

THE FLIGHT FROM  
HUMANITY

A STUDY OF THE EFFECT  
OF NEOPLATONISM  
ON CHRISTIANITY

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

This study is primarily and essentially a theological analysis, and only secondarily historical or literal. A theological study is an analysis of a particular area of faith and life in terms of the enscriptured word of God. While such a study must also be intellectually and exegetically sound, it must be related to the reality of the battlefield of human thought and action. A theological study is thus also an act of intellectual exorcism, an attempt to cast out the evil spirits of some kind of heretical, debilitating thought which is enfeebling and crippling the life of man and our understanding of the word of God.

This point is important. Attention is given in this study to Michael Wigglesworth, as an example of a particular expression of faith which is defective and unbiblical. For some, Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan pastor and poet now known mainly to scholars, is an irrelevant figure; this is not true. He is very much with us, both in the churches and in the rebel youth of our time, hippies and others. If to others it seems as though I am unfairly striking at a man long dead, Michael Wigglesworth, I must add that this is not true. I am aiming at the living.

For a Christian, the lives of “the saints” are sometimes painful reading. Intelligence and faith are sometimes wedded to the most

ludicrous practices and to ideas alien to biblical religion. Thus Palladius saw the goal of Christian living as release from this world and the flesh: “All those who love Christ make haste to be joined to God through these virtuous acts, each day preparing for the release of the soul.”<sup>1</sup> It was considered a virtue in Isidore the elder, guest-master of the church of Alexandria, that, “Up to the very end of his life he wore no fine linen except for a headband. He neither bathed nor ate meat.”<sup>2</sup> When, after a very hot journey, Jovinus washed his tired feet (and hands) in very cold water, and then stretched out to rest, the “holy” Melania rebuked him:

Melania approached him like a wise mother approaching her own son, and she scoffed at his weakness, saying: “How can a warm-blooded young man like you dare to pamper your flesh that way? Do you not know that this is the source of much harm? Look, I am sixty years old and neither my feet nor my face nor any of my members, except for the tips of my fingers, has touched water, although I am afflicted with many ailments and my doctors urge me. I have not yet made concessions to my bodily desires, nor have I used a couch for resting, nor have I ever made a journey on a litter.”<sup>3</sup>

We learn nothing about biblical holiness from Melania, although we do begin to realize what “the odor of sanctity” could have meant.

“Killing” the body, short of suicide, was a common practice, for the body was treated as an enemy. When a Theban ascetic, Dorotheus, was asked, “What are you doing, Father, killing your body in such heat?” he answered, “It kills me; I will kill it.”<sup>4</sup> Suicidal self-mortification was called sanctification. The body, the flesh, was the enemy of sanctification, and it had to be whipped, rolled on thorns, and abused in order to enhance “spirituality.” We are told of Ammonius that, “He never pampered his flesh when desire rose up in revolt, but he heated an iron in the fire and applied it to his limbs, so that he became ulcerated all over.”<sup>5</sup>

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1. Robert T. Meyer, trans., *Palladius: The Lausiaca History* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1965), 24.

2. *Ibid.*, 31.

3. *Ibid.*, 136.

4. *Ibid.*, 33.

5. *Ibid.*, 47.

According to Scripture, it was not man's flesh that fell into sin, but the whole man. The doctrine of total depravity means that the extent of the Fall is total, that every aspect of man's being is tainted by sin, and that the root of it is in the "heart" of man, in his mind, nature and being. To seek refuge in the spirit to escape from the flesh is to seek sanctity in the capitol of sin, for it was and is man's desire to be as God, to be his own god, determining good and evil for himself, which is the essence of original sin (Gen. 3:5). The ascetic quest thus took refuge in sin from sin! It flew from the suburbs of temptation into the central city of sin and was then bewildered to find the enemy there.

Under the guise of humility, this ascetic quest manifested an arrogant and fearful pride. In the name of being beyond material considerations, the ascetics and hermits despised duly constituted authorities for no other reason than that they were authorities. Thus "the blessed Nathaniel" refused to show courtesy to "seven holy bishops" who visited him:

The deacons told him: "You are committing an arrogant act, Father, not escorting the bishops forth."

But he said: "I am dead both to my sovereign bishops and to the whole world. I have an intention which is hidden, and God knows my heart, why I do not escort them forth."<sup>6</sup>

This hidden intention was the sin of Adam, to be as God, *to transcend creatureliness* with all its limitations and become more than a man. Macarius of Alexandria gives us an example of this:

Here is another example of his asceticism: He decided to be above the need for sleep, and he claimed that he did not go under a roof for twenty days in order to conquer sleep. He was burned by the heat of the sun and was drawn up with the cold at night. And he also said, "If I had not gone into the house and obtained the advantage of some sleep, my brain would have shriveled up for good. I conquered to the extent I was able, but I gave in to the extent my nature required sleep."

Early one morning when he was sitting in his cell a gnat stung him on the foot. Feeling the pain, he killed it with his hands, and it was gorged with his blood. He accused himself of acting out of revenge and he condemned himself to sit naked in the marsh of Scete out

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6. *Ibid.*, 53.

in the great desert for a period of six months. Here the mosquitoes lacerate even the hides of the wild swine just as wasps do. Soon he was bitten all over his body, and he became so swollen that some thought he had elephantiasis. When he returned to his cell after six months he was recognized as Macarius only by his voice.<sup>7</sup>

To attain perfection meant forsaking every evidence of creatureliness, every element of bodily desires and needs, and becoming pure spirit in a virtually dead flesh. This on a few occasions meant actual castration (a common pagan practice), but it was at all times a form of psychic castration. The goal was to be, like the Greek and Stoic conception of God, passionless. The monk Diocles explained that “desire was beastlike, but anger was demonlike.”<sup>8</sup> The fact that Christ was more than once angry was not considered.

The goal was to have no feelings about anything material or fleshly. Sarapion, who never wore more than a loincloth, once shamed a young virgin who felt that she had attained a high state of passionless living:

He said: “Where do you travel?”

And she said: “To God.”

He asked her: “Are you living or dead?”

She answered: “I believe in God that I am dead, for no one in the flesh makes that journey.”

He said: “So that you may indeed convince me you are dead, do what I do.... Go out and show yourself.... Disrobe yourself and place your clothing on your shoulders and go through the middle of the city with me in the lead in this way.”

She said to him: “I would scandalize many doing such an indecent thing and they would have to say: ‘That one is insane and demon-ridden.’”

He told her: “And so far as you are concerned, what does it matter that they say you are insane and demon-ridden?”

Then she told him: “If you wish anything else, I will do it; for I do not boast that I have come to this point.”

Then he told her: “See now, do not consider yourself more pious than the others, or dead to the world, for I am more dead in that sense than you are; in fact I will show you that I am dead to the

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7. *Ibid.*, 59.

8. *Ibid.*, 139.

world, for I will do this without shame and without feeling.” Thus he left her humbled and broke her pride.

There are many other wonders which he did also proving his perfect self-control.<sup>9</sup>

This attitude is very much like that of the modern hippy, who despises the flesh and shows contempt for the body and its dress. The hippy, in his sexuality, expresses contempt for the body, either by treating sexual acts as of no account in casual promiscuity, or by a bored denial of sex. There is far more abstention from sex among hippies than is generally recognized. Either in abstention or in casual, unemotional promiscuity, it is a contempt of the flesh which is manifested. Dirty bodies and dirty clothing are other means of manifesting the same faith. Not surprisingly, hippy youth are very prone to “conversion” to the so-called Jesus Movement, a modern expression of an ancient, other-worldly heresy.

The asceticism of the early church was not new to the Greco-Roman world. As a matter of fact, it was so deeply a part of that culture that asceticism long retained its pagan orientation, and many of the more prominent ascetics, like Simeon Stylites, were more pagan than “Christian” in their orientation. The sources of asceticism were deeply rooted in motives of the pagan world. These motives were caught up in the neoplatonist philosophy and transmitted to the church. According to Porphyry, *Vita Plotini I*, the pagan philosopher Plotinus was ashamed to have a body. Both the morbid and sadistic sensuality and equally morbid and masochistic asceticism of the Roman world had their origin in this viewpoint. To understand neoplatonism is therefore urgently necessary to any understanding of some chronic problems of Western civilization.

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9. *Ibid.*, 109-10.



## II

# NEOPLATONISM

The dialectical nature of Greek thought led inevitably to neoplatonism. Dialectical philosophy is any system of thought which tries to reconcile two basically hostile concepts and to retain both of the alien substances or worlds within its system. Dialectical thought thus shows a tension between its two alien constituent members and this tension finally resolves itself by a decision in favor of one of the elements.

For Greek thought, two substances existed. On the one hand are ideas, mind, or spirit, the world of Forms, and on the other hand is the world of matter, of particulars as against universals, of the many as against the one. Since each was an independent substance, there was no effective and necessary link between the world of mind and the world of matter, and, as a result, the two tended to fall apart as philosophy pursued the logic of such a starting point.

Neoplatonism developed in Alexandria and spread throughout the ancient world. Basic to neoplatonism was the emphasis on mind or ideas as the true or more important substance, so that the superior man, discerning the irrelevance and/or illusory nature of the material world, concentrated on the things of the mind or spirit.

Very important in the development of neoplatonism was the influence of India. Appolonius of Tyana went to India to consult Brahman thinkers; Plotinus went to Persia with the Roman army in order to “gather wisdom” from “Oriental” thinkers. The source of neoplatonism, however, was not India, nor was it Plotinus. It was Plato and Greek philosophy, and it was a natural and legitimate development thereof. The function of India was that, by providing a similar world of ideas, it confirmed the belief that the universals of neoplatonism were innate in the human mind, and that all men everywhere, when they plumbed the depths of their souls, came up with these same ideas.

Neoplatonism as a formal school of philosophy held sway in the academies of the Greco-Roman world for centuries. When the Edict of Justinian in 529 closed the last academy in Athens there had been 800 years of Platonic teaching at that school. The formal school of neoplatonism became more and more anti-Christian and irrelevant. The real history of neoplatonism lies elsewhere.

What neoplatonism offered men was the belief that it represented a common world of truths shared by thinkers in Asia, Africa, and Europe, a common ground philosophy open to use by all men as the foundation of human thought. Clement of Alexandria treated it as neutral ground which all men could use. It meant that the timeless and the spiritual alone are truly real, so that the material and the historical were depreciated; “the monks tried to combine apostolic life with the philosophy which finds its highest expression in the renunciation of the material for the sake of the spiritual, in making the soul less of a partner with the body and more of a master.”<sup>1</sup>

Pagan mystics had

prayed to be delivered from the flesh rather than from sin. The body was a prison or a tomb, dissociation from which was the soul's one hope. Salvation therefore meant relief, if possible, from suffering in this present life, and release from the shame and limitation of the body in the life to come.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Robert R. Williams, *A Guide to the Teachings of the Early Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 187.

2. G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1940), 76.

The biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body prevented Christians from going quite that far, but they still pressed the pre-suppositions of neoplatonism to the fullest possible extent within a facade of the faith.

The common ground of neoplatonist ideas infiltrated Islam also, and the Sufis very clearly showed the influence of neoplatonism.<sup>3</sup>

There are many variations in neoplatonism, but in essence they all view the real world as essentially a unity which can be called mind or spirit. The world of nature is either an illusory or an inferior realm because it passes away, whereas mind or spirit seeks to realize itself as pure existence, unhampered by the material and transient. According to Lewes, "Plotinus and Hegel shake hands."<sup>4</sup>

"For Plotinus the whole world-process is summed up in the double conception of the outgoing of all things from the One, the Divine, and the return of all things to the One."<sup>5</sup> For such a philosophy, the soul is essentially good but it is held in a prison-house of flesh. Liberation and/or salvation means to despise material things and concentrate on spiritual things. For Biblical faith, there is nothing evil in the body, nor does sin spring from the presence of the soul in the body and in a material world.

Conversion means, not the turning of the soul to seek higher and nobler objects of desire, but a complete change of mind, whereby the self-centered will is changed to a theocentric will, subject to the Will of God.<sup>6</sup>

The neoplatonic goal, as expressed in Marxist terminology, is a movement from the kingdom of necessity, the realm of the material and its power, to the kingdom of freedom, the realm of mind or spirit. The chains of the material world must be broken and mind established in the purity of freedom from it.

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3. Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1931), 245ff.

4. See E. Crewdson Thomas, *History of the Schoolmen* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1946), 106ff. W. R. Inge, "Neo-Platonism," in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1917, 1930), IX, 307-19.

5. Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: S.P.C.K., 1932, 1937), pt. I, 146.

6. *Ibid.*, 175.

In some forms of neoplatonism, from Origen to the present, mind or spirit expresses itself as love, and “love is an elemental force found in all men.” Love must choose between the spiritual and the material world.<sup>7</sup> For Dante, God is “the love that moves the sun and the other stars” and which at the same time moves his own “desire and will” upward to itself.<sup>8</sup> The movement upward in Dante is neoplatonistic to the core. Essentially, the movement upward is the natural direction of the soul, whereas failure to so move is unnatural and alien to the soul and is therefore its damnation.

Both Plotinus and Porphyry attacked Christianity for its downward movement, the incarnation, whereby God became flesh in order to restore Man to his rightful place on earth, as God’s vicegerent called to exercise dominion and to subdue the earth under God. Rather than a concern with the earth, the downward motive, theirs was an insistence on an abandonment of the earth in an upward movement. Later neoplatonism made room for this descent by calling it a descent to make possible man’s ascent. As some theologians expressed this heresy, God became man so that man might become God. All things were reinterpreted in terms of this neoplatonic motive. Thus in Pseudo-Dionysius,

Fellowship with God does not occur on our level, but on the Divine level. This is best shown by Dionysius’ conception of prayer. It might seem as if in prayer we drew God’s blessing down to us. But that is not the case. God remains in His transcendence, and the effect of prayer is that we raise ourselves up to God and are united with Him.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in prayer, instead of gaining God’s guidance and His prospering hand upon our activities in a very material world, we seek escape from that realm to the spiritual world.

With the Renaissance, in Marsilio Ficino the soul became fully divine, the divine returning upward to the Divine. Man’s ability to know God came, not from revelation, but from introspection; we know God because our own nature has its divine part, a piece of God. Ficino did not consciously oppose Christianity: he

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7. *Ibid.*, pt. II, vol. I, 175.

8. Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII.

9. Nygren, *op.cit.* (1939), pt. II, vol. II, 370.

was pressing home the implications of the common ground of all religions as he understood them. Man was for him a microcosm who includes in himself all that is in the macrocosm, so that man is thus the center of the world and the key to knowledge. "If one with all this before his eyes will not admit that the human soul is a *rival of God*, he is undoubtedly out of his mind, says Ficino."<sup>10</sup> As Nygren commented, describing Ficino's position:

Since man is fundamentally a divine being, he cannot bear to see in God any perfection and power which he does not himself possess. He is inflamed with desire to vie with God.

So Nietzsche was not the first to think: "if there were gods, how could I endure not to be a god!" (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, ii. 2). What is new in this idea is the hypothetical beginning, and the negative conclusion: "Thus, there are no gods." It is not a far cry from Ficino to Nietzsche, who replaces God with the Superman, and to Feuerbach, who conceives God as the projection of man's wish fantasy.<sup>11</sup>

The essential humanism of neoplatonism thus leads to Ficino, Nietzsche, and Feuerbach. In its less open forms, it is humanism parading as the most devout Christian piety, high-minded and spiritually minded.

Neoplatonism's infection of thought and life in the early church as well as the medieval era is well known. Its infection of the Reformation's heirs, of men like Jonathan Edwards, and many of the Puritans, is well established but less recognized. Neoplatonism was present to a minor degree in the great Dutch Reformed thinker, Abraham Kuyper, and some of his heirs have constructed a whole new world of platonic Forms or Ideas as a substitute authority for the word of God. Neoplatonism is very much with us, although its terminology has changed. The new world of ideas and forms for many neoplatonists in the Reformed tradition is "common grace," a new world of natural law, ideas, forms and universals in which our "Reformed" Platos find their freedom from the restrictions of Scripture.

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10. *Ibid.*, 457.

11. *Ibid.*, 458, 458n.

For neoplatonism, when it becomes fully consistent, salvation is not a divine transaction and miracle but a thoroughly human one. Man's spirit, reason, idea, form or plan, or planning, saves man from his body, or from the world of material necessity, so that man is transferred from bondage to matter, from the kingdom of necessity, to the world of mind or spirit, the kingdom of freedom. The modern form of the ancient Greek dialectic is nature and freedom. The world of nature is the world of material necessity, bondage and slavery, the world of the bourgeois or middle classes with their materialistic money-grubbing; the world of nature is also the world of sex, and of women, seen as physical and materialistic creatures. The world of freedom is the world of mind or spirit (Hegel's *geist*); it is the world of ideas, forms, reason, and planning. Man's only hope is to impose his idea or plan on the material world and compel it to be a servant of freedom or mind. For this reason, planning to the twentieth century platonist, as to all utopians, is a religious necessity; it is the way of salvation. The gospel of Sir Thomas More was his *Utopia*, wherein man's mind imposed its idea on all of the world of matter. For More, wives were to be selected after being inspected naked; their minds were not important enough to count. So unimportant was matter or particularity, so little was it the world of spirit, that wives were to be chosen without regard to the unity of mind and matter, naked on inspection like cattle. For Aristotle, women were misbegotten males, an inferior form of humanity (more material), and Plato wondered as to whether women could be called reasonable creatures. Aristotle held that men, slaves, women, and children all have souls. However, "although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees."<sup>12</sup> Women thus have less soul than men and are thus more material. As a result, the neoplatonist tradition has tended strongly toward a hostility to women as the principle of sensuality and materialism. The implication of More's principle, which he applied to his daughter, was that women are at best essentially flesh rather than spirit, and hence, like cattle, to be inspected physically before marriage.

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12. Aristotle, *Politics*, Max Lerner (ed.) (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), I, 13.

The feminist movement, despite its serious errors, has some justification, in that the neoplatonist movement has consistently treated women with contempt. In the Bible, women are presented as no less intelligent than men, nor any the less capable of redemption; the question is one of authority, not of humanity or dignity, whereas in the neoplatonist tradition women are seen at times almost as a different species or at best a very inferior form of man.

The influence of Hellenic thought on Islam is a marked one, and women are the victims of it. Islam is a good example of men setting up a sexual order for their gratification, all the while insisting that men are rational and spiritual, and that women are coarse, materialistic, and sensual in nature. They are also supposedly inferior to men. The Bible teaches, not the inferiority of women, but their subordination, a very different thing.

Inverted neoplatonism glorified nature and therefore women. The troubadours of medieval and Renaissance Europe downgraded love in marriage, because it belonged to the world of grace, which they identified as the platonic world of spirit. Adultery, on the other hand, belonged to the world of nature. The wife was thus a low creature, and the illicit lover a queen of love. As Valency noted, in writing of such adulterous love, "However illicit it might be from the point of view of religion and society, it had the sanction of nature; as matters stood it was grounded on firmer stuff than the marriage bond."<sup>13</sup> "The sanction of nature," this is the key. Two worlds exist for neoplatonism, as for all dialecticism; they are alien to one another, so that, however much they exist as one, the world of matter and spirit, nature and grace, or nature and freedom, are somehow at odds with one another. If one is favored, the other must suffer. If *the sanction of nature*, illicit love, is exalted, *the sanction of grace*, lawful marriage, must be downgraded, because it is in principle unnatural for love and marriage, nature and grace, to be compatible.

For Scripture, however, there is no such dialectical tension. The warfare is not between matter and spirit, nature and grace, or

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13. Maurice Valency, *In Praise of Love: An Introduction to the Love-Poetry of the Renaissance* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 77.

nature and freedom, but between sinful man and God. Man by his sin has declared war on God, and as a result is in a state of tension and warfare because of sin, not because of a dual nature. Man's problem is moral or ethical, not metaphysical. Neoplatonism not only misrepresents the problem man faces, but, by making it metaphysical, makes it necessary to truncate or castrate man of a basic aspect of his being before he can be delivered.

# III

## MAN AS AN IDEA

The pagan poet Claudian in A.D. 396 expressed the Roman concern with the problem of evil in his *In Rufinum*. Claudian was a native of Alexandria, Greek in education, and highly rated by Edward Gibbon. According to Claudian,

My mind has often wavered between two opinions: have the gods a care for the world or is there no ruler therein and do mortal things drift as dubious chance dictates? For when I investigated the laws and the ordinances of heaven and observed the sea's appointed limits, the year's fixed cycle and the alternation of light and darkness, then I thought everything was ordained according to the direction of God who had bidden the stars move by fixed laws, plants grow at different seasons, the changing moon fulfil her circle with borrowed light and the sunshine by his own, who spread the shore before the waves and balanced the world in the centre of the firmament. But when I saw the impenetrable mist that surrounds human affairs, the wicked happy and long prosperous and the good discomfited, then in turn my belief in God was weakened and failed, and even against mine own will I embraced the tenet of that other philosophy which teaches that atoms drift in purposeless motion and that new forms throughout the vast void are shaped by chance and not design—that philosophy which believes in God in an ambiguous sense, or hold that there be no gods, or that they are careless of our doings.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Claudian, *In Rufinum*, lines 1-19, cited by Edward Motley Pickman, *The Mind of Latin Christendom*, 373-496 (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), I, 314.

Pickman's discerning comment on Claudian's dilemma is a pointer in the direction of a critical problem:

This passage reveals the weakness of Stoicism: for it apparently argued the existence of a Providence from the fact that there was justice on earth. Consequently it tacitly admitted the corollary that if there were no justice on earth there could be no Providence.<sup>2</sup>

The "Providence" and "God" sought by Claudian was in the neoplatonist and Stoic tradition, essentially an impersonal law order and necessity in being, the *Idea* everywhere manifest. Significantly, Claudian failed to see that *Idea* in "human affairs"; there he saw instead injustice and chance, in other words, freedom. The ironic fact was that the impersonal necessity of the idea was best seen in the material world, and least seen in the human sphere! Since the *Idea* was by definition impersonal and abstract, it was thus most readily seen where personality, human or divine, was least in evidence. This meant too that the *Idea* of man held by such a philosophy would find historical man a contradiction to the *Idea*. This real, i.e., historical, man could be excused as a mixture of mind and matter and thus imperfect, but it meant that the ideal man was inevitably an inhuman abstraction.

For man to be truly mind or *Idea* meant that man was fully governed by reason, by the necessity of mind, so that man became truly man when he entered the kingdom of freedom. As a result, in the Marxist and neo-Marxist versions of the neoplatonist tradition, the goal is said to be freedom from the kingdom of necessity, the material world, into the kingdom of freedom, which is suddenly an ant-hill society, but one ruled by mind or reason. This rule by reason is freedom from material necessity but slavery to the necessity of reason or the idea. The real man of history is thus crucified on the cross of reason as an offering to the idea of man. The real man is manure for future man, man as pure *Idea*.

But this is not all. Claudian sought God in the world in terms of his own rules of evidence. Only if God provided the abstract and rational order which the Stoic declared was true order could God prove that He was there! God, who created and ordained all things,

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2. *Ibid.*, I, 314-15.

and by His sovereign decree predestines all things, was most visibly present in the cross of Christ, an offense and foolishness to the Greeks (I Cor. 1:23) because it was by definition an act of disorder and injustice if it was even remotely what the Christians said it was.

God, to be God, had to provide Plato's kind of order, or Aristotle's, or else He obviously was not God. The God of Scripture was so alien to the passionless Idea and First Cause, the unmoved mover, of Hellenic philosophy, that He was embarrassing even to consider. Since the Providence and purpose, as well as *the person*, of the God of Scripture was not acceptable to Claudian's standard test for all gods, his conclusion was that "purposeless motion and...chance" ruled, not any god.

Pickman was right. If there is no justice on earth that meets a Stoic's definition of justice, then there is neither God nor Providence. The logical step then is for the sons of Plato to provide justice and to become the new gods of creation. If no *Idea* or purpose governs the world, then the philosopher must provide, indeed, he must *become* that Idea. Karl Marx summed up this concept faithfully: the purpose of philosophy is not to understand the world but to *change* it, to *make* it a new world by providing the necessary order. For Marx, after Hegel, the spirit or Idea of history was working to incarnate itself, and the purpose of the philosopher is to become that Idea, the philosopher-king, and to create the new order, true order, by revolution.

The goal of history, according to Frederick Engels, is "the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom." It will also mean a new kind of man, a post-historical man who is pure Idea. Thus, Seidenberg tells us that in the growth of mind and its power, "Inherently organization moves towards universality." This means collectivization in society and the reduction of man to an atom in a planned (by reason and science) society.<sup>3</sup>

Rooted in what is conceived to be a fundamental antithesis between instinct and intelligence, the entire span of history may be regarded as a transitional era in a profound metamorphosis during which mankind has been subject to the deep travail of changing

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3. Roderick Seidenberg, *Anatomy of the Future* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 40.

from the once dominant influence of the instincts to that of our rational proclivities. Under the triumphant sway of science and the universal impact of our machine technology, we are approaching, it would seem, a climactic turning point in this metamorphosis.<sup>4</sup>

All men are not wise enough to move from instinct to reason, but the philosopher-kings will solve this problem for them: they will make them atoms in the rational society, so that they will at least be made to function in a world of pure mind and thus be gradually transformed by it.

Thus, the sons of Plato proclaim “the death of God,” i.e., the God of Scripture, because He refuses to exist in terms of their definition. It does not greatly trouble them to proclaim God dead; in fact, the supposed funeral is their celebration. The “death” of the God of Scripture, however, requires the death of the man created in His image, and, as a result, “the death of God” society seeks then to destroy historical man, the real man of time, in order to create a new man in terms of their idea and purpose.

Man as an Idea in philosophy and sociology is an inhuman abstraction; he is a monster who neither exists nor can exist.

Man as an Idea in neoplatonist religion is again an abstraction, less a monster and more a bad joke. The religious idea of man is of a bodiless being who works to undo his flesh, deny his appetites, and to rise above the ordinary requirements of the body. This abstraction has a horror of the material world as a kind of fatal allure seeking to corrupt his soul. But no man finds himself more beset by lust than the man who tries to deny he is a man.

St. Paul spoke plainly of the evil of this dream of a “spiritual” man:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

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4. *Ibid.*, 41.

St. Paul stated it clearly: such people “depart from the faith.” They will accept neither the world nor themselves as God created them. To live in terms of the word of God is to live in God’s reality; to live in terms of man’s word or idea is to commit moral and emotional suicide. When man denies himself as man, he has nothing, for his imagination is neither a world nor a realm to live in: it is a denial of life.



## IV

### THE PASSIONLESS IDEAL

**F**or Greek thought, and especially in neoplatonism, the superior realm is the world of Ideas, Forms, or Spirit. This realm is also the world of causality and determinism. For Marx and Engels, the material world was the kingdom of necessity, the world of Ideas, the kingdom of freedom. However, with a great world revolution, necessity and determinism were to be fully transformed to the world of Ideas, a process already under way. The evolution of history is thus the transfer of necessity from matter to mind. This realm of mind is not personal; it is not the world of particulars but of universals, of the new state or communist social order in which alienation is overcome.

For the Greeks also the realm of Ideas is not the realm of individuals nor of particulars but the realm of universals. To put it crudely, man is not an Idea, because he is a personality; in man, there is some kind of union between idea (form of spirit) and matter (the realm of the particular and individual) which produces man. As long as man thinks of himself and his particular interests or goals, he is not moving in terms of the Ideas or universals of being. Moreover, because he is moving in terms of himself, man is governed by passion, whereas Ideas and universals are passionless.

The word passion comes from the Greek *pascho*, to suffer. It is not to be confused with the Hebrew *pascha*, passover, which means literally to pass over, to spare. In its wider meaning, passion meant every form or degree of feeling, although it was often restricted to mean those feelings which weaken the powers of reason and self-command. At this point, a very important fact of Greek psychology, still very much with us, appears, namely, a schizophrenic view of man. Man is seen as an unstable union of two contrary substances, mind and matter, and as a result, the two are in constant war one with the other. Belief in this psychological schizophrenia is so widespread that it has bred a deeply ingrained hypocrisy in Western man. Thus a man will delude himself, believing that with his mind or spirit he is against committing fornication or adultery, but that by his lusts and bodily appetites he is being driven toward the act. His excuse for the commission of sin is that his lusts are too strong and his spirit too weak and weary to resist them. In reality, his sin has been the act of a unified man, whose mind has willed to sin but has acted out a charade designed to impress his mind's native innocence on God and himself. Man sins because he chooses to sin, because every aspect of his being, mind and body, are alike fallen and given to sin. Indeed, long after the body is too sated or worn to continue in sin, the mind pores over sin like a miser over hoarded gold.

Yet Plato, who divided passions into two classes, held that concupiscible passions spring from the body (and perish with it) and are given to and are essentially lust, *epithumia*, whereas irascible passions are *thumos*, the mind roused to anger or wrath, and are connected by Plato with the rational and immortal part of our nature, stimulating us to the pursuit of good and the avoiding of excess and evil. Because in this world we are still body and soul, the mind must accomplish its stimulation of the unified man by means of irascible passions, *thumos*, but the stimulation, while an imperfection, is still to the pursuit of good. Aristotle also held to this distinction between appetites irascible and concupiscible: it was a natural development in terms of Greek thought.

Stoicism followed the neoplatonic depreciation of passion or feeling. Reason, the faculty of mind or spirit, had to be the

mainspring of action and life; the act of virtue must come from the knowledge of reason; reason being naturally good, the more nearly a man became pure reason, the more he approximated ideal reason and good. The “*summum bonum*” or highest good of man is the regulation of passion and the total ordering of life by passionless reason. The law of nature is virtue, a rational or passionless good; “nature” definitely did not mean the material world but the world of Ideas or Forms. The irrational nature of man must be suppressed and subjugated by his rational and true nature. The world of reason or nature is a passionless, determined, impersonal world, and as a result Stoicism was fatalistic. The world of necessity is the world of reason, whereas the world of freedom is the anarchistic world of personality, feeling, and imperfection.

This concept entered deeply into the Western world. Whether in medieval heretical sects, Renaissance thinkers, modern anarchism, or the new left and the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, the association of law with impersonal, mechanical forces, and of freedom with passionate and lawless impulses is Stoic and anti-Christian to the core. Such people have accepted the Stoic analysis but have chosen the side of passion as against reason. The Christian must oppose this false and dialectical faith.

The recurring hatred of women which has beset Western cultures is again a product of this Greek tradition. Women are seen as passionate creatures, readily given to emotions and therefore inferior and less capable of virtue. Acceptance of the Stoic faith has meant a contempt for women. A denial of reason, but a retention of the Stoic (and neoplatonic) world view has meant the worship of anarchistic passions, and, as a result, a romantic worship of women as the supposed incarnation of pure feeling.

The true Stoic suppresses all passion or feeling and acts in accordance with reason (or “nature” or “law”) and is therefore wise and happy (in an intellectual way, of course). To act in accordance with reason is to act without reference to passion or feeling. The wise ruler therefore is an unfeeling and radically rational man.

In the French Revolution, the Committee of Public Safety saw itself as reason in action against the enemies of reason, nature, law, and justice. Evil had to be destroyed, and this meant the Reign of Terror. Robespierre saw it as his task to institute the reign of reason by destroying unreason or crime. "The Revolution is the transition from the regime of crime to the regime of justice."<sup>1</sup> The modern intellectual, because he is himself a part of the same intellectual tradition, sees Robespierre as a hero. Thus, Pizzinelli says of the death of the murderous Robespierre, "Let us never forget: when he died the conscience of the Revolution perished with him."<sup>2</sup> The fact that the Terror ended soon after Robespierre's death means nothing to such men; Robespierre meant the rule of reason and therefore of law and conscience. Men could be killed casually to make way for the future, but all this was evidence of the priority of reason over passion. There was in operation a plan of systematic depopulation, the planned annihilation of twelve or fifteen million of the French people as a part of the revolutionary dream of remaking France in terms of reason, but, to the heirs of Plato and the would-be philosopher-kings, this is reason and conscience in operation.<sup>3</sup>

For the same reason, the murderous regimes of the Soviet Union, Red China, Communist Cuba, and like states have a natural appeal for the heirs of Plato: here is Reason, Idea, in action, without reference to passion, personality, human feeling, or emotional considerations. The more depraved such a regime is, the more ideal it appears to the sons of Plato, because men are used without reference to their humanity; they are sacrificed nobly to the ideal future, the rational order planned for man. From Plato through Thomas More to the present, the man of reason finds his fondest hopes expressed in a totally unfeeling, impersonal, inhuman order: it is his dream of a rational paradise, man's Garden of Reason.

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1. J. M. Thompson, *Robespierre and the French Revolution* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 113.

2. Luigi Mario Pizzinelli, *The Life and Times of Robespierre* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1968), 75.

3. See Nesta H. Webster, *The French Revolution* (London: Constable and Company, 1921), 424-29, for the plan of depopulation.

The heirs of Plato are not wholly devoid of passion, of course. They eschew concupiscence, the reign of bodily passion; when they indulge in fornication and adultery, it is without real feeling, of course, and simply as a therapeutic exercise to calm the body's rage. Nothing makes them hate a woman more than for her to be appealingly lovable, for there must be no claims of passion or feeling on a man. Such a woman must be exorcised by being possessed and then cast aside and despised. How dare she intrude on their inner being and exercise a claim over them?

The good passion is the intellectual one. The intellectual will gurgle with delight over a turn of phrase in an insipid poet; he will relish the latest development of revolutionary (and hence, by definition, rational) rage against man. Since revolutions are the planned "rational" destruction of the past's "irrationality," they are by definition "rational." The intellectual passion over Ideas is thus by necessity over Ideas that are inhuman and devoid of feeling. If this seems an overstatement, notice how a Princeton professor of philosophy read Hegel:

It was the summer of 1942, after I had passed my "prelims" at Harvard and got married, that I first read the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia*. One might study Hegel with one's teeth clinched, but I read him in a honeymoon spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Kaufmann adds that "My honeymoon with Hegel is long passed,"<sup>5</sup> but consider the fact of his "honeymoon" with Hegel. In 1942, the armies of the Soviet Union and of Nazi Germany, among others, were marching brutally to the Idea of Hegel; Kaufmann could read Hegel "in a honeymoon spirit."

For the sons of Plato, passion is exercised, not for man, but for the Idea of man. It is not the Negro, or the Indian, or the poor who concern the intellectual (the man of reason after Plato), but rather the Idea of these people. He can thus be callously oblivious of their plight until his Idea requires concern for them. Passion thus is directed toward Ideas, not realities, not persons in themselves under God.

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4. Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 10.

5. *Ibid.*, 11.

The result is *intellectual gush*, emotional hypocrisy because its concern is with the masks of men rather than their persons.

Within the realm of the church, intellectual gush has as its counterpart *pious gush*, mind or spirit expressing itself as “soul” rather than “reason.” Roman Catholic literature is full of pious gush, libraries full of it. But, as a Protestant, I shall consider the Protestant versions instead. Consider, for example, the following, the heart of a prayer by a woman at a prayer-meeting; to reproduce accurately the gush of that prayer is beyond me, but this was its beginning (the end coming long minutes later):

Lord, be merciful unto me, poor sinner that I am. I sometimes go a whole hour doing my work and never thinking about you. How can I, who have known such sweet joys in your presence, fall into such sin as to forget you for a whole hour. My heart breaks with the knowledge of my failure to love you as I should. Possess my soul with a never-ending passion for you, that I may every moment be near to the heart of Jesus and be filled with the sweet passions of your grace and love, etc., etc., ad nauseam.

This woman was negligent of her ordinary responsibilities as a daughter, wife, and mother. Her refuge from responsibility was in pious gush and sanctimonious piety. The purpose of her prayers was to impress on others her closeness to God and to make them feel ashamed that they, unlike her, were not going about their work in religious ecstasy day after day. She was without either faith or works; she had replaced both with pious gush.

To cite another example: In 1952, I attended (but not again) a conference held by a notable evangelist for ministers; the reaction of all the clergy other than mine was very favorable. The pious and blasphemous fool took as his “text” John 13:25, which refers to the seating at the Last Supper, St. John “lying on Jesus’ breast” in the custom of the time at tables. The breast, he declared, is the organ of milk which nourishes babes. The greatness of John was that, as a babe, he lay in Jesus’ bosom, drawing the sweet milk of the gospel. Let us too draw near and suck earnestly at the breast of Jesus, etc., etc., ad nauseam.

The woman in question, in the first illustration, was unfeeling in her relationship to her family and friends; she was

“above” earthly things, including her ordinary duties. The evangelist, I found on a little inquiry, was also a very “spiritual” man, not concerned with creaturely comforts. (He was better clothed than I, and looked as well fed, but he no doubt never gave such matters a thought, being “spiritual.”)

Pious gush militates against the essentials of Christian life, faith and obedience, and it substitutes for them a flight from reality and responsibility—a hypocritical spirituality which has indeed a genuine spirituality underneath it all, but it is the spirituality of Satan, a purely spiritual being.



# V

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGY

The belief that mind and body are two alien substances had a deadly effect on the psychology of man. It led to the belief that man is a “prisoner” of the body and therefore either must war against it, or seek escape from it if his mind is to be free. The true philosopher ought not to care about the pleasures of eating and drinking. In Plato’s *Phaedo* we read that “thought is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her — neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure, — when she takes leave of the body, and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being.”<sup>1</sup> Socrates held that the purest knowledge comes when the imperfection of the senses is set aside and mind alone operates: “It has been proved to us by experience that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover Socrates said,

And were we not saying long ago that the soul when using the body as an instrument of perception, that is to say, when using the sense of sight or hearing or some other sense (for the meaning of perceiving through the body is perceiving through the senses) — were we

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1. Irwin Edman, ed., *The Works of Plato* (New York: Modern Library, 1930), 119.  
2. *Ibid.*, 121.

not saying that the soul too is then dragged by the body into the region of the changeable, and wanders and is confused; the world spins round her, and she is like a drunkard, when she touches change?<sup>3</sup>

Such a view of man's nature led to the extensive pagan ascetic practices of the Greco-Roman world. The pagan ascetic withdrew from the world and the environment of the senses. He courted fatigue and deprived himself of sleep in order to weaken the flesh and free the mind; fasting was practiced for the same reason. Perfection came through asceticism. These ideas infected the early church, and the practices of the Christian ascetics were adaptations and continuations of pagan ascetics. Moreover, their "vision," according to Dr. Violet MacDermont, in *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East*, were "Christianized" versions of traditions common to pre-Christian asceticism.

The schizophrenic psychology of Greek philosophy could and did lead to asceticism, to the emphasis on the spirit, mind, or soul as the truer and superior substance as against matter or the flesh. Other choices, however, were possible. Instead of asceticism, the body could be used freely *if* separated from the mind, i.e., if its pleasures were made schizophrenic also by being divorced from an emotional claim on the mind. This viewpoint was especially popular in Greece. It is reflected in Demosthenes' speech against Neaera, when he pointed out that "The hetaerae [prostitutes] are for our amusement, our slave women are for our daily personal service, and our wives are to bear us children and manage our household." The sexual relation had to be rationally controlled, and concupiscence could not be allowed to govern man. Plutarch's *Lives* gives us many examples of this perspective. Thus, in "Lycurgus," we read that

Lycurgus allowed a man who was advanced in years and had a young wife to recommend some virtuous and approved young man, that she might have a child by him, who might inherit the good qualities of the father, and be a son to himself. On the other side, an honest man who had love for a married woman upon account of her modesty and the well-favouredness of her children, might, without formality, beg her company of her husband, that

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3. *Ibid.*, 139.

he might raise, as it were, from this plot of good ground, worthy and well-allied children for himself. And indeed, Lycurgus was of a persuasion that children were not so much the property of their parents as of the whole commonwealth, and, therefore, would not have his citizens begot by the first-comers, but by the best men that could be found; the laws of other nations seemed to him very absurd and inconsistent, where people would be so solicitous for their dogs and horses as to exert interest and to pay money to procure fine breeding, and yet kept their wives shut up, to be made mothers only by themselves, who might be foolish, infirm, or diseased; as if it were not apparent that children of a bad breed would prove their bad qualities first upon those who kept and were rearing them, and well-born children, in like manner, their good qualities. These regulations founded on natural and social grounds, were certainly so far from that scandalous liberty which was afterwards charged upon their women, that they knew not what adultery meant.

This illustration from Greece is matched by one from Rome, in Plutarch's "Cato the Younger":

It is thus related by Thrasea, who refers to the authority of Munatius, Cato's friend and constant companion. Among many that loved and admired Cato, some were more remarkable and conspicuous than others. Of these was Quintus Hortensius, a man of high repute and approved virtue, who desired not only to live in friendship and familiarity with Cato, but also to unite his whole house and family with him by some sort of alliance in marriage. Therefore he set himself to persuade Cato that his daughter Porcia, who was already married to Bibulus, and had borne him two children, might nevertheless be given to him, as a fair plot of land, to bear fruit also for him. "For," said he, "though this in the opinion of men may seem strange, yet in nature it is honest, and profitable for the public that a woman in the prime of her youth should not lie useless, and lose the fruit of her womb, nor, on the other side, should burden and impoverish one man, by bringing him too many children. Also by this communication of families among worthy men, virtue would increase, and be diffused through their posterity; and the commonwealth would be united and cemented by their alliances." Yet if Bibulus would not part with his wife altogether, he would restore her as soon as she had brought him a child, whereby he might be united to both their families. Cato answered that he loved Hortensius very well, and much approved of uniting their houses, but he thought it strange to speak of marrying his daughter, when she was already given to another. Then Hortensius, turning the discourse, did not hesitate to speak openly and ask for Cato's own wife, for she was young and fruitful, and he had already children enough. Neither can it be thought that

Hortensius did this, as imagining Cato did not care for Marcia; for, it is said, she was then with child. Cato, perceiving his earnest desire, did not deny his request, but said that Philippus, the father of Marcia, ought also to be consulted. Philippus, therefore, being sent for, came; and finding they were well agreed, gave his daughter Marcia to Hortensius in the presence of Cato, who himself also assisted at the marriage.

Plato's *Republic*, in the plan for a communism of women by the philosopher-kings, reflects a similar opinion. Other examples also can be cited. Heraclides of Pontos, a pupil of Plato, also held that luxury and sensual indulgences were the privileges of the ruling classes, who could govern all things with reason, whereas the poor and the slaves should be restricted to sweat and toil. The men of reason could indulge the flesh without being commanded by the flesh, it was held. Thus, Aristippus of Cyrene, when reproached for too continuous an affair with a Corinthian prostitute, said, "I possess Lais, and am not possessed by her."

On the other hand, some philosophers resolved the schizophrenic psychology in favor of the body, and hence concupiscence. Aristoxenus reflected this opinion:

Nature demands that we make lust the zenith of life. The greatest possible increase of sexual feeling should be every human being's goal. To suppress the claims of the flesh is neither reason nor happiness; to do so is to be proved ignorant of the demands of human nature.<sup>4</sup>

The Cynics in particular were intellectual champions of this position.

In every case, the warfare of body and mind was assumed; this conflict was in essence a *metaphysical*, not an *ethical or moral* conflict. Man's problem was at bottom a problem of being; it was not his fault that he was made of two mutually exclusive substances in an unhappy union.

In the biblical perspective, man's mind and body are simply two aspects of his created being, no more at war with each other than his two hands are at war with one another. It is as absurd to say that man's right hand and left hand are at war with one another, by nature in contradiction, as it is to say that his mind

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4. Ove Brusendorff and Paul Henningsen, *A History of Eroticism: Antiquity* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1963), 14.

and body are in natural contradiction. Man's war is with God, and its name is sin, his desire to be his own god and to determine good and evil in terms of his own fiat will (Gen. 3:5). Man suppresses the fact of this war against God, because it means his moral guiltiness and his liability to punishment as a capital offender. Instead, he seeks to convert his moral failure into a metaphysical fact: "I was made that way."

This deadly psychology, transferred to and adopted by Christian theology, meant a severe blinding of moral vision and a crippling of moral strength.

A glance at a church father, Clement of Alexandria, makes clear how the pagan psychology influenced the church. Clement, instead of seeing the radical cleavage between Moses and Plato, saw Plato as an imitator of Moses, but only by reading Moses with Plato in mind! He therefore held that,

...law is the opinion which is good, and what is good is that which is true, and what is true is that which finds "true being," and attains it. "He who is," says Moses, "sent me" (Ex. iii. 13) [*sic*]. In accordance with which, namely, good opinion, some have called law, right reason, which enjoins what is to be done and forbids what is not to be done.<sup>5</sup>

In such a perspective, reason is not depraved and wilfully blind: it is rather the source of law and truth. The quotation from Moses asserts *revelation* but it is out of place in this passage, which instead holds to the priority and ultimacy of reason. It is not too long a step from here, and it is a very logical one, to eliminate God and affirm reason as the de facto god of philosophy.

Clement clearly held to the Platonic psychology, as his comments on passion show:

Passion is an excessive appetite exceeding the measures of reason, or appetite unbridled and disobedient to the word. Passions, then, are a perturbation of the soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason. But revolt and distraction and disobedience are in our power, as obedience is in our power. Wherefore voluntary actions are judged. But should one examine each one of the passions, he will find them irrational impulses.<sup>6</sup>

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5. *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, vol. I, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), IV, 460.

6. *Ibid.*, "Miscellanies," bk. II, chap. XIII; vol. II, 37.

Clement then went on to make a distinction in terms of Greek psychology which we have today in the courts in pleas of not guilty by reason of temporary insanity. "What is involuntary is not a matter for judgment."<sup>7</sup> If mind and body are two alien substances, then the door is open to all kinds of claims that the passions of the body have acted against the mind, and moral responsibility is thereby denied. Voluntary actions, according to Clement, are by desire, by choice, and by intention; he distinguished between sins, mistakes and crimes.

It is sin, for example, to live luxuriously and licentiously; a misfortune, to wound one's friend in ignorance, taking him for an enemy; and crime, to violate graves or commit sacrilege. Sinning arises from being unable to do it; as doubtless one falls into a ditch either through not knowing, or through inability to leap across through feebleness of body. But application to the training of ourselves, and subjection to the commandments, is in our own power; with which if we will have nothing to do, by abandoning ourselves wholly to lust, we shall sin, nay rather, wrong our own soul.<sup>8</sup>

Sin is thus reduced to ignorance and inability, whereas the Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly defines sin, as "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." Clement's remedy for sin is the exercise of reason. Moreover, for him sin is especially wronging "our own soul" rather than violating God's law. "Voluntary sin is crime; and crime is voluntary wickedness. Sin, then, is on my part voluntary."<sup>9</sup> The result is a very confused and unbiblical psychology.

By holding that the soul or mind is passionless, and that affections and feelings are an imperfection, Clement faced a problem with the God of Scripture, to whom wrath and joy are ascribed and who is even defined as "Love." For him, the deity was by definition "impassible," beyond passion and feeling. The Bible therefore is an accommodation to man's condition: "For the Divine Being cannot be declared as it exists: but as we who are fettered in the flesh were able to listen, so the prophets spake to us; the Lord savingly accommodating Himself to the weakness of men."<sup>10</sup>

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7. *Ibid.*, chap. XIV; vol. II, 37.

8. *Ibid.*, chap. XV; vol. II, 38-39.

9. *Ibid.*, 39-40.

10. *Ibid.*, chap. XVI; vol. II, 44.

The body is the source of man's weaknesses:

For as the exhalations which arise from the earth, and from marshes, gather into mists and cloudy masses; so the vapours of fleshly lusts bring on the soul an evil condition, scattering about the idols of pleasure before the soul. Accordingly they spread darkness over the light of intelligence, the spirit attracting the exhalations that arise from lust, and thickening the masses of the passions by persistency in pleasures. Gold is not taken from the earth in the lump, but is purified by smelting; then, when made pure, it is called gold, the earth being purified.<sup>11</sup>

Like the refining of gold, the soul must be purged and refined from the body. The true Gnostic is the Christian, Clement held, who becomes... "like his Teacher in impassibility."

We must therefore rescue the gnostic and perfect man from all passion of the soul. For knowledge (*gnosis*) produces practice, and practice habit or disposition; and such a state as this produces impassibility, not moderation of passion. And the complete eradication of desire reaps as its fruit impassibility.<sup>12</sup>

The goal is an unfeeling man who is pure reason, a yogi and a commissar in one person, a man proficient in Greek philosophy as the necessary prerequisite to becoming a Christian Gnostic.

Much later, this emphasis on impassible reason marked Scholasticism. Lloyd has referred to "The extremism of remorseless logic" which marked such thought.<sup>13</sup> The scholars on the one hand became Reason; the students, on the other hand, later moved to become pure flesh, denying the elusive other substance, soul. As a student song held,

Down the broad way I go  
 Young and unregretting,  
 Wrap me in my vices up,  
 Virtue all forgetting,  
 Greedier for all delight  
 Than heaven to enter in:  
 Since the soul in me is dead,  
 Better save the skin.<sup>14</sup>

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11. *Ibid.*, chap. XX; vol. II, 66.

12. *Ibid.*, bk. VI, chap. IX; vol. II, 346.

13. Roger Lloyd, *The Golden Middle Ages*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1939), 115.

14. Helen Waddell, trans., *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (London: Constable), 173.

Modern man has not escaped the dilemma of Greek psychology. Some have chosen to “solve” the problem by denying the body, as witness Christian Science, and others have denied the soul, as witness the Behaviorists. These “solutions” are metaphysical, not moral. They leave only a fragmented man, as in the last days of the Greco-Roman world. The same is true of those who seek in the drug experience a flight from the world of the senses into the supposed timelessness and oneness of the world of the soul.

Much has been said in the twentieth century about avoiding a dualistic psychology, a legitimate and necessary concern. However, because the presuppositions of modern man are rooted in Greek philosophy, their answer to dualism is not a new view of man but rather his castration. To avoid dualism, a segment of reality is eliminated or downgraded. Mind becomes at best an “epiphenomenon,” and the distortion of psychology is aggravated. To deny the whole man is to pervert man and to warp him.

A tragic example of false holiness leading to very serious sins was the Company of the Holy Sacrament, a secular organization founded about 1620 by the Duke of Ventadour. This young duke believed that holiness required him to live with his beautiful wife as a brother. The purpose of the Company was to assist the Church’s works of charity by supplying anonymous information about worthy causes or works to be done. It soon became a harsh, intolerant persecuting force against casual Catholics and against Protestants. It was a dreaded secret society in many areas and also “the huge, organising power which at the end of the century forced the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.”<sup>15</sup> The evils perpetrated by this Company were mild when compared to the evils being practiced today in the name of passionless Reason in the Marxist world, and in Western countries. The dream of Reason breeds monsters.

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15. C. V. Wedgwood, *Richelieu and the French Monarchy*, rev. ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1968), 122.

## VI

### MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH

And now we come to the unhappy Michael Wigglesworth. It would be a pleasure to speak well of him. He was born on October 28, 1631, in Yorkshire, England, probably, and he died in America on June 10, 1705, in his 74th year. His father migrated to New England with his family in 1638. He was a man of faith, and he sacrificed to give his son an education to prepare him for the ministry. Wigglesworth taught at Harvard for a time and then entered the ministry. He was regarded in his day as a kindly and generous man, and the Rev. Dr. Peabody later called him “a man of the beatitudes.”

Wigglesworth was best known for his poem on the Last Judgment, *The Day of Doom*, and, in particular, for his comments on children who died in infancy. These lines gained him the scorn of nineteenth and twentieth century scholars. As Wigglesworth portrayed the Judgment,

CLXVI.

Then to the Bar they all drew near  
who dy'd in infancy  
And never had or good or bad  
effected pers' nally

But from the womb unto the tomb  
were straightway carried....<sup>1</sup>

After a long plea by these souls (and Wigglesworth is very fair in presenting their case), he has his Christ answer in part:

CLXXX.

You sinners are, and such a share  
as sinners, may expect;  
Such you shall have, for I do save  
none but mine own Elect.  
Yet to compare your sin with theirs  
who liv'd a longer time,  
I do confess yours is much less,  
though every sin's a crime.

CLXXXI.

A crime it is, therefore in bliss  
you may not hope to dwell;  
But unto you I shall allow  
the easiest room in Hell.  
The glorious King thus answering,  
they cease, and plead no longer;  
Their Consciences must needs confess  
his Reasons are the stronger.<sup>2</sup>

As a good neoplatonist, Wigglesworth, throughout *The Day of Doom*, portrays those who are being sent to hell as desirous of heaven. For this there is no scriptural evidence, and Milton's portrait of Satan was wiser in this respect. Milton's Satan preferred to rule in hell than to serve in heaven, and Milton saw the hatred of God's presence which is in the heart of all rebels. The neoplatonist, however, sees all souls as inescapably drawn to God and to heaven. It is the nature of the soul to move toward God, it is held. The neoplatonist soul ever yearns to return to the world soul, and only a violent act of judgment can prevent its ultimate return.

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1. Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom; or a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment; with Other Poems* (New York: American News Company, [c. 1662] 1867), 68.

2. *Ibid.*, 72-73.

To return to the life of Wigglesworth, his *Diary* has been published in this century. Morgan has commented on the person revealed by the *Diary*. Scholarship has done much to demonstrate that the Puritans were a happy, full-bodied people, very much unlike popular caricatures of them. His *Diary* contradicts this happier view of the Puritans, at least in his case.

The grim pages of his Day of Doom have long been familiar to students of American literature. His diary is even more challenging than his verse to any liberal view of the Puritans. For the man that emerges here calls to mind those stern figures in steeple-crowned hats who represent Puritanism in popular cartoons. So closely does Michael Wigglesworth approximate the unhappy popular conception of our seventeenth-century forebears that he seems more plausible as a satirical reconstruction than he does as a human being. His very name, to anyone not familiar with its illustrious history, must suggest a caricature, and the suggestion is sadly borne out by the diary and supported by all that can be ascertained about him.<sup>3</sup>

Here was a man who “was obsessed with guilt.” He himself felt that he lacked natural affection for his own father, to whom he owed so much. “We should scarcely exaggerate, I think, if we described Michael Wigglesworth as a morbid, humorless, selfish busybody.” The very caricature of the Puritans that historians have sought to erase comes sharply to the fore in Wigglesworth’s *Diary*.<sup>4</sup>

If we remove the religious terminology from Wigglesworth’s *Diary*, he becomes a surprisingly modern figure. He has the morbid introspection of *Portnoy’s Complaint* and of modern psychiatric patients. He has the cold, calculating mind of the modern intellectual, devoid of personal warmth and feeling and using people in terms of his needs.

Wigglesworth’s Puritan contemporaries could not exorcise the strain he represented, because they had not clearly recognized neoplatonism for the evil that it is. As a result, whereas Puritanism was largely governed by biblical premises, it was repeatedly open to neoplatonist infection.

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3. Edmund S. Morgan, “Introduction,” to *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653-1657* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1946] 1965), v.

4. *Ibid.*, viii.

In Wigglesworth's defense, it might be said that he was a sickly man most of his life, an invalid much of the time, and always complaining of ill health. In spite of this, he fathered eight children, outlived two wives, and was survived by a third wife when he died in his 74th year. But we can ask legitimately how much of this illness was a result of a neoplatonistic war against the body.

Moreover, Morgan rightly calls attention to the "unrestrained selfishness" which Wigglesworth's reflections on marriage revealed:

Wigglesworth evidently believed that he was suffering from gonorrhoea and accordingly had some doubts about whether or not he should marry. His doubts arose, however, not from any concern for his bride-to-be, but from an apprehension that marriage might impair his own health. The factor which finally determined him to marry was the advice of a physician that marriage might prove beneficial, instead of detrimental. He accordingly resolved "to redeem the spring time for marrying or taking physick or both" (p. 85). The sad sequel is that his bride died four years after her marriage, from what cause is unknown.

His crass behavior in this episode never gave Wigglesworth any pangs of conscience, but he was by no means free from a morbid feeling of guilt for other offenses that we should probably consider entirely innocuous.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the *Diary* was written while Wigglesworth taught at Harvard; in the earlier part, he is a single man. Marriage, however, made no change in his outlook or disposition.

Like a good neoplatonist, Wigglesworth found his body a sore burden and a real embarrassment. He was deeply distressed by the fact that he farted; this made his "life a burden," and, amazingly, moved him to "carnal lusts."<sup>6</sup> The fact was that any reminder that he had a body had a distressing effect on Wigglesworth, but, like all would-be ascetics, the more he tried to forget his body, the more vocal his body became. Wigglesworth regarded the flesh's needs with horror: "Witness my daily sensual glutting my heart with creature comforts."<sup>7</sup> The expression "*creature* comforts" is especially revealing; the neoplatonist is not willing to be a creature.

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5. *Ibid.*, vii.

6. *Ibid.*, 81; cf. 6.

7. *Ibid.*, 10.

Certainly Wigglesworth *never* rejoiced in being a creature; instead he seemed to mourn, with no small caterwauling, that he was not pure spirit.

Other Puritans were zealous in working to make a new Zion out of New England, to establish God's kingdom on earth, but Wigglesworth felt it was a temptation to have such a hope: "I am ready to be desiring and hoping for a paradise in this world, Lord pardon it."<sup>8</sup> To be at all concerned about people, material things, or this world, was for Wigglesworth a sin:

After my return home I found much adoe with a Carnall sensuall heart, that is apt to leav my rest in god, and to seek it in the creature ever and anon. Soon gone from spiritual things in my desires and impatient in the pursuit of earthly contentments. Apt to be distracted about those things which are not; and to neglect and be careless in greater matters. The Lord sometimes affects my heart with some shame that I should so dishonour my Fathers hous as to feed upon and be greedy after huskes, when as he hath bread enough for me. That I should promise myself any paradise under the sun when as I have experimentally found all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. That I should mind or desire the Love of the creature, more than take contentment in the love of christ....<sup>9</sup>

To love Christ, Wigglesworth felt it necessary to avoid loving the creature and to avoid "earthly contentments." To the neoplatonist, it was an irreconcilable conflict. To love things of the spiritual realm meant hating or at least being indifferent to things of the material realm. To the extent that the neoplatonist loved something creaturely or material, to that extent he did not love the spiritual, the rational, or the divine. By pitting the two realms against one another as two irreconcilable worlds, the neoplatonist insured hypocrisy. It is impossible to live in this world without some regard for some things in it; to deny this is to foster hypocrisy. At the same time, to the extent that the neoplatonist sets aside the material, the personal, and the creaturely for the rational, the spiritual, or the divine, to that extent he becomes an inhuman monster. Wigglesworth, like all neoplatonists, had elements of both hypocrite and monster in him.

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8. *Ibid.*, 81.

9. *Ibid.*, 74.

With respect to sex and marriage, the normal Puritan view was a robust and healthy one. The Rev. William Gouge, in *Of domesticall duties* (London, 1634), used Proverbs 5:18-19, to express the joy and beauty of marital sex: "Let thy fountain be blessed, and rejoyce with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love." The Puritans often spoke of marital sex as one of the great delights and joys among earthly blessings. Frye tells us that a "favorite Biblical passage cited by Puritan churchmen is Genesis XXVI. 8 where it is recorded that 'Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.'"

A typical employment of this passage is that made by William Gouge, who uses it for an attack upon Stoical abstinence — "A disposition," says the Puritan Gouge, "no way warranted by the Word." Thomas Gataker provides a final and summarizing statement of Puritanism's anti-asceticism in a marriage sermon published in 1620. Gataker is discussing the Christian life, with particular reference to marriage, and observes that it is a tactic of the demonic to misrepresent Christianity as a damper placed upon the joys of living; in other words, to misrepresent it as opposed to human happiness. This false picture of Christianity, says the Puritan Gataker, is "an illusion of Sathan, whereby he usually persuades the Merry Greekes of the world; That if they should once devote themselves to the Service of Jesus Christ, that then they must bid an everlasting farewell to all mirth and delight; that then all their merry dayes are gone; that in the kingdome of Christ, there is nothing, but sighing and groning, and fasting and prayer. But see here the contrary; even in the Kingdome of Christ and in his House, there is marrying and giving in marriage, drinking of wine, feasting, and rejoicing even in the very face of Christ."<sup>10</sup>

There is nothing even remotely like this in Wigglesworth. Sex was a vile problem to him. Nocturnal dreams and emissions were a major problem to him. "I loath myself, and could even take vengeance of my self for these abominations."<sup>11</sup> Part of his horror stemmed from his awareness of his sexual disease.<sup>12</sup> The emissions occurred after marriage as well.<sup>13</sup> In marriage, he warred against too

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10. Roland M. Frye, "Classical Puritanism on Conjugal Love," in Arnold Stein, ed., *On Milton's Poetry* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1970), 104.

11. *Diary*, 4-5.

12. *Ibid.*, 79.

13. *Ibid.*, 93.

much sex, saying, "Lord forgive my intemperance in the use of marriage for thy son's sake."<sup>14</sup>

His view of marriage reflected this dislike of sex and yet his desire to still the flesh by a prophylactic use of marriage. When marriage was first suggested to him by a go-between, he found his "heart too much taken" with the idea. However, the sacrament helped him to put his mind on heavenly things until the next day.

On the 2d day again I was ready to be gone awhoring after other loves and to cool in my love to God though at a private meeting the 2d day at night the Lord awakened me and helped me to loath myself and so again on the lecture day...

Friday. I still feel my carnality of heart (that seeks after sensual contentment and cannot find satisfaction in God) prevalent. I strive against it, yet it prevails, and I am ever and anon ceasing to strive; For this caus I might wel make tears my meet, because the Lord answer's me not, but ah my heart is hard and cannot mourn after the Lord.<sup>15</sup>

Here is the familiar neoplatonic schizophrenia which seeks to tear a man apart by denying one side of his being and the fundamental unity of mind and body. The altogether natural and godly claims of the body are treated as enemies of God.

Finally, Wigglesworth decided that "marriage will be necessary for me (as an ordinance of god appointed to maintain purity which my heart loveth)..."<sup>16</sup> The choice of wording is singularly neoplatonic: "to maintain purity." This indeed was that which Wigglesworth could honestly say "my heart loveth," neoplatonic purity, the soul enabled to function without any pressing claims from the body. Marriage was thus to be an exercise in neoplatonic prophylaxis. It was also to be a cure for his physical and venereal ailment.

At the time appointed with fear and trembling I came to Rowley to be marryed. The great arguments unto me were, 1: Physicians counsel: 2ly the institution of marryage by god himself for the preservation of purity and chastity, which with most humble and hearty prayers I have begged and stil wil beg of the Lord. So that I

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14. *Ibid.*, 88.

15. *Ibid.*, 71.

16. *Ibid.*, 81.

went about the business which god call'd me to attend And consummated it now is by the will of god May 18. 1655.<sup>17</sup>

Wigglesworth had a horror for any contentment with this world and he doubted his status with God, for “witness my dayly sensuall glutting my heart with creature comforts.”<sup>18</sup> He knew that the Bible commanded certain duties of love and obedience, and so he felt guilty also for lacking these. “I am affraid of my want of natural affection and pittty to my afflicted parents.”<sup>19</sup> He also accused himself of a “want of natural affection to my father in desiring the continuance of his life,” and a “want of honoring my mother yea slighting of her speech.” At the same time he accused himself of “again whorish desertions of my heart from God to the creature.”<sup>20</sup> He thus saw himself as guilty for lacking the biblical attitude toward his parents, and yet guilty for considering the creature at all. His blend of neoplatonism and Christianity ensured his guilt at all times.

His basic urge was neoplatonist, to be spiritual and to forsake the earth and material things, and so he berated himself because, “I still find pride and a deceitfulness of heart in going out of affections toward things here below.”<sup>21</sup> To see a happy marriage and to feel a desire for such an estate was in his eyes a sin, so it is no wonder that he later justified getting married on prophylactic grounds.

The thursday I went to Boston and from thens to Mr. Butlers he being married. There I found my heart secretly departing from god hankering after the creature. but at Boston lecture and at a private meeting at Mr. Butlers god did in some measure awaken and recal my straying affections.<sup>22</sup>

After another journey, he wrote in a similar vein about his “carnal and whoarish” heart.<sup>23</sup> On another occasion he listed his sins before taking the Lord’s Supper and listed “a sensual heart that

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17. *Ibid.*, 87.

18. *Ibid.*, 10.

19. *Ibid.*, 13.

20. *Ibid.*, 17.

21. *Ibid.*, 21.

22. *Ibid.*, 69.

23. *Ibid.*, 75.

sometimes can see no glory in heavenly things, no nor in heaven itself.”<sup>24</sup> It was hard to be a good neoplatonist.

Wigglesworth saw it as a lack of faith and an evidence of a sensual nature to love people.

Myne inordinate affection unto creatures and too must [*sic*] trusting to the bountiful provision that god hath made for us, is a grief to my heart because a dishonour and grief to the lord.<sup>25</sup>

He should not have worried too much about this; his love of creatures was in fact very slight. He was quite ready to gain greater holiness by sacrificing his family and friends. Indeed, he asked God, “Why has thou not pluck’t away from me by some sad stroke my dearest ones?”<sup>26</sup> When his wife’s difficult labor pains kept him awake, he was very ready to have her die. His entry for that episode deserves citation in full:

February 20 toward night being wednesday my wife began to travail, and has sore paines. The nearnes of my bed to hers made me hear all the nois. her pangs pained my heart, broke my sleep the most off that night. I lay sighing, sweating, praying, almost fainting through weariness before morning. The next day. the sleep much enfeebled me, and setting in with grief took away my strength, my heart was smitten within me, and as sleep departed from myne eyes so my stomack abhorred meat. I was brought very low and knew not how to pass away another night; For so long as my love lay crying I lay sweating, and groaning. I was now apt to be hasty and impatient, but the Lord made me desirous to stoop to his wil (if he should take away her whom he had given, much more) if he should onely prolong her paines (himself supporting) and in time restore her. Being brought to this the Lord gave some support to my heart. After about midnight he sent me the glad tidings of a daughter that and the mother both living; after she had been in paines about 30 houres or more. oh Let the Lord be magnified who heareth the poor chatterings of his prisoners; who wil lay no more than he enableth to bear. 2 Lessons the Lord hath taught me by this. 1: If the evil of sorrow be so great how evil then in [is?] sin the cause off it 2: If the dolours of childbearing be so bitter (which may be onely a fatherly chastizement) then how dreadful are the pangs of eternal death.

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24. *Ibid.*, 77.

25. *Ibid.*, 95.

26. *Ibid.*, 9.

After our child was about a Fourtnight old it was much afflicted with a sore mouth, which continued near 3 weeks, accompanyd with griping and loosnes and sore hips.

Shee had in this time 2 pittiful nights, especially the one of them. At that time 2 things I desir'd of the Lord 1. A heart to subject my wisdom and wil to his touching the childs life or Extremity. he knows what is best, and is as tenderly affected as I, and much more. 2. That I may maintain good thoughts of god while he afflicts am-are deum castigantem I have given my daughter to him with all my heart desiring she may be his, rejoycing he hath given me a child to give up to him. And shall he not do with his own as he will, either to afflict or to take it to himself. His glory is better than the eas of the creature, and yet his glory shall be coincident with our good.

After this the Lord mercifully recovered it, and it is now grown and come to be a quarter old. Friday May 16.<sup>27</sup>

It must be said for Wigglesworth that he did speak of his wife here as “my love.” Carefully analyzed, the passage does reveal some pathetic if earnest qualities in the man. The overwhelming impression, however, is one of intense introspection and self-absorption. Everything has meaning in terms of its relationship to Wigglesworth, so that, whether it is the life of his wife or daughter, its purpose is centered on Wigglesworth. Like every neoplatonist, his world is egocentric; to rise above egocentricity to consider other people and to love them is to lose sight of God, in Wigglesworth’s eyes.

Thus, while at Harvard, he was distressed when he found himself delighting either in his studies or in his students:

I am so soon lost in my affections. I find such a bent of spirit to feed my self with fore-contrivances for my own selfe and work or for my pupils good, and so unable to do in that kind what god requires without losing my love to my god and communion with him. that my soul is affraid within me of my owne spirit of whoardoms. I can meddle with nothing but I mar it, and lose myself, and griev the spirit of my god; and find a dead heart that cannot griev for it when I have done. I am affraid to follow close my ordinary studys, because my heart is so stouln away with them, and I cannot prize the presence of god more than them, I mean his outward services.<sup>28</sup>

He was right in describing his condition as “a dead heart.” A man so bent on seeing a natural and godly delight in students and studies

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27. *Ibid.*, 96-97.

28. *Ibid.*, 31.

as somehow a threat to his spirituality would be so torn by a perpetual inner warfare as to be emotionally sterile. Very early he weaned himself from such creaturely affections to a considerable degree: “The Lord in some measure helped me to attend on him this day free from those doting affections to others that I use to have and did speak some suitable truths to my need and brought them home to me in some measure.”<sup>29</sup>

Michael Wigglesworth thus gives us a vivid glimpse into the conscience of a neoplatonist. The garb is Christian, but the reality is Hellenic.

He lived a long, sick life, not often in the pulpit by his own admission:

Thou wonderest, perhaps,  
That I in Print appear,  
Who to the Pulpit dwell so nigh,  
Yet come so seldom there.<sup>30</sup>

Wigglesworth was aware that some people felt that his illness was mental, not physical. He defended himself against this charge:

Yet some (*I know*) do judge  
Mine inability  
To come abroad and do Christ’s work,  
To be Melancholy;  
And that I’m not so weak  
As I myself conceit:  
But who in other things have found  
Me so conceited yet?<sup>31</sup>

He tried to defend himself against this charge by pleading also that he had been patient under his physical sufferings and never “dumpish.” He tried also to explain why, for so sick a man, his preaching was so forceful:

Or who of all my friends  
That have my trials seen,  
Can tell the time in seven years  
When I have dumpish been?  
Some think my voice is strong,  
Most times when I do Preach;

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29. *Ibid.*, 32.

30. Wigglesworth, “To the Christian Reader,” *Day of Doom*, 13.

31. *Ibid.*, 14.

But ten days after, what I feel  
And suffer few can reach.

My prison'd thoughts break forth,  
When open'd is the door,  
With greater force and violence,  
And strain my voice the more.  
But vainly do they tell  
That I am growing stronger  
Who hear me speak in half an hour,  
Till I can speak no longer.

Some for because they see not  
My cheerfulness to fail,  
Nor that I am disconsolate,  
Do think I nothing ail.  
If they had borne my griefs,  
Their courage might have fail'd them,  
And all the town (perhaps) have known  
(Once and again) what ail'd them.<sup>32</sup>

The American Puritans in their day were far more healthy and vigorous than other peoples. Ill health such as Wigglesworth's was not commonplace, although sudden death was. As a result, there was suspicion about his illness, and it was well grounded. Wigglesworth had no discernible physical defect or weakness; he did have a serious psychosomatic problem created by his neoplatonic philosophy, applied with a vengeance to his life. He enjoyed bad health; it was a way of denying the body; he enjoyed guilt, because it was a way of proving his dislike for the things of this world and his "sensitivity" to their false claims. His "spiritual" sensitivity rested, however, on a false premise which made him a moral monster.

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32. *Ibid.*, 14-15.

## VII

# WIGGLESWORTH'S DAY OF DOOM

Wigglesworth's famous poem, *The Day of Doom*, is an amazing work. It is, on the whole, theologically correct. The verse is better than average and is highly readable. The work has a sustained intensity and reads well. From a purely literary point of view, Wigglesworth can be rated higher than some poets who are still taken seriously. Two things, however, limit the appreciation of *The Day of Doom*. The first is the subject matter, now no longer a popular one, especially not in the form Wigglesworth presents it. The second is the temper of the poem, its harsh, wooden perspective. The terror and grandeur of the Last Judgment are reduced at times to a debating society level. The ultimate ground and righteousness of God's judgment is His absolute wisdom and sovereign counsel; to rationalize this is to lower it and to diminish its majesty.

This is not to say that Wigglesworth is without discernment and some good passages. He shows us the security of the world before the judgment, and then its terror. Summoned to the bar of justice,

At Christ's left hand the Goats do stand,  
all whining Hypocrites.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Wigglesworth, *Day of Doom*, XXVII, 28.

Wigglesworth plainly affirmed the sovereignty of grace, and he had Christ declare that

XLIII.

My grace to one is wrong to none;  
 none can Election Claim;  
 Amongst all those their souls that lose;  
 none can Rejection blame.  
 He that may choose, or else refuse,  
 all men to save or spill,  
 May this Man choose, and that refuse,  
 redeeming whom he will.<sup>2</sup>

The *Diary* is clearly neoplatonic; *The Day of Doom* is formally correct in its Calvinism.

Wigglesworth's Christ grants free speech to all sinners

Nevertheless, they all express,  
 (Christ granting liberty)  
 What for their way they have to say,  
 how they have liv'd, and why.<sup>3</sup>

This is necessary for dramatic reasons, although it turns the Last Judgment into a debate. In Christ's answer to the hypocrites who were outwardly earnest Christians, Wigglesworth wrote some lines that must have hurt his neoplatonic soul:

Thus from yourselves unto yourselves,  
 your duties all do tend;  
 And as self-love the wheels do move,  
 so in self-love they end.<sup>4</sup>

The poem, while formally correct theologically, reveals its neoplatonic function in "A Postscript Unto the Reader," which declares in part:

Thou has a Soul, my Friend, and so have I,  
 To save or lose; a Soul that cannot die;  
 A Soul of greater price than Gold or Gems;  
 A Soul more worth than Crowns and Diadems;  
 A Soul at first created like its Maker,

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2. *Ibid.*, 33.

3. *Ibid.*, LXVIII, 40.

4. *Ibid.*, XCI, 47.

And of God's Image made to be partaker:  
 Upon the wings of noblest Faculties,  
 Taught for us to soar above the Starry Skies,  
 And not to rest, until it understood  
 Itself possessed of the chiefest Good.  
 And since the Fall thy Soul retaineth still  
 Those faculties of Reason and of Will,  
 But oh! how much deprav'd and out of frame,  
 As if they were some other's, not the same!  
 Thine Understanding dimly benighted,  
 And Reason's eye in Spiritual things dim-sighted,  
 Or else stark blind; thy Will inclin'd to evil,  
 And nothing else; a slave unto the Devil;  
 That loves to live, and liveth to transgress,  
 But shuns the way of God and Holiness  
 All thine Affections are disordered,  
 And thus by headstrong Passions are misled.<sup>5</sup>

Here, clearly, is a neoplatonic reading of Christianity. As a Puritan, Wigglesworth had been taught the Shorter Catechism, which declared (Question 10), "God created man, male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures." The Bible emphatically declares, "And God said, Let us make *man*, in our image, after our likeness.... So God created *man* in his own image, in the image of God created he him" (Gen. 1:26-27). The difference here cannot be underestimated. The Bible says that *man, the whole man*, was created in God's image; Wigglesworth said that the *soul* was created in God's image, a very different thing. Wigglesworth's statement is a neoplatonic misreading and perversion of the Bible. The neoplatonic fall was into flesh, which dimmed and blinded the soul. Accordingly, some neoplatonists have seen the fall as a sexual act!

It is now apparent why the Last Judgment was once so heavily stressed by many churchmen and writers. It lent itself to misuse by neoplatonists. It meant to them the eternal damnation of the old world of flesh and the birth of a new world, of a spiritual body which was somehow non-material. There was thus a longing for, as well as a dread of, the Last Judgment. It meant the necessary separation of the soul from a material creation into a spiritual one.

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5. *Ibid.*, 93-94.

Man in this world was seen as man in captivity, not so much as to sin and death but to the world of the flesh, to the material creation. It was an act of virtue to flee from that material creation and to long for its death and damnation.

Wigglesworth warned his readers:

But if, O man, thou liv'st a Christless creature,  
 And Death surprise thee in a state of nature,  
 (As who can tell but that may be thy case?)  
 How wilt thou stand before the Judge's face,  
 When he shall be reveal'd in flaming fire,  
 And come to pay ungodly men their hire,  
 To execute due vengeance upon those  
 That knew him not, or that had been his foes?<sup>6</sup>

Here Wigglesworth's neoplatonic dialectic, in its medieval form, appears clearly. The state of sin is the "state of nature." The Greek dialectic was form versus matter; the medieval version of this same dialectic was grace versus nature, and this is implicit in everything Wigglesworth wrote. The purpose of grace is for him to rescue men from nature, which is equated with sin and the fall. Salvation is then at least in part metaphysical, whereas in Scripture there is no opposition of grace and nature but of grace and sin. Nature was created to be God's kingdom, and the purpose of grace is to restore nature as God's realm.

Wigglesworth used an illustration later made famous by Jonathan Edwards, who also was influenced by neoplatonism:

O Child of wrath, and object of God's anger,  
 Thou hangest over the Infernal Pit,  
 By one small thread, and car'st not thou a whit?<sup>7</sup>

His warned his reader,

Perhaps thou harborest such thoughts as these:  
 "I hope I may enjoy my carnal ease  
 A little longer, and myself refresh  
 With those delights that gratify the flesh,  
 And yet repent before it be too late,  
 And get into a comfortable state.

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6. *Ibid.*, 94.

7. *Ibid.*, 97.

I hope I have yet many years to spend,  
And time enough those matters to attend.”<sup>8</sup>

Creaturely comforts and pleasures were always a threat in Wigglesworth's eyes. God's promise of such blessings to His saints somehow meant nothing to him. To “gratify the flesh” for him was a cardinal offense. He does not go to Abraham, for example, as one whom God blessed with wealth, and three women (as was Wigglesworth!), but he chooses examples of sin instead:

What gained Samson by his Delilah?  
What gained David by his Bathshebah?<sup>9</sup>

He also wrote, in “Vanity of Vanities,” “what is Pleasure but the Devil's bait?”<sup>10</sup> Beauty, friends, riches, all “draw men's Souls into Perdition.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, as a good neoplatonist, he could write also a poem on “Death Expected and Welcomed.” There was nothing in life that Wigglesworth enjoyed, or if he did, that he did not feel guilty about. He included also “A Farewell to the World,” of which he said that it “is not my Treasure.” Although he looked forward to the resurrection body, he had no good word for his present body, on which he heaped every kind of insult:

Farewell, vile Body, subject to decay,  
Which art with lingering sickness worn away;  
I have by thee much Pain and Smart endur'd;  
Great Grief of Mind hast thou to me procur'd;  
Great Grief of Mind by being Impotent,  
And to Christ's Work an awkward Instrument.  
Thou shalt not henceforth be a clog to me,  
Nor shall my Soul a Burthen be to thee.<sup>12</sup>

This is good neoplatonic dualism. It is alien to biblical faith. For such a neoplatonic dualism, *The Day of Doom* has an appeal: it is the formal condemnation of the world of the body and the final exorcism of the flesh. It has little to do with Scripture.

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8. *Ibid.*, 99-100.

9. *Ibid.*, 100.

10. *Ibid.*, 107.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 114.



# VIII

## NEOPLATONISM AND PURITANISM

The source of infection for Puritanism was Cambridge University and the Cambridge Platonists. For these men, reason was, as Benjamin Whichcote often said, “the candle of the Lord.” Since he also held that men share, even in this life, in the divine nature, it was easy to see how closely the neoplatonic dialectic was followed. Reason is the Idea or Form of being, whereas body or matter is the other and less valued substance. The Cambridge Platonists were thus congenial to Descartes’ philosophy, with its rejection of authority and its reliance upon the self-sufficiency of autonomous reason. John Smith held that “We must shut the eye of Sense, and open that brighter Eye of our Understandings.” Smith placed the *idea* of the good above God, so that, as Willey summarized his position, “We should hold, not that what God decrees is right, but that God decrees what *is* right...The concept ‘right’ has in effect been deified, made antecedent to ‘God.’”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Smith said, “The Scripture speaks of Christ not only as a Particular person, but as a Divine Principle in holy Souls.”<sup>2</sup> The purpose of Christ’s coming, for Smith, was to unfold “The Way and Method of uniting

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1. Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (London: Chatlo & Windus, 1942), 143.

2. *Ibid.*, 144.

humane nature to Divinity.”<sup>3</sup> He held that the Bible was written for “vulgar apprehensions,” for the minds of weak and foolish men: “It speaks with the most Idiotal sort of men in the most Idiotal way, and becomes all things to all men, as every sonne of Truth should doe, for their good.”<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis of these men was thus not so much on Scripture as on mystical experience, on *experimental religion*. It was a mistake, they held, to seek Christ in books, or in the Bible; He was to be sought in experience, experimentally. This experimentalism was heavily influenced by science, but by Cartesian, mathematical, and rational science, so that it was still a rationalistic experimentalism. Only later was it to become an experimentalism grounded on sensation or the senses.

In Peter Sterry we can see the groundwork which made possible the later transition to a sensational experimentalism in religion. Sterry paid lip service to Whichcote’s principle that reason is the candle of the Lord, but he tended to associate reason with the body, and *spirit* as the superior substance. Spirit was thus the means whereby man could rise above reason. In *The Spirits Conviction of Sinne* (London, 1645), Sterry held:

The soule shuts up the windows of sense, when she would have the room fill’d with the light of Reason. Reason’s self must first be cast into a deep sleep and die, before she can rise again in the brightnesse of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

With reason assigned to sleep, and placed on the side of the world of the senses, the foundation was being laid for the Wesleyan revival, with its sensational experimentalism, and the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, and the nineteenth century American revivals. It was also a necessary pre-condition of the Romantic Movement, with its contempt for reason, and its plumbing of the secular depths of Spirit, the unconscious, racial, and emotional experience of man.

In Plato, the great triad was *Logos*, *Nomos*, *Taxis*, or, Reason, Lawfulness, Order. This constituted the realm of Spirit, Idea, or

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3. *Ibid.*, 152.

4. *Ibid.*, 146.

5. Vivian De Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry, Platonist and Puritan*, 1613-1672 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1934), 17.

Form, as against Matter. The way was now being prepared for assigning Plato's triad to the deadly world of matter as against Spirit. In William Blake, this became a reality. Blake's thinking was clearly dialectical, although it also reveals evidences of the collapse of the dialectic. Blake inverted the Platonic dialectic, making the body the good substance and reason the bad substance, but he also tended to a Christian Science solution of the dialectic by calling *body* the true *soul* of man, or body as a portion of the soul. Blake was an uncritical catch-all of ancient heresies. His dialecticism is very clearly stated, although ironically, because his position was to favor what was called evil or energy:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.<sup>6</sup>

This is a very clear-cut statement of dialectics, with the difference being the romantic inversion. The collapse of the dialectic into a monism is apparent also in some statements of Blake, as witness another statement from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors:

1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz; a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies. But the following Contraries to these are True;
4. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the fine Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
5. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
6. Energy is Eternal Delight.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, while Blake was wrong in ascribing such opinions to the Bible, he was right on seeing them as characteristic

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6. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, c. 1793.

7. *Ibid.*, Geoffrey Keynes edition of Blake (London: Nonesuch Press, 1935), 191.

of the religion of his day. Thus, on one occasion John Wesley's mother wrote to him, saying:

Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure, take this rule: — Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.<sup>8</sup>

The moral concern here is a sound one, but the underlying psychology is all wrong; the assumption is that two wills in effect are present in man, a rational will and a bodily, emotional one, and that moral strength comes from a reliance on reason. The struggle is a nature and grace dialectic rather than a sin and grace confrontation. Such a psychology could and did lead to a highly rational form of sinning, just as the later Romantic emphasis led to much emotional sinning which also masqueraded as virtue. The body, energy, and hell, to use Blake's terminology, are no more eternal delight or salvation than are reason and the spirit.

Peter Sterry foreshadowed some of Blake's ideas in holding that sin is a necessary stage in the development of the soul.<sup>9</sup> Sterry held that Christ is "an Universall Soul" and "a Top Branch in the Tree of Being."<sup>10</sup> Here we see the Great Chain of Being theory; Sterry was clearly moving into a strong monism. In one sermon, he declared, "God is the only Substance."<sup>11</sup> According to Sterry,

The Creature is nothing of it self, or by it self but a momentary emanation from God, sent forth from him and filled with him. God is not the Creature, yet he is in the Creature, not...confined to the Creature, or defined by the Creature, but...filling all in all, every Creature....<sup>12</sup>

He added further that "Nothing is mean and vile seen in a right and universal Light." As Pinto observed, Sterry "anticipated" Blake's principle, "Everything that lives is Holy."<sup>13</sup>

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8. C. Sydney Carter, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Church Book Room Press, 1945), 55.

9. Pinto, *op. cit.*, 52.

10. *Ibid.*, 88.

11. *Ibid.*, 90.

12. *Ibid.*, 97.

13. *Ibid.*

The goal of being is to purge away the grossness of “flesh” or “matter,” another name for unreality, and to convert all things into “spirit.”<sup>14</sup> To this end, a man should live unconcerned about friends and relatives, above passions and possessions, and indifferent to “Employments, and Entertainments.”

Live unconcerned in this World...There is no real Difference between having a Husband, Wife, or Children, and having none; between being in Grief, or Joy, and being without Grief, or Joy; between having an Estate and having none; between being in the height of all Employments, or Entertainments, and being out of all. This world hath nothing real. It is all a Shadow. Seeing then the various States of things on Earth have no real Difference, pass thou through all estates with a perfect indifference of Spirit, in a constant calm.<sup>15</sup>

This is Stoicism, not Christianity. Moreover, by downgrading the material world, the neoplatonists undercut the Puritan emphasis on God’s law as the way of holiness. The result was antinomianism. In Jonathan Edwards, neoplatonism was apparent in his idea of God as general benevolence, but it did not lead to antinomianism although it resulted in a heavy emphasis on experimental religion. In other men of the Great Awakening, antinomianism was most pronounced; some advocated and practiced a forsaking of marriage and a practice of perfection, which was practical adultery, on the excuse that they were beyond the law and flesh.<sup>16</sup>

By downgrading the material world, neoplatonism in every age has been incapable of dealing with it. A world which is unimportant will be neglected, and its pressing and urgent problems despised for a more “spiritual” way. The result is an irrelevant religion and philosophy.

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14. *Ibid.*, 100.

15. *Ibid.*, 177. Sterry to the contrary, while at times “having a husband, wife, or children” may not be better than none, there is certainly a real difference! To “live unconcerned in this world” is not to live at all.

16. C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1770-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 200ff.



# IX

## NEOPLATONISM AND MODERN MAN

The Michael Wigglesworth of the nineteenth century was Karl Marx. It is not our purpose to examine closely or more than in passing the philosophy of Marx. For Marx, the dialectic was one of nature and freedom (or spirit). The material world of nature is a threatening and evil world when it dominates men as it does in capitalism. Freedom means the capture and total control of the material world by the mind or spirit of Hegel, which would incarnate itself in the dictatorship of the proletariat and free man from bondage to work and from alienation. Bondage for Marx was *work*, being tied to the material world. For Marx, freedom meant this, “The shortening of the working day is its fundamental premise.”<sup>1</sup> Freedom thus was the triumph of spirit by controlling the material world and by releasing man as far as possible from work. In the same passage, Marx began by declaring that “the realm of freedom does not commence until the point is passed where labor under the compulsion of necessity and of external unity is required.”<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels stated the case in good neoplatonic terms when he called for “the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.” Unlike previous neoplatonism, in which the

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1. Karl Marx, *Capital* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1909), III, 955.

2. *Ibid.*, 954.

individual spirit made the ascent from the realm of necessity, the material world, into the realm of freedom, the spiritual world, Marxist ascent was social. Isidor Schneider, literary editor of the *New Masses*, wrote a novel to set forth this thesis, and his hero came to the following decision at the end of the book:

He has set out from the kingdom of necessity; he had found a way out, the escape from his class, only to find that, outside, he was homeless. He was to learn that no one enters the kingdom of freedom alone. He would return to his class. With it, he would march, taking his place in the advancing lines, in the irresistible movement of the masses of mankind from the kingdom of necessity to the Kingdom of Freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Basic to Marx's neoplatonism was his theory of value. For him, as he evaluated products, it was definitely not the materialistic market-place and its supply and demand that governed value. For Marx, "the value of each commodity is determined by the quantity of labour expended on and materialized in it; by the working time necessary, under given social conditions, for its production."<sup>4</sup> Value was thus removed from the market-place and determined instead by *labor*, and labor meant something which was "materialized" in a product. In other words, value was a consequence of an idea becoming materialized by labor. The market-place must not govern, because it is the crass world of material reality as against the pure world of mind or reason. As North has observed,

Marx demanded an economic paradise where there would be no scarcity, no uncertainty, and no capitalist entrepreneurship. It is only this kind of world which can dispense with profits. Marx wanted heaven on earth, or more accurately, he wanted an escape from time and the curses which time has brought. His vision of socialism ultimately required a static universe in which there would be no change whatsoever, or at least where all change could be accurately predicted and controlled. Because the capitalist system failed to meet this requirement, he rejected it as the creation of an alienated mankind, a temporary period which would come to an end with the Revolution. He castigated the capitalist for deviating from the utopian conception of a perfect world.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Isidor Schneider, *From the Kingdom of Necessity* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), 450.

4. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Encyclopedia Britannica edition, pt. III, 2, 89-90.

5. Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution* (Nutley, N. J.: The Craig Press, 1968), 170.

North's statement is an excellent summary of the implications and goals of a socialized neoplatonism.

In more ways than one, Marx resembled Wigglesworth. Somewhere in his youth, Wigglesworth had apparently fallen into sexual troubles and perhaps contracted gonorrhea. Marx had seduced, or, more likely, raped his wife's servant, a faithful woman who guided the improvident Marx family with common sense and dignity. A son was born. As Payne has commented,

For Marx, wrapped up in his dreams of revolution and power, the birth of a bastard son was an unmitigated tragedy, a shadow falling over all the remaining years of his life. His life was devoted to the creation of a revolutionary legend of heroic proportions; in this legend the rape of a servant girl could have no place. He therefore repudiated the child, refused as far as possible to have anything to do with it, and made no attempt to support it. Many years later he met his son, but it was a very brief meeting. The son did not know he was seeing his father.<sup>6</sup>

Wigglesworth despised the flesh, but found sex a continual temptation. Marx despised capitalistic materialism, but he was continually seeking wealth. During much of his life, Marx had a very high income at his command, but he spent much of it in foolish speculation on the stock exchange, trying to get rich quick.<sup>7</sup>

Ironically, Marx, like other neoplatonists of the early centuries, was plagued by physical ailments. Payne tells us that Marx's body was for twenty years of his life covered with ulcerous boils and carbuncles, "exuding a stench which drove people away."<sup>8</sup> "There were periods of quiescence, and other periods when his whole body seemed to break out in ulcerous sores. Like Job, he protested vehemently, accusing the fates of reserving a special malediction for him alone."<sup>9</sup> The rejected material world was exacting its price for Marx's rejection.

The neoplatonic hope had been made a social goal by Marx, and the artists soon shared it. One of the results was a characteristic

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6. Robert Payne, *Marx* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 266.

7. *Ibid.*, 353-54.

8. *Ibid.*, 342.

9. *Ibid.*, 343.

hatred of material reality, and “a protest against the ugliness of industrialism.”<sup>10</sup>

Art, when Christian, has stressed *grace*, not *nature* (realism). Humanistic art of the Renaissance, neoplatonist to the core, began by stressing *nature* (realism) and moved into a slavish adherence to the idea of nature in neo-classicism. Modern art has rejected grace and nature alike to affirm the neoplatonist spirit, usually in the anarchistic, individualistic sense. The goal of modern art is to express the inner world of the spirit.

Art requires justification, as do all human activities. Having lost its Christian justification, art sought a humanistic one. There has thus been a relentless search for meaning and justification, thus far fruitless. The void has been filled by giving priority, in an earlier era, to technique, and now to novelty. The classical emphasis on lines, on form and structure, the Romantic addition of new subjects, pastoral motifs, humanized animals, and so on, these things have been the main line of development in art, and each development has been revealed as empty by its imitators, and then abandoned by all.

Hatred of the middle class, the “materialistic” people of society, became the mark of the Bohemian and artist, also of the intellectuals. Even de Tocqueville shared this temper, holding that a moral order could come only from the aristocracy or the lower class.<sup>11</sup> As Cesar Grana points out, for the writers and thinkers of the day “meaningful values were by definition nonutilitarian values.”<sup>12</sup> The world of values was seen by them as the world of mind or spirit and definitely not to be associated with the material world and its representative middle class.

Because the material world and its middle class had been rejected, the “materialistic” morality of biblical religion also had to be rejected, and it was an intellectual necessity to be a Bohemian and an outcast. One young literary aspirant of nineteenth century

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10. R. H. Wilenski, *The Modernist Movement in Art* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), 95.

11. Cesar Grana, *Bohemian Versus Bourgeois* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 104.

12. *Ibid.*

France remarked: "I would give half my talents to be a bastard. What a beautiful play I would then write."<sup>13</sup>

In the twentieth century, this concept of the bastard received further development at the hands of Jean-Paul Sartre. Full development for man was interpreted as meaning a radical break with bourgeois morality and materialism. Values for Sartre are existential: they come directly out of the uncontaminated spirit of man, uninfluenced by religion and the past and ungoverned by the material world of history. Man's spirit when free begets the idea which is true value or morality; then everything that man does is a value. The false bourgeois world of material values must be destroyed. As Molnar has pointed out,

Superficially seen, the anti-bourgeois, the bastard, belongs to the class of the modern hero in literature, morally free and non-conformist in action...But the theme of the modern hero must be decisively transformed before it becomes usable in the Sartrean world; here the bourgeois world is not only left behind, it becomes the anti-world whose substance and structure cannot be merely ignored, but must be destroyed in order to attain total metaphysical liberation.<sup>14</sup>

This alienation from the material world is the modern stance. To be interested in commerce and material things is evidence of anti-intellectualism to the new neoplatonism. "Nature" as an abstraction is honored, but nature is divorced from material reality, from the world of hard material necessity, in favor of nature as an expression of spirit.

Among the beatniks and then the hippies, this contempt of materialism and the flesh took the classic form of neglect of dress, matted hair, and dirty bodies, and a sexuality which treated sex with contempt. Sex for many was divorced from morality, except the existentialist morality of the free spirit giving value to the moment. Sex meant "love" in this existentialist and fleeting sense, not in the hard, material sense of work and support, a household and its work, faithfulness, an attention to everyday physical necessities, and the like.

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13. *Ibid.*, 145.

14. Thomas Molnar, *Sartre: Ideologue of Our Time* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), 10-11.

Such things were seen as materialistic strangulations of the spirit, of love. The neoplatonic separation of spirit and body was far gone.

In medicine, the failure to come to a recognition of the biblical nature of mind and body has led to a crisis. According to Pedro Entralgo, a professor of the history of medicine, Occidental medicine, despite scientific progress, is in “a grave and continuous impasse” because it “has been able to consider human illness only from the point of view of the ‘physical’ side of man’s being, if it has not arrived at the extreme of identifying ‘nature’ or *physis* with ‘body.’ The attempts to escape from such a perspective — Paracelsus, Van Helmont, medical Romanticism — have been as ineffective as misguided.”<sup>15</sup>

Man has never ceased to be material by despising the body; it has usually aggravated his materialism because it has denied it a normal expression, as in Wigglesworth. Similarly, man has never ceased to be spiritual when he has denied the spirit; instead, he has fallen prey then to a false and fanatical tyranny of the spirit, as in Karl Marx.

Neoplatonism leads to a contempt for time and history. Cornelius Van Til has called attention to the parallel between the development from Aristotle to Plotinus and from Descartes to Kant. Such philosophies must deny the biblical faith as impossible, in particular, the incarnation, because “Nothing unique can be identified with anything historical.” The historical world, the world of matter, cannot be the world of the incarnation in any biblical sense. In ancient and modern philosophies, this is equally true:

In the case of each of these the would-be autonomous man first assumes that by the powers of his logic he can determine what can and cannot exist. In true Parmenidean fashion he determines that there can be no such thing as a really significant temporal experience. There can be no creation out of nothing. There can be no incarnation of the Son of God. If he is the Son of God, then he is an eternal changeless principle. If the Son of God becomes identical with Jesus as a man, then he has accidentally fallen from his status of divinity and must himself be saved by being absorbed into himself as an eternal principle.

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15. Pedro L. Entralgo, *Mind and Body* (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, n.d.), 112.

When, therefore, Gnostics were seeking friendly relations with Christianity and called themselves Christians, this was ultimately, whether fully known to themselves or not, an effort of the natural man to absorb the kingdom of God into the kingdom of Satan.<sup>16</sup>

Where any element of neoplatonism exists, the Bible is misunderstood and misinterpreted. Man is handicapped in his ability to recognize the nature of reality and is blinded to the basic moral issues of his existence.

In both evangelical and modernist theologies, the virus of neoplatonism is strong and deadly. Only by a return to a systematically biblical theology can the vitality of Christian faith and action be restored.

In non-Christian thought, neoplatonism dehumanizes life because it denies individuality in favor of universals; and it seeks to end history and institute a timeless order, or, despairing of this, it denies universals in favor of particulars and exalts the moment as the only reality.

Neoplatonism, by its misinterpretation of the nature and psychology of man, has also worked to dehumanize man. In Marxist orders, the goal is to incarnate scientific reason in the political order and to strip it of material and passionate considerations. The Soviet leaders, such as Stalin and Molotov, adopted these new names to indicate their transcendence of their old nature: they were now *steel* and *hammer* in the service of the pure reason of the general will of history.

The studied rootlessness of modern education after Locke, the mind as a blank tablet, has produced the modern intellectual. The mind as a blank tablet, a concept which underlies modern psychologies, including Behaviorism, is a neoplatonist development. The clean slate mind can supposedly be developed into a passionless, rational, and scientific mind that functions as pure reason. The net result of the neoplatonic fantasy is that it has produced with its dialecticism the modern diabolism. By attempting to transcend humanity, neoplatonist man has had to declare war against humanity. Nietzsche held that Christianity was a life-denying faith,

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16. Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary Syllabus, 1962), pt. I, 47-48.

only to produce himself the most life-denying faith of Western history. Man had to be destroyed to make way for superman, a passionless fiction and a life-denying monster. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche held that the ascetic ideal was the “hate of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material.” With great clarity, he saw the issue, and, in telling words, summed up the deadly goal of the ascetic ideal. Instead of a will to life, it was clearly a will to death, or to Nothingness:

...this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this desire to get right away from all illusion, change, growth, death, wishing and even desiring—all this means—let us have the courage to grasp it—a will for Nothingness, a will opposed to life, a repudiation of the most fundamental conditions of life, but it is and remains a *will!*—and to say at the end that which I said at the beginning—man will wish *Nothingness* rather than not wish *at all*.<sup>17</sup>

But Nietzsche himself came to wish for death and Nothingness like a good neoplatonist. He denied man, and he denied God, in favor of a myth of reason, superman. By denying God, he denied the levelling equality of men before God, because men stand before God, not in terms of their works but His grace and work. Because Nietzsche held that God had died, men’s equality was gone. “God hath died: now do *we* desire—the Superman to live.”<sup>18</sup> Man must be surpassed. Nietzsche’s feeling toward “the populace—mish-mash:—*that* wisheth now to be master of all human destiny—O disgust! Disgust! Disgust!”<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche poured out his contempt and hatred of man in the name of superman, a figment of his neoplatonic imagination. He cites also the “last sin” or temptation of Zarathustra, the champion of superman. It is “fellow-suffering.” This temptation he rejects:

“*Fellow-suffering! Fellow-suffering with the higher men!*” he cried out, and his countenance changed into brass “Well! *That*—hath had its time!

“My suffering and my fellow-suffering—what matter about them! Do I then strive after Happiness? I strive after my work!...”<sup>20</sup>

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17. Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Genealogy of Morals,” in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 178.

18. Nietzsche, “Thus Spake Zarathustra,” in *ibid.*, 286.

19. *Ibid.*, 287.

20. *Ibid.*, 325.

Nietzsche ended with “a repudiation of the most fundamental conditions of life.” He ended with a repudiation of man, and of any passion for man. Man for him, as for all neoplatonists, was the abstract man of their imagination, whether called man or superman. In every case, neoplatonism is at war with reality. It dreams of playing god and recreating man, but, in its dream, man becomes a Frankenstein monster, an impossibility in whose name the real man must be sacrificed. In its mildest forms, it still depersonalizes man, as witness Thomas More allowing his daughters to be examined naked like livestock by a suitor before the man took his choice of one of them. In this More was faithful to the standard he had laid down in his *Utopia*.

This war against humanity became very vocal in the life, thought, and action of the twentieth century. The goal of Henry Miller’s sexuality is in large measure anti-sexual. By his own statement, the goal is to be “inhuman,” and man must “rip out his entrails” and become passionless:

Side by side with the human race there runs another race of beings, the inhuman ones, the race of artists who, goaded by unknown impulses, take the lifeless mass of humanity and by the fever and ferment with which they imbue it turn this soggy dough into bread and the bread into wine and the wine into song. Out of the dead compost and the inert slag they breed a song that contaminates. I see this other race of individuals ransacking the universe, turning everything upside down, their feet always moving in blood and tears, their hands always empty, always clutching and grasping for the beyond, for the god out of reach: slaying everything within reach in order to quiet the monster that gnaws at their vitals. I see that when they tear their hair with the effort to comprehend, to seize this forever unattainable, I see that when they bellow like crazed beasts and rip and gore, I see that this is right, that there is no other path to pursue. A man who belongs to this race must stand up on the high place with gibberish in his mouth and rip out his entrails. It is right and just, because he must! And everything that falls short of this frightening spectacle, anything less shuddering, less terrifying, less mad, less intoxicated, less contaminating, is not art. The rest is counterfeit. The rest is human. The rest belongs to life and lifelessness.

When I think of Stavrogin for example, I think of some divine monster standing on a high place and flinging to us his torn bowels. In *The Possessed* the earth quakes: it is not the catastrophe that

befalls the imaginative individual, but a cataclysm in which a large portion of humanity is buried, wiped out forever.<sup>21</sup>

This neoplatonic superman must move always through “blood and tears,” trampling humanity underfoot. He is a failure, Miller says, if he is not murderous and “contaminating”; he is then “counterfeit” and “human,” he “belongs to life and lifelessness,” to the passionate world of birth and death rather than the world of pure reason, pure spirit, *Geist*, or mind, to use Hegel’s terms. The goal is that “a large portion of humanity” be “buried, wiped out forever.”

Any thoughtful evaluation of the twentieth century and its wars, its slave-labor camps and concentration camps, its universities and its schools, must conclude that this war is in progress. It will not cease until the philosophy which undergirds it is rooted out and man again placed under God and His sovereign word. In Van Til’s words,

The self-attesting Christ will yet gain victory. But he will gain it when theologians, philosophers and scientists, and all that have cultural responsibility, re-assume afresh the mandate given to Adam to subdue the earth to the praise of its maker and redeemer.<sup>22</sup>

The neoplatonist has a bitter hatred of life, because he neither made it nor can control it; therefore, he seeks to destroy it, and few are as honest as Miller in expressing their urge to destroy and to kill. As Wisdom declared long ago, “He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death” (Prov. 8:36).

While some neoplatonists work for the death of man, others proclaim him an illusion. Dewey, in modern form, saw the individual’s Psychology as illusory, as unimportant; Mary Baker Eddy saw only universal mind as truly existent. The individual as well as matter are for Christian Science an illusion. However, salvation for these and others is always an individual matter, and God’s word gives no evidence of such a general and total decree. The neoplatonist haters of life are thus doomed to disappointment; they may find some consolation in their little, private corners of hell.

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21. Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 254-55.

22. Van Til, *op. cit.*, 169.

# Appendix I

## NEOPLATONISM AND FEMINISM

In Plutarch's letter of consolation to his wife on news of the death of their daughter, neoplatonism is very much in evidence. He wrote that "The soul is incorruptible, and you must imagine that its experience is like that of a caged bird." Death is thus freedom from the body.<sup>1</sup> Plutarch added,

The truth concerning these matters is emphasized in our ancient and traditional laws and usages. For those who die in infancy we do not offer the libations or other funeral rites which are customary in the case of other dead because children have no share in earth or earthly concerns. Nor do we visit their tombs and monuments or keep solemn wakes at their bodies. Our laws do not permit such practices because it is an impious thing to mourn for those who are so quickly translated to a better region and a divine lot.<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch gives us many evidences of the influence of the Greek dialectic on everyday life. In the "Dialogue on Love," Pisiais declared, "Chaste women have no business at all with loving or being loved." Protogenes stated that "A man ought to avoid and abominate a woman who declares her love; he ought not undertake

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1. Plutarch, *Selected Essays on Love, the Family and the Good Life*, Moses Hadas translation (New York: Mentor Books, 1957), 99.

2. *Ibid.*, 100.

marriage with her under the impression that such lasciviousness is a valid motive.”<sup>3</sup> In “Marriage Counsel,” Plutarch had this to say:

A Spartan lass was asked whether she had ever approached a man. “No,” she answered, “but a man has approached me.” Such behavior, I take it, is appropriate for a housewife, neither to avoid such relationship or be vexed when her husband takes the initiative, nor yet to take the initiative herself; for the one course is lascivious and brazen, and the other haughty and unamiable.<sup>4</sup>

Much of what has been condemned as a product of Catholic and Protestant teaching has been the continuing influence of neoplatonism and best exemplified in its original form among Greeks and Romans.

Neoplatonism was very powerful in the feminist movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now, however, the roles were reversed. Woman was seen as pure and spiritual, and man as coarse and material. Women, it was thus held, are more “spiritual” and therefore superior beings. Crime statistics were compiled to prove that men were more materialistic and evil. Nahum Tate, in *A Present for the Ladies*, said that woman, having been created after man, was therefore the “consummation of the Works of God.” Mrs. L. G. Abell, in *Woman in her Various Relations*, held that “Man’s work shall decay and die. His loftiest and proudest work shall be forgotten but that of woman is immortal.” Eliza Farnham in *Woman in Her Era* (1864) held that women are both superior and sovereign. Virginia Leblick in *The New Era: Woman’s Era; or Transformation from Barbaric to Humane Civilization* (1910) said that the lowest prostitute was better than the best of men.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, in Islam, women are associated with the principle of sin, with matter, and are accordingly seen as the source of evil.

From the biblical perspective, both men and women are equally creatures, equally capable of sinning, and equally capable of righteousness. It is not being material that makes them sinners but

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3. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

4. *Ibid.*, 83.

5. Eric John Dingwall, *The American Woman* (New York: Signet Books, 1958), 98-100.

a wilful rebellion against God. Sin begins in the desire of the creature to be as God, to determine good and evil for himself (Gen. 3:5). The expression of this sin can be spiritual or physical: it is still sin.



# Appendix II

## NEOPLATONISM AND ECONOMICS

A persistent belief that makes for socialism is the belief in *the conflict of interests*. All forms of socialism agree that there is an inescapable conflict of interests between the varying elements of society: between capital and labor, farm and city, producer and consumer, and so on. These inescapable conflicts necessitate the continual intervention of the state, for otherwise society would be in a condition of civil war. The state thus becomes the central agency of society, its coercive arm for the prevention of the explosive forces of the conflict of interests.

The other opinion holds instead to *a harmony of interests*. The interests of all aspects of society — capital and labor, farm and city, and producer and consumer—are in reality interlocking and interdependent. Conflict is introduced by statist intervention, in behalf of one party or another, while ostensibly for the welfare of all. To harm, limit, or cripple by controls one aspect of society is to damage all ultimately, because of their interdependence. The harmony of interests requires therefore a freedom from statist intervention in order to function.

The roots of the belief in the conflict of interests are dualistic and neoplatonist. If reality is divided into mind and matter, two alien and conflicting forms of being, their dialectical unity repre-

sents a continual state of tension and conflict. It is then inevitable that the essence of life is a conflict of interests. This conflict will be so deeply imbedded into the structure of being that life will be a continual state of civil war, class against class, group against group, mind against body, and so on. The civil war will be within man and between men.

If, however, neoplatonism is denied, and the biblical doctrine of creation is affirmed, then there is an essential harmony in all created being. God made it wholly good. The Fall introduced conflict, but the conflict is moral, not metaphysical. It is the rebellion of sinful men against God. The conflict is between man and God, and this conflict creates a conflict in men and between men. However, it is *an unnecessary conflict*, not a necessary one. It is a wilful, sinful conflict, a conflict by choice, not by necessity.

When man is at peace with God, he is also at peace with himself, and with men of good will. The basic harmony of interests which is a part of God's purpose at creation is then again in force. Man, who had warred against God and that harmony, now rejoices in it and prospers because of it.

The belief of socialists in an ultimate conflict of interests is a metaphysical presupposition, just as a belief in the harmony of interests is a metaphysical and religious presupposition. Where men lose faith in the doctrine of creation, they either abandon belief in the harmony of interests, or else hold it as a rootless and sterile principle. Having denied its foundation, they cannot successfully maintain the conclusions.

The doctrine of the harmony of interests also has an implication for prayer. Most Christians pray in terms of a conflict of interests with God, as though what they desire as a Christian is somehow in conflict with God's purpose and an exception to it is being asked. The fact, however, is that the more a Christian grows in grace, the more obedient he is to God's law-word, the greater the harmony of interests between man and God. The Christian should pray in terms of this harmony of interests.

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