

POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE WE DOING?

WHY ARE WE STUDYING THIS?

1. THE WORLD OUR CHILDREN GROW UP IN IS NOT AND WILL NOT BE THE SAME ONE WE DID.

- See the chart “changing values.”
- Though, it should be noted: culture is always in flux. There are specific elements of our culture that are new, but the basic rejection of God’s truth is a constant fixture of history. Our job is not any different from the job of Christians in any era: to prepare our children to face the world head on.

2. UNTIL THERE IS A MAJOR CHANGE IN ACADEMIA AND/OR MEDIA, THE TRENDS OF POSTMODERNISM WILL CONTINUE UNABATED.

- See the chart “Dissemination of Theory.”
- Eventually, the pendulum will swing back as it always does. But in the here and now, it’s probable that the trends of a post-truth society will continue until some unforeseeable event or events force people to reconsider. Since we can’t plan for unforeseeable events, we will plan for what is in front of us.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA HAS EXACERBATED THE PROBLEM, AND MADE OUR OPTIONS MORE CLEAR.

1. OPT OUT OF SOCIETY

- This is a route many religious groups take, to divorce themselves entirely from modern ideas and influences. As Christians, however, we are not afforded that option as righteousness (**John 17:15; 1 Corinthians 5:10**).

2. ALLOW THE WORLD EASY ACCESS TO OUR HEARTS

- This is the default position. If we do nothing and do not think intentionally about how we teach our children and how we interact with the world, then the world will eventually win in our hearts and minds.

3. FIGURE OUT WHAT IS GOING ON AND PREPARE

- This is the righteous path; developing discernment in the face of a world that constantly bombards us with untruth. This is the eternal quest of the Christian, from the time of Jesus until his eventual return.

4. CHRISTIANS CANNOT LIVE IN THE WORLD AS WE WANT IT TO BE, WE MUST LIVE IN THE WORLD AS IT IS.

1. JESUS KNEW THAT THE CHRISTIAN MISSION WOULD BE DIFFICULT

- **Matthew 10:16-23**
- What does it mean to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves”?

2. PAUL KNEW THAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE WOULD REQUIRE DIFFERENT APPROACHES

- **1 Corinthians 9:19-27**
- What was the difference between how a Jew and Gentile approached reality and understanding?
- What would it mean to “run aimlessly” as Paul uses the phrase?

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS CLASS?

1. TO UNDERSTAND WHY OUR WORLD IS THE WAY IT IS.

2. TO FIGURE OUT WHAT COMMON GROUND WE SHARE WITH THE WORLD.

3. TO PREPARE OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN TO DEFEND A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW(1 PETER 3:14-17; DEUTERONOMY 31:10-13).

POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

2

INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE WE DOING?

A WORD OF WARNING:

1. MOST PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE A CLEAR OR COHERENT WORLDVIEW.

COHERENT: LOGICAL AND CONSISTENT, FORMING A UNIFIED WHOLE

- Most people who accept the truth claims of Postmodernism and Critical Theory are not familiar with the philosophies themselves in any detailed way, just like many Christians have not ever considered the various logical arguments for the existence of God. Most people do not deeply investigate why they believe what they believe.
- Additionally, most people (including Christians) do not try to be coherent or consistent. They believe a hodge-podge of various things acquired from parents, media, peers, and teachers. While we are going to be technical in parts in studying Postmodernism and Critical Theory, we must recognize that many people will not recognize the deeper philosophy. This is in part why we are studying it, so that we can show people the roots of modern epistemology and the inconsistencies in it.

2. AS CHRISTIANS, WE MUST STRIVE TO BE CLEAR, CONSISTENT, AND COHERENT IN OUR BELIEFS AND ACTIONS.

1. LEVITITUCS 11:45; 1 PETER 1:13-16; HEBREWS 6:13-18

- God is eternally consistent and perfectly coherent. Jesus was perfectly clear in his mission and actions. As Christians, this is the kind of clarity and coherence we must strive for.

2. HEBREWS 5:11-14; 1 KINGS 3:7-9

- A lot of this class will be focused on the Biblical concept of *discernment*, and how to develop that skill and impart it to our children. We live in a fallen world, yet even the worst people have redeemable qualities and can say true things.

3. WE CANNOT EXPECT OTHERS (INCLUDING OUR CHILDREN) TO BE IDEOLOGICALLY COHERENT IF WE ARE NOT WILLING TO PUT IN THE WORK.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-6; MATTHEW 7:1-5

- We (rightfully) want others to be consistent and think through the consequences of their worldviews. Do we apply the same standard to ourselves?
- We want our children to put faith and reason above emotional reasoning and childish desire. How can they do that if we do not first enforce those ideals in ourselves?

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THIS CLASS

1. WE ARE NOT GOING TO “SPEAK EVIL” OF ANYONE.

- TITUS 3:1-3; 1 PETER 3:8-9

2. WE ARE GOING TO BE TECHNICAL AND ACADEMIC IN SOME WAYS, YET ALWAYS STRIVE TO BRING OUR DISCUSSION BACK TO APPLICABLE IDEAS.

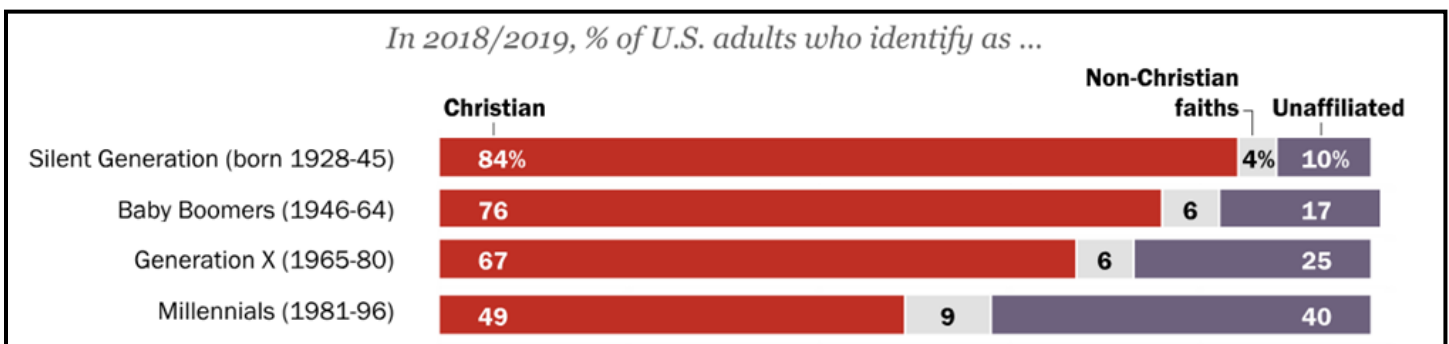
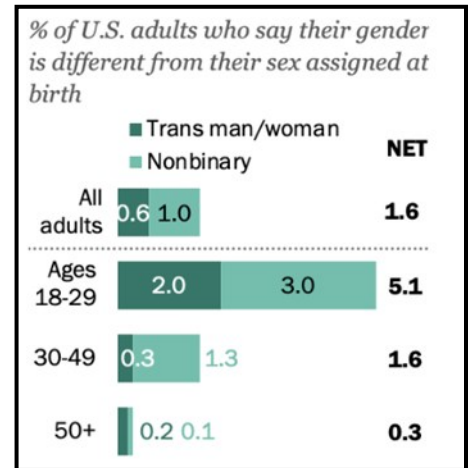
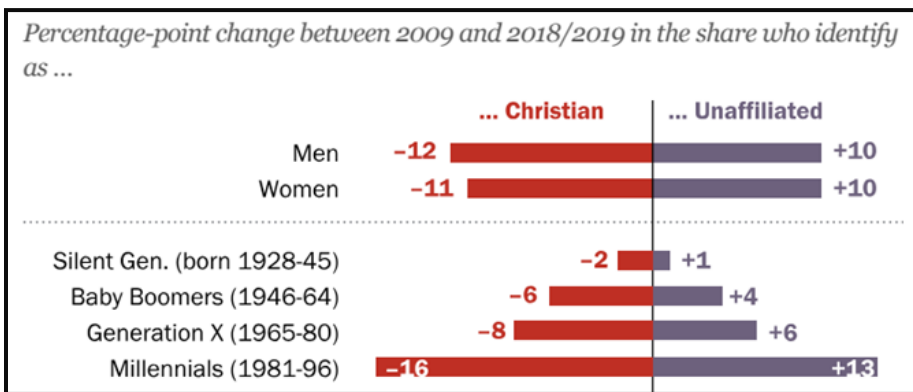
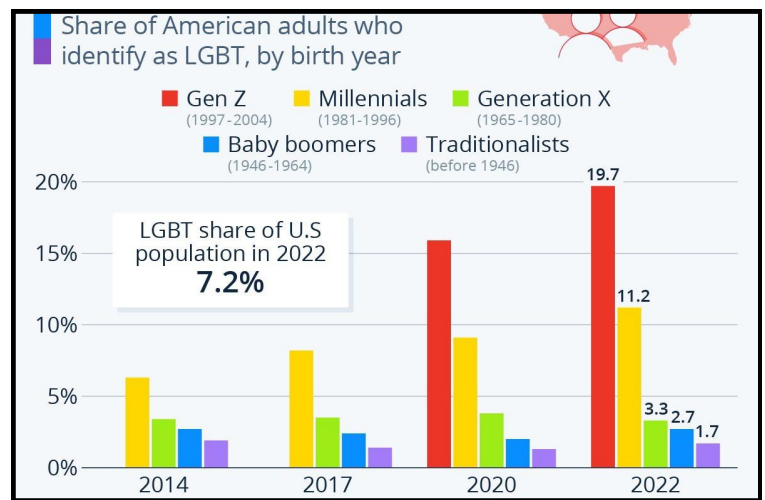
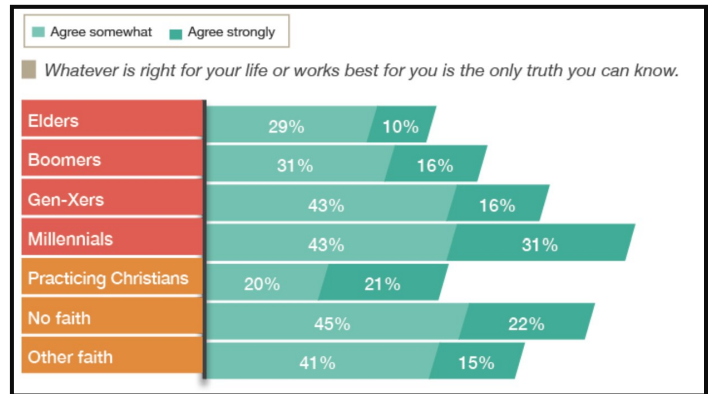
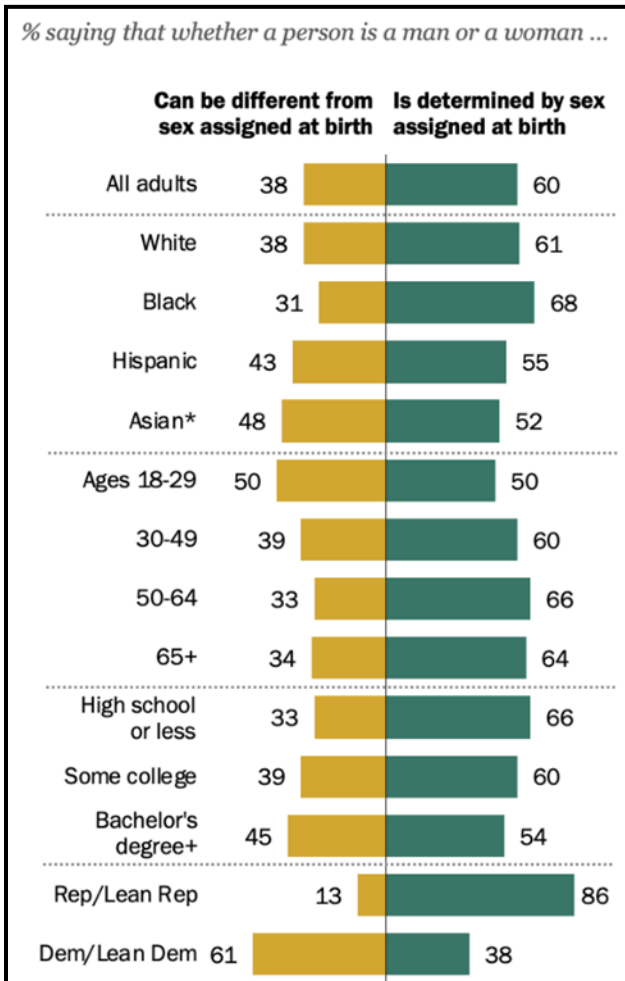
- TITUS 3:8-9, 14

3. WE ARE NOT OUT TO CONFIRM OUR OWN WORLDVIEW, BUT TO DISCOVER GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- ROMANS 10:1-3; 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-4

CHANGING VALUES

HOW PERCEPTION OF TRUTH AND MORALITY IS CHANGING OVER GENERATIONS.



CULTURE AND HISTORY

CYNICAL THEORIES

JAMES LINDSAY AND HELEN PLUCKROSE
A deep dive into the academic history of Postmodernism and Critical Theory. Written from the perspective of a liberal atheist.

THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND

GREG LUKIANOFF AND JONATHAN HAIDT
An in-depth look at how modern cultural norms have psychologically hampered the development of youth, from young children to college-age.

THE MADNESS OF CROWDS

DOUGLAS MURRAY
A companion to *Cynical Theories*, an examination of the prevailing cultural conflicts surrounding gender, sex, and race, and how they came about.

THE AGE OF ENTITLEMENT

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL
A political and cultural review of America since the 60s, tracing how Postmodernism has manifested in politics.

SEX AND GENDER

THE END OF GENDER

DEBORAH SOH
A more technical examination of war over the science of gender. Written by an atheist Ph.D. sex researcher.

IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE

ABIGAIL SHRIER
A look at the transgender “social contagion” sweeping through young girls, how the medical field is responding, and what parents can do.

THE CASE AGAINST THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

LOUISE PERRY
A secular view the history of the “gender wars,” and how the currently prevailing attitudes about gender harm women more than help. Warning: this book addresses sex in a very frank and explicit way.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

GOOD FAITH

DAVID KINNAMAN AND GABE LYONS
A broad but shallow consideration of how Christians might helpfully and compassionately engage with a world hostile to Christianity.

MAMA BEAR APOLOGETICS

HILLARY MORGAN FERRER
An examination of a wide array of cultural issues facing parents who want to raise faithful children.

TRUTH DECAY

DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS
A lengthy examination of Postmodernism from a Christian framework and an attempt to recalibrate classical apologetics.

THE SURPRISING REBIRTH IN THE BELIEF IN GOD

JUSTIN BRIERLY
A survey of how secular intellectuals have begun to reevaluate Christianity and the Bible.

METHODOLOGY

We will reference some of these more than others. I do not expect everyone to read all or even any of these. They are books that were helpful to me, and might be to you. Ultimately, none of these books are 100% true or accurate, and all contain various biases; all stand in secondary position to God’s word.

POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

5

AN OUTLINE OF OUR STUDY (SUBJECT TO CHANGE).

SECTION 1: THINKING ABOUT THINKING

BEFORE WE DIG INTO THE SPECIFICS OF POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY, WE SHOULD SPEND SOME TIME THINKING ABOUT KNOWLEDGE IN THE ABSTRACT. WHERE DOES KNOWLEDGE COME FROM? WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW OR METANARRATIVE? HOW DO PEOPLE FORM A WORLDVIEW? MORE OFTEN, WHERE DO PEOPLE ACQUIRE THEIR WORLDVIEWS? WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR A WORLDVIEW TO BE COHERENT, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

1. THE SPREAD OF NEW IDEAS

- Where do new ideas come from? Where do they typically begin their cultural lifecycle?
- How do new ideas leap from the niche to the mainstream?
- How do centers of learning (i.e. universities) impact the spread and adoption of new ideas?
- How does media impact the spread and adoption of new ideas?
- What is the difference between new media and legacy media? Why does it matter?
- How did Christianity spread so far so fast? Why didn't Judaism do the same?
- What happens when a specific worldview (like Christianity) reaches saturation in a culture?

2. EPISTEMOLOGY

- Where does knowledge come from and how can we know things are true?
- How have humans typically viewed knowledge throughout history?
- What do Postmodernism and Critical Theory say about the formation and acquisition of knowledge?
- How have people historically defined "true"?
- What does the Bible say about knowledge and its formation?
- How does epistemology apply to Bible study and apologetics?

3. WORLDVIEWS AND METANARRATIVES

- What is a metanarrative?
- How do people typically relate to the world? How do they usually form a worldview?
- How often do people *form* worldviews vs *acquiring* worldviews? What is the difference and why does it matter?
- How coherent is the average person's worldview?
- How intentional are we about developing an internally consistent view of the world?
- What (if anything) does the Bible say about metanarratives, and the importance of developing a consistent worldview?

4. PREPARING OUR CHILDREN, PART I

- HOW COHERENT (INTERNALLY CONSISTENT) IS OUR EPISTEMOLOGY AND WORLDVIEW?
 - HOW ARE WE IMPARTING YOUR EPISTEMOLOGY TO OUR CHILDREN? ARE WE INTENTIONAL?
 - WHAT KINDS OF REASONS DO WE GIVE OUR CHILDREN FOR WHY WE BELIEVE OR DO THE THINGS WE DO?
 - WHAT KIDS OF REASONS DO WE ACCEPT FROM THEM?
 - HOW CAN WE SHOW OUR CHILDREN OUR DESIRE TO PURSUE OBJECTIVE, EXTERNAL TRUTH?
 - HOW CAN WE BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT TALKING TO OUR CHILDREN ABOUT THESE KINDS OF THINGS?
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POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

6

AN OUTLINE OF OUR STUDY (SUBJECT TO CHANGE).

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING POSTMODERNISM

POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY ARE WORLDVIEWS OR *METANARRATIVES*. WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? WHAT DO THEY HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE WORLD? WHAT DO THEY SAY ABOUT TRUTH, KNOWLEDGE, AND POWER? AND, WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER?

5. POSTMODERNISM

- What does Postmodernism claim to be true?
- Where did it come from, and what was it a response to? What contributed to its formation?
- What does Postmodernism say about knowledge and metanarratives?
- How did it come to be accepted by much of the academic world?
- What does the Bible say about Postmodernism, or about the truth claims of postmodernism?
- What, if anything, can Christians learn from the philosophy of Postmodernism?

6. CRITICAL THEORY

- What is Critical Theory? What distinguishes Critical Theory from the broader Postmodern movement?
- Where did Critical Theory come from?
- How does CT attempt to make sense of the world?
- What is Critical Race Theory? Social Justice? Wokeism? How do they come from Critical Theory?
- What does the Bible say about the truth claims of Critical Theory and Social Justice?

7. INTENDED EFFECTS

- How does Critical Theory appeal to people? How does it influence people's thinking unintentionally?
- How did Postmodernism and Critical Theory give rise to the Sexual Revolution?
- Where did Transgender Ideology come from?
- What are the main pillars of the new sexual ethic?
- How does Critical Theory influence antinatalism and abortion?

8. DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- What makes it difficult to have productive conversations with people to believe some of the main truth claims in Postmodernism and Critical Theory?
- What are "safe spaces"? Where did they come from?
- What is "Cancel Culture"? Is it a good or bad thing?
- What has Postmodernism and Critical Theory done to the scientific community? The university setting?
- How does Cancel Culture lead to self-censoring?
- What is the difference between being antiracist and nonracist? Why does it matter?
- How do the discourses of Critical Theory compare to something like the Inquisition? How can Christians condemn "cancel culture" unhyppocritically?

9. UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

- How have parts of these worldviews become so prominent among young people?
- What have they done to dating and relationships?
- How have they contributed to growing feelings of nihilism among young people?
- What happens when society loses a sense of shared, common reality?
- When society removes religion, what do people do with their need for transcendent experiences and beliefs?
- What might happen when society elevates "lived experience" or self-referentiality above "objective" knowledge in science? Medicine? Law?

10. PREPARING OUR CHILDREN, PART 2

- HOW DO WE INSTILL IN OUR CHILDREN THE DANGER AND TEMPTATION OF SELF-REFERENTIALITY?
 - HOW DO WE HELP THEM REALIZE THAT UNCOMFORTABLE EMOTIONS AND SITUATIONS ARE NOT "VIOLENCE"?
 - HOW DO WE ADDRESS ACCUSATIONS OF MISOGYNY, HOMOPHOBIA, AND TRANSPHOBIA?
 - HOW CAN WE HELP THEM SEE THE HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF THIS KIND OF WORLDVIEW?
 - HOW DO WE PREPARE THEM TO FACE THE OSTRACIZATION OF REJECTING THIS WORLDVIEW?
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POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

7

AN OUTLINE OF OUR STUDY (SUBJECT TO CHANGE).

SECTION 3: DEVELOPING A NEW APOLOGETIC

MOST TRADITIONAL “APOLOGETICS” MATERIAL ASSUMES A RATIONAL, ENLIGHTENMENT-ERA EPISTEMOLOGY AND WORLDVIEW. BECAUSE POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY REJECT THOSE METANARRATIVES (AND, INDEED, ANY METANARRATIVE), WE CAN EASILY COME TO AN IMPASSE IN OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH PEOPLE. HOW CAN WE DEVELOP A WAY OF TALKING ABOUT TRUTH THAT REACHES THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO HAVE ACCEPTED SOME OR ALL OF THE TRUTHCLAIMS OF CRITICAL THEORY?

11. FOUNDATIONS OF APOLOGETICS

- What is “apologetics”?
- In what ways are rationalist versions of apologetics inadequate to face Postmodernism?
- What kind of epistemology or metanarrative is required to submit to the Bible as true and authoritative?
- How would a Theorist respond to Biblical truth claims? What would you say to such a person?
- How does internalizing Postmodernism and Critical Theory begin to undermine confidence in Biblical Truth?
- What sorts of factors influence what people believe to be true? How does this impact a consideration of apologetics?

12. FINDING COMMON GROUND

- What elements of Postmodernism and Critical Theory would find agreement in the Bible?
- Are any of the goals of Critical Theory good? What makes them good, according to God?
- Why is it tempting to falsely caricature proponents of Postmodernism and Critical Theory? How does it feel when people do the same to Christians?
- How does a Biblical discussion of judgment, judging, and hypocrisy affect our conversations with Critical Theorists?
- How can we become “all things to all people” in regards to these worldviews?

13. A NEW APOLOGETIC?

- Effects-Based vs Argument-Based Apologetics: what’s the difference?
- What are the various benefits and drawbacks of example vs. teaching?
- Why is hypocrisy so damaging in a Postmodern society?
- What does “taking the high road” look like?
- What can we say to Critical Theorists who reject the idea of God? Of moral truth? Of Biblical authority?
- How should we respond to accusations of misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia?
- How do cancel culture specifically and Critical Theory more broadly interact with how our culture thinks about atonement and redemption?
- How can we stand out in offering redemption and reconciliation in a world that has shunned both concepts?
- How can we offer homosexuals and transsexuals purpose and fulfilment in the church?
- How do politics and religion interact? How should they interact? What happens when our politics become more important than our religion? How can you tell if this has happened to you?

14. PREPARING OUR CHILDREN, PART 3

- HOW DO WE TALK ABOUT POLITICS IN OUR FAMILIES? WHAT WOULD OUR KIDS THINK MATTERS MORE TO US: POLITICS OR RELIGION?
 - HOW SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DISAGREE WITH US? HOW IS THAT GOING TO IMPACT OUR CHILDREN’S WILLINGNESS TO TALK TO US ABOUT DIFFICULT SUBJECTS?
 - WHAT KIND OF LIVES ARE WE MODELLING FOR OUR CHILDREN? DO THEY SEE ANY BENEFITS TO LIVING A CHRISTIAN LIFE?
 - HOW OFTEN DO WE TALK ABOUT WHAT THE WORLD IS TEACHING OUR CHILDREN? HOW CAN WE ENGAGE WITH THEM ABOUT WHAT THEY HEAR AT SCHOOL OR ONLINE?
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POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY

ABBREVIATED OUTLINE OF POSTMODERN EPISTEMOLOGIES, METHODS, AND EFFECTS.

EPISTEMOLOGIES "WAYS OF KNOWING"

DISCOURSES

The Nature of Language
Dominance Hierarchies

TRUTH CLAIMS

Post-Structuralism
Self-Referentiality

GNOSTICISM

(Not the one you're thinking of.)

METHODOLOGIES THE MEANS TO THE END

LANGUAGE

Deconstruction
Social Constructionism

CRITICAL THEORY

Intersectionality
Social Justice/"Wokeism"

INTOLERANCE

"Cancel Culture"
Antiracist vs Nonracist

IDEOLOGIES WHAT IS THE GOAL?

TOTAL FREEDOM

Self-Defined Reality
Lack of Consequences

MORAL RELATIVISM

Flattened Political Strata

Dismantling "Systems of Oppression"

EFFECTS TANGIBLE "SUCCESSSES"

SEX AND GENDER

Sexual Revolution
Transgender Ideology

CHILDREN

Low Trust in Parents
Abortion

PURITY

"Cancel Culture"
Religious Decline

CONSEQUENCES OBSERVED OUTCOMES

STAGNATION

Self-Censoring
Academic Imbalance

FRAGMENTATION

Collapse of Relationships
Lack of Shared Reality

NIHILISM

Antinatalism
MAID Laws

**PRIMARY PRINCIPLE:
EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE**

**PRIMARY PRINCIPLE:
ONLY POWER MATTERS**

DISSEMINATION OF THEORY

EXAMINING HOW NEW IDEAS SPREAD THROUGHOUT CULTURE.

ORIGINS OF IDEAS

NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT THE WORLD GENERALLY BEGIN WITH THE PHILOSOPHERS, THEOLOGAINS, WRITERS, AND/OR THINKERS. THESE INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS FORMULATE NEW IDEOLOGIES AND NEW WORLDVIEWS, BUT ARE OFTEN DISREGARDED IN THEIR OWN LIFETIMES.

EDUCATIONAL MODEL

ACADEMICS » EDUCATION » CULTURE

ACADEMICS

Others latch on to the new way of thinking and the new way of thinking gains disciples among “professional thinkers”. Disciples begin analyzing, accepting, building on, and teaching the new way of thinking within their professional contexts, often (though not exclusively) at universities.



EDUCATION

As colleagues are converted, the new way of thinking becomes the predominant model among faculty. At a certain tipping point, the university begins explicitly looking for faculty who agree with the new way of thinking, and thus begins a feedback loop. Since most grade school faculties are fed by the university system, the new way of thinking filters to lower education.



CULTURE

Educators begin imparting the new way of thinking to students. As a higher percentage of students graduate from universities having been made into disciples, they influence their friends, coworkers, and eventually their families and children, and support the change in lower education. In this way, the new way of thinking spreads to the broader culture.

MEDIA MODEL

NEW MEDIA » LEGACY MEDIA » CULTURE

NEW MEDIA

Someone introduces the new way of thinking to isolated, niche groups on social media (i.e. Tumblr in the early 00s) and users latch on as a way of making sense of their lives. They share this view with their friends online. Those who find meaning in the new way of thinking share it, and so on, but it remains out of the mainstream, mostly accepted by pockets of young people on the internet.



LEGACY MEDIA

Journalists, Hollywood producers, and content creators, always on the lookout for new content, latch onto anything that might be trending and exploit it. In this way, the niche, isolated new way of thinking previously only discussed on social media is introduced to mainstream audiences.



CULTURE

As more people become aware of the new way of thinking, they become comfortable with it as a worldview and begin casually discussing it with their friends, coworkers, and their families and children. In this way, the new way of thinking spreads and gains more acceptance in the broader culture.

DEMOCRATIC REINFORCEMENT

IN A SOCIETY WITH FREE SPEECH, FREE MARKETS, AND ELECTIONS, NEW WAYS OF THINKING HAVE UNIQUE REINFORCEMENT MECHANISMS.

FREE MARKET

Growing numbers demand their employers conform to the new way of thinking.



IDEA SPREADS TO MORE PEOPLE.

ENTERTAINMENT

Growing numbers of creatives incorporate the new way of thinking in entertainment.



ELECTIONS

As more and more people convert, they elect people who accept the new way of thinking.

THEORETICAL NOMENCLATURE

ABBREVIATED DEFINITIONS OF COMMON POSTMODERN WORDS AND PHRASES.

EPISTEMOLOGY

THE STUDY OF AND THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE. SPECIFICALLY:

- WHAT SEPARATES KNOWLEDGE FROM OPINION?
- WHAT SEPARATES JUSTIFIED BELIEF FROM WISHING OR HOPING? WHAT MAKES SOMETHING A “JUSTIFIED BELIEF”?
- WHERE DOES KNOWLEDGE COME FROM?
- HOW DO/CAN WE AS SOCIETIES AND INDIVIDUALS GENERATE NEW KNOWLEDGE?
- HOW CAN WE MEASURE THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS BITS OF KNOWLEDGE?
- WHAT ARE VALID SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE? WHAT MAKES A SOURCE AUTHORITATIVE?

MODES OF DISCOURSE

The study of *discourses* (the ways we talk to one another) has become a prominent sub-category of epistemology. Even if there is an objective reality that exists independent of any human observer, we would have to convey that through discourse. The consideration of discourses asks questions like:

- How precise is the common language?
- What kinds of things are people allowed to talk about without consequence?
- How are taboos formed and transmitted in a culture?
- What are the consequences for discussing taboo topics?
- How do we as a society and individuals attempt to convey meaning? How successful are we?

WAYS OF KNOWING

“Ways of knowing” is a postmodern term describing various methods of creating and acquiring knowledge. There are four basic ways of knowing:

- Sensory perception/observation.
- Rationality/reason.
- Language/communication.
- Intuition/inspiration.

Most epistemologies emphasize some of these more than others. Empiricism and scientific epistemology, for example, emphasize observation and rationality. Postmodernism emphasizes language, personal experience (a version of observation), and intuition. Christianity relies on another way, *revelation*, which most academics would put in the fourth category.

OBJECTIVE/SUBJECTIVE

There are supposedly two kinds of knowledge:

- *Objective*: knowledge that two or more independent observers could create/discover without cross-contamination. Knowledge that does not depend on a particular viewpoint or worldview. Typically called “factual knowledge” though that term itself is philosophically loaded.
- *Subjective*: knowledge that could not be created or discovered at without the specific viewpoint or experience of the knowledge-creator. Common examples might be emotional knowledge or personal interpretations of events.

GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism is part religion, part philosophy, part religious category. Many religions and beliefs can exhibit the basic pillars of Gnosticism, which are:

- Belief that there is some secret, esoteric knowledge hidden from the masses.
- Belief that being ignorant of this hidden knowledge imprisons people (either metaphorically or literally).
- Belief that only by learning and accepting the hidden knowledge can a person escape the prison of the masses and achieve true understanding.

METANARRATIVE

An overarching way of looking at the world, or a worldview or unifying theory of reality. *Christianity* is a metanarrative, as is *atheism*. In epistemology, a *metanarrative* is a way of looking at the world that attempts to explain all or most knowledge in one theory.

THE CHRISTIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

EPISTEMOLOGY IS ONE OF THE PRIMARY CHRISTIAN CONCERNS. THE CHRISTIAN METANARRATIVE COMBINES ALL THE WAYS OF KNOWING (ROM. 1:19-22; HEB. 1:1-3; ACTS 26:24-29; GAL. 1:12), AND IS EMINENTLY CONCERNED WITH HUMAN LANGUAGE AND IT'S IMPORTANCE (JOHN 1; GEN. 11). BUT, WHAT WAS ONCE SECRET KNOWLEDGE IS NOW MEANT TO BE SHARED WITH ALL (EPH. 3:1-6; COL. 2:2-4).

THEORETICAL NOMENCLATURE

ABBREVIATED DEFINITIONS OF COMMON POSTMODERN WORDS AND PHRASES.

POSTMODERNISM

POSTMODERNISM BEGAN AS A LITERARY THEORY WHICH STATED AN AUTHOR'S INTENT CANNOT DETERMINE MEANING MORE THAN A READER'S INTERPRETATION. HOW A WORK IS INTERPRETED MATTERS JUST AS MUCH OR MORE THAN WHAT THE AUTHOR MEANT TO CONVEY. AS AN EXPANDED PHILOSOPHY, POSTMODERNISM APPLIES THIS IDEA TO EPISTEMOLOGY. OBJECTIVE REALITY MAY EXIST, BUT ALL ATTEMPTS TO DISCOVER IT ARE INFLUENCED BY THE CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND EXPERIENCE OF THE OBSERVER. ANY ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT A COHERENT METANARRATIVE WILL BE DEPENDENT ON THE LANGUAGE PEOPLE USE AND THE SYSTEMS OF AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH A PERSON LIVES. THE END RESULT IS THAT POSTMODERNISTS REJECT ALL METANARRATIVES (CHRISTIANITY, SCIENTIFIC RATIONALISM, ETC.) IN FAVOR OF LOCAL NARRATIVES. THE MEANING OF REALITY IS NOT DETERMINED BY THE "AUTHOR" (IF THERE IS SUCH A BEING), BUT BY THE INTERPRETER, THE ONE WHO EXPERIENCES REALITY.

DOMINANCE HIERARCHIES

In Postmodern thought, words only have meaning in comparison to other words (*being* has no meaning without the contrast to the word *nothing*). Additionally, meaning is mostly derived from the dominance of one concept over another. This dominance can be explicit (most people say *truth* is better than *falsehood*), or implied (as many say the word *man* implicitly dominates the word *woman*).

DECONSTRUCTION

If all meaning is derived by the implicit opposition and contrast between words, then the meaning of a text can be *deconstructed* by discovering and emphasizing the implicit dominance hierarchies. By "close reading," it is possible to discover how a text betrays itself or subverts its own message in the way words influence other words.

POST-STRUCTURALISM

Post-structuralism posits that it is impossible to understand something without examining both the thing itself *and* the systems that produced it, including the culture, the language, and the predominant ways of knowing. Whereas *structuralists* believe it is possible to bridge the gap between reality and abstract thought by building "structures" (e.g. linguistic or mathematical models), post-structuralists reject that reality is discernable in such a way, since any model will be influenced by the system in which it is created, and therefore fail to represent reality.

PLURALISM

Epistemological pluralism is the belief that there is no one "right way" to determine what is true about the world. No "way of knowing" is any better than any other, since all will fail in some key way to truly articulate objective reality. Since all methods of producing, determining, and explaining truth are flawed in their own ways, none can claim to be "correct."

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Essentially, this is the belief that it is impossible to understand reality without being unduly influenced by the culture. Because society imposes limits on language, acceptable ways of knowing, and dominance hierarchies, a person's understanding of reality cannot truly be objective, but can only arise out of the way people collectively talk about and consider things. As such, all "knowledge" is socially constructed.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Because any pursuit of knowledge and truth is unavoidably biased by culture, society, and systems of authority, it is impossible to arrive at a universal set of truths. What a person believes and does cannot be compared to a standard created by and under a different culture from the person's own. All evaluation of "ought" and "should" can only be done in comparison to the person's own cultural norms. Because all cultures impose their own limits on the pursuit of knowledge, none can claim to be more "correct" than another.

SELF-REFERENTIALITY

ALL OF THESE COMPONENTS INTERACT TO LEAD TO ONE CONCLUSION. SINCE NO ONE ELSE EXPERIENCES THE EXACT SET OF EXTERNAL PRESSURES, CULTURAL POSITIONING, SOCIETAL HIERARCHY, AND EPISTEMIC BACKGROUND AS I DO, MY ONLY RELIABLE NARRATIVE ABOUT THE WORLD WILL BE MY OWN. NO ONE ELSE'S NARRATIVE WILL SUIT MY NEEDS PERFECTLY.

THEORETICAL NOMENCLATURE

ABBREVIATED DEFINITIONS OF COMMON POSTMODERN WORDS AND PHRASES.

CRITICAL THEORY

BECAUSE IT IS SUPPOSEDLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE OBJECTIVE REALITY, AND AUTHORITY-SYSTEMS ULTIMATELY SHAPE WHAT CAN BE KNOWN, THERE IS NO WAY TO OBJECTIVELY KNOW REALITY. AS A RESULT, POSTMODERNISM IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM LEAD TO NIHILISM IN THOSE THAT ASCRIBED TO IT. CRITICAL THEORY SEEKS TO CIRCUMVENT THIS NIHILISTIC CONCLUSION AND APPLY POSTMODERNISM IN A WAY THAT TANGIBLY AFFECTS SOCIETY. IF ALL DISCOURSES ARE CONTROLLED BY SYSTEMS OF POWER, THEN BY ALTERING THOSE SYSTEMS WE CAN CHANGE HOW PEOPLE THINK AND ACT. THE ONLY WAY TO DO THIS IS BY “DECONSTRUCTING” THE CURRENT SYSTEMS OF POWER AND CULTURE. IMPORTANTLY, CRITICAL THEORY DOES NOT CLAIM TO BE *TRUE*, BUT RATHER CLAIMS TO BE *USEFUL*.

POWER STRUCTURES

The primary pillar of Critical Theory is that all knowledge production is controlled by those in power in society. *Power*, in this use, is not just governmental authority, but also cultural influence and economic power. Those in power always promote *discourses* that perpetuate the systems that keep them in power. Thus, all who participate in the predominant system either knowingly or unwittingly help those in power stay in power.

MARGINALIZATION

Under this philosophy, to be *marginalized* simply means that your existence, way of thinking, or life experience does not match the predominant ways of thinking and being. Your life is lived “on the margins” of wider societal thought and knowledge. Those in power *oppress* those who do not conform to the predominant ways of being by setting the terms for success in society. This can occur either knowingly or by accident. The extent to which the predominant systems of thought and practice inherently benefit you is your *privilege*.

ANTIRACIST vs NONRACIST

It is not sufficient to try to treat everyone equally, without regard to race, sex, gender, etc. To do so unintentionally perpetuates the status quo which has already marginalized certain groups. Rather, a person must act in a way that intentionally *deconstructs* the power structures of society by consciously elevating the experiences and narratives of marginalized groups.

CRITICAL THEORY IN CHRISTIANITY

THERE ARE SOME COMPONENTS OF CRITICAL THEORY IN THE BIBLE, SPECIFICALLY THE WAY THE NT WRITERS TALK ABOUT THE RICH AND POWERFUL (MAT. 23:1-12; JAMES 2:5-7; ACTS 16:19-24). WE ARE OFTEN TOLD TO HELP THE “MARGINALIZED” (ROM. 12:16; PSALM 138:6). HOWEVER, THE CHRISTIAN IS TO REMOVE EARTHLY CATEGORIES FROM OUR CONSIDERATION OF PEOPLE (2 COR. 5:16; JAMES 2:1-4; DEUT. 1:16-17), AND SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY IS A CENTRAL CHRISTIAN TENANT (ROM. 13:1-7; 1 PET 2:13-3:17; HEB. 13:17).

INTERSECTIONALITY

There are many axes along which a person might be privileged or marginalized, based on different categories of *identity*. The apex of power in our society is the white, male, cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, neurotypical person. The specific extent of the oppression you face occurs at the unique *intersection* of all your points on these axes, and the ways in which you deviate from the “ideal.” *Intersectionality*, then, seeks to elevate most of all the narratives of those who are marginalized along more than one axis.

Wokeism

To be “woke” is to “wake up” to the realities of systemic oppression in societies. Someone who is woke is aware of the ways that power unintentionally sets the bounds and limits of what can be considered true, and ways that hierarchical structures inherently benefit some and disadvantage others.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

“Social Justice” is a broad term for the desired outcome of Critical Theory. Social Justice seeks equal *outcomes* rather than equal *opportunities* because, according to Critical Theory, it is genuinely impossible to create equal opportunities; power will always circumscribe the ability of marginalized groups to live out their own narratives the way they desire. *Justice* requires the *deconstruction* of current power structures that oppress people and reconstructing a society that equally benefits all people, especially those who were previously marginalized.

DISAGREEMENTS AND DISCOURSES

CONTRASTING HOW CLASSIC LIBERALISM AND CRITICAL THEORY HANDLE DISPUTES.

DISCOURSES IN CRITICAL THEORY

THE ABSOLUTE UNWILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE WITH OR TOLERATE ANY VIEWS, ACTIONS, OR STATEMENTS THAT ARE NOT TOTALLY IN LINE WITH CRITICAL THEORY IS A NATURAL CONCLUSION OF THE PHILOSOPHY. REMEMBER, THE POINT IS NOT TO BE “CORRECT” IN THE SENSE OF “IN ALIGNMENT WITH OBJECTIVE REALITY”, BECAUSE OBJECTIVE REALITY IS UNKNOWABLE AND INDESCRIBABLE. RATHER, THE POINT IS TO RESHAPE SOCIETY UNTIL ALL OUTCOMES ARE EQUAL. *OUTCOMES*, NOT *OPPORTUNITIES*, ARE THE GOAL.

CLASSIC LIBERALISM

THE GOAL IS TO PURSUE AND DISCOVER OBJECTIVE, UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Classic liberalism assumes that “objective reality” is knowable and discoverable. There is a way the world really is, and human life would be better off if we could discover it and mold our behavior around it. “Truth” is that knowledge which withstands falsifiability and is universal.



WAYS OF KNOWING

Because it is assumed that objective reality is discoverable, classic liberalism emphasizes ways of knowing that lend themselves to object knowledge production (observation and rationality). While experience, emotion, and intuition might be good and valid, they do not *necessarily* line up with what is objectively true.



DISCOURSE

Because the goal is objective knowledge, and it is assumed that the goal is achievable, classic liberalism allows for disagreement in discourse (the ways we talk about the world and produce knowledge). Only by allowing disagreement can various ideas and ways of knowing be compared to each other. By pursuing disagreement in a way that is civil (not violent), ideas ideally should be allowed to stand on their own merits, though of course human bias and imperfection can often get in the way of this process.

CRITICAL THEORY

THE GOAL IS TO PRODUCE A SOCIETY WITH UNIVERSALLY EQUAL OUTCOMES.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Critical Theory assumes that all knowledge is a biproduct of the power structures of society and the language we use. “Objective reality”, if it even exists, is not discoverable because all knowledge-production is biased by the society of the observer. “Truth” is not a useful concept.



WAYS OF KNOWING

Because all knowledge is circumscribed by those in power and the ways of knowing that they favor, Critical theory emphasizes any way of knowing that destabilizes the current systems of authority. Experience and emotion are equally valid (if not more so), because only the individual can truly say if they have been marginalized and negatively affected by society.



DISCOURSE

Because the goal is dismantling power structures and achieving a society with truly equal outcomes, Critical Theory cannot allow dissent, nor even engage with disagreement. To engage with disagreement is to unwittingly participate in the knowledge-creation systems of those in power. If those in power seek “objective reality,” then any attempt to do so will only further *their* ends, not the goal of undoing injustice. Remember, Critical Theory does not claim to be *true*, it claims to be *useful* for the pursuit of Social Justice.

DISCOURSES IN CHRISTIANITY

THE BIBLE CERTAINLY TEACHES THAT “OBJECTIVE REALITY” EXISTS; IT IS WHATEVER GOD SAYS (GEN. 1:1-3; PROV. 30:5; HEB. 6:13-19). GOD MADE REALITY, AND WE CAN UNDERSTAND IT (ACTS 17:22-31; ROM. 1:18-20; 1 COR. 8:4-6). MOREOVER, THE PURSUIT OF AN “OBJECTIVE TRUTH” IS A REQUIREMENT OF ALL CHRISTIANS (PS. 119:159-160; 2 THESS. 2:10; 1 TIM. 2:4). THEREFORE, IT IS NECESSARY TO BE WILLING TO ENGAGE WITH DISAGREEMENT AND ADMIT YOU MIGHT BE WRONG (ACTS 26:16-18; EPH 4. 17-24). IT IS ALSO VITAL THAT WE DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY “CANCEL” THOSE WHO DOUBT THE TRUTH (JUDE 22; 1 COR. 8:1-13).

WORDS AS VIOLENCE

THE RISE OF SAFE SPACES AND CANCEL CULTURE.

ROOTS IN POSTMODERNISM

REMEMBER, THIS ALL STARTED WITH A LITERARY THEORY WHICH STATED THAT THE INTENT OF AN AUTHOR WAS IRRELEVANT, OR AT LEAST SECONDARY, TO MEANING. *INTERPRETATION*, MORE THAN INTENT, DETERMINES MEANING. HOW A TEXT AFFECTS A READER MATTERS MORE THAN WHAT THE AUTHOR MEANT TO SAY. THIS IDEA IS CENTRAL TO CRITICAL THEORY.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Because all knowledge and power is based on how people talk and what they are allowed to talk about (discourses), words carry inherent power to hurt and harm, not just emotionally but materially. Words can be “violent” if they perpetuate or contribute to the marginalization of people.



“SAFE SPACES”

The concept of “safe spaces” arise from fear of the power of language and the importance of self-referentiality. Because emotional and experiential “ways of knowing” are just as valid as observational/ external ways, the feeling of emotional harm is just as important as the feeling of physical harm. Additionally, because words can perpetuate systemic oppression, they can result in material harm. “Safe spaces,” then, are places where marginalized groups can expect to be sheltered from “epistemic harm” as well as emotional harm.

SELF-REFERENTIALITY

Because “objective reality” is impossible to discover, “ways of knowing” that prioritize objectivity are not superior to those that emphasize personal experience. Thus, if a person *feels* harmed, they functionally *are* harmed. The speakers *intent* is less important than *perception*.



THE NEED TO DECONSTRUCT

Those in power perpetuate unjust systems by the discourses they favor and prioritize. Thus, you must constantly be *deconstructing* what people say, in order to find the inconsistencies and inherent biases that feed the systems of oppression in society. By deconstructing what individuals say, you can eventually begin to deconstruct whole institutions.



“CANCEL CULTURE”

“Cancel culture” arises from the idea of social constructionism and the need to deconstruct dominant narratives. To allow dissent from the ideals of “Social Justice” is to participate in the systems of power that have created marginalization and oppressed people for centuries. *Deconstruction* is used to find any possible expression of oppression (racism, sexism, etc.), no matter how small. If a person is not willing to repent and show absolute contrition, then they are (either intentionally or unintentionally) endorsing the predominant discourse that led to such racism. Therefore, they must be shunned and ostracized from public life, lest they contribute negatively to social constructionism.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

If all morals, norms, and identities are socially constructed through the discourses of culture, then the only way to change what is considered “true” and “good” is to change the way people talk and think about things. To allow people to continue to talk and think about things in the ways that gave rise to oppressive systems is to contribute to their continued existence.



“SAFE SPACES” IN CHRISTIANITY

WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO FALL INTO HYPOCRISY WITH HOW WE TALK ABOUT CANCEL CULTURE AND SAFE SPACES. WHILE THERE IS A POINT WHERE WE SHOULD NOT TOLERATE UNTRUTH IN OUR FELLOWSHIP (1 COR. 5:1-13; TIT. 3:8-11; 2 JOHN 9-11), THIS SHOULD BE A LAST RESORT, NOT OUR FIRST INSTINCT. THE CHURCH CAN BE A “SAFE SPACE” IN A SENSE, BUT IT SHOULD ALSO BE A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE ARE CHALLENGED IN THEIR COMPLACENCY (1 COR. 11:17-22; 2 COR. 7:5-13). ALSO, PEOPLE NEED TO QUESTION WHAT IS TAUGHT (ACTS 17:10-15) AND CHALLENGE SINFUL LEADERSHIP (1 TIM. 5:17-21).

CRITICAL CONSEQUENCES

THE IMPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES FOR SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALS

15

OUTCOMES FOR SOCIETY

THE LOSS OF A COMMON, UNIFYING METANARRATIVE HAS LED TO A TERRIFYING FRAGMENTATION AND FRACTURING OF SOCIETY, PRECISELY AT THE TIME WHEN TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES *SHOULD* HAVE ALLOWED FOR EXPONENTIAL UNIFICATION AND CO-OPERATION. THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING POSTMODERNISM AND CRITICAL THEORY HAVE DEVASTATING PRACTICAL EFFECTS ON THE WAY PEOPLE CAN AND SHOULD TREAT ONE ANOTHER.

LACK OF GRACE

Critical Theory assumes that all disparities in society are either intentionally or unintentionally perpetrated by those with privilege. This leads people to assume the worst in what others say and do, rather than attempt to understand people at face value.



FEAR AND MISTRUST

“Cancel culture” and the total unwillingness to show mercy and grace creates an atmosphere of fear, not only in social spaces, but also in academia and professional spaces. Because there can be no disagreement allowed, people do not feel free to voice any opinion that might be construed as against the prevailing political norm. This applies, not only to those on the “left,” but just as vehemently to those on the “right.” People are afraid to be who they are around uncertain company (in other words, online), and are absolutely terrified to dabble in any truth-pursuing activity that might be misconstrued as siding with the enemy.

LACK OF MERCY

At any moment, any past mistake is fair game for re-litigation and new discipline. Once a person “crosses the line” (either politically, ideologically, or philosophically) it is nigh-impossible to return. Any step out of line, no matter how small or how long ago, is grounds for total excommunication.



FRAGMENTATION

Societies that are low in trust and high in fear create the ideal conditions for fragmentation and isolation. The inability or unwillingness to engage with those who do not agree with you on every level disincentivizes the formation of groups with mixed ideologies. This kind of fragmentation can be seen in:

- **GENDER RELATIONS:** If all of reality is reframed as oppressed and oppressor, it becomes very hard to create equal footing between men and women. Critical theory is a zero-sum game; for one group to advance, another must be disadvantaged. We can see this in college admissions, grade-school performance, employment stability, and the decline in dating. Any metanarrative that is based in oppositional relationships will as a by-product create animosity between men and women, because men and women have never had (and will never have) entirely uniform outcomes. No discrepancy can be benign; all are at best due to unconscious bias, and at worst malicious.
- **ECHO-CHAMBERS AND PARTISAN NEWS:** The perverse incentive structures of the internet conspire with Critical Theory to create a uniquely polarized information apparatus. News channels are motivated to broadcast either that which will get the most people to hate-watch, or to appeal to the most hardcore base. Social media motivate people to either only associate with people who already think like them, or to be as inflammatory as possible.

LIKE CHRIST, OR LIKE THE WORLD?

THE CULTURE IN WHICH WE LIVE POSES MANY DANGERS TO THE MODERN CHRISTIAN, BUT PERHAPS NONE SO INSIDIOUS AS THE SIREN CALL TO FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE. WHEN “THE OTHER SIDE” IS UNWILLING TO OFFER MERCY OR PRESUME THE BEST IN PEOPLE, SHOULDN’T WE DO THE SAME? WHEN CHRISTIANS ARE SO QUICKLY “CANCELLED,” SHOULDN’T WE ALSO BE UNWILLING TO LET THE WICKEDNESS OF OTHERS GO? SEE COLOSSIAN 3:12-17; TITUS 3:1-8; ROMANS 12:14-21. OR, PERHAPS MORE UNDERSTANDABLY, WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO WITHDRAW FROM SOCIETY ALTOGETHER. SEE 1 COR. 5:9-13; 1 PETER 1:13-2:3.

CRITICAL CONSEQUENCES

THE IMPLICATIONS AND OUTCOMES FOR SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALS

OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS

THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD HAS STRIPPED PEOPLE OF THEIR SENSE OF MEANING AND A GOOD IDEA OF WHERE THEY FIT INTO HISTORY AND SOCIETY. THE FRAGMENTATION OF GROUPS (IN ADDITION TO THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA) HAS LED TO AN UNPRECEDENTED RISE IN LONELINESS, ESPECIALLY IN YOUNG PEOPLE. MORE SPECIFICALLY, YOUNG MEN SHOW A PROFOUND LACK OF PURPOSE AND AIMLESSNESS, AND YOUNG WOMEN REPORT ASTONISHING LEVELS OF DEPRESSION.

FRAGILITY

Fear of the other and unwillingness to engage with those who disagree create mental, emotional, and intellectual fragility. People become less able to handle disagreements, which in turn make them less willing to in the future, and the cycle continues. *Note: Christians are not exempt from this. The more we isolate from the world and refrain from challenging evangelism, the more fragile we become in our own beliefs.*



CONFUSION

As people silo off into various echo-chambers, room for doubt and growth are cut off. People who begin to question their worldviews have no where to earnestly engage, because social groups are so “all-or-nothing” and “us-vs-them.” Thus, more people begin to feel overwhelmed by confusion and doubt, because there is no one to turn to.



AIMLESSNESS

Lack of social cohesion and internal coherency lead to aimlessness and loss of purpose. While the end result of this is nihilism, there are plenty of steps along the way that are full of various depressive and anxious disorders..



NIHILISM

At this point it is worth going into a deeper discussion of what exactly nihilism is. Put most succinctly, nihilism is the belief that nothing matters. More broadly, it manifests as doubt that anything will ever get better, and a sense of impotence to affect any real change. This nihilism (especially in young people) is seen in everything from humor to relationships, but a few manifestations really stand out:

- **ANTINATALISM:** This is the belief that it is morally wrong to produce offspring, and is a core manifestation of nihilism. If all of life is defined by power structures and there is no way to make it better or discover what is true and real, then what is the point of having kids? It will only create more suffering in the world, and foist on them a burden that the parent themselves doesn't want to have to bear.
- **VOLUNTARY CELIBACY:** While the rising tension in gender relations has led many to struggle to make connection or find intimacy (inceldom, or *involuntary celibacy*), many are taking it one step furth to simply opt out of dating and relationships. The number of sexually active teens has *plummeted* in recent years, which is good, but so has the number of teens *who have ever been on a date*. This is especially exacerbated by technology in places like Japan that have embraced artificial intimacy.

HOPE AS A FOUNDATION OF APOLOGETICS

1 PETER 3:13-17 IS A FOUNDATIONAL TEXT IN CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS, DESERVEDLY SO; THE WORD “APOLOGETICS” COMES FROM THE WORD TRANSLATED “DEFENSE” IN 3:15. BUT THE WORD “HOPE” HAS PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO THE DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANITY IN OUR CULTURAL MALAISE; WHAT THE REMOVAL OF TRANSCENDENTAL BELIEF AND ABSOLUTE TRUTH HAVE DONE IS LED TO THE ABSENCE OF HOPE IN MANY PEOPLE’S LIVES. HOPE IS THE OPPOSITE OF NIHILISM. AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO OFFER HOPE, BUT ONLY IF WE FIRST DEMONSTRATE THAT HOPE IN OURSELVES.

WHAT CHRISTIANITY HAS TO OFFER

THE BENEFITS OF CHRISTIANITY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY

CONSEQUENTIALISM

MANY SECULAR THINKERS HAVE BEGUN TO RECONSIDER CHRISTIANITY, NOT BECAUSE THEY THINK IT IS TRUE, BUT BECAUSE THEY THINK IT IS USEFUL TO SOCIETY. THE LOSS OF COMMON NARRATIVE, PURPOSE, AND MORAL FRAMEWORK HAS FRAGMENTED SOCIETY. THINKING ABOUT CHRISTIANITY THIS WAY USES A *CONSEQUENTIALIST* APPROACH; WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR ABANDONING METANARRATIVES, AND WHAT MIGHT BE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR REDISCOVERING THEM? WHILE NOT PROPERLY APOLOGETIC (A RATIONAL DEFENSE OF CHRSTIANITY), THINKING ABOUT CHRISTIANITY THIS WAY CAN AND HAS BEGUN TO OPEN HEARTS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF IT'S TRUTH.

COMMUNITY

More and more people (especially young men) report have little or no close friends, and no one that they can turn to in times of crisis. The church *should* be providing this in people's lives, and it should be obvious to people that we belong in a community that looks out for one another.

MEANING

People will always have the big questions; why are we here, where are we going, what is the meaning of life? Christianity offers universal answers grounded in reality and human experience. A lot of the nihilism people experience is the natural result of forsaking eternal truths.

TRANSCENDENCE

The "disenchantment" of things like sex has left people feeling empty. There are clearly parts of life that are more than the mundane physical components; Christianity (and especially communal worship) can "re-enchant" the world, and provide people with a feeling of something beyond the mundane.

IDENTITY

In some ways Christians have always been involved in a version of "identity politics." Christianity provides an identity for people that transcends physical, racial, or societal attributes, and grounds human value and dignity in something transcendent, rather than utilitarian.

PURPOSE

A lot of people struggle with purpose; if this life is all there is, and power is all that matters, then what point is there to life, especially if we have no or little power? Christianity provides tangible, practical purpose and direction, ways to act and goals to achieve no matter what our life looks like.

MERCY/ATONEMENT

In a culture where certain past mistakes are always liable for relitigating and re-disciplining, Christianity can offer something truly unique: a sense of atonement and forgiveness, and the ability to move beyond the sins of our pasts. Additionally, Christians should stand out as uniquely willing to offer grace and mercy in their dealings with others.

PREREQUISITES FOR APOLOGETICS

THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE CASE, BUT AS THE AVERAGE LIFESTYLE DEVIATES MORE AND MORE FROM THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL, CHRISTIANS ARE PRESENTED WITH A GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO "BE THE LIGHT" (MATTHEW 5:13-16; EPHESIANS 5:6-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:14-18). CHRISTIANITY HAS REAL, MEANINGFUL ANSWERS FOR PEOPLE, BUT THEY WILL ONLY CARE TO HEAR THE ANSWERS IF THEY SEE THE BENEFITS OF THE CHRISTIAN METANARRATIVE PROMINENTLY ON DISPLAY IN OUR LIVES. SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER, BOTH IN OUR EVANGELISM AND IN RAISING OUR FAMILIES:

- IS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY A PRIORITY IN OUR LIVES? ARE WE CONTRIBUTING AND RECEIVING IN RETURN?
- IS IT OBVIOUS THAT DESTABILIZING EVENTS IN THE WORLD DO NOT SHAKE US? WHY OR WHY NOT?
- WHAT IS THE CORE OF OUR IDENTITY? HOW COULD PEOPLE TELL?
- ARE WE CLEAR ABOUT OUR PURPOSE AND MEANING? DOES OUR STATED PURPOSE LINE UP WITH HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES?

TWO THINGS SHOULD BE OBVIOUS TO PEOPLE AROUND US. FIRST, WE SHOULD BE "AT PEACE" (2 PETER 3:14; PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7). SECOND, WE SHOULD BE FILLED WITH LOVE (JOHN 13:34-15). THESE WILL BE THE THINGS THAT ULTIMATELY DRAW PEOPLE TO THE TRUTH WE OFFER.
