



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Something to Chew On

G. K. Chesterton on H. G. Wells:
 “I think he thought that the object of opening the mind is simply opening the mind. Whereas I am incurably convinced that the object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.”
 - *Autobiography* (Hutchinson, 1927), 223-224; in John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist: A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion* (InterVarsity, 1970), 16.

Good Philosophy Needed

“If all the world were Christian, it might not matter if all the world were uneducated. But, as it is, a cultural life will exist outside the Church whether it exists inside or not. To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered. – C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory & Other Addresses* (HarperOne, [1949] 1980), 58.

It is written in the Prophets, “And they will all be taught by God.” Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me - John 6.45.

Outcomes Have Reasons

David Anguish

“The idea preceded the product . . . To not think is unthinkable.”¹

Were you aware the New York state legislature considered bills to legalize euthanasia in the late 1940s?² Did you know a meeting of psychiatrists in the German state of Bavaria discussed the sterilization and euthanasia of those with chronic mental illness in 1931, more than a year before Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor on January 30, 1933?

In his 1950 book, *The Ethical Basis of Medical Practice*, Willard Sperry, Dean of Harvard’s Divinity School, referenced Dr. Leo Alexander’s discussion of the latter to highlight the dangers of the former. Alexander, who served in the office of the Chief of Counsel for War Crimes at Nuremberg, noted that, even before Hitler was appointed Chancellor,

a propaganda barrage was directed at the nineteenth century *attitude* toward the chronically ill, and for the adoption of a *utilitarian, Hegelian point of view*. Sterilization and euthanasia of persons with chronic mental illness was discussed at a meeting of Bavarian psychiatrists in 1931. By 1936 extermination of the physically or socially unfit was so openly accepted that its practice was mentioned incidentally in an article published in an official German medical journal. . . . Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a *subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physicians*. It started with the *attitude*, basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as a life not worth living. The infinitely small wedged-in level from which this *entire trend of mind* received its impetus was the *attitude* toward the non-rehabilitable sick. *It is, therefore, this subtle shift of emphasis in the physician’s attitude that one must thoroughly examine* (my emphasis).³

Notice my italics in the above, highlighting *attitude, point of view, utilitarian, Hegelian, shift of emphasis, and trend of mind*. Notice too that in 1950—seventy-one years ago—Sperry was responding to a proposal to legalize euthanasia.

What Price Technology?

“[N]ot everything is *televisable*. Or to put it more precisely, what’s televised is transformed from what it was to something else, which may or may not preserve its former essence.... For the most part, television preachers have ... assumed that what had formerly been done in a church or a tent, and face-to-face, can be done on television without loss of meaning, without changing the quality of the religious experience. Perhaps their failure to address the translation issue has its origin in the hubris engendered by the dazzling number of people to whom television gives them access.”

~ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Penguin Books, 1984), 118.

“The cultural shift from emphasizing the word to focusing on the image—or what Jacques Ellul called ‘the humiliation of the word’—retards abstract thinking, replaces the work of imagination with literal pictures, weakens community, which is bound together by words, and undermines ‘public goods, which demand the interactive deliberation of rational citizens armed with literacy.” ~ Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Post-modernism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 54; citing Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*; & Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, 89.

“Truth eludes us as soon as our concentration begins to flag, all the while leaving the illusion that we are continuing to pursue it.” ~ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart* (Harper & Row, 1978), 1; in Groothuis, 23.

Finally, consider this, also from Sperry. Noting the “ghastly inhumanity” described by Alexander, he wrote that, while

we in America cannot conceive of our doctors or ourselves going to such extremes, . . . the record does suggest what can happen to the *minds of men* when the economic welfare of the state rather than the care of the individual patient becomes the doctor’s major concern (emphasis mine).⁴

Seventy-one years later, I think Sperry would agree that it is now much easier to conceive of such things. We’ve seen too much to argue otherwise. I don’t mention his examples to raise the alarm about things we’ve not noticed, but to remind us of the need to think about the reasons behind the behaviors.

Scripture draws a line from “futile thinking” to “darkened hearts/ understanding” and then to depraved behavior (Rom 1.21ff.; Eph 4.17ff.).⁵ That’s not news, but I don’t think it’s something we’ve talked as much about at the practical level. I say that in light of having heard so many express bewilderment about “what things are coming to.”

That they seem surprised is evidence of collective inattention at the practical level to the thinking that has long advocated the behaviors we’re seeing.⁶ Being more often attentive to outcomes than reasons, we neglect the necessary work of analysis that best equips us to reply.

In short, we need to think more about what people have been thinking. To encourage that project, if the Lord wills, in coming issues we’ll begin a closer look at the above texts.

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Notes

¹ R. C. Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts That Shaped Our World* (Crossway, 2000), 9, 11.

² For a summary, see “1949 New York State Petition for Euthanasia and Catholic opposition,” in <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euthanasia>. For a timeline of U. S. legalization efforts, see <https://euthanasia.procon.org/historical-timeline/#1900-1949>; both accessed February 1, 2021.

³ Leo Alexander, “Medical Science Under Dictatorship,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 241, no 2 (July 14, 1949), cited in Willard L. Sperry, *The Ethical Basis of Medical Practice* (Paul B. Hoeber, Inc., 1950), 155-156.

⁴ Sperry, 152.

⁵ Of interest is the fact that “futile/futility” in Romans and Ephesians translate forms of *ματαιότης* (*mataiotēs*), the LXX rendering of *הֶבֶל* (*hebel*), “vanity,” in Ecclesiastes. “Vanity,” of course, is the Preacher’s assessment of the worth of “under the sun” thinking (cf. Eccl 1.3; et. al.).

⁶ See for example the 1979 discussion of a 1973 *Newsweek* article, “Shall This Child Die?” in which a doctor at the Yale Medical School said, “The public has got to decide what to do with vegetated individuals who have no human potential.” In Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Fleming H. Revell, 1979), 80.

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