

OCCUPY!

Vol. II, No. 6

Luke 19:13

June 1980

© Institute for Christian Economics, 1980

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF DEATH (Knowledge and Politics, Part II)

By Archie P. Jones

Shocking though it may seem, all men are finite. This finitude necessarily imposes limits on men's knowledge, for all men are limited in time and space. This alone makes it impossible for any man or group of men to know everything, for it is impossible for men to investigate the whole universe, in the past, present or future. Finitude alone imposes impassable barriers to the unaided human mind.

Where can finite man begin in his quest for knowledge of himself and of things outside of himself?

If he begins from the evidence seemingly presented by his sensory experience, he discovers a host of insoluble problems. By what standard should he judge sensory evidence? How can he know what categories (if there are such things as categories) to place the individual, particular objects which his senses seem to present to him? Unless there are universal categories or standards he cannot possibly make sense of the myriad of impressions which he seemingly receives from his senses. Unless there are some universal standards available to man, he cannot possibly know how to evaluate any particular sensory impression which strikes his mind. Unless all things that exist are somehow unified into an orderly pattern, there can be no universals in terms of which to explain particular things encountered by his sensory experience. And do the things which his mind tells him exist really exist? Do his senses really report reality to him, and if so how accurately?

How can the empiricist, the man who begins from individual, sensory objects or experiences, really know that the idealist, who says that experience is really composed of ideas, not material objects, is wrong? (For a fuller discussion of these and other problems of knowledge, see Gordon H. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy*, Craig Press, 1973, and R. J. Rushdoony, *The Word of Flux; Modern Man and the Problem of Knowledge*, The Thoburn Press, 1975.) He can't. It is impossible to know the significance of the part unless one knows the whole and the relationship of the part to the whole. What if the "universe" is really a chance, evolutionary product? If the "universe" is a chance universe, it is an irrational entity; if the universe is irrational, man cannot know that the current relationships of things (assuming that he can truly know these) will continue for even an instant longer. If we live in a "universe" of flux, man's knowledge must be at best ephemeral. But in an environment of irrational change, man cannot have even ephemeral knowledge, for there can be no enduring standard of knowledge, in terms of which to measure the changes that occur with time. In order to know that he knows anything man must know that he lives in a rational universe, but this cannot be known empirically. In order to know that He knows anything, the em-

piricist must know everything—which is difficult. Small wonder, then, that philosophers of "science" have gone from verificationism to falsificationism to out and out skepticism.

Since finite man's reason cannot possibly achieve knowledge via ascending from particular things to universal principles, perhaps it would be better to begin from universals, in order to explain and understand individual, particular things. If man could know the whole of things, then he could know the significance of the particular things which he encounters. But can men rationally know universals, as Socrates claimed to be able to do? How can finite man be sure that following the path of logic will lead him to knowledge of universal principles? He can't. Socrates had to presuppose the existence of universals; he could not prove their existence. Awareness of this fatal flaw in the rationalist argument is what led to the rise of Empiricism. Following the path of logic cannot lead man to knowledge unless a) man's reason is capable of infallible operation, and b) the universe has a rational structure which is fully accessible to man's reason's scrutiny. For this it is necessary that God be the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

But not just any god will do. If the god who created and sustains the universe is anything less than sovereign, then he becomes, as Van Til has said, epistemologically nothing more than our senior partner in exploring the universe. If one's god is a finite, limited being, he is no help to man's quest for knowledge. And if one admits chance into a status in the nature of things, then the intellectual game is up. For a chance "universe" is not a cosmos, but a chaos, an irrational whorl of events. If one's god exists in a "universe" which contains chance, then one's god is limited by chance, by an irrationality which is superior to that god, and which renders him (or her) impotent to aid man's finite quest for certainty.

The same must be said of intuitive knowledge. How do we verify intuition? What if my intuition conflicts with yours? (Actually, this is easy: I'm right and you're wrong.) And how do I know that what you claim is intuitive knowledge is truly an intuition and not a disguised desire? Can reason really verify intuition, in a "Universe" which has, in Neo-Kantian fashion, at best a finite, limited god? Intuition can only work if the infinite, sovereign God of Scripture has created, and sustains, the universe, and then only if He has created a universe in which intuitive knowledge is possible. The catch, for the would-be autonomous humanistic man, is that he will not knowingly admit the God of Scripture into his system of thought. That would be bad for finite man's autonomy: you'd have to obey the word of a sovereign God.

This brings us to the second major difficulty in acquiring knowledge which faces man: man is fallen. Man is naturally—

apart from the regenerating, sanctifying grace of God—in ethical rebellion against God. He naturally wants to substitute his word about good and evil for God's word on good and evil. He naturally seeks to know the universe apart from its Creator, Sustainer, Ruler and Judge. Fundamentally, he desires to re-create the universe away from that which its true Creator has made it to be. Aristotle and others to the contrary notwithstanding, man does not will to do the good; he wills to define as good what God defines as evil. Man's will is fallen. So is his reason. As James Madison, steeped in the education of a then orthodox Princeton University said in his famous Federalist No. 10, not only do men have a diversity of faculties, or mental capabilities, but also man's reason is both fallible and inseparately attached to his self-love, so that his opinions and his passions have a reciprocal influence on each other. These facts are the death of all would-be autonomous philosophical infallibility and self-perfection.

All human thought is necessarily presuppositional. Being finite alone guarantees this. Being fallen ensures it. Presuppositions are ideas about the fundamental nature of reality, ideas which are posited and assumed, without proof, as axiomatic. Presuppositions are necessarily **religious**, for they are **a priori**, without proof, both unproven and incapable of proof to one who is unwilling to abandon his contrary presuppositions. They necessarily deal with religious questions relating to God, man and the universe. Moreover, fallen man's thought is necessarily religious because he has, but suppresses (Rom. 1:18) the knowledge of God and His law in his heart; man's very heart is inescapably religious. All human ideas and systems of thought are religious, whether or not they speak of the divine. All human ideas and systems of thought presuppose, in addition, a divine source of authority, of one sort or another, in that they presuppose infallibility (see R. J. Rushdoony, *Infallibility: An Inescapable Concept*, Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978). As Rushdoony and Scripture stress, finite man's fundamental problem of knowledge is *ethical, not meta-physical*; his *ethical rebellion against God, not his finitude*, keeps him from knowing himself or his environment. His vaunted philosophies are all but false religions: religions of willful ignorance and death.

The Political Significance of Knowledge

If he is honest with himself in confronting merely the insurmountable problems of knowledge involved in the inescapable fact of his finitude, the man who rejects the infallibly inspired Bible (II Tim. 3:16), God's revealed word, as the source of authority, will be driven to **irrationalism**. This is, after all, **where the problems of Rationalism, Empiricism and Intuitionism lead man**, and where attempts of men to achieve knowledge apart from God have historically led, in classical times, in late medieval times, and now again in modern times. Irrationalism holds that it is impossible for man to have a rational knowledge of himself or the world, since either the world is irrational or man is incapable of rational knowledge of things. As Clark has shown, (See Gordon H. Clark, *Thales to Dewey, and Three Types of Religious Philosophy*.) the dubious "progress" of humanistic thought since Plato (indeed, the natural "progress of all would-be autonomous human thought) has been from **rationalism to empiricism to irrationalism**. Men who seek to be independent of God first posit the existence of abstract universals, then, upon philosophically discovering the impossibility of proving universals' existence, they turn to empiricism, in order to discover if there are any universals; empiricism, in turn, because of the manifold problems inherent in its nature, leads to **skepticism** about man's ability to know anything. This was the destiny of the inherent logic of ancient and medieval thought, and it is the visible course of modern thought as well.

As Van Til has abundantly demonstrated, **irrationalism** is not only the natural development of human thought which seeks to

discover knowledge apart from the Sovereign, Triune God of Scripture, but also **the inevitable correlative of would-be autonomous man's presupposition of his own autonomy**. (See Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, with his *A Christian Theory of Knowledge and The Defense of the Faith*.) Fallen man naturally presupposes his own autonomy, but in order for man to be self-sufficient (intellectually or otherwise), the Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe, Jesus Christ, the unchanging God of Scripture, must be presupposed not to exist. For if such a God exists, He must be the source of truth and law, and fallen man desires to be his own source of authority, his own lawgiver. The denial of God, however, immediately plunges one into **intellectual suicide**, for without God we are in an irrational universe, and in an irrational universe one can truly know nothing. It is no wonder, then, that Holy Scripture says: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not on thine own understanding." Prov. 3:5.

These things are not only the inevitable outcome of ancient and modern humanistic thought; nor are they mere matters of intellectual curiosity. Without the God of the Bible, men and their cultures are inevitably led to work out the consequences of their apostate ideas. The attempted autonomous use of human reason leads directly to skepticism, irrationalism and nihilism.

Those who are skeptical about their ability to know anything must be skeptical about their knowledge of moral principles, and hence skeptical about the value of acting on and defending moral principles. A nation with such convictions will, like our own nation today, be **unwilling to endure sacrifices** for the defense of both its principles and its very national existence. In the face of communists and other hostile powers skepticism is suicide. Skepticism, of course, also breeds **internal cultural suicide**, by way of increasing crime, immorality in private and public life, and willingness to abandon tried and true beliefs, and (institutions, social, political and economic) true ways for unproven innovations, with all the injury and heartache which that often brings.

Irrationalism leads to the pursuit of **hedonistic self-gratification** by many, to **suicide** in the face of cosmic meaninglessness by others, and to the **pursuit of power** through crime and violence by the more bold members of society. **Private and public disorder, crime and violence** increase, and with it governmental corruption and crime. Anarchy threatens, as antinomianism waxes. In classic pattern, the wiser and more timid souls withdraw from public activity, economic activity decreases, **productivity declines** and with it **material well being**. As the nation weakens internal war and external conquest become increasing possibilities. **Civil disorder and the threat of conquest**, as Hamilton noted, have dire consequences:

Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war, the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to **liberty** to resort for repose and security to institutions which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. **To be more safe, they at length become willing to run the risk of being less free.** (Federalist #8; emphasis added)

The Ninefold Way

Fundamentally, epistemological skepticism (doubt about man's ability to know) renders man unable to acquire any objective knowledge of moral law, which plunges him into a positivistic world devoid of moral standards, a world supposedly beyond good and evil. A world beyond good and evil is a world in which anything goes—provided that one can get away with it. In such a world the

"knowing" man (the man who knows that he cannot know, and hence cannot know how he ought to act) becomes the unprincipled pragmatist, utilizing force and deceit to achieve the gratification of desires. In this world of moral anarchy, everyone, to a large degree, does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6).

The doctrine of epistemological skepticism thus opens to man at least nine paths—one might call it the Ninefold Way of Death:

1. **Conceal your skepticism.** If you teach it to others, they'll probably act on it. This is why Voltaire, who militantly attacked Christianity in print, never attacked it in his home, before his servants: should his arguments be convincing, his life, person and possessions would be unsafe. (Better to attack Christianity in print, so that **others'** lives, persons, loved ones and property—in the present and in the future—will be unsafe!) Better yet, be like Cicero: conceal your skepticism and **teach its opposite**. Cicero, a secret atheist, taught Natural Law (a doctrine which we will consider later in this series), in order to avoid the social consequences of his beliefs. At least he was humane!
2. **Teach your skepticism:** undermine others' morals and so the foundation of trust upon which society is built. This may be done knowingly or unknowingly. Radicals, of course, do this knowingly. Most positivistic, Behaviorist professors, who take their self-proclaimed status as Scientists seriously, do this knowingly. No! I take that back (Scientific accuracy must replace casual charity!): most positivistic profs know very well that their denial of the ability to know objective moral principles is a denial of biblical teaching; they merely suppose that their skeptical teaching will have few adverse consequences.
3. **Be a Sophist: teach skepticism** and the techniques of acquiring and retaining power, especially via deceitful speech, to the young, the ambitious and the wealthy. Come to think or it, a lot of profs do this, too.
4. **Act on your skepticism: be an anarchist.** If one can know nothing, and no moral principles, then no government can legitimately coerce you into doing anything against your will. If there are no objective morals to be enforced, then there should be no government.
5. **Act on your skepticism: be a totalitarian.** This alternative, of course, is for the ambitious; the less ambitious may be plain, old-fashioned tyrants of one degree or another. The philosophical justification for this can be seen to be the same as for anarchism: If there is no moral law, then it is just as just (since nothing is just) to impose your will on others as it is to resist the imposition of others' will on you. Come out fighting, and may the basest man win!
6. **Act on your skepticism: advocate group struggle** as the basis of rule. This is for the less talented and ambitious, the less bold. In a world devoid of moral law, what individuals can do groups can do. The possibilities for choice here are various. You may choose the economic group (a la Marxists), the race (a la National Socialists), the nation (a la the Fascists); or, if you are not so ambitious, the groupie family" (a la the satanic Mansonists). The philosophical justification here is the same as for the above. Again, may the basest group win!
7. **Act on your skepticism: be a criminal.** This is one of the

most popular alternatives today. Part of the reason is the seemingly endless scope and variety it offers to the exercise of one's Original Sin. Note that it also features the option of becoming a public or a private criminal. There is plenty of room for self-advancement, in this life, and both theoretical and on-the-job training available, in specialized institutions and via home study. And, under the aegis of applied Humanism and intellectually schizophrenic contemporary Christianity (especially of the modernistic variety), there is little chance of being caught and less of being punished. The one drawback is that the indirect consequences of government intervention and the direct consequences of public schools' teaching are flooding the market with other practitioners of the art—introducing "destructive competition."

8. **Go whole hog in your skepticism: be a nihilist.** Nihilism is really the ambitious, angry man's option. If you are bold and intemperate, with a tendency toward extremism, this is the option for you. No milquetoast skepticism here: screech out your denial of the existence of moral law! **Actively seek converts to your views.** Combine practice with theory: do your utmost to destroy all constraints—governmental, institutional, ideological, religious, social—on your freedom to do as you will. Like the Russian Narodniki and their descendants, the American New Leftists, make the destruction of society your goal; swear your enmity against all things. You may even have the thrill of joining or fomenting a revolution! Depending on your talent and "luck," you may be a smashing success. (After all, you have plenty of help from humanistic philosophers and writers, publishers and teachers and mediamen, and you have the whole historic thrust of would-be-autonomous thought on your side.) Your only problem, in this world, is that the skepticism to which all brands of Humanism naturally leads makes all of the above alternatives equally as valid as yours. Since this is so, many others will choose other alternatives, and consequently you yourself will be threatened with destruction. But that is the end of your philosophy, anyway.
9. Of course, there is always **the hippie alternative**. Simply drop out! Blasphemously sing "Halleluia, I'm a hobo;" journey to the garden spots of the world and spoil the scenery; become a vegetarian; study Zen. Or, if you're the type, stay home and travel on drugs, or, if you prefer a slower death, alcohol. In any case, you'll like dig experiencing the meaninglessness of your existence, man, provided the fuzz don't hassle ya too much, ya know? The only hitch is that on your way to death via alcoholism, drugs or one or more of the "social diseases" your property, person, loved ones (if any), physical and mental well-being and your **very life will be threatened** by the depredations of all of the above of your philosophical kinsmen, not to mention by other hippies or your own hand, when you become tired of your empty pleasures.

The natural and inevitable end of all varieties of humanistic thought is the denial of man's ability to know, so long as humanistic thinkers are true to the implications of their denial of the Triune God of Scripture. The God of Scripture, and no other god, is alone the basis of man's ability to know anything. All theoretical thought which attempts to grant man an autonomy from God's sovereign creation and providential sustenance of all things, and from His word's decrees, at the same time makes knowledge impossible for "autonomous" man and opens the gate to the Ninefold Way to his individual and cultural death.

EGALITARIANISM vs. THE FAMILY

(THE BATTLE FOR THE FAMILY, Part III)

By Archie P. Jones

The war between Christ and Satan, between Christianity and Humanism, is a war of ideas, in which ideas are weapons for the conquest of men's hearts, minds and souls. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. This is why we are to try the spirits, whether they be of God, for there are many false prophets gone out in the land.

One of the most effective concepts of the Humanists in their assault on biblical ideas and institutions is the idea of egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is essentially the absolutization of equality, applied to metaphysics and ethics. Egalitarianism is the belief in the goodness, truth, justice and beauty of equality, especially social, economic and political equality. The egalitarian holds that "all men are equal," or that "all men are created equal," or in our liberated times, that all people are equal, or that they **should be equal**.

Egalitarianism is based on, first, a distorted, reductionist view of reality, in that, it is derived from the application of equality, a mathematical concept, to man and society. As a wise northern congressman said in debate with an early American egalitarian colleague, the statement that all men are created equal is a self-evident lie, for it omits the unequal attributes, talent, virtues, circumstances and souls that our Creator has given us, and the unequal contributions which men make with their gifts. People are metaphysically equal only in the sense that they are equally created, fallen, totally dependent on God's grace, and totally in need of a Saviour. Furthermore, it is the plain teaching of Scripture that people are by no means equal in the eternal and temporal statuses of their souls—in their justification or sanctification.

It is for these reasons, secondly, that egalitarianism, while an ethical concept, is an unjust notion. For men's talents, virtues and contributions are by no means equal, nor among men of equal virtues and talents, are contributions equal. More importantly, from the biblical perspective while all men are equally justly damned for violating God's law, some are saved, forgiven, and others are not, and among the saved and the lost individuals are unequal in their law-keeping. Egalitarianism is essentially existentialist and antinomian in its assumption that equality is justice, for it in fact holds that existence is prior to essence, a position diametrically opposed to biblical teaching.

Egalitarianism is also unjust in that its assertion that equality is the highest good involves a fundamental **intellectual and moral relativism**. Only if all men's ideas, actions and accomplishments are equal can equality of social, political and economic status be just. But if this is so, then there can be no moral laws, no moral norms of human thought and action, and no legal or social accountability of men for their actions and words. It is for this reason that egalitarians want not equality of men under law, but rather the alien concept of **equality of condition**. Equality under law is the biblical teaching; it allows men to achieve rewards commensurate with their applied talents; it allows unequal men to achieve unequal statuses, and equal men who contribute unequally to achieve unequal statuses. Equality under law is the biblical way of freedom and responsibility. Equality of condition is the humanistic way of injustice, servitude and irresponsibility, for it requires the coercive punishment of the achievers, the workers and the good to reward the mediocre, the slothful and the evil.

Egalitarianism is unjust both as to its ends and as to its

means. Its desiderata of social, political and economic equality are unjust in themselves. But the means employed by egalitarians must also be unjust, because **egalitarianism requires coercion**, unbiblical coercion. It is perhaps easiest to see this by looking briefly at equality. If some in society are unequal in social, economic and political status, and if equality of condition be reckoned to be justice, then all must somehow be made to be equal. How can this be accomplished? They must be either persuaded (fat chance!) or forced to have an equal socio-economic status, or an equal political status. In order for all men to have an equal political status, government must be democratic in form. In fact, all must be forced to vote; otherwise the majority could rule the majority. Obviously, majority rule, the basis of democracy, is not, per se, consistent with biblical justice. How, therefore, can enforced voting to achieve majority rule be? And certainly government—enforced theft, a la Robin Hood, is unjust. Even if the end of equality were just, its means are not. Can bad roots produce good fruits?

The injustice of egalitarianism may also be seen by considering that it is a product of **environmental determinism**. If all men are created equal, or are naturally equal, then equality is just. If all men are naturally equal and if equality is just, then all men must be naturally good, for justice is good. If all men are not now equal, then the social or economic or political system is unjust (if equality is just!). If men are now unequal, their environments must have intervened to produce the various aspects of inequality which we now see. If men think and act unequally, their environments made them do so. **But if environments can produce inequality, they can also produce equality.** Thus the government must be given sufficient power to transform the environment, to remake man, society and government itself. From the biblical perspective, such a project would require total power and totalitarian actions by government, and hence would require injustice.

The injustice of egalitarianism is further seen from the fact that it is founded on and encourages **envy**. If equality is just, then inequality is unjust and perhaps there is room for legitimate envy. Since equality of condition is unjust, and since envy is forbidden by Scripture, both the foundation of egalitarianism in envy and the stimulation of envy by egalitarian theoreticians and politicians is a grievous sin. The very nature of envy, as Helmut Schoeck points out in his classic but little read work, *Envy* (Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1970), manifests its injustice, for envy is the desire to both prohibit others from having more than you have and to tear down those who are blessed with greater wealth, status, beauty, intelligence and so forth. As such, envy contains **hostility** hatred toward those who have greater possessions or other blessings. Such destructive sentiments have resulted in not only horrible personal violence but also, as Nathaniel Weyl has shown (*Modern Age*, Vol. 18, No. 1; Vol. 19, No. 3), in massive violence and murder, especially when envy is a part of leftist ideologies such as National Socialism and Communism.

Envy is not an accidental or isolated phenomenon but rather, as the great economist Ludwig von Mises has shown (*The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*), integral to hostility to the free market economy on the part of both ordinary people and intellectuals. Very well, but what impact does all this have on the family?

(continued in the next issue)

Occupy is published every month by the Institute for Christian Economics, a non-profit, tax-exempt educational organization. It is mailed free of charge to those who ask to be put on the mailing list. **Subscriptions:** P.O. Box 25, Sterling, VA 22170. Donations are fully tax deductible; checks should be made out to **Institute for Christian Economics**.