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## Bazz Childress

Fire Eater! Writer

### Man the Machine: A Conversation with Bazz Childress and MacDonald King Aston

## Part II: Athens & Jerusalem

8 January 2006

Dear Mac,

At the end of your first paragraph, you remark ".....I do have some familiarity with the historical reasons for the ascension of materialism or, as it is often called in speculative philosophy, philosophical naturalism."

You'll recall I mentioned in some of our prior correspondence having taken a class with my wife at the University of Kentucky a while back. The class was taught by James Francis, (a former, I believe, Franciscan monk interestingly enough), who teaches in the UK Honors Program Classics Department. The course was titled *Denying the Body: Pagan and Christian Parallels*. The class covered the origins of Christian asceticism (whether it was intrinsic to itself or had simply dressed itself up in Greek philosophy, an aspect of that mixing of Jerusalem and Athens of which we've spoken before). Some fascinating discussions, but it became apparent yet again that the issues boiled down to disagreements or interpretations of the "nature of nature."

Indeed, how we look at nature forms our construct of the world—it gives a vision of reality and from that flows how we behave in the world and what we expect from it. As Professor Jesse Deboer, my Comparative Religions professor at UK, in a note to me on one of my assignments, put it:

"The point [of the question in the assignment] is that the text is wholly uncritical about the assumptions on which the discussion [concerning the origins of ritual in ancient religious practice] rests. There is almost no thinking about the serious role in life of stories about how the world arose, how humans got placed, (i.e., what their task is), and how they may fit in or look for prospects. The old myths are enormously deep and profound. Noss [the author of the text] talks empty psychology."

Evidently there is a feature film in the works covering the killing of five missionaries back in the early 50s. It made big news back then (*Life Magazine*, etc.—US Army officers were involved in the search for them, at the end of which they found them murdered). The headline coverage (mind you about 1952 or so) boiled down to *Savages in Ecuador kill 5 US Missionaries*.

The tribe who murdered them lived deep in the rainforest and were feared by all. They lived contiguous to another tribe (to whom, it's evidently been discovered, they are close kin) that is one of the most peaceful in the area (perhaps the world). No, I

don't want to get into the "nature/nurture" debate, but one is confronted by the question—how did such a difference in "prospects" among essentially the same people occur?

**"Indeed, how we look at nature forms our construct of the world—it gives a vision of reality and from that flows how we behave in the world and what we expect from it."**

The violent tribe had by the time of the missionaries' visits presented the imminent prospect of self-extermination. What began their salvation were two young tribal girls, who, fearing for their lives among their murdering families, ran away to the "outside." The rest of the story is one of Forgiveness and Redemption—I don't mean to give that part of the story less than its due, because I think ultimately it's the core of the matter, but for the present purpose what is significant is those girls had to

leave the construct of their reality and have it shaped by another for them to save themselves and, through them (and others), their people.

"Leaving to the outside" is simply to remark in another way on Plato's Cave. Even the greatest of human minds cannot see the "beyond" from inside their particular cave. One has to leave the cave (that construct of reality) to see in a different way. Modern people have nearly lost the capacity to look at the constructs of their own reality, ironically as a result of the project to free themselves from their prior cave. They have done so by shutting themselves off even to considering the religious origins and foundation of the world they believe is the only one that can or should exist. How we have come to that point is the story to which you refer.

The irony is the tools and patterns they used to shut themselves off from those origins. The walls that Natural Philosophy provides, by viewing the world as material and mechanical, were provided in that prior construct, and still sit on its foundation. That foundation of course is the particular transcendent view Christianity provided, to which I was referring when I wrote in *Upon the Sea Adrift*, from which I quote:

Is it possible that the anxiety from this world re-making project's effects on the human capacity for and need for Hope present a glimmer of a turn back toward a truly life affirming philosophy? Is it yet evident that the Jacobin's view has proven extremely naive and rather than providing heaven on earth has resulted in some of the worst slaughters in the history of the world. In fact, with great irony, the utopia sought has simply resulted in an atavism—the return to a prison ancient in age and practice, which their project was meant to destroy. Could it be that enough of us are becoming aware of the "to the death" nature of the demands for cultural surrender to the Jacobin views that found the modern world and its governments, even our government?

That new prison is the one that defines out of existence any other view of reality but its own, as you put it:

In fancy terms, science has defined itself as a branch of speculative philosophy, in specific, philosophical naturalism. the doctrine that the only valid theories are those that reject anything "beyond" (another metaphor) the 'natural world' (another metaphor). Philosophical naturalism, or materialism, now controls not only science, but nearly every other discipline as well. As I had mentioned to you previously, we can thank Darwin for the religious fanaticism we now know as "descent with modification," or "evolution." Because of evolutionism, science is in firm control of the terms of discourse by which science itself is defined. The foxes rule the henhouse, in other words.

As I remarked at the outset, your remarks are telling and cut to the core. And again we confront tremendous irony. To fully understand that irony, we must become familiar with that story to which you refer. To continue your remarks:

My understanding of the rise of materialism and the resultant disinclination given to the realm of the spiritual rests upon the Enlightenment thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries, with their emphasis upon reason as the guiding principle of the age.

You are correct, but reason was but a vehicle on the road to a larger project. The vehicle and the road were built by the worldview that they set about to destroy by remaking the world. The philosophical speculations of Rousseau, the father of Jacobinism, with its call to annihilate the old order, formed the roadmap for that new world. To illustrate, let me quote extensively from *Striptease of Humanism*, in which Mr. Guinness is far more clear.

Western culture is marked at the present moment by a distinct slowing of momentum, or perhaps, more accurately, by a decline in purposefulness and an increase in cultural introspection. This temporary lull, this vacuum in thought and effective action, has been created by the convergence of three cultural trends, each emphasizing a loss of direction. The first is the erosion of the Christian basis of Western culture, an erosion with deep historical causes and clearly visible results. The second is the failure of optimistic humanism to provide an effective alternative in the leadership of the post-Christian culture. And the third is the failure of our generation's counter culture to demonstrate a credible alternative to either of the other two—Western Christianity and humanism.

The convergence of these three factors in the late sixties marks this period as especially important. What is at stake is nothing less than the direction of Western man. Only a few years ago the dismissal of Christianity was held to be a prerequisite for cultural advance. The decline of Christianity thus represented a cure for man's problems, not a cause. So with the dawning of optimistic humanism the decline of Christianity was welcomed. Its adherents would be the only losers.

But that was yesterday. And contemporary yesterdays have a habit of suddenly seeming a hundred years ago. Today the cultural memory of traditional values hangs precariously like late autumn leaves, and in the new wintry bleakness optimism itself is greying. Now it appears that all of Western culture may be the loser. My purpose is first to examine humanism, partially as a movement in itself but even more as a backdrop against which to appreciate the need for an alternative; then to chart the alternative offered by the counter culture with all its kaleidoscopic variety; and finally, to present a third way as a more viable option in the light of man's current situation. The weaknesses in both humanism and the counter culture are pointed out, not to negate much that has been extremely sensitive and intensely human, but to show the inevitability of their failures. The critique at least serves to illustrate certain mistakes that must not be repeated, and it highlights important questions and dilemmas with which further alternatives must grapple.

A third way is desperately necessary because the present options are growing more obviously unacceptable. And, in fact, there is a Third Way—one which is becoming increasingly welcome to a large number of sensitive searchers and free-spirited individuals who make up a major part of those dissatisfied with things as they are. This Third Way holds the promise of realism without despair, involvement without frustration, hope without romanticism. It combines a

**"Modern human beings have held a faith undergirded by the fatal error of which Weaver wrote. But perhaps the tide is turning. The fall of the Church of Darwin, though crucial, is only part of stepping away from the abyss on the edge of which we've been sitting for too long—and in fact we may not win that race—meaning God may have to rescue us (again), and soon."**

concern for humanness with intellectual integrity, a love of truth with a love of beauty, conviction with compassion and deep spirituality. But this is running ahead.

### *The Rise of Optimistic Humanism*

We cannot appreciate the need for the Third Way unless we understand the present crisis of humanism, and this in turn requires a knowledge of its historical background. Sometimes the forerunners of modern humanism are said to be Confucianism and those branches of Buddhism which put an early and distinctive stress on man's responsibility to manage his own life without gods or religion. However, the first milestone on the journey of Western humanism was in the fifth century B.C. in Greece, where for the first time in Europe the use of objective reason freed science and philosophy from the shackles of superstition and religion. The Golden Age of Greece was brief but glorious, and its influence cast a long shadow over the Roman Empire and the classical world. Yet with the advent of Islam and barbarism, except for small pockets of scholars the classical age was swept from the face of Europe.

The Renaissance was the second important milestone on the road to modern humanism, the eruption of the importance of man irreparably severing the intricate unity of the medieval web of life. Along dark, narrow streets appeared light, sunny arcades; beside the impressive heaven-directed Gothic architecture grew humanly scaled towns, buildings, squares and statues; instead of stiff figures and symbolic images, warm, fully-rounded human beings sprang to life on canvas.

The Renaissance was an intoxicating phase of humanism, an explosive confidence of the human mind, the celebration of art, morals, thought and life on an eminently human scale. It was Christendom's twilight toast to the dignity and excellence of man. Making flattering self-comparisons with republican Rome and the Athens of Pericles, the Florentines appointed themselves both executors and heirs of the classical heritage. The scale of Protagoras was to be their scale—"Man is the measure of all things." As Leon Battista Alberti, a typical early Renaissance thinker, expressed it, "A man can do all things if he will."

It was during the Renaissance that the word humanist was coined. Initially it only defined a concern for humanity, and many early humanists saw no dichotomy between this and their Christian faith. Yet it was from the Renaissance that modern secular humanism grew, with the development of an important split between reason and religion. This occurred as the church's complacent authority was exposed in two vital areas. In science, Galileo's support of the Copernican revolution upset the church's adherence to the theories of Aristotle, exposing them as false. In theology, the Dutch scholar Erasmus with his new Greek text showed that the Roman Catholic adherence to Jerome's Vulgate was frequently in error. A tiny wedge was thus forced between reason and authority, as both of them were then understood.

It was in fact in a combination of the forward-looking thrust of science and the backward-looking stance of classicism (made possible through the new sources, improved texts and fresh interpretations) that the Renaissance found its leading intellectual impetus. Vasari, the Renaissance art historian, asked himself why it was in Florence that men became perfect in the arts and then gave as his first answer: "The spirit of criticism." It was this same spirit of criticism which continued to gather force until it crashed down on Europe in a landslide of unbelief. As the dust settled, the ensuing period was described as the Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century ferment of thought and action which is the third great milestone on the road to modern humanism.

The Enlightenment has its own unmistakable identity, but at the same time it also has an affinity with the Renaissance. Both directly appealed to classical antiquity, deliberately opposed Christianity and consequently accelerated the forces of modernity. But the Enlightenment, with its advantage of distance, could afford to view the Middle Ages through the eyes of the Renaissance, so that there was a detachment and an objectivity impossible for the earlier humanism. If the Renaissance humanists proclaimed a new world, it was because they knew that the old world was irretrievable. But for the men of the Enlightenment the joy of the new world was a result of the triumphs that were predictable from the progress of the scientific intellect. If the legacy of the Renaissance is humanism, then the contribution of the Enlightenment is paganism.

The eighteenth century came in on a wave of irony and satire, exalting the trivial, ridiculing the noble and attacking anything which previous centuries had been taught to believe, revere or love. It was the heyday of the ubiquitous critic, but the chief influence lay not with the popular writers and dramatists (such as Jonathan Swift and Oliver Goldsmith) but with the philosophes, the articulate, sociable, secular men of letters who were the heart and soul of the Enlightenment. In 1784, toward the end of the Enlightenment, Kant defined the era as the period of man's emergence from his self-imposed minority. He offered as its motto, *Sapere Aude!* (Dare to know!). It was in the pursuit of this challenge that the powerful combination of British Empiricism and French Rationalism (both extended into the fields of science and political action) changed the face of Europe.

As this occurred, the break between reason and revelation was finalized, and the battle was joined in terms of "Hellene" versus "Hebrew," light versus darkness, reason versus superstition, philosopher versus priest and men of realism versus purveyors of myth. In this battle the impact of the Classical Age was not just antiquarian. The ancients were "signposts to secularism." Across the fog of the Christian centuries, as they saw it, the philosophes tried to build a bridge to the Greeks and the Romans. They succeeded in bringing back a great prize—the spirit of criticism. They took pride in the omni-competence of reason, not just because they held reason to be all-powerful, but because they had developed an extreme anti-authoritarian temperament. They asserted their right to use reason to question anything.

As time went on the questions became more far-reaching and the criticisms more uncompromising. In the earlier stages many leading philosophes were deists, arguing against theism from a rigid concept of natural law; later on they were atheists, using the arguments of utilitarianism. Within the church, where there was spiritual life it was often inward-looking pietism with no cultural cutting edge, and where there was no spiritual life the bankruptcy was not decently disguised but brazenly advertised by a mixture of internal struggles, bland theologies and dull apologetics. Little wonder that it could be said that for men like David Hume "religion has lost all specificity and authority; it is no more than a dim, meaningless and unwelcome shadow on the face of reason." As the eighteenth century came to a close, all the wisdom and all the wit apparently lay on the side of the Enlightenment. Man was demanding to be recognized as an adult, a responsible being. There is no denying that this was a momentous stage in the journey of the Western mind.

The eighteenth century went out amid wars of revolution and the nineteenth century was ushered in by the campaigns of Napoleon. To the perceptive this was symptomatic of the hidden logic of humanism, but to most men it was only a sign that an age of ideas was ripening into an age of application. Man was not only the measure of the world he knew but the measure of the world of which he dreamed. Relying on its application of reason and science,

the nineteenth century could anticipate a rich fund from which to draw its buoyant idealism and robust social enterprise.

If there was any lingering doubt as to whether or not philosophy had transferred its support from theology to humanism, this was finally dispelled for most people when the mechanistic worldview of science provided an explanation of the origin and development of the universe. Astronomy and physics had already removed any need for God as a scientific hypothesis, but the turning point came in the nineteenth century when biology added its explanation. Simultaneously the evolutionary theory appeared to demolish Christianity and provide a scientific basis for the philosophy of progress already widely held. Technically, Darwin was not the originator of the idea of evolution but rather the first to give the theory a detailed scientific basis.

The most telling section of the above are these comments:

The eighteenth century went out amid wars of revolution and the nineteenth century was ushered in by the campaigns of Napoleon. To the perceptive this was symptomatic of the hidden logic of humanism, [and our Confederate ancestors were among that perceptive few] but to most men it was only a sign that an age of ideas was ripening into an age of application. Man was not only the measure of the world he knew but the measure of the world of which he dreamed. Relying on its application of reason and science, the nineteenth century could anticipate a rich fund from which to draw its buoyant idealism and robust social enterprise.

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So the foxes indeed do run the henhouse. And, as you remark:

Most Americans have little idea about the gross materialism that so dominates their lives, and that is a shame considering the impact materialism has upon the dominant culture. The problem lies in the perceived complexity of materialism as well as the "common-sensist" interpretations of phenomena. Nonetheless, all theories of materialism (naturalism) are, despite the ballyhoo, silly faery tales told by either the ignorant or the liar, or both. As you put it, "Our ancient forbears' stance acknowledged that there is a Life-Source and that a human life is a spiritual quest toward the end of returning properly to that Life-Source." The point I would like to make is that the modern theories of materialism, which have so damaged the psyches of most of us, are easy to refute despite their ubiquity. It all begins with what you called a "Life-Source" and what I would call "Person." Both are traditionalist and both transcend the world of the seen, the world of phenomena."

Yes, they are easy to refute, but logic cannot compel one to come out of the cave, especially if one prefers the cave one's in. And the demand to maintain a materialist orthodoxy is the means by which to throw away the key to the cave's exit. By remarking thus, we get very close to elements of our current "Culture War." In *Upon the Sea Adrift* I made these comments:

Today's arguments are between those who want to keep the philosophical ground, which came to be generally called Jacobinism (which forms the foundation for all the "isms" of modernity), where "man has got the measure of the world," as opposed to allowing the re-emergence to practical political power of a philosophy acknowledging man's dependence or being subject to (enslaved) to the Something Beyond....

Indeed, the South is vilified precisely because it refuses to accede to the Jacobin utopian World-Remakers' demand for abject surrender to their falsehoods [and once fought a war to separate from them, I might interpose], because the South, despite taking on some of the practical results of this project, does not believe in its central proposition. That central proposition is the core of the modern idea of progress- that to have material benefits, one must cast off religious superstition,—and to remain 'free' one cannot allow any acknowledgment of the possibility there is any power beyond our own reckoning....

In other words, modern humans have done what Christ refused to do in his confrontation with the Deceiver, who offered Christ "The World," if only Christ would worship him. We have been so seduced by the blandishments of the bounty before us, the maintenance of which has nearly become the object of our worship, that we are unable to see that such choices are false choices. The refusal to accept those false choices is the cultural divide that separates modern America—today not only along the Mason-Dixon line, but down every Main Street in this country. And make no mistake, that cultural divide does not just involve a particular religion (Christianity in the South's case), but involves slaying the very idea of Transcendence upon which any and all religions sit. That is where the modern world has gone astray and why today's politics threatens to renew the turmoil this philosophical fight has engendered over the last few hundred years and devastatingly so over the last hundred.

As Guinness remarks, Darwinism is the keystone holding up one side in this struggle—but its turning point was far earlier. In my article, *Back to the Future*, I quoted Richard Weaver's introduction to *Ideas Have Consequences*:

Western man made an evil decision....that man could realize himself more fully if he would only abandon his belief in the existence of transcendentals....The defeat of logical realism in the great medieval debate was the crucial event in the history of Western culture; from this flowed those acts which issue now in modern decadence....William of Occam, who propounded the fateful doctrine of nominalism which denies that universals have a real existence....The issue ultimately involved is whether there is a source of truth higher than, and independent of man; and the answer to the question is decisive for one's view of the nature and destiny of humankind....[the work of the nominalist is to banish] reality...perceived by the intellect, [for] reality is perceived by the senses. With this change in the affirmation of what is real, the whole orientation of culture takes a turn, and we are on the road to modern empiricism....The denial of universals carries with it the denial of everything transcending experience. The denial of everything transcending experience means inevitably—though ways are found to hedge on this—the denial of truth. With the denial of objective truth there is no escape from the relativism of "man the measure of all things"...[thus] actually initiating a course which cuts one off from reality. Thus began the "abomination of desolation" appearing today as a feeling of alienation from all fixed truth.

The disagreement over what constitutes "Truth" is why we are now beginning to see surface fights in the courts over whether to teach "Intelligent Design" theory in classrooms. However, for the law to have authority, it must call upon the public sentiments formed and informed by the cultural assumptions (that "Truth") from which it springs, which is why we are even now having broader disagreements over the foundation of the law itself (church-state separation arguments into which praying in certain

venues or displaying religious symbols would fall). Our Confederate ancestors saw this clearly (they and their forbears who created this country were geniuses after all)—we have in the scheme of things only yesterday begun to comprehend them because we've accepted New England's myth of our history for so long.

As an illustration of their clear foresight, let me offer the following comments from a presentation to my SCV camp back in May of 2005:

James Henley Thornwell in 1850 reminded a congregation in Charleston, South Carolina, that "the parties in this conflict are not merely Abolitionists and Slaveholders; they are Atheists, Socialists, Communists, Red Republicans, Jacobins on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battle ground, Christianity and Atheism the combatants, and the progress of humanity the stake.....But if Thornwell was correct, then how could we or should we expect the conflict to which Thornwell referred (call it what you might: WBTS, WofNA, American Civil War) to have ended in 1865? Indeed, entertaining the possibility that Thornwell's expansive view of the matter is correct, might afford a context by which we might better understand Jefferson Davis' assertion that, despite the northern victory, the issues involved would inevitably resurface—or Vice President A H Stephens comment that, 'the cause of the South is the cause of us all.'"

The above piece ends with ".....as I move toward the end of this presentation, let me refer back to my assertion that the South's defeat in 1865 lead to a 50-year period during which Rousseau's radical philosophy that inspired the bloody French Revolution became the foundation—in some form—of all of today's governments, with the possible exception of some of the governments of the Muslim world. In 1865, an Irish poet named W. B. Yeats was born. He died in 1939. In roughly the middle of that 50-year period he wrote a famous poem that presaged the blood bath unleashed upon the world after the South's defeat. The poem is called *The Second Coming*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Was Yeats speaking of the awakening of the spirit of the Anti-Christ—loosed upon the world with new desperate energy? The subsequent events of the 20th Century might argue for such a reading, and I repeat, the South's defeat cleared the way for that course of events to unfold. Indeed, here in the early years of the 21st Century, Yeats' "rough beast" seems just as hungry as ever, for we yet live in the middle of that fight between the beast and God's spirit captured in these rival philosophies.

And now let me continue with Guinness:

The cultural flow at the end of the nineteenth century became a series of whirlpools with many strange currents and cross-currents. From one side of the spectrum of religious thinking came Higher Criticism and liberal theology; from the other side came an extremely reactionary entrenchment within the church. (The Roman Catholics promulgated the dogma of papal infallibility in 1870, while in England Bishop Wilberforce achieved notoriety in his debate with T. H. Huxley.) This period saw the appearance of semi-religions like the Church of Christ, Scientist and the Theosophical Society, and on the secular front it witnessed also the birth of the modern humanist societies.

The Ethical Union was founded in 1896 to federate all the humanist secular societies then in existence. Three years later they launched the Rationalist Press. Both of these remained comparatively small until humanism was popularized in the mid nineteen-fifties. In 1963 they merged to form the British Humanist Association, itself linked with the wider International Humanist and Ethical Union. This marks the fourth milestone on the road to modern optimistic humanism.

Looked at another way, it could be said that after the first slow stage of "cosmic" evolution (inorganic) had come the second stage of "biological" evolution (organic). With the universe "decreated" (Simone Weil), and the West "unchristened" (C. S. Lewis), the third stage, "purposive psycho-social" evolution, could now begin. "We're storming the gates of heaven!" cried German socialist Karl Liebknecht at the end of World War I. He need not have troubled. For most people, heaven had long since been evacuated and Man had come of age. "Man makes himself," said Gordon Childe. "We see the future of man as one of his own making," said H. J. Muller. And Sir Julian Huxley remarked, "Today, in twentieth-century man, the evolutionary process is at last becoming conscious of itself. . . . Human knowledge, worked over by human imagination, is seen as the basis to human understanding and belief, and the ultimate guide to human progress."

If the earlier days of secularism sometimes represented a belligerent all-out anti-God campaign, then Swinburne's "Hymn of Man" ("Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things") was a typical text—a monumental defiance that was actually a mask for underlying insecurity. Modern humanism is more urbane and self-assured. Typical as a text for this is John F. Kennedy's reputed dictum enlarging on Alberti: "All men's problems were created by man, and can be solved by man." The modern humanist at his best is a man highly educated, deeply aware, tolerant and farsighted, with clearly defined policies, confident that his philosophy is a relevant way of life and determined to communicate it.

The mid-sixties were the high noon of optimistic humanism. The British Humanist Association, with its distinguished Presidents Sir Julian Huxley and Professor Sir Alfred Ayer and its dazzling intellectual representation, blossomed in public influence and political activity. Around it, the new universities mushroomed like institutional tracts erected on the same beliefs. The crowning proof of man's capability seemed to be the triumph of the moon landing. The gigantic satellite launching towers were hailed by many as technological cathedrals built to the glory of modern man.

As a result, optimistic humanism gained its strength from the confidence that the entire field of human development was now possible within the humanist frame. Julian Huxley claimed that all problems could be solved by humanism and that the whole range of human living could be included within its scope. He predicted that philosophical problems like mind versus matter, social problems like the clash of the two cultures and even international problems such as war would soon be solved. Humanism, he said, would "heal the split between the two sides in the cold war."

Also included was a new concept of religion, distinctively humanist because it was a religion without revelation. In the nineteenth century Auguste Comte had proposed a Religion of Humanity complete with his own suggestion for sacraments, saints and rituals, organized into two thousand churches throughout Europe, with Comte himself the supreme leader. Huxley's version is far less papal and more in line with the urbanity of modern humanism. "Religion of some sort is probably necessary . . . Instead of worshipping supernatural rulers, it will sanctify the higher manifestations of human nature in art and love, in intellectual comprehension and aspiring adoration." Here is humanism at its highest and most hopeful, attempting to solve all problems and include all human living within its framework, guiding the progress and guarding the evolution of the human race by its own purposive direction.

Time, however, is gradually and cynically stripping this to its essential quaintness. Only the cold-blooded technocrat finds modern war less chilling or its solution nearer. The ideal of human nature "sanctified" in humanist art was already falsified, faltering under the sunken stare of an alienated Giacometti bronze, or strangled by the tortured canvases of Francis Bacon. Evolutionary optimistic humanism is in the process of being betrayed by its own idealism. The humanist artists as its antennae were already into a world which the humanist philosophers and scientists had not yet seen. As with all idealism, its tragedy is the blindness of its heroes; tuned into a world of illusions, they are only too vulnerable to reality.

### *The Surfacing of Pessimism*

Now we can see an important point more clearly. Optimistic humanism was only one stream of secular humanism. Its reverse was pessimistic humanism, and if the optimism was characteristically strong in academic circles, it is now evident that pessimism was more prevalent in the wider reality of life. Pessimistic humanism was always there, like a subterranean stream, murky in its depths and dark in its apprehension of dilemmas. It is this subterranean stream that is now threatening to surface and usurp the dignity and dominance of optimistic humanism.

Again we must go back in history to realize the full importance of this surfacing pessimism. Its genius was to see that behind the apparent stability of the nineteenth-century world in which modern humanism was born stood a different reality. Both Nietzsche and Kirkegaard were men who lived in passionate revolt against the smugness of the nineteenth century, particularly against the cheapness of its religious faith and the brash confidence of its secular reasoning, or generally against its shallow optimism, wordy idealism and tendency to conform. Such a smug

world was not just false but dangerously foolish, if the true nature of reality lay elsewhere.

It is amazing that this subterranean pessimism was not taken more seriously earlier. But it was derided as the “Devil’s Party”—the poets, philosophers and prophets of chaos and catastrophe—and all too easy to dismiss. Some were ignored. Their repeated warnings were simply relegated to the status of cultural myth having only an innocuous respectability. In 1832 Heinrich Heine had said, “Do you hear the little bell tinkle? Kneel down—one brings the sacraments for a dying God.” Nietzsche’s later cry of the death of God and his searching diagnosis (“Everything lacks meaning. What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The goal is lacking; the answer is lacking to our ‘Why?’”) were not taken seriously either. After all, wasn’t Heine a poet, and wasn’t Nietzsche later deranged?

Repeatedly in the 1930s, George Orwell depicted Western intellectuals as men who in blithe ignorance were sawing off the very branch on which they were sitting. Malcolm Muggeridge in his articles lanced open the “death wish of liberalism.” C. S. Lewis carefully made his exposures in “The Funeral of a Great Myth.” But the serious disquiet of Orwell, the humorous if testy honesty of Muggeridge and the gentle clarity and utter reasonableness of C. S. Lewis were before their time. They were predictable. They were ignored.

But the rising tide of disquiet cannot now be ignored. It is becoming the accepted mood of much recent judgment, as a hundred illustrations could quickly show. Writing in 1961 specifically on problems of Western culture, Frantz Fanon mocked, “Look at them today, swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration.” In the same context, Jean Paul Sartre challenged, “Let us look at ourselves if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First we must face that unexpected revelation, the strip tease of our humanism.” These two men could easily be dismissed as pessimistic, prejudiced politically and philosophically, but the disquiet does not stop there. Coming closer to the heart of humanism and speaking almost as an heir to a distinguished humanist house, Aldous Huxley described himself this way: “I was born wandering between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born, and have made in a curious way the worst of both.” From the world of science John Rader Platt, the American biophysicist, said, “The world has now become too dangerous for anything less than Utopia.” Norman O. Brown, a man famous for the lyrical romanticism of his visions, admitted, “Today even the survival of humanity is a utopian hope.”

Modern human beings have held a faith undergirded by the fatal error of which Weaver wrote. But perhaps the tide is turning. The fall of the Church of Darwin, though crucial, is only part of stepping away from the abyss on the edge of which we’ve been sitting for too long—and in fact we may not win that race—meaning God may have to rescue us (again), and soon.

Give me your thoughts—and perhaps we can talk more about the particulars of how we’ve gotten where we are and just how important Christianity (that mixing of Athens and Jerusalem) is to the tale.

*Bazz*