

# THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN SOURCES OF WESTERN CULTURE

[Outline/Notes for Religion 101, 102]

prepared (c. 1955) by  
Edmond La B. Cherbonnier

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### I - PRESUPPOSITIONS

A) Presuppositions defined and illustrated

B) “Ultimate Presuppositions”: the answers which a person or a culture gives to the three “ultimate questions”; viz.,

what is really real?

what is man?

what is the meaning and purpose of human life?

C) Definition of religion: a person’s religion consists in his ultimate presuppositions, plus the manner of thinking and of acting which follows therefrom.

The study of religion is the examination of various ultimate presuppositions and of their consequences in thought and action.

Corollary: no man is without a religion of some sort. The only possible question open to man is not whether to “be religious”, but *which* religion to adopt.

### II - WHY STUDY THE “JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN SOURCES OF WESTERN CULTURE”?

A) Answer: in order to become conscious of the presuppositions which have made our culture what it is, and which silently operate to make us what we are.

Consequences of such awareness:

one can accomplish one’s own purposes more effectively if one understands the milieu in which they must be carried out.

one can understand contemporary trends, and so cope with contemporary problems, if one knows their origin.

one might conceivably be led to inquire whether any one set of ultimate presuppositions (or religion) were the true one, and to search for a criterion by which to test them.

### III - THE TWO SOURCES OF WESTERN CULTURE

A) Terminology

Judaeo-Christian (biblical, Hebraic, prophetic)

Greco-Roman (classical, pagan)

## CHAPTER TWO CONCEPTIONS OF ULTIMATE REALITY (*i.e.*, of God) IN

## THE TWO SOURCES OF WESTERN CULTURE, RESPECTIVELY

### I - GRECO-ROMAN: THE TWO LEVELS OF REALITY

#### A) FIRST LEVEL: THE GODS OF POPULAR POLYTHEISM

- 1) **Mythology: Homer, etc.**
- 2) **Gods of the state; religious observance a civic duty;**  
"it is politically expedient to be deceived in matters of religion".
- 3) **Gods of personal worship: *lares* and *penates*; manes; divination and astrology;  
*fortuna* and *fatum***  
The persistence of the idea of fate and destiny in the Greco-Roman world  
Examples from the Stoic philosophy of Marcus Aurelius and from  
the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles

#### B) SECOND LEVEL: THE TRANSCENDENT "GOD" OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

- 1) **The philosopher's criticism of popular polytheism**  
Example: Socrates and Euthyphro.
- 2) **The philosopher's alternative: a reality beyond space, time, and matter –  
known as "Being" or "the One"**  
  
The reasoning behind this conception
- 3) **Minority report: the philosophy of naturalism or materialism, which held that all  
reality can be reduced to matter-in-motion (Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius).**

#### C) THE ATTEMPT TO SYNTHESIZE THE TWO LEVELS: PANTHEISM

- 1) **Theory: allegory; syncretism**
- 2) **Practice: the mystery cults. Isis and Osiris, Mithra, Orpheus, Cybele,  
Dionysius, Serapis, Persephone**  
  
ecstasy - induced by any and all means

### II – JUDAE0 -CHRISTIAN: ALL OF REALITY WITHIN A SINGLE PERSPECTIVE

#### A) ANTHROPOMORPHISM

**biblical illustrations**  
"The most vivid of all the characters portrayed in the Old Testament is that of God himself."  
**objections to anthropomorphism**

#### B) CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BIBLE'S ANTHROPOMORPHIC GOD

- 1) **"Jealous" -- exclusive. Anything less than wholehearted allegiance is betrayal.  
Hence, idolatry the worst sin.**

- 2) Prohibition of graven images --- they would misrepresent God, and lead to “mistaken identity” (none discovered in the archeology of Palestine).
- 3) Prohibition of divination --- it suggests that the future is not in God’s hands (Isaiah 2:6; 47:13; King Saul and the Witch of Endor); it also presumes to read God’s mind (Romans 11:33, 34; Isaiah 44:25).

**Difference between prophecy and pagan oracles:**

the initiative lies with God, not the soothsayer, the prophecy is clear, not enigmatic.

the prophecy announces God’s purpose, not an inexorable Fate.

- 4) “God who acts” - the biblical proof of the existence of God (Isaiah 46:7; Psalms 116, 135; Elijah on Mt. Carmel).
- 5) God who speaks (Habakkuk 2: 18, 19; Isaiah 45:19. 46: 9-11)  
The importance of speech, and the power of words to transform situations (Les Misérables; Matthew 15: 10-20; 12: 34-37)

**Definition of the term “revelation”**

- 6) God who cares: love, wrath, disappointment

### **C) ALTERNATIVE VIEWS OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THESE TWO SOURCES**

- 1) Mutually complementary - no conflict (Will Durant)
- 2) Mutually exclusive
  - a) The view that Christianity corrupted Rome from within, and replaced a heroic, intelligent culture with sentiment and superstition (Gibbon).
  - b) The view that the entire classical culture was depraved, and ought to have been stamped out more thoroughly than it was (Tertullian).
- 3) Mutually exclusive at the level of ultimate presuppositions, but capable of mutual enrichment on subordinate levels (Toynbee, Cochrane, Dix, St. Augustine; "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong").

## **III - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPTION COMPARED WITH THE CLASSICAL**

### **A) COMPARISON WITH THE TRANSCEDENT REALITY OF THE PHILOSOPHERS**

From the point of view of the philosophers, the biblical God is quite as objectionable as the deities of Mt. Olympus. The god of the philosophers is not anthropomorphic. It not only excludes rival “gods,” but defies all description whatever. Since it is timeless, it can hardly speak, act, or care.

Philosophy had so successfully demolished the pagan gods that Christianity’s real battle was not against them, but against the transcendent “One” of the philosophers.

## **B) COMPARISON WITH THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC GODS OF POLYTHEISM**

- 1) Qualifying round: What conditions would an anthropomorphic god have to fulfill in order to be at all credible?**

**Lord of creation; not subject to fate**

**Not subject to human manipulation or mind-reading (divination, etc. )**

**Not betrayed with impunity (NB: idolatry hardly possible within the framework of polytheism) Jeremiah 10:14-15.**

**Portrayed with constancy of character by scores of authors spanning a 1000-year period.**

- 2) The finals: pagan gods eliminated by the above tests.  
But the biblical Cod could still conceivably be the invention of clever collaborators.**

**The conclusive test: has he in fact spoken and acted within space and time, as he is alleged to have done?**

## **C) COMPARISON OF CHRISTIANITY WITH THE MYSTERY CULTS**

- 1) Superficial similarities: voluntary; open to all classes; Dec. 25; account of a god who dies and rises again, offering immortality to his followers through the ritual consumption of his flesh and blood.**
- 2) Decisive dissimilarities: mystery god not a historical figure (nor would this have been considered an advantage); a demi-god, rather than fully divine; does not remain alive, but dies again; not exclusive; requires no special morality (except Mithra); ecstasy self-justifying, as opposed to biblical jubilation-in-love. The mysteries are individualistic, whereas Judaism and Christianity are communal. The mysteries are secret societies and very expensive, whereas Christianity is proclaimed from the housetops and has no initiation fee.**

## **IV - THE RIVALRY OF PAGAN AND BIBLICAL CONCEPTIONS OF GOD**

### **A) CONFLICT IN THE EARLY CENTURIES**

- 1) Open combat: persecution (Polycarp)**
- 2) Subversion**

**a) unsuccessful: Arius vs. Athanasius at the Council of Nicaea, 325.**

**The issue at stake**

**b) successful: patripassionism declared heretical**

**Note on the significance of the concept of heresy; its abuse distinguished from its proper use. The unfortunate precedent set by Athanasius.**

### **B) THE IMPACT OF THE “GOD WHO CARES” UPON WESTERN CIVILIZATION**

**History becomes dynamic. Biblical examples: Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, Samuel. Examples from European history: the crusades, St. Francis, Joan of Arc (see remainder of course).**

## C) THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE PAGAN CONCEPTION IN MODERN TIMES

1) Never fully overcome; foothold within Christianity from early centuries on.

2) Symptoms today:

anthropomorphic God not taken seriously (not even refuted); hence no concept of a God who speaks, acts, cares

popular pantheism: "religion on the golf course"

the sin of idolatry replaced by the indiscriminating syncretism known as the virtue of toleration

the concept of late returns in the guise of scientific determinism. Laplace

national gods ride again

ecstasy re-discovered, with its twin, despair.

## CHAPTER THREE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WORLD OF NATURE

### I - GRECO-ROMAN

A) Variations on one underlying theme:

1) Mystical: disparagement of nature

Plato's myth of the cave

The physical world, in all its multiplicity, contradicts the ideal of unity and universality

Time the great destroyer, *Omne corpus fugiendum est.*

2) Materialistic (Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius)

Nothing exists but atoms in motion.

Consequent air of melancholy, for the highest human aspirations become meaningless.

3) Divinity lurking within and behind nature

a) Rationalistic (Stoic) - though natural objects themselves are unimportant, they are the manifestation of enduring structures, intelligible patterns, rational order: *logos*.

The regularities and cycles of nature, and especially of the heavens: predictable recurrence the ideal for both the individual and the society.

b) Romantic or vitalistic - the divinity in nature conceived not as *logos* but as vital energy. Fertility cults, orgiastic practices of the mystery religions

B) What all four variations have in common (like the many shapes of Proteus):

1) Immanent explanation: nature self-explanatory; a closed system in which any occurrence is explained by reference to causes within the system.

*ex nihilo, nihil fit*

hence the world had no beginning, but is eternal.

no novelty possible - the same things happen over and over again  
nature not interpreted in terms of the *purposes* of its Creator

2) Man in subjection to nature

3) Nature morally neutral - the doubtful statue of human values in a physical universe  
which is blind to good and evil.

## II - BIBLICAL

### A) Creation

The universe had a beginning - created by God out of nothing: *creatio ex nihilo*.

The Bible refers to this throughout; *e.g.*, Genesis 1:1, Amos 5:8, Isaiah 45:12, 48:12-13, Job 38, Psalm 104, John 1, Hebrews 1, etc.

*Cf.* the creed: "maker of heaven and earth" [*Cf. means compare, consult*]

### B) Creation Good

"And God saw that it was good." "Consider the lilies of the field..." Also I Timothy 4:1-5,  
the psalms and canticles.

No antagonism of matter versus spirit. "Christianity is the most materialistic of all  
religions" ---Archbishop Temple.

Man can at last feel at home in the world: "*vous êtes chez moi.*"

Time the condition of life, not an implacable slayer

### C) Creation Acquires A Purpose

Nature the stage-setting for the drama of history:

Man released from the subjection to nature--no question of deifying the structures or  
potencies of nature--man called to have dominion over the earth and subdue it

But man also reminded that he is a guest in the world, and not to plunder his Host's  
creation wantonly.

### D) Miracles Are *Possible*.

If God made the universe in the first place, he surely retains his dominion over it. It obeys  
him, not immanent Principles of its own.

Novelty in nature can be expected.

## III - THE RIVALRY BETWEEN PAGAN AND BIBLICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE

### A) The Incomplete Victory Of The Biblical View

1) Unsuccessful attempt to subvert the doctrine of creation.

Marcion and gnosticism: rejection of the OT and its Creator-God;  
substitution of a truncated version of the NT; docetism. Marcion's  
aim: to make Christianity intellectually respectable.

Defeated by Irenaeus and the early Church Fathers generally. But sometimes  
rejected dogmatically, rather than refuted by reason.

- 2) Successful subversion of the doctrine of the goodness of creation. *Contemptus mundi*; the temporal contrasted with the spiritual; physical things disparaged by Christians down to the present day.

## B) Re-emergence Of The Pagan View In Modern Times

- 1) The four classical attitudes toward nature revived:
  - a) mystical - the existentialist's revulsion for the "disease of existence."
  - b) materialistic - Bertrand Russell and the "trampling march of unconscious power."
  - c) rationalistic - science and the intelligibility of nature (without a Planner behind it).
  - d) vitalistic - Walt Whitman; Bergson and the *elan vital*; G. B. Shaw and the life force.
- 2) Revival of certain presupposition shared by all four of these views:

**Immanent explanation: Russell and the dancing bear**

**Hence the world was not created.**

**Quotes from various philosophers and scientists**

**Though some scientists are suggesting that nature is unintelligible apart from the concept of purpose, the idea of a cosmic Purposer is rigidly excluded.**

**Man subjected to nature - a wayward creature with delusions of grandeur whose true goal is a return to the predictable harmonies of nature: Walden II. Perhaps the animal-headed gods of Egypt are worshipped in all but name by the 20th century.**

**No room for human values in the neutral world of nature. Good and evil are fictions to be either mocked or ignored.**

## IV - RELATION OF CLASSICAL AND BIBLICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS TO MODERN SCIENCE

### A) Introductory Remarks

- 1) As matter of historical record, the foundations of the scientific method, as stated by Galileo and Newton, were laid during the Middle Ages by men like the monk Roger Bacon and Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln.
- 2) When the Church did oppose certain scientific developments, such as the theories of Galileo and Darwin, it not only acted contrary to biblical principles, but also in defense of certain pagan views which it had adopted, such as Ptolemaic astronomy or Aristotelian physics.

**St. Augustine disparages the investigation- of nature, but for reasons which are pagan, rather than biblical.**

- 3) Principle of historical interpretation to be applied and tested in this and the ensuing chapters: When the Church in practice refuses to recognize its own legitimate offspring such as science, democracy, etc. it drives them into opposition. When thus cut off from their true source, they turn into monstrosities, like the religion of science, or the religion of democracy, which finally destroy themselves.

## **B) Greek Contributions to The Scientific Method**

- 1) Mathematics, the means of correlating observed data and them to a single formula.  
(The Hebrews made no contributions to mathematics)**
- 2) Observations of nature. Despite the strong tendency to disparage nature, Aristotle and his followers engaged in accurate observation and classification of data. The Hebrews, though they were at home in the world of nature, observed it more in the spirit of wonder than of dispassionate scientific investigation.**

## **C) Presuppositions Of The Experimental Method Derived From Biblical And Hindered By Classical Attitudes Toward Nature.**

- 1) Man the master of nature (Genesis 1:26:31; Psalm 8:5-8). The Greek rarely overcame the tendency either to flee from nature or to bow down in reverence before the divinity within nature. For the Bible, it is man's mission to fashion nature in the extension of God's creative purpose.**
- 2) Nature worth investigating.  
For the Greek, nature was an inferior realm of being. Even those who observed it, like Aristotle, considered it inferior. For the Bible, nature is the Garden of God, and hence well worth knowing.**
- 3) Knowledge of individual things is both possible and significant. For the Greek, knowledge of universals was the only certain knowledge, and therefore superior to knowledge of individuals. Hence, contemplation superior to knowledge gained through the senses.  
For the Bible, God Himself is an individual, not a universal. Hence, individuals are not inferior to universals and knowledge of individuals in both possible and significant.**
- 4) The order of nature, recognized by both Jew and Greek, can only be discovered by experiment ("*a posteriori*"). Since the Greek considered the order of nature to be a manifestation of logos, a particle of which he carried about in his own head, he sought to discover this order by meditating upon the principles of thought.  
(Archimedes arrived at his principle sitting in the bathtub).**

**For the Bible, the order of nature is due to the purposes of God. It can therefore never be discovered "*a priori*" (that is, by sheer thought), but only by investigation; *i.e.*, by experiment.**

**"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork".  
*Cf.* the famous remark of Kepler who said that he had simply been thinking God's thoughts after him.**

- 5) The realm of change and time is not inferior, and can be known. For the Greek mind, the realm of change ("*Becoming*") was not perfectly knowable, because it would not "hold still" long enough for the mind to grasp it. Hence it was held to be inferior to the realm of 'Being', which never changed. *NB:* Greek mathematics all dealt with the static: trigonometry, plane and solid geometry.**

For the Bible, God Himself was active, dynamic. The unchanging was stagnant and lifeless. Before science could get off the ground, there had to be mathematics which could deal with the phenomena of *change*: the calculus (17th c.)

**D) Presuppositions Of *Applied* Science Derived From Biblical And Hindered By Classical Attitudes.**

**1) Dignity of manual labor**

Where the Greek scorned manual labor as beneath the dignity of a rational man, the main characters of the Bible are fishermen, shepherds, tent-makers, carpenters. *Laborare est orare*. Contact with the earth does not contaminate.

**2) Mundane preoccupations are important. Where the Greek was haunted by the thought that “no human thing is of any great importance, biblical men were called upon to build the kingdom of God on earth.**

**3) Knowledge not simply an end in itself, but also *useful*. Where the Greek prized knowledge for its own sake, and would have scorned subordinating it to merely human interests, the Bible regards “merely human interests” as also God’s interests. Hence, knowledge was in principle subordinated to divine and human purposes.**

**RESULTS:** where Greek knowledge tended to be intensely aristocratic, the prerogative of the very few, the biblical view could enlist the mass effort essential to the large-scale endeavor of science.

**E) Conclusion: The Greeks did have far more “intellectual curiosity” than the Hebrews, and boasted innumerable intellectual attainments. The marvel is, not that they occasionally anticipated modern scientific developments, but that when they did, they failed to take the hint. Men like Galen, who did conduct some experiments, were ridiculed. The explanation of this marvel herewith proposed (though awaiting further confirmation): The Greeks were blinded by their own presuppositions to what lay within their grasp. Before their brilliant achievements could be exploited, these presuppositions had to give way to biblical ones.**

Examples from Whitehead, Collingwood, Duhem.

**V - RECENT SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS WHICH SUPPORT BIBLICAL, RATHER THAN CLASSICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS**

**A) Immanent Explanation Challenged**

Heisenberg’s “principle of indeterminacy”, though subject to conflicting interpretations, denies that cause-and-effect can explain all natural events. Instead of complete predictability, nature seems to display surprise and novelty. In any case, scientists now prefer to speak of “laws” as averages, rather than as causes.

Explanation in terms of purpose appears to some scientists and philosophers to be the only way to make sense out of certain biological phenomena (though of course without reference to a Purposer). *e.g.*, the slime mold.

Some scientists have even departed so far from the doctrine of *ex nihilo nihil fit* as to postulate the spontaneous creation of matter at the rate of one hydrogen atom per cubic meter every 300,000 years (according to Hoyle). (No Creator, of course).

(Even the theory of evolution requires novelty and change, as opposed to the dominant classical view that the species are rigidly fixed).

## B) Eternity of the Universe Challenged

### 1) Second law of thermodynamics (entropy)

The energy of the universe is tending toward a state of equilibrium. In an infinite amount of time, this state would already have been reached. Therefore....

### 2) Expanding universe.

If the universe is expanding in all directions away from a center, then, if you “run the film backwards”, you come to a time when the universe did not exist.

### 3) Age of the universe about 4.5 billion years.

Using the most diverse methods, scientists have measured the age of the universe as a whole, star clusters, binary systems, individual stars, and meteorites. The results converge toward a figure between one and ten billion years, and remarkably close to the most recent figure for the age of the earth: 4.5 billion years.

## CHAPTER FOUR THE NATURE OF MAN

### I - CLASSICAL AND BIBLICAL VIEWS COMPARED

#### A) The relation of mind and body

##### 1) Classical - the definition of man as “rational animal” involves a contradiction in terms.

The following three views represent attempts to resolve this contradiction.

a) Mystical - The mind, whose true kinship is with “the universal”, the immaterial the timeless, is imprisoned in a material, temporal, individual body. The wise man never assents to this ‘unholy alliance’, but constantly protests against it, and longs for its dissolution.

*Soma sema.* Quotes from Plato’s *Phaedo*. The myth of King Midas. Plotinus’ refusal to sit for a portrait.

b) Rational - the stoic mind-over-matter theory sets out to conquer physical appetites and subdue the emotions: *logos spermatikos*.

c) materialist - the mind is really a highly specialized physical phenomenon, and therefore has no independent existence, but is subject to the laws of physical nature.

(concluding note concerning Greco-Roman “physical culture” and appreciation of the beauty of the human form.)

- 2) **Biblical - the unity of human nature, symbolized by the absence from the Hebrew language of words for mind or body (except a dead body). The body essential to human self-hood. The emphasis more on man as animated body than incarnate soul. "Soul" a misleading translation of *nephesh*. Possible misunderstanding of the biblical term "flesh", illustrations:**

**resurrection; psychic functions of parts of the body; the body not a prison, but the opposite, the only means of relating to the outside world.**

**"thought" not an independent entity, but the product of the activity of free selves.**

## **B) Origin and destiny of man**

### **1) Classical**

- a) **The most influential view was the mystical or gnostic, represented by Plato's myth of the charioteer. Some hints of judgment after death. Reincarnation.**
- b) **The materialists deplored such speculations as tending to spoil the present life by preoccupation with the next. "*Tantum malorum fecit religio*".**
- c) **Modified views of Aristotle and Stoics.**

- 2) **Biblical - Constant reminder that each man comes into existence as a special act of god. No pre-existent soul, no "spark of divinity" within each person. No reincarnation, but once-for-all character of this life.**

**Difference between immortality and resurrection. Life everlasting not automatic.**

## **C) Value of the individual**

- 1) **Classical humanism - the Greeks famous for exalting the distinctively human, for developing the civilized arts and culture, for pursuing "true manhood".**

**But: the "distinctively human" was the rational faculty; the rational faculty exalted "universals" at the expense of particular individuals; in the last analysis, the "distinctively human" became the capacity to transcend individuality, to approximate the 'ideal' pattern of "the-human-in-general" (Cf. dog show: the individual is never quite as perfect as the ideal model).**

**Quotes from Plato and Aristotle.**

- 2) **Biblical - the *imago dei* (the basis for the prohibition of murder). "God so loved the world ..." "The hairs of your head are numbered". "I have called you friends". What other basis could there be for the value of the individual, aside from mere dogmatic insistence?**

## **D) The question of free will**

## 1) Classical

a) **Rationalists** - as rational animal, man always acts in accordance with reason. Therefore, “no man knowingly does evil.” All problems due to ignorance, and soluble by knowledge.

How this denies freedom. *Cf.* fate and destiny.

b) **materialists** - all action a complex instance of matter-in motion. Man the creature of impulse and appetite. Freedom again denied.

c) attempts to restore freedom: Aristotle. The Epicurean doctrine that the atoms swerve.

(Note: neither the Greeks nor anyone else *consistently* denies freedom. It creeps into their writings *in spite of* them. Possible explanation: no false theory can be consistently maintained).

2) **Biblical** - the principal words in the Bible all take free will for granted: love, covenant, gratitude, judgment, repentance, and even sin. The relation of sin to the idea of free will.

“Choose ye this day..”

The Bible’s solution to the problem of how to become truly free and stay that way. Knowledge *alone* not enough. Quotes.

## E) Relation of individual to community

### 1) Classical

a) man considered as “rational” - the cultivation of the mind requires independence from all external influence (*Cf.* “pure objectivity”), so that the thinker may be “purely objective”. Philosophic contemplation a solitary activity, “the flight of the alone to the alone”.

Hence the ideal of complete self-sufficiency. Examples.

b) Man considered as “animal” - As a member of the material, animal kingdom, man falls under the same laws that govern it. From this point of view, the individual is a member of the pack, subordinated to the group. *Cf.* most ancient political theory: “deviationism” is unpredictable, and therefore irrational.

### 2) Biblical -

a) *not* individualistic - “we are members one of another” Who you are and what you are depends largely upon your emotional and volitional relationships with others. Isaiah 6. The emphasis on *Israel*, old and new. The impossibility of becoming a Jew or Christian alone, on a desert island.

Human existence is corporate. The attempt to “go it alone” cripples the person. *E.g.*, wolf children and solitary confinement.

The worst punishment for the ancient Hebrews was to be alone. “*Ein mensch ist kein mensch.*”

Hence many Churches forbid the Minister to celebrate Holy Communion unless a congregation is present.

b) not collectivistic - rather, the individual only comes to full flower in the context of positive relations with his fellows. The hermit may correctly diagnose his society as destructive, but to flee into isolation is not the answer. The only answer is a “redemptive community.”

- - which was the original definition of “church”; not an institution or a building, but ekklesia and koinonia. A community in which the individual at last comes into his own because at last he is truly loved. “We know that we have been brought from death unto life because we love the brethren.” “Where two or three are gathered together...”

Love takes two; therefore a self-sufficient Christian is a contradiction in terms. The triangular relation between self, neighbor, and God. The biblical heaven: a banquet!!

(Note: did Judaism and Christianity discover personality, in our modern sense? *Cf.* statues of Buddhist saints and Greek philosophers. A reflection on the great personalities of the ancient world, like Socrates, Alexander, Caesar).

## II - RIVALRY OF PAGAN AND BIBLICAL CONCEPTIONS

### A) Open conflict

1) Pagan attacks on the biblical view; Celsus, Julian

2) Biblical rejoinder

Origen

Augustine: opposed reincarnation; “*Quid sumus nisi voluntates?*”; the pear tree

### B) Infiltration of Christianity by pagan views

1) Unsuccessful: Origen’s doctrine of pre-existence and reincarnation condemned

2) Successful:

Mind superior, body inferior (Augustine, Aquinas, Dante) -Thinking better than acting, quiescence better than motion (the beatific vision) - belief in immortal “souls” - mortification of the flesh and flagellation (monks and Puritans).

Predestination (most famous theologians - “*non posse peccare*”).

Solitary salvation

**“Original sin”, at least in some formulations of the doctrine.**

**C) Impact of biblical view on Western culture**

- 1) Equality - “God is no respecter of persons” - anyone eligible to high Church office, regardless of birth - Cf. tympana of medieval cathedrals.**
- 2) Importance of inner experience - man becomes aware of the dynamics of freedom, the exercise of decision. Introspection and self-criticism in terms motives and loyalties (cf. the practice of confession).**

**Augustine’s “Confessions” a milestone in the spiritual history of the race. Cf. Marcus Aurelius’ “Meditations”: non-historical, non-self-critical. Cf. Caesars “Gallic Wars”: impersonal. No autobiography, In our sense of the word, in all antiquity (Lyric poetry is “personal”, but has nothing to do with “spiritual autobiography”).**

**Cf. Rembrandt.**

- 3) Value of the individual - taken for granted by the heirs of the biblical outlook, but, not at all self-evident to the rest of the world. The source of modern humanitarianism**

**D) Re-emergence of pagan views in modern times**

- 1) Mind-body dualism. Descartes. Consequence: man conceived either as rational intelligence (as in some scientists), or as merely a complex animal, with the mind a mere epiphenomenon (as in some other scientists). Examples**
- 2) Devaluation of the individual. (despite “humanism”). Existentialism and the “vilification of man”**
- 3) Freedom denied. Bertrand Russell and the dancing bear. Illustrations from other writers**
- 4) Extreme individualism combined with collectivism. Confusion of “value of the individual” with self-sufficiency. De Tocqueville on American individualism. Simultaneously, a strong drift toward the faceless crowd, the organization man, mass culture.**

**E) Scientific confirmation of the biblical view.**

- 1) Body-soul unity - psychosomatic medicine**
- 2) One’s spiritual health depends upon his emotional relations with others. Group therapy and the continuum of neurosis.**
- 3) Man *does* knowingly do evil.**
- 4) Mental health achieved in terms of *agape*.**

Introductory remarks: descriptive vs. normative statements;  
“ethics” as an inquiry, and as *answer*.

## I - GRAECO-ROMAN: IMPERSONAL.

### A) Human good conceived analogously to sub-human “good”

- 1) Virtue regarded as means to an end: *areté*
- 2) The search for “moral laws” comparable to “laws of nature”.  
Irregular behavior a deviation from the norm.
- 3) Not much emphasis on motive. No “conscience” as we understand it, nor repentance, for “no man knowingly does evil.”

### B) The several ethical answers reflect the basic ambiguity in the classical conception of the nature of man.

- 1) Considered primarily as *animal*, man ought to observe the limitations of nature” and not try and not try to be anything but an animal. The golden mean the ideal, and *hybris* the great sin. Epicureanism. In politics, this attitude can lead to a herd-mentality and collectivism.
- 2) Considered as rational-animal, man fulfills his proper function in terms of the four cardinal virtues (which Plato derives by first considering society as a whole).
- 3) Considered primarily as rational, man finds his highest good in philosophic contemplation. The ideal of *self-sufficiency*, which runs through much of ancient ethics, is accentuated. Cf. Aristotle’s:” “proud man”, and the Stoic who stifles his emotions. Note how individualism and collectivism turn out to be two sides of the same coin.

### C) A minor current in ancient thought held that all value judgments are subjective (the Sophists). But the dominant note was struck by Socrates, who showed by his life and thought that value judgments could not be escaped.

## II - BIBLICAL: PERSONAL

### A) CRITIQUE OF ANY SYSTEM OF ETHICAL LAWS

- 1) In some situations, to follow the law will do more harm than to break it. “The harm that ‘good’ men do.”
- 2) Legalism leads to inner tensions and split personality. Either you take the law seriously, and are tortured by guilt for failing to practice it; or you become a conscious hypocrite, giving lip service to one set of standards but living by quite another. “A cynic is a disillusioned idealist”.
- 3) Instead of responsible decision, automatic reflexes. Instead of creative imagination, mere obedience. Freedom becomes undesirable.
- 4) Laws become tyrants. Rebellion appears to be the only way to preserve integrity. Cf. Nietzsche.

5) Legalism, instead of promoting love, actually hinders or destroys it. “Honesty”, for example, can provide a pretext for subtle cruelty. Corroboration from psychoanalysis. “Woe to ye scribes and pharisees...”

6) Moral laws are finally unprovable.

7) “Splendid vices”.

B) The biblical answer reflects the biblical conception of the nature of man as “worshipping animal”. Every man has some “god” (or “gods”).

1) The dynamics of idolatry. Illustrations.

the idolater is made in the image of his “god”

he becomes enslaved to it

he is blinded by it

he is duped by it -- *i. e.*, he finally gets from it the opposite of what he expected.

2) Conversely, the true God liberates his worshiper; removes the scales from his eyes; is steadfast forever; re-creates him in his own image.

C) How the biblical ethic works in practice

1) The norm: not laws, but the will of God (four kinds of question)

Wickedness not law-breaking, but double-crossing.

2) Virtue and happiness coincide: *agape* I Cor. 13.

3) Although *agape* cannot be generated by a unilateral act of will, a “good” action is one which furthers and nurtures *agape*. *i.e.*, it fosters *trust* and *respect*. A “bad” action does the opposite. Note that the test is always in terms of *consequences*, rather than principles. Importance of manners

4) Not irresponsible, but *more* responsible. Accountable to *Someone*. Stewardship. *Cf. Crime and Punishment*.

5) Laws are subordinate -- useful rules of thumb, but never absolute. “Love, and do as you please.”

6) Vocation. *Not* equivalent to “occupation”. Provides the over-all context, and also available in immediate situations.

7) The importance of motive. *NB*: self-denial and self-sacrifice never an acceptable motive. muscular ethic, not a doormat ethic.

8) Value of the individual implied throughout.

### III - IMPACT OF BIBLICAL ETHICS ON WESTERN SOCIETY

A) Ancient

1) Slavery: Pagan practices vs. “neither bond nor free”. The Epistle to Philemon,

**Manumission encouraged, until slavery died out.**

- 2) Gladiatorial spectacles. “Bread and circuses”. Under Trajan, 10000 gladiators fought for 123 days. Forbidden by Constantine. Death blow by Telemachus.**
- 3) Sex. The “decline and fall of Rome’ accompanied by the “decline and fall of sex”: sacred prostitution, theatrical exhibitions (including tales about the gods). Impotence of Stoic protests. Contrast the traditional Hebraic approach: sex good -- *too* good to be degraded. Constant campaign of early Christians, as seen in St. Paul’s letters.**
- 4) Women and children. The absolute rights of the *paterfamilias*. Children unwanted: exposure. Women subject to father and husband; at a disadvantage because of free marriage, easy divorce, double standard. Christian attack on these practices**
- 5) The plight of the poor. Under Caesar, handouts by lot, to calm rebellious spirits. Christian concern for the person led to establishments of charitable foundations, hospitals, homes for the poor, aged, and orphans.**
- 6) Suicide common among pagans, even advocated by some philosophers. Opposed by biblical sense of meaningfulness of human life, and sense of belonging to God.**
- 7) NB: all these pagan practices imply lack of concern for the person as a child of God, and lack of sense of responsibility to a Creator-God.**

**B) Medieval. (Granted that medieval practice often fell below medieval ideals, the crucial point is that such practice was not admired).**

- 1) Peace of God, Truce of God**
- 2) Chivalry**
- 3) Alms**
- 4) “Members one of another” - *noblesse oblige* - the “just price”, and the prohibition of usury**
- 5) Liberty and equality - Wycliffe and the Lollards - “Piers Plowman”. Marsilio of Padua.**

**C) Modern. in modern times, many of the humanitarian implications of biblical ethics, which had been suppressed within Christianity itself, were taken up and implemented by secularists. Two-fold tragedy: the Church has sometimes failed to acknowledge these movements as its own legitimate offspring, and opposed them. Likewise, humanitarian movements have failed to recognize their biblical sources, and in cutting themselves off from their origins, have left themselves defenseless. They show a strong tendency to turn sour when transplanted out of their biblical soil.**

- 1) Charitable institutions - Father Damien, Albert Schweitzer - Hospitals, and care of the needy - Jane Addams**
- 2) Abolition of slavery - Bishop Wilberforce**

- 3) Crusade for social justice - universal suffrage, human rights, child labor laws, democratic institutions (Diggers and Levellers; Roger Williams).

#### **IV - RIVALRY OF PAGAN AND BIBLICAL ETHICS**

**A) Infiltration of classical concepts within Christian thought (due partly to fear that the end will justify the means).**

- 1) “Natural law” theory or ethics - especially in Roman Catholicism
- 2) Aimless obedience and self-denial for its own sake, especially among Protestants. In extreme cases, Christianity reduced to a suffocating list of petty “do’s” and “don’ts.

**B) Re-emergence of pagan views in recent times**

- 1) Symbol: Nietzsche, ‘if God is dead, then everything is permitted’ No personal responsibility - conscience departs. The individual devaluated in favor of the “Superman”
- 2) Without a secure foundation in the will of God, ethical standards dissolve. It is too late to fall back on a theory of “natural law” - Christianity itself has made such an expedient obsolete. Possible prophecy: apart from a revival of biblical ethics, the future holds moral chaos and its counterpart, tyranny. Example: existentialism, which holds (with the Bible) that all mere rules of conduct are both restrictive and unprovable.

**3) Examples of how pagan practices have returned with a vengeance.**

concentration camps; why not?  
conformity - not prevented by slogans about “the land of the free” - perhaps just hidden by them,  
the “decline and fall of sex”.  
break-up of the family (the biblical “microcosm” of the kingdom of God)  
spread of suicide

Can we “discern the signs of the times?”