

IDOLS FOR DESTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Men may risk everything, including their lives, for family, for wealth, for country, for class, or for the kingdom of God. Even the cynic who believes he is above all that nonsense has established a hierarchy of values; otherwise he could identify *those* values as nonsense. 4

Anyone with a hierarchy of values has placed something at its apex, and whatever that is is the god he serves. 5

Legions of ordinary people know how to use such ideas as inferiority complex, relativity, and pragmatism, although scarcely any of them have read a page of Freud, Einstein, or Dewey. Those philosophies may have come down in transmogrified form, but come down they do. That is the wisdom in John Maynard Keynes's remark that 'Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.' 7

It is the assumptions we must question. These are statements that are assumed to be true but are not proven Assumptions are beliefs; if they were proven they would not be assumptions. 8

W.R. Inge: 'He who marries the spirit of the age soon finds himself a widower.' 9

All idols belong either to nature or to history. The whole of creation falls into those two categories, and there is no other place to which man can turn to find a substitute for God. Any idol that is not an artifact of the natural world is an artifact of the social world. 11

ONE: IDOLS OF HISTORY

Time ... is a religious concept, and there can be no agreement on a philosophy of history without agreement on religion. 12

What we think of the meaning of life is inseparable from what we think of the meaning of history. 12

The idolatries of history exalt an age (past, present, or future), or a process, or an institution, or a class, or a trend and make it normative. 13

Peter Berger: The *past* out of which the tradition comes, is relativized in terms of this or that socio-historical analysis. The *present*, however, remains strangely immune from relativization. 20

Couple of assumptions in modern discipline of history:

- a) Multiple causation: it is now considered dubious to ascribe important historical events to single causes. Ask what caused the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.
- b) Assumes that the explanation of history lies within history itself. 23 - no evidence for this - is an assumption. 'Even those historians who explicitly disbelieve it - Christians for example - write history as if they do believe it ... accepting assumptions as professionals that they do not accept as individuals'. 24

The seamless web ... it has become a dominant assumption of the historical profession ... Insisting on a smooth flow of events, it abhors discontinuity, revolution, or sudden catastrophe. The historical 'process' takes place entirely with materials already present within itself. All the elements of history are already there in embryo before a complex of events occurs. Afterwards the historian identifies the elements and tries to explain how they 'emerged' in the pattern that he finds took place. The system is closed ... Nothing breaks through from the outside because there is no outside. 25-26

Different assumptions ... that God enters history with blessing and judgment. To one who holds that opinion, the Hegelian seamless web seems not only pallid and lifeless but at variance with the observed facts of history. 26

Modern people either think of history as random - 'one damn thing after another'. Or they think of it as governed by forces within it. Bible otherwise - 'History had a beginning and will have an end, and that both the beginning and the end are in God's hands.' 27

The dual effect of this revolutionary idea [Bib view] is to de-divinize history, removing it as an idol, and, paradoxically, to acknowledge its vital importance. 28

Mystical visions, ratiocination, and emotional experiences are not central to the biblical epistemology, but history lessons are. 29

History's creator is outside of history and gives meaning to it:-

1. Distinguishes nature from history
2. Restores meaning to otherwise valueless events
3. Means and ends in proper perspective
4. Basis for understanding change - have standard which doesn't change
5. Principle of value against which all values are judged.

'God changed the course of history and politics and society and civilization by means of a vision that had nothing to do with history or politics or society or civilization.' Ellul q31

Norms come from outside history.

A man who said a priori that he would not consider causes that could not be seen would miss entirely the connection between the moon and tides because gravity cannot be seen. 33

A society that cannot tolerate a judge beyond history will find that it can learn to tolerate anything else. 37

In the Christian conception, the unconditioned acts on the conditioned, the absolute on the contingent, the outside on the inside, creator on the created, God on history. The action beyond history makes history what it is but is absent from the accounts of history. That is why Niebuhr concluded that 'history does not solve the enigma of history.' It will be objected that this conception of history depends on the faith of the observer, and so it does. But the rival conception, immanent history, is no less dependent on belief. As with most pairs of diametrically opposed convictions, incompatible faiths confront each other. 37-38

TWO: IDOLS OF HUMANITY

No deity will save us, we must save ourselves - Humanist Manifesto II q42

The idea of humanity as a deity is seldom avowed openly but rather is expressed by ascribing to man attributes of God: sovereignty (or autonomy), complete rationality, and moral perfection. 42

Any conception that has love without law as its ethical principle will be relativistic and self-serving and without any means of arranging a priority between rival goods. There is no action so evil that it cannot and will not be said to be motivated by love. 47

When law loses what only the conviction of ultimacy can bestow, it degenerates into pragmatism, and that means that breakdown is near. 47

Faith and law are opposed only as principles of salvation, not as principles of conduct. 48

If faith may not be opposed to law, neither may love. Sentimental love negates the law by asserting priority over it. But Paul linked the performance of the duties of Christian love with the keeping of the law. 48

Our capacity for self-deception and self-justification is almost infinite. 50

When hatred does not dare come out into the open it can be easily expressed in the form of ostensible love - love for something which has features that are the opposite of those of the hated object. This can happen in such a way that the hatred remains secret. q Scheler p53

Equality of opportunity guarantees inequality of results because people are unequal in motivation, ability, and will, and their values are so varied that they direct their energies toward different goals. 55

It is ironic that those who have denied the existence of any objective [absolute moral] reason for believing in guilt should be the ones to accomplish their ends by fanning guilt feelings. 57

Guilt feelings coming from the real or imagined envy of others have nothing whatever to do with the Christian understanding of guilt. 59

As wealth increases, people redefine poverty. The need for food, clothing and shelter is taken to mean the need for meat, new clothing, and a house with indoor plumbing and then again to mean steak, stylish clothing and a house with still more amenities. 59

Being poor is the greatest evil in humanitarian thinking, because having material possessions is the greatest good. 61

There is no recognition that the 'victim' may have had some role in creating the circumstances, and thus is an accomplice. That, he says, would be blaming the victim. But did those babies arrive after acts of immaculate conception? That is not a question of middle class moralism. It is rather an insistence that circumstances do not just 'come' but are made. If to say, 'Why did you do *this* instead of *that*?' is to blame the victim, then everything is determined by circumstance. 69

Bauer finds it paradoxical that the supporters of increased foreign aid extol the moral superiority of people in poor nations while maintaining that they cannot make their way in the world without outside help The West is not superior because it is wealthy; it is wealthy because it is superior, because it believes that work is a calling, that matter is important, that reason is a gift of God. This culture, God's gift, transmits its material blessings along with its interpretation of reality the West cannot export prosperity without also exporting the culture that makes it possible. 72

The power behind the lever of modern humanitarianism is the state, that saviour through which the apostles of ontological victimhood find a poor man in the slums and shower compassion on him in the form of other peoples' property. 75

The basic problem for old-fashioned humanists is that they wish to keep the fruits of Christian doctrine while jettisoning the doctrine itself. 77

Miss Voluntary Euthanasia is not likely to be going it alone for very long. Many of her admirers ... would be neither surprised nor distressed to see her joined by Miss Euthanatize the Congenital Idiots and Miss Euthanatize the Permanently Insane and Miss Euthanatize the Senile Dementia. 79

a twisted and deformed travesty. It is ironic that for humanitarians only poor people, minorities, and those who have run afoul of the law are assumed to be shaped by the iron grip of circumstance. If we look at the villains instead of the victims - the police, politicians, social workers, businessmen - we find that the humanitarians have given them free will. They do not speak about the industrialist's tyrannical father, the loan shark's miserable childhood in an orphan home, the politician's neurotic mother. Those people are responsible for their acts, and therefore are human. Humanism thus awards its enemies the status of human beings while taking that status from its wards. 83

The god that failed is man. 87

THREE: IDOLS OF MAMMON

Like all idolatries it finds its ultimate meaning in an aspect of the creation rather than in the creator. 88-89

Rising prices result from increases in the supply of money without corresponding increases in the supply of goods for it to purchase [that's why debasing coins is same as inflation] 92

The alchemist's trick of creating something of value without work. 92

He tries to create ex nihilo and imitate the power of God 92

Inflation is a process of redistribution 98

The cultural [moral] level of a nation correlates inversely with its interest rates. 102

All true needs - such as food, drink, and companionship - are satiable. Illegitimate wants - pride, envy, greed - are insatiable. 107

The revolution of rising expectations, which has been dominant for the last twenty five years, 'is being transformed into a revolution of rising entitlements' for the next twenty five. q D. Bell p108

One of the main functions of government [as it now works] is taking resources from some people and giving them to others. 108

A corollary of a generalized ethic of redistribution is the dominance of pressure groups or constituencies. ... Redistribution thus ensures that society is divided into adversary groups. 117

Since government produces no goods, it can distribute only what it takes from others. 118

Irving Kristol - unable to find a single example in history 'of a society that repressed the economic liberties of the individual while being solicitous of his other liberties.' q 120

A problem solved gives an agency new difficulties justifying its existence. In the economy of the omniscient state, nothing succeeds like failure. 124

Jurisdictions that have rent controls have housing shortages. 125

One of evils of a depreciating currency [time of inflation] is that it confuses the distinction between income and capital, making it likely that people will live off the latter while thinking they are living off the former. 131

Living off capital - consuming not investing - 'an infantile inability to discipline itself and provide for its future.' 131

People that choose wealth over freedom can have neither. 133

There are no societies that are cavalier toward property rights but which safeguard human rights. 134

Idols of mammon invite us, too, to place our hopes on wealth, tell us that taking is better than giving, tempt us to covet what our neighbour has, convince us that we have been wronged because we do not possess as much as we desire, and, finally, pervert the sense of justice that alone can preserve peace. If we continue to worship them, the unrest and discontent that mark our society now are only a sample of the destruction that is to come. Insatiable greed placing infinite claims on finite resources can have no other end. 139

FOUR: IDOLS OF NATURE

All systems of thought rest on assumptions or beliefs. An assertion about God is not logically different from a physicist's assumption that the physical world actually exists apart from anyone's mind. There can be no simple appeal to the 'facts' for factuality cannot be considered apart from a philosophy by which the facts are interpreted. 144

Typically the sociology of knowledge is used as a debunking device. For example, one of its best-known practitioners, German sociologist Karl; Mannheim, does not believe in absolutes. He says that people who do are merely exhibiting a 'sign of the loss of and the need for intellectual and moral certainty ... unable to look life in the face.' We may question how he learned that, but there will be no satisfactory answer. 153

The sociology of knowledge always has the environment precede the idea, even when it cannot produce evidence for that order. 154

The power that enables sociology of knowledge arguments [you only think that because ...] arguments to pulverize those who do not know how to deal with them lies in its relativizing function. 155

Beyond the obvious point that these relativisms cannot withstand their own methodology is that fact that they so conceive the nature of argumentation as to render themselves impervious to refutation. 156

Even if the debunker correctly identifies the motivation behind his adversary's position, that says nothing about the validity of the adversary's argument or the truth of his conclusion. 156

In this view, life began by chance chemical encounters in the rich primordial soup that once covered the earth; developed into higher forms through the genetic selection of characteristics that enhanced survival; produced the human species; and eventually will pass into extinction. 164

C.S. Lewis: If minds are wholly dependent on brains and brains on biochemistry, and biochemistry (in the long run) on the meaningless flux of the atoms, I cannot understand how the thought of those minds should have any more significance than the sound of the wind in the trees. 165

Chesterton: That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. q 166

Movement to irrationalism - 'the glorification of the primitive and coarse over the refined and civilized; the rhythmic over the melodic.' 171

The differences between maggots and men, on this showing, are only quantitative and relative. 172

Two odd fish:

1. Noumenal man, with a dreamy irresponsibility repudiating the rationality that makes possible what he values as well as what he hates, glorifying sensual experiences, and exalting attitudes and values that, widespread enough, would make it impossible for society to persist. Here is an antinomian egoism that by some miracle is expected to result in love and justice.
2. Phenomenal man, exalting rationality with a philosophy that makes reason impossible, submerging man into a nature that binds him irretrievably, giving him the status of brute or machine, and finally, taking charge in the name of survival. 173-4

Materialism and pantheism, whatever their differences, share immanence, the identification of ultimacy with the creation. They must therefore end up deterministic, fatalistic, and pessimistic, or else cover up their logical conclusions with mystification.

What the doctrine of creation does with the metaphysical problem, incarnation does with the epistemological one. 175

FIVE: IDOLS OF POWER

Inequality is advanced as a greater evil than theft. 181

This reversal of ethical thinking makes voluntary sacrifice for the good of others an example of 'petty moralism', while it advances state confiscation to the pinnacle of moral rectitude. 181

Looking to the state for sustenance is a cultic act; we rightly learn to expect food from parents and when we regard the state as the source of physical provision we render to it the obeisance of idolatry. 183

The paternal state not only feeds its children, but nurtures, educates, comforts and disciplines them, providing all they need for their security. This appears to be a mildly insulting way to treat adults, but it is really a great crime because it transforms the state from being a gift of God, given to protect us against violence, into an idol. It supplies us with all blessings and we look to it for all our needs. Once we sink to that level, as Lewis says, there is no point in telling state officials to mind their own business. 'Our whole lives are their business.' 184

It is because we rejected the doctrine of original sin that we on the Left were always being disappointed. C.E.M. Joad - q 190-91

Bureaucrats shuffle not papers but people. 205

One of the most useful tools in the quest for power is the educational system. 209
Value-free education is a contradiction in terms, and any hierarchy of values constitutes a religious system. Hence, all education is fundamentally religious. 210

The power of assumption is so great. Assumptions, in fact, are more powerful than assertions, because they bypass the critical faculty and thereby create prejudice. ... The false assumption is additionally beguiling because it often appeals to one of the worst instincts - the desire to be fashionable or at least to avoid being associated with the unfashionable or unpopular. 210-211

'Education is implication. It is not the things you say which children respect; when you say things they very commonly laugh and do the opposite. It is the things you assume that really sink into them. It is the things you forget even to teach that they learn.' Chesterton q 211

One of the primary bulwarks against both atomization and tyranny is the family, which is therefore a target of those who idolize the state. 215

We should understand totalitarianism to refer not to the severity of the regime, its propensity to use such tools as terror and concentration camps, but rather the scope of its purview. A totalitarian regime is one that seeks to control every aspect of communal life, and to bring as much of private life as possible into the sphere of the communal. 222

Substantive law is totalitarian by nature because it is teleologically oriented, drawn by a vision of final ends with respect to the way people live, and it seeks to impose that vision on its citizens. 222

Social democracy cannot be distinguished formally from totalitarianism, since it does not recognize in principle, any limit to the purview of state supervision. 222

When they appear in the social democracies, policies of state supremacy are justified as being for the good of society and contrasted with individualism. That is, that state is confused with society. When society is said to require something, we find that the state is thereby given the right to accomplish it. 223

Declining civilizations form universal states ... by what miracle [can] the species, insufficiently good and wise to rule the micro-jurisdictions, ... obtain a new nature fitting them to rule the macro-jurisdictions. 226

The economics of central direction ... substitutes preferences of central planners for the estimations based upon a price system that reflects both supply and demand. The system ignores the information contained in billions of decisions throughout the economy. 227

SIX: IDOLS OF RELIGION

Concern for the poor should have the church back to the Bible - often it has sent them into the arms of the state - summary of 243

Liberation theology - Jesus is Lord in the Church - Marx is Lord in history.

In a society in which idolatry runs rampant, a church that is not iconoclastic is a travesty. If it is not against the idols it is with them. 254

SEVEN: CONSEQUENCES AND EXPECTATIONS

The great fallacy of our time, Malcolm Muggeridge has written, is the one that says that we may pursue collective virtue apart from personal behaviour. 264

One way to evaluate the future of society is to determine the direction of mimesis. Who admires whom and on what grounds? Who seeks to be more like whom? 269

As the proletariat in Western societies has become more affluent, so the middle and upper classes have become proletarianized. Their attitudes towards time, work and leisure have come to exhibit characteristics of the lower classes. 269

Solzhenitsyn - Western intellectuals are legally free but are 'hemmed in by the idols of the prevailing fad.' 271

The religious character of human ideas and institutions is all-pervasive ... all social phenomena constitute systems of faith, not being based on logical or empirical demonstration, and all seek to respond to the most basic problems of human existence. Thus all normal adults are religious. 'Human existence compels men to act on unproven and unprovable assumptions' (Lenski) 273

A deterministic materialism leads to frantic search for freedom and thus to openness to weird, mystical, irrationality. 274 (summary)

Man is the autonomous ruler of himself, able to define right and wrong and frame statutes according to whatever he defines as just. Or else man is created and sustained by a holy and just God who declares on matters of right and wrong in the form of law. Both are religious views held by faith. In the most basic sense there is no such thing as a secular culture. This is not a call for religious warfare; it is an assertion that religious warfare exists and inevitably so if one religion does not simply surrender. 275

The emotional intensity of the struggle [partic ref to schooling but applies to other humanist-Christian clashes] is a direct function of its status as a form of religious warfare. 276

The dogmas of civil religion: materialist and selfist psychologies; relativist ethics; the policies of statism 276

Welfare system - govt handouts: 'it requires unusual decadence for an entire population to acquiesce in mutual pocket-picking, to allow itself, that is, to be bribed with its own money. 281

Should the redistributionary phenomenon continue, then the inflationary one will also persist. For in the absence of moral restraint, which would insist on paying for what one receives, the sums required to supply the wards of the state will not be covered by taxes and the balance will be provided by printing money. The debtor class, which has benefitted from inflation, is so enormous and so influential that it is difficult to see how the political will could ever be summoned to stop the currency depreciation. Every time the recessionary part of the business cycle begins, the cries for more monetary expansion overwhelm the political system, as bankruptcies, defaults, foreclosures and other evidences of over-borrowing increase. People do not want to repay their debts in currency of the same value as they borrowed. 281

The moral failures that ensure a declining economy also ensure that people will not be content with less. 283

The contemptuous attitude of many private citizens toward the statutes therefore mirrors that of the state officials toward the higher law they should be reflecting.. 286

The most vigorous atheist in the West has grown up in a world in which love and justice are ideals. But such ideals have no objective referent outside of the biblical accounts. 288

If man is taken to be different from animals in degree only, and not radically in kind, then there is no logical reason to treat him differently from the animals. The exploitation or killing of people deemed to be inferior could not then be condemned any more than the killing of steers in a slaughterhouse. 288

Death, then, is the answer to our economic problems. The elderly will be called selfish if they insist on living. 289

Once we agree that we have the right to end the lives of those who are no sufficiently useful, we shall have to devise a hierarchy of usefulness. 290

The prophets did not say that poor people were morally superior to others but that the perverse use of legitimate institutions to rob a person and impoverish him was an injustice that would bring judgment upon the guilty ones. They were denouncing a redistributory system that used political power to take from one set of people to give to another. 293

Bloodthirsty gods produce bloodthirsty people. If someone thinks that chance rules the universe, his actions are likely to appear random. 295

After biblical faith wanes, a people can maintain habits of thought and of self-restraint. The ethic remains after the faith that bore it departs. But eventually a generation arises that no longer has the habit and that is when the behaviour changes radically. 296

EIGHT: THE NEW COMMUNITY

Without a biblical understanding of faith, the sacraments degenerate into magic and moral principles into moralism. 299

Chesterton, Lewis, Sayers etc - 'rather than begging the world to believe, they told it the truth Apologetics should never be apologetic.' 301

People following one course of action rather than another must not blame their choice on external contingencies. 302

One major function of the church is to unmask the idols and expose them for what they are. There is no basis for this to be done except the authority of the biblical witness. Unmasking the idols destroys their effectiveness Christianity can be true to itself only if it is iconoclastic. If it is to have any effectiveness it must be actively engaged in breaking the idols. 308

The constant biblical witness concerning poverty was directed towards those who had difficulty sustaining themselves with food and shelter (Lev 25.35ff James 2.15). It had nothing to do with 'poverty' that is based on visions of affluence, the kind that has difficulty securing a car or television set, for that is a vision based upon envy. 313

Biblically ... poverty is not a permanent condition, defining the essence of a person, but a circumstance to be assuaged by the restoration of justice or by charitable help until the poor person can resume his normal status in society, one in which he contributes rather than being the recipient of contributions. 313

The humanitarian imitation of love assumes that man is a belly. 314

No theory of helping the poor may be said to be Christian if it does not discriminate among the poor. 314

Generous giving to the needy is both voluntary - that is, not a matter of compulsion - and obligatory [God requires it]. Distributory justice, then, occurs when people redistribute their own property, not that of others. 316

What is the capital? Family structure, intellectual competence, legal foundations, economic base. 317

The true Christian community will be what sociologists call a deviant subculture. 321

To expect a transformation of society that results from changed people is not an idealistic hope that can never come to pass; it is a matter of historical record. 325

There is no such thing as law that does not at least pretend to tell what kind of values are to be considered ultimate ... justice means the ruling of society is conformance with the law of God. 327

The Lord of history is the rightful sovereign of events and institutions. There is a note of triumph in the writings left to us by the early church that breaks through the telling of manifold difficulties. It recognized that crucifixion was followed by resurrection. The current critique of 'triumphalism' with its lachrymose dwelling on 'brokenness' is the recipe for retreat and defeat ... 328

To the democratic ideology, any action is just if it is approved by majority rule. To the libertarian ideology, any action is just if it is not coercive. Both are humanist to the core. In biblical perspective, right and wrong are not determined by the processes leading up to their proclamation, but by the degree of conformity to the law of God. 330

Biblical faith finds great power - as does its imitator Marxism - in the conviction that history is going its way. Or rather, that since Christ is the Lord of history, it is going history's way. ... 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', is not a pious wish, but a certainty. We do not question if we shall be able to bring such a happy state of affairs into being, but rather was our role should be in its inevitable fulfillment. 333

About seventy-five years ago French poet Charles Peguy declared that the true revolutionaries of the twentieth century would be the fathers of Christian families. 333

In the late twentieth century the West is plagued with major and minor idols, some of them all but invisible. It is hard to imagine a more important or satisfying role than to embark on the spiritual, intellectual, and political adventure of working toward stripping them, root and branch, from the land. 335