



THE BEREHA PAGE

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

We Should Not Be Surprised

David Anguish

Some recent opinion articles in my news feed offered analysis of the university protests ([here](#)), [marxist subversion](#) of western culture, and the [cultural discouragement](#) of family formation. While their topics differ, and the evidence offered in defense of their theses is rightly subject to Berean-like questioning, all four writers assume a common premise: the behaviors we are seeing stem from ideas that have been disseminated for decades. As one author wrote regarding the protests, “Most Americans find these scenes shocking, and many [university] administrators claim to be stunned. Yet those of us who’ve been following the disastrous decline of American higher education *have been warning for years* about the inevitable” (Corcoran 2024; my emphasis).

Of course, the behaviors they discuss are not the only examples of changes in mores that have resulted from sustained propagation of ideologies. The view that “ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*,” for example, was stated in *Humanist Manifesto II* in 1973. So, too, were calls for abortion to be established as a right and for the loosening of legal and social sanctions on practices including “sexual behavior between consenting adults,” “euthanasia,” and “the right to suicide” (*Humanist* 1973, 17-19). I am not saying the promoted ideas *originated* with the *Manifestos*; in fact, all were previously touted elsewhere (see e.g., Joseph Fletcher’s *Situation Ethics*, published in 1966). Nor am I saying the various editions of the *Manifesto* include nothing of value or that its signers would approve of every application of their ideas (see their comments in this regard and their trenchant critiques of New Age and postmodernist ideologies in the 2000 revision; Kurtz 2000, 12, 22-23, 29).

Just as the best way to confront a disease is to ascertain and address its root cause, not just treat its symptoms, so it is sensible to make the effort to identify and address the root ideologies behind aberrant behaviors, not just react to their manifestations. It is a concern, then, when we hear believers sound surprised to see the cultural changes we’ve experienced. That incredulity often takes the form of a question that asks, “Just what are people thinking now?” While that approximates the point, it is better asked this way: “What have people *been* thinking?” For as Os Guinness reminds us, “All people at some point behave true to their beliefs. Sooner or later they will act on the assumptions they truly hold and reap the consequences” (Guinness 2000, 98).

I have referred [before](#) to Peter Kreeft’s imagined exhortation of the devil to his minions about the best way to gain control over human lives:

The Enemy’s people think they are safe from us because we cannot create or move matter, as the Enemy can, but all we can do is tempt and influence thought. Ha! “All we can do” is quite enough. For as one of their poets sagely said, “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” Their thoughts are their premises; their lives—and their eternal lives—are their conclusions. Get those premises! Occupy the premises! Conquer their philosophy.

That strategy works especially well in American society because they don't pay much attention to philosophy, so they let their guard down there (Kreeft 2002, 71; my emphasis).

Kreeft is right; many “don't pay much attention to philosophy,” to the root ideas that influence behaviors and eventually transform cultures. And that inattention extends to believers who exhibit an outlook Jerram Barrs summarized well:

Some people dislike this approach to Christian faith. It appears to belong to the realm of philosophy, which they see as complicated where Christianity should be simple, abstract where Christianity should be real, and intellectual where Christianity should be spiritual. They quote the apostle Paul who wrote that, “since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” [1 Cor 1.21]. But Paul is in no way saying that the gospel is actually foolish; only that it seems foolish in the eyes of people who discount God. In the same passage he goes on to say it is the non-Christian thinking or philosophy which is in truth foolish, and the Christian message which is the only true wisdom (Barrs 1982, 38).

Barrs's analysis serves to remind us that the faith's first teachers embraced what many today dislike. Peter tells Christians under duress to prepare to make a defense to anyone asking why they believe (1 Pet 3.15). John tells us not to be gullible, but to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4.1). And Paul tells us that correct behavior, including imitation of Christ Jesus, begins with the right use of our minds (Phil 2.5; cf. 1.7; 2.2; 3.15, 19; 4.2, 10; elaborated [here](#)).

He assumes the same truth elsewhere, including in 2 Corinthians, where he declares that we are engaged in a spiritual war that is being waged at the level of thought and ideas:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10.3–5).

In light of such teaching, we should ponder Ronald Nash's statement in the Preface to his book on worldviews:

To me, it is a great mystery why so many people who respond heroically to other challenges shun those so abundant in the world of ideas. While many of us push our bodies to the limit, any unnecessary use of our minds is treated with the same disdain we gave, as children, to eating spinach or broccoli (Nash 1992, 11).

Given the enemy's success in occupying the premises, perhaps it's time for us to improve our diets.

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