geraten."

In the apparatus of Hannibal: der Roman KARTHAGOs

¹¹ "Non privatim solum, sed publice furimus. Homicidia comescimus et singulas caedes; quid bella et occisarum gentium gloriosum scelus? Imo avaritia, non crudelitas modum novit. Et ista quamdiu furtim et a singulis fiunt, minus noxia minusque monstruosa sunt; ex senatus consultis plebisque scitis saeva exercentur et publice iubentur vetata privatim. Quae clam commissa capita luerent, turn quis paludati fedcere, laudamus." (Epistulae Morales, 95)

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E.M. Cioran:

"...But as soon as health wavers, a man dreams of nothing but paradise and inferno, that is, he reforms: he seeks to amend the irreparable, to redress or demolish society, which he can no longer endure because he can no longer endure himself. A man who suffers is a public menace, a disequibrated being, all the more fearsome in that he usually has to conceal his pain, the source of his energy. We cannot assert ourselves, or play a role here on earth, without help from some infirmity, and there is no dynamism that is not the sign of physiological misery or internal devastation. When we know equilibrium we care for nothing, we do not even feel attached to life, for we are life; once equilibrium is destroyed, instead of identifying ourselves with things, we think of nothing but overthrowing or molding them..."¹²

Joseph Campbell says somewhere that people don't so much crave the meaning of life as the feeling of being alive*

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Seneca:¹³

The first thing which philosophy undertakes to give is fellow-feeling with all men; in other words, sympathy and sociability.

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It was Hume who observed that the difference between atheism and deism is a matter of verbal emphasis.

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The last several pages of Shelley's notes to "Queen Mab" is devoted to an impassioned defense of vegetarianism, which includes a comparison of carnivore and herbivore colons and the economic waste of cropland devoted to animal feed. Shelley died at the age of 29 in 1822.

¹² from "Odyssey of Rancor"

¹³ Hoc primum philosophia promittit, sensum communem, humanitatem et congregationem. Epistulae Morales, V

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Perhaps the most absurd command in the Bible is the command to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. How can one love on command? Ridiculous.

Shelly makes the point in his atheism tract (which got him thrown out of Oxford) that we cannot choose to believe. Belief, he says, is not subject to volition.

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To our knowledge, the first person to enunciate the Golden Rule was Confucius, around 500 B.C.:

"What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others."

In the 4th Century B.C., the Greek philosopher Aristotle taught:

"We should behave to our friends as we would wish our friends to behave to us,"¹⁴

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Would there have been a Commandment honor for children!

"The highest degree of respect is due a child."¹⁵ (The Roman poet Juvenal)

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With few exceptions, the ancient philosophers maintained a fairly gentlemanly discourse. Seneca, ever fond of citing Epicurus, wrote to Lucilius that "...you must not think that our school alone can utter noble words" (Epistle 9) Arcesilaus, one of the heads of the Academy, "was modest enough to recommend his pupils to hear other philosophers."

Compare this to the buckets of bile and sulphur in the letters of Paul, Jerome and Augustine heaped upon "heretics," those who dissent from their views.

¹⁴ Both quotations in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

¹⁵ Maxima debetur puero reverentia.

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Whenever I see a priest pontificating on sexual morality, I think of the contrast between the ancient philosophers Heraclitus and Democritus, the former the "crying philosopher" and the latter the "laughing philosopher." Which response is more appropriate?

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Porphyry also levelled a charge against Christianity which was later taken up by Spinoza at the dawn of the modern age, namely, the Christian ethic of rewards and punishment.

"What reward have ye if..." says Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Reward and punishment. Carrot and stick. A suitable ethic for the rabble.

The ancient philosophers taught that virtue is its own reward, as Marcus Aurelius, for example, when he writes of a man who is..

"like the vine that has borne a cluster of grapes, and when it has once borne its due fruit looks for no reward beyond."¹⁶

Or Seneca when writing on the topic of Justice says that he finds "fair play is desirable in itself, that we are not forced into it by fear nor hired to that end for pay, and that no man is just who is attracted by anything in this virtue other than the virtue itself."

Such observations could be cited by the dozen.

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It was Schopenhauer who noted the particular militancy and cruelty of monotheistic religions.

There can be no "idolatry" with a one true God, and idols must be destroyed for the good of everyone, including the idolaters.

Thus we have the history of the Hebrews' invasion of Canaan with all its cruelties, the history of the Islamic invasion of India,

¹⁶ Meditations, Book V

and the history of the Christian Crusades. All carried on ad maiorem Dei gloriam.¹⁷

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The Christians killed more Jews in one day that the Roman authorities killed Christians over three centuries of persecutions. The number of Christians martyred by the Romans totals two or three thousand, despite the absurd exaggerations of Eusebius.

The Romans who persecuted Christians were motivated by security concerns for the state, not by any religious zeal. They were either polytheists or, more likely, atheists.

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It's obvious that America is one of the last few countries in the modern world—along with the Soviet Union, Red China, South Africa, and several Islamic countries—where people still know the meaning of justice.

What is difficult to grasp is the evident squeamishness expressed when considering the method of execution: gas? injection? noose?

In the days of "eye for an eye," death by stoning was the standard punishment meted out to blasphemers, sabbath breakers, rebellious adolescents and adulterers (Lev. 24, Num. 15, Deut. 21 and 22). For lesser offenses, public flogging was common (Deut. 25).

Once, when "the anger of the Lord was kindled" against some idolaters, He ordered Moses to "hang them up before the Lord against the sun" (Num. 25:4).

A more accurate translation (The Jerusalem Bible) is probably "impale," whereby a sharpened stake was forced through the anus and out the neck— Death did not come quickly and impalement was banished during the Middle Ages since it aroused sympathy for the victim. Medieval ecclesiastical authorities applied a clever variation of this punishment to countless women suspected of witchcraft, another capital offense (Ex. 22).

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¹⁷To the great glory of God (motto of the Jesuit order)

There are parallels between vegetarianism and atheism¹⁸:

- 1) We are brought up in a culture which believes not only that eating meat is natural but that it is necessary for our well-being.
- 2) The more carefully you scientifically examine the issue, the more you realize that you don't need meat. There are, for example, entire societies which do quite well with almost no meat consumption.
- 3) Millions of people would have to change their jobs and way of life if we all stopped eating meat.
- 4) Once you stop eating meat, your health immediately begins to improve. You feel light and clean and alert.
- 5) The vegetarian is a threat to meat-eaters since s/he is living proof that you not only survive but thrive on a meatless diet.
- 6) There are partial vegetarians (lacto--, ovo-vegetarians) and total vegetarians (vegans) who shun all animal products. This last group, the most "radical," do quite fine.
- 7) Once you've been a vegan for a while, the prospect of eating animal products is offensive.

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¹⁸ "atheism" defined here as "the radical rejection of the basic tenets of the three Western monotheistic religions."

SUPERSTITION

Nietzsche's anguished lament in his *Antichrist*: as a professor of the Greco-Roman classics, he contemplated the victory of Christianity: "All of antiquity in vain!"¹

At first reading, *The Antichrist* may seem overwrought and absurdly radical, outre. Critics have seen in it evidence of Nietzsche's impending madness.² The madness, however, is not in Nietzsche but in the culture. It is society which is radically skewed. A way to judge Nietzsche's analysis is to spend several hours or days reading, say, the pagans Euripides, Seneca or Aurelius and then pick up the Christian fathers St. Augustine or St. Jerome.

Then you can begin to understand why Joseph Campbell³ calls the emergence of Christianity a "cultural collapse."

This "collapse" is brilliantly expressed in the last chapter of E.R. Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational*:

"...the fear of freedom--the unconscious flight from the heavy burden of individual choice which an open society lays upon its members...the hardening of philosophical speculation into quasi-religious dogma which provided the individual with an unchanging rule of life...later, on a more popular level, in the demand for a prophet or a scripture; and more generally, in the pathetic reverence for the written word characteristic of late Roman and medieval times..."

Pauline Christianity exploited this "cultural collapse," sanctified and perpetuated it. Within a couple generations, for example, the serious study of history and medicine died out, not to return until the Renaissance.

There is indeed a great truth, a kind of esoteric insight, an intellectual/spiritual awareness while the mass of people sleeps that Christianity is a crime against humanity. For to step out from the shadow of the Christian God is, for the first time, to begin to see things clearly for the first time. What prevents this insight, among other things, is the lack of imagination,

¹Die ganze Antike umsonst!

²Nietzsche wrote *Der Antichrist* in 1888 and lapsed into insanity in January of 1889. He died in 1900.

³scholar of comparative mythology and folklore. He died in 1987.

i.e., imagination to grasp the power of evil, to appreciate the absurd in history, to contemplate alternatives.

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Catholicism is two things: a manifestation of the Mediterranean culture: delicate, graceful, dignified, refined, a vehicle of pre-Christian, popular religiosity, with its saints and festivals and sacraments, relics and pilgrimages and all the rest. And it is a manifestation of religious imperialism, a power structure, whose influence, on societies and individuals, is a cultural catastrophe of the first order.

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One would do well to study carefully the social conditions in that part of Europe which was last in the grip of the Catholic hierarchy? Spain in the years preceding the Civil War. Why was it that only 5% of the rural population of New Castile carried out their Easter duties in 1931 or that in some villages of Andalusia, only 1% of men attended church?"⁴

"Power," noted Shelley, "like a desolating pestilence, Pollutes whate'er it touches."⁵

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Protestantism is to be preferred to Catholicism for one important reason. By its emphasis on the individual conscience, it is a step closer to secularism in society and to individual autonomy. Neither secularism nor autonomy are absolute goods but are necessary conditions for the highest social and personal well-being.

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Can we imagine what our society would be like if, say, every Sunday morning millions of people listened to the Meditations of the Roman Stoic philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius rather than the Epistles of that fanatical, self-righteous Pharisee from Tarsus?

Such a hope, however, is expecting far too much from the mass of humans. They need guilt and blood, sacrifice and sacraments, redemption and miracles, eternal reward and punishment and, of

⁴Hugh Thomas' The Spanish Civil War

⁵"Queen Mab," III

course, their need to feel cosmically special, which is the legacy of the Jews, God's own Chosen People.

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English vulgar, from Latin vulgus, "the common people."

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To appreciate Nietzsche's radical rejection of Christianity⁶ one must come at Christianity from his direction- Nietzsche was a classicist, a scholar of Greco-Roman antiquity. And bear in mind that it was the discovery of Greco-Roman literature and philosophy during the Renaissance which marked the beginning of the end of Christian domination of the West.

In reading the ancient philosophers, the contrast to Christianity is apparent on page after page. Take this passage from one of Seneca's letters, for example:

"Our motto [the Stoics'], as you know, is 'Live according to Nature'; but it is quite contrary to nature to torture the body, to hate unlabored elegance, to be dirty on purpose, to eat food that is not only plain, but disgusting and forbidding ... Philosophy calls for plain living, but not for penance."⁷

The contrast to Christian monasticism cannot be more apparent. In his Antichrist, Nietzsche notes that when Christians reconquered Moorish Spain, they tore down the public baths. (They also burned mountains of Arab scholarship.)

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St. Anthony never bathed, out of religious principal. He was the founder of monasticism and his biography, Vita Antonii, was one of the more influential books of the Middle Ages, the Age of Stench.

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⁶ "...das Christentum war bisher das größte Unglück der Menschheit." "...Christianity has been until now humankind's greatest misfortune." The Antichrist

⁷Nempe propositum nostrum est secundum naturam vivere; hoc contra naturam est, torquere corpus suum et faciles odisse munditias et squalorem adpetere et cibis non tanturn vilibus uti sed taetris et horridis....Frugalitatem exigit philosophia, non poenam.
Epistulae Morales, 5

Medieval expression: "He stinks like a Capuchin!"⁸

St. Jerome considered a filthy exterior the mark of inner purity.⁹

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Seneca: Man is by nature a neat and well-groomed animal.¹⁰

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Moderation, the middle path, the golden mean, so central to Eastern thought and our own Western antiquity, is not a prominent element in the monotheistic religions.

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Swedish proverb: Just right (not extreme) is best.¹¹

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You hear little of relics outside of Catholic circles these days, and for good reason.

There were once thirteen sites which claimed to possess the foreskin of Jesus. A "Brotherhood of the Holy Foreskin" was founded in 1427 and as late as the 18th Century pregnant women made a pilgrimage to one such site (Charroux) to assure themselves a successful childbirth.¹²

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The common people of Greece and Rome also made pilgrimages, to Crete, for example, to have pointed out to them (for a fee, no doubt) the cave where the child Zeus was hidden from his hungry father.

⁸Er stinkt wie ein Kaupziner! Pfarrherrschaft, I, 214. The Capuchins were an order of monks.

⁹cited in Kreuz mit der Kirche, 84

¹⁰Natura enim homo mundum et elegans animal est. Epistles 92

¹¹Lagom ar bast.

¹²Kreuz mit der Kirche. 122

Have you ever noticed that the "holier" a person becomes;, the more his movements slow down? This is presumably an effect of the Holy Spirit.

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Even the great Goethe had to be discreet about his paganism. But his writings do not lack testimony.

"Many things," he wrote in a little poem he scribbled off, "I can endure. Most bothersome things I suffer with quiet courage, as commanded me by a divinity. A few things, however, are as offensive to me as poison and a snake. Four things, in fact: tobacco smoke, bugs, garlic, and the cross."¹³

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Whenever I see someone wearing a cross, I often think of the millions of people over the centuries who fled from the Christian cross for their very lives; ancient pagans, Saracens, Albigensians and other heretics, Moors, Jews, witches, not to mention "natives," from Africa to Tasmania to the Argentine pampas.

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Lucretius, the Epicurean philosopher: Religion has brought forth crimes and wicked deeds.¹⁴

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Looking at contemporary Muslim societies, how sad it is for them that they never had a Voltaire. We forget that the last witch was burned in Europe the year following our victory at Yorktown¹⁵--1782, in Switzerland.

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The execution of heretics is based on sound Biblical doctrine, an Deuteronomy 18:20 for example: But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded

¹³Vieles kann ich ertragen. Die meisten beschwerlichen Dinge Dulde ich mit ruhigem Mut, wie es ein Gott mir gebeut. Wenige sind mir jedoch wie Gift und Schlange zuwider. Viere: Rauch des Tabaks, Wanzen und Knoblauch und Kreuz.

¹⁴Religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta.

¹⁵ending the American War of Independence

him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods,
even that prophet shall die.

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As late as the 1750's 13- and 14-year old girls were burned as
witches in Bavaria, for "having communion with the Devil,
casting spells and 'making' weather."¹⁶

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The medieval inquisitors were instructed that "the greatest pain
should be inflicted for a length of time equal to the recitation
of the Lord's Prayer."¹⁷
Pater noster, qui est in caelis, sanctificatur...

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Speaking of the Inquisition: Dominicans¹⁸ > domini canes (hounds
of the Lord)

In his work *The Culture of the Renaissance in Italy*, the great
Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt notes the following:
"Already in the 13th Century there was clearly a recognition
among the Italians of a Islamic ideal of nobility, dignity and
pride."

Ever since the Crusades, in fact, the Moslem infidels had become
a threat to the spiritual tyranny of the church. The Jews had
presented such a threat from the very beginning.

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No movie or book, of course, can do justice to the horrors of
the Holocaust. The movie "Shoah," which is a nine-hour string
of interviews with survivors and perpetrators, comes the
closest.

¹⁶ Pfarrenherrschaft, 11 , 629

¹⁷ Die Zeitlangen der höchsten Marter sollen mit und nach dem
heiligen Vaterunser abgemessen werden. (Höffli, cited in
Pfaffenherrschaft, II, 644)

¹⁸ The Dominican order spearheaded the Inquisition, the campaign
of the Church to eliminate opposition to its power.

The "mystery of iniquity"¹⁹ some see in the activities of the SS Einsatzgruppen becomes less mysterious after reading The Anguish of the Jews (written by Edward Flannery, a Catholic priest) or The Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism, by Malcolm Hay (with a forward by Edward Flannery).

In contemplating the Holocaust it is well to recall that the Nazis no more rose from hell than did Christianity descend from heaven.

"How ludicrous is he and out of place who marvels at anything that happens in life-" Marcus Aurelius

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Who was it who said that you have to be indulgent toward the Jews, since 2,000 years of Christian charity have unsettled their nerves?

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Anyone capable of reading the first few pages of the Gospel of John will find there the seeds of anti-Semitism, seeds which did not take long to bear fruit. In describing the Jews, the vitriol of St. Chrysostom (d. 407 A.D.) is sometimes indistinguishable from that of Julius Streicher, editor of the Nazi blatt, "Der Sturmer": "children of the devil," for example.²⁰

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The following German proverbs reveal something about Medieval attitudes:

"I do not believe," said the monk, as the maid brought him a child.

The nuns fast so, that their stomachs swell.

Nun or whore, monk or rascal.

Priestly greed
and God's mercy
endure to all eternity.

¹⁹ Francois Mauriac, in his introduction to Elie Wiesel's Night

²⁰ a charge also levelled in John 8:44: "Ye are of your father the devil..."

Beware of Rome
If you wish to remain pious.

If there is a hell, Rome must be built on it.²¹

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Advice for priests, and a lesson in ecclesiastical Latin: Si non
caste caute. If not innocently, carefully.²²

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It took many centuries for the Holy Spirit to reveal to the
Catholic Church that 1) Mary's hymen remained intact during the
birth of our Lord, 2) the birth was painless., and 3) there was
no afterbirth.²³

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In Christianity you can draw and quarter your own mother and
still go to Paradise. Anything can be forgiven. There's only
one unpardonable sin: apostasy, since that removes you from the
Church's control.

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Perhaps the discovery of the Qumran materials and more to be
found is one more piece of the new, emerging cultural paradigm,
the contribution of archaeology to finally achieve what
Voltaire, Nietzsche and Freud have laid the groundwork for: the
general recognition of Christianity as a bizarre, apocalyptic
sect.

So we can get on with the job of making this earth a decent
place to live.

Not likely.

²¹ Non credo, sprach der Monch, als ihm die Magd ein Kind
brachte.

Die Nonnen fasten, daß ihnen die Bäuche schwellen.

Nonn oder Hur, Mönch oder Bub.

Pfaffen-Gierigkeit / Und Gottes Barmherzigkeit

Währt in alle Ewigkeit.

Hute dich vor Rom, / Willst du bleiben fromm. Ist eine Hölle,
so muß Rom darauf gebaut sein.

²² Kreuz mit der Kirche, 207

²³ Ute Ranke-Heinemann, Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven

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The Russians are particularly vulnerable to American Christian fundamentalists, for a couple reasons: 1) the daily existence of so many is desperate and threadbare, and 2) over half of them, we are told, believe in astrology,,

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Can you imagine a Lutheran confirmation class which presented a priest to give the Catholic version of the Reformation? Or, conversely, a Catholic confirmation class inviting a Lutheran pastor to talk about Luther?

Why not?

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An observation of Mencken which can be addressed to used car salesmen, politicians and preachers:

"No man's opinion is worth a hoot, however well supported and maintained, so long as he is not absolutely free, if the spirit moves him, to support and maintain the exactly contrary opinion."