

Secular Humanism Making It Up as We Go

The single best picture of secular humanism was a cartoon in the LA Times at the death of famous existential philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre depicting him carving his own statue; he had gotten to his ankles. The inscription read, "Man makes himself."

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by Mary Poplin

The faith of secular humanism is that we make ourselves as we make decisions, which in turn lessens the "angst" that is presumed fundamental to human existence. If Sartre and some of his friends had been drawn carving the shape of the globe, the picture would have been complete since those in power lead the advancement or social evolution of human nature as they socially construct our world.

Early secular humanists were basically advancing Judeo-Christian principles without Christ; today's secular humanist has no such moral plumb line. In theology, this same slide sought first to "demystify Christ" and later "process" theology claimed that God is also remaking himself; He is still learning, even from man.

Every creator of an invention shares the laws and principles by which his/her creation best functions; machines come with manuals. The universe, too, was built on a set of physical properties and laws (gravity, thermodynamics, entropy). Man was given a mind that could understand and work within these laws, which become the foundation of man's technological creativity.

So too there are laws of human flourishing, that are transmitted in the Old and New Testaments, "written on our hearts", and even evident ultimately in medical and psychological research. While we are not offended by the physical laws of nature around which the universe operates, human beings have always sought to live outside the laws by which human nature functions best. But God says *obey my laws so that it will go well for you* (Jeremiah 7:23, 38:20, 42:6). Thus "sin" is missing the mark of human flourishing.

In order to justify sin the powerful elite reconstruct moral values largely by changing the meanings of the language they use in the media to describe human desire. Something once considered out of the question is re-presented as "contemporary", "modern", and "hip" and then is disassociated from the natural consequences of acting on those desires. Thus, we no longer speak about scientifically established consequences of such things as abortion to depression and breast cancer, divorce to diminishing child welfare, or a host of sexual activities to worldwide health crises. Sociologist Anne Hendershott noted the language change that has accompanied suicide; what we once associated with "being deeply disturbed" is now associated with "dignity" and "autonomy." Once separated from permanent moral guardrails *and* factual consequences, we are free to exalt any human desires.

Much of our secular humanist culture is not intentionally hostile to Christian principles. They are simply unaware that Judeo Christianity has truth in it that cannot be found elsewhere. They cannot imagine a living and active God that transcends the principles of secular medicine, sociology and psychology. For example, in Robert Putnam and David Campbell's famous book, *American Grace*, they report that church and

synagogue attenders are better neighbors, more generous, and more civically engaged. They summarize that this is because they are in *intense social networks*. They even suggest nonbelievers might do just as well if they formed "close, morally intense, but not religious *social networks*."

Likewise, prominent psychologists, Krause and Ellison studied 1300 adults finding that people who believe that God has forgiven them are two and one-half times more likely to forgive others unconditionally and to have higher levels of life satisfaction. They attribute this also to the *psychosocial institutional climate* of the church, not to a God who forgives. These are perfect examples of what Dallas Willard called "the calamity of displacing the central points of Christian knowledge into the domain of mere faith, sentiment, tradition, ritual or power."

These omnipresent cultural assumptions also infect Christians; we often adopt secular ways without discerning their truth relative to Christian principles. For example, Christian counselors recommended that I needed also to forgive myself for my abortions. Concentrating on forgiving myself was a slippery thing, one day releasing it and the next not. After three years on this seesaw, I went to Mother Teresa's and was assigned, not coincidentally, to work with sick babies. This intensified my grief. Upon my return, while asking God once again to forgive me, the Lord, spoke in an angry tone, "I forgave you the first time you asked and I don't want you to ask me again." The emphasis here was on I, as in the great "I AM" – the one who does the forgiving. Scriptures never recommend we forgive ourselves. Forgiving ourselves is not the way human beings have been created; it is one of many secular "plausible arguments" of which Paul warns (Col. 2:4) and into which we easily slip. But things that are not true never really work.

The member of the Godhead who stands most in the way of *man being the measure of all things* is Christ. Jesus can be a great moral teacher but not God. C.S. Lewis writes, "That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.... But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

"The problem of leading a Christian life in a non-Christian society is now very present to us. . . . It is the problem constituted by our implication in a network of institutions from which we cannot dissociate ourselves: institutions the operation of which appears no longer neutral, but non-Christian. And as for the Christian who is not conscious of his dilemma—and he is the majority—he is becoming more and more de-Christianized by all sorts of unconscious pressure: paganism holds all the most valuable advertising space. . . . When the Christian is treated as an enemy of the State, his course is very much harder." T. S. Eliot *Christianity and Culture*, 1942

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A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert—himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason.

G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

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Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, who writes eloquently of her conversion in her book, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, writes, "I was working from a historical materialist [Marxist or critical theory] worldview. . . . Christians maintained that Jesus Christ was historically and globally true, but his entrance into history violated a core value of my research: no one, according to the tenets of historical materialism, enters history; rather, we all emerge from it."

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Though an atheist, Italian philosopher, Marcello Pera writes, "Two divergent theories may be compared on the common ground, . . . and one may be judged better than the other. By better we mean that it has greater empirical content, more heuristic capacity, and so on. . . . Two religious systems may be compared by their cultural consequences, and here too one may be judged better than the other. By "better" we mean that it recognizes and respects more fundamental rights, satisfies more expectation, allows for more efficient, transparent, democratic institution and so on.... In the end, we must choose. As the history of liberalism and modernity shows, the Christian choice to give oneself to God, or to act . . . as if God existed, has yielded the best results."

Professor of psychology Paul Vitz explains the emphasis on self-worship in psychology

"The modern self is characterized by such things as freedom and autonomy, by strong will, and by the presumptions that the self is self-created by the will, operating freely in the construction. The self is assumed to be strong, capable, and above all coherent; it is also largely conscious and heavily indebted to reason or at least reasonableness. . . . In recent years the presumed goal or ideal is the self of self-actualization or self-fulfillment."

Robert George in his book, *Conscience and Its Enemies*, explains the critical necessity of preserving religious freedoms: "Religion provides authority structures, and where it flourishes and is healthy, is among the institutions of civil society providing a buffer between the individual and the state."

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Mary Poplin

Mary Poplin is professor at Claremont Graduate University and the author of a new book published by InterVarsity Press - *Is Reality Secular? Testing the Assumptions of Four Global Worldviews* (interVarsity Press). Professor Poplin earned her PhD from the University of Texas and is a professor in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University. Her work spans K-12 to higher education. Professor Poplin, who began her career as a public school teacher, conducts research largely on the inside of schools and classrooms, and more recently on highly effective teachers in urban poor schools. Her work in higher education has included administration; at various times, she served as dean and as director of teacher education. Academically, she explores the contemporary intellectual trends dominant in the various academic disciplines—the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. She is a frequent speaker in Veritas Forums throughout the country.

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