



Intersectionalism: A Weaponized Parody of Christianity

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When one gives up Christian belief one thereby deprives oneself of the right to Christian morality. For the latter is absolutely not self-evident: one must make this point clear again and again, in spite of English shallowpates.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*.

In its time, the statement quoted above seemed more immediately shocking than most moderns would find it now. A Yale undergrad who cited this quote in 1890 or even in 1960 might have seen his roommates furrow their brows. The words would have stung them. As graduates of genteel, old-line Episcopal prep schools or military academies infused by “muscular Christianity,” they might well have their doubts, or more than doubts, about Christian metaphysics. But they were still certain that they wanted Christian morals—at least, what they’d learned of those.

In that 70-year span, and perhaps for another decade, the liberal education on offer in America was infused by Matthew Arnold’s humanism. That worldview took for granted as valuable and crucial for civilized life some core of Christian ethics, which Arnold thought could be freed from the dead hands of debunked Revelation and discredited metaphysics, and passed along via arts and literature. His own poem, “Dover Beach,” offered both program and praxis, pleading with us:

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“Ah, love, let us be true/To one another!” This despite the fact that the world, stripped bare of both divine revelation and the illusion of teleology, “Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light/Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.”

But poems like Arnold’s, and liberal arts programs like Yale’s Directed Studies (1947) could forge a golden chain to the humane, benevolent ethics preached by Jesus, now stripped of dogmatic accretions and dead scholastic arguments. And this would be enough, Arnold hoped and may have managed to believe, to outlast and restrain the clash of “ignorant armies” “by night.” Nietzsche, of course, would have considered Arnold a “shallowpate,” as he did George Eliot, the original target of his barb. And in some sense he would have been right.

The “ignorant armies” did indeed arrive, at Yale and Harvard and Columbia in the middle and late 1960s in the form of the “New Left,” which managed to shake the grim associations Marxism had with the Berlin Wall and massacred Hungarians, and replace them with “free love,” “peace,” and Dionysian pleasure. Instead of trooping like past generations of Marxists to toil in garment factories, the new leftists were asked simply to shake off their parents’ sexual inhibitions, try exciting new drugs, listen to lively music, and refuse to fight for their country. Not a hard sell for any young person, as events certainly proved.

The canniest leftists realized, shunning Lenin’s plan for Gramsci’s, that with the help of “woke” corporations they could capture the nation’s elites, and use these talented young people to dismantle the very bulwarks of our free “bourgeois” society: the traditional family, religion, and (much later) private property. We see the political outcome in today’s Democratic presidential field, all of whom, to one degree or another, support late-term (or even post-birth abortion), narrowing religious exemptions from punitive “social justice” mandates, and confiscatory tax rates.

The Arnoldian Humanists and liberal Christians who manned our humanities faculties and theological seminaries never stood a chance. It turns out that Christian ethics, even in the attenuated, homeopathic doses offered by liberal churches and genteel aesthetes, aren’t self-evident at all. In fact, the Jewish-Christian notion of the sanctity and moral equality of each human being is a strange historical freak, like something that dropped here from another world. It would have shocked and amused alike the Assyrians and the Hittites, the Homeric Greeks and their heirs in Plato’s Academy, the Aztecs and the Chinese Legalists, the Brahmins and the Samurai. To the fiery protesters of the anti-war movement (then the Women’s Liberation, and Gay Liberation movements, and each one after that), the YMCA platitudes and high-minded talk of “Western Civilization” must have sounded like the mew of a tame Persian cat whose eunuch master’s home was being plundered

by lusty Vandals. George Marsden lays this process out in excruciating detail in *The Soul of the American University* (1996). Convinced by modern philosophy to abandon teleology in nature, then by Darwin to dismiss biblical Revelation, liberal Christians had nothing left but charming old gothic buildings and projects of social reform. Neither would outlast the adolescent excitement and ideological zeal of projects for outright “revolution.”

So we might say, at a first look, that twenty-first century man has decided Christian ethics are neither self-evident nor even desirable. We can do without them just fine, thanks very much. “Dover Beach” is in fact a happy poem, a tale of enlightenment and escape from superstitious restrictions. Certainly, today’s Woke English faculty would likely coach students to read it this way, if they read it at all, instead of transgender graphic novels or Slavoj Žižek fan fiction. Maybe the poem would prove too “triggering” to students of Caribbean descent, who enjoy a \$50,000 per year education in exquisite buildings modeled on Oxford, but have been taught to remember that Matthew Arnold’s privilege was partly funded by wealth accrued from slavery and empire. So even savaging his poem in class makes them feel unsafe.

What students like that—and the teachers who encourage them—really need is not a personal encounter with Jesus. At least not yet. First they really ought to get out more, and go meet some Nazis. No, not goofball rednecks with prison tattoos or bitter cranks snarking about the Holocaust from the comfort of mom’s air-conditioned basement. No, the real deal. The combat-hardened veterans of Verdun who joined the Freikorps, and smashed the heads of Leninists in the streets of Munich. The highly educated legal theorists, biologists, sociologists, economists, and ethicists who in the course of just a few years created a whole new system of ethics and praxis, and put it into action in the world’s most literate nation, and almost conquered Europe. Thanks to the dogged labors of historian Johann Chapoutot, we really can meet these men.¹ Not in their last defeat, making squalid excuses at Nuremberg. No, in their full flush of power, when they really spoke their minds, and crafted a coherent, powerful program for remaking Western Civilization along the lines of racial pantheism. These men took Darwin’s assertions seriously, as few others did. They listened to what he taught us, stared him straight in the eye unblinking, as he explained that each one of us is just an insignificant outcome of a meaningless cosmic process. That desperate strife for survival and competitive breeding is the only vital constant. And that such brutal combat is the genuine source of progress, the one force that raised up something more than amoebas and paramecia. This force, in fact, and

¹Johann Chapoutot, *The Law of Blood Thinking and Acting as a Nazi* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2018).

not Jewish scruples or Christian compassion, had built our civilization. The real science of biology could banish the fantasies of messianic Marx, who still smuggled into his materialistic system a rabbinical craving for brotherhood, equality, and dilettantish leisure—albeit only as the end product of brutal revolution. These men saw through that illusion, too.

Of course, they indulged in some of their own. They chose, somewhat arbitrarily, to value the “race” above either the individual or the species, and their own race above all others. They filled the gap of meaning in a godless world by imagining a biological collective could replace the Body of Christ. But surely, as modern men, they were free to make that decision. To choose race instead of class as their locus of solidarity. To locate some source of “the sacred” that met their personal needs. And photos of ruined Berlin in 1945 remind us that these men put their money where their mouth was.

Who in our time has really explored what it means to reject Christian ethics, root and branch? It was these men, and their brethren in other nations’ eugenics movements—such as Margaret Sanger of Planned Parenthood, a long-time collaborator with Nazi eugenicists such as Eugen Fischer, who had run a concentration camp in Africa during World War I, killing and experimenting on thousands of helpless natives. These were the thoroughgoing, consistent Darwinists and debunkers. Not even the Stalinists, whose cruelest purges and artificial famines were waged in the name of a utopia that Norman Cohn rightly identified in *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1970) as a revival of late-medieval Gnostic Christian heresy.

If you don’t believe me, ask Jorge Luis Borges. His short story “Deutsches Requiem” is a monologue by an idealistic war criminal, explaining how he systematically crushed every last particle of residual Christian ethics in his soul. He completed the process by murdering an imprisoned Jewish genius whose writing he’d always treasured. Then at last he knew he was free. And though the Nazi veteran was headed for the gallows, he went gladly, knowing that his ethics, not Christ’s, would eventually reign triumphant. Even if the German people must die, the Nazi ethic would rise from its empty tomb.

The only other really rigorous effort to exclude every trace of the Christian heritage from ethics that we have seen is Utilitarian Hedonism. That’s Pete Singer’s creed.² It posits that all we can know is that pleasure is good and suffering is evil. We must try to quantify suffering, not just for humans but every conscious creature. Then do what we can to reduce it, no matter the other

²For a good summary of Singer’s views see Anthony McCarthy, “Pleasure, Consent, and Dignity: Peter Singer Is Wrong About the Sexual Assault of a Disabled Man,” *Public Discourse*, April 25, 2017, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/04/19251/>

consequences. Sadly, the logical consequences, for Singer himself, include valuing the lives of healthy pigs and monkeys over those of handicapped infants, and affirming that bestiality can be good, as long as the animal (tacitly) seems to consent. The fly in that ointment, of course? That nature itself seems to disagree. The animal world is a farrago of carnivorous slaughter and carnage. It's just how the cosmos seems to prefer to transfer energy. The real world that Darwin supposedly showed us is not a vegan tableau where the lion eats hay with the lamb. It's red in tooth and claw. Why should we root for the lion to starve so the lamb can escape? Isn't its pleasure in killing as meaningful as the prey's brief, needful suffering? I don't think Borges's narrator would debate Singer for long. He'd just laugh at him.

This is all tough, ugly stuff. Not easy to convey to a self-important undergrad who thinks he has progressed far beyond Christian ethics, while in fact he channels its ghost for most of his governing prejudices and politics. But you could make progress by being Socratic. Ask tough questions, and keep on asking, even if your students start shouting at you, or break down crying. Ask them, to start with:

- What's wrong with racism?
- Why is inequality bad?
- Why should those who enjoy the benefits of "privilege" ever surrender it?
- If the results of injustice are more aesthetically pleasing to me than those of justice, why shouldn't I choose injustice? Assuming that I can keep the whip hand, of course.

Each time the student answers, critique his response by referring strictly to Darwinian materialism. Any argument that can't withstand that corrosive acid, toss in the trash. Such an exercise won't prove pleasant for anyone involved, including you. But I recommend it. Not, of course, to mold young people into future war criminals or Borges characters. Instead, it's meant to unmask the mechanism that's really behind Intersectionalism. To pull back the curtain and show not the Wizard of Oz, but the vast, creaky Rube Goldberg system of ducts and pipes, treadmills run by hamsters and crows tethered to clotheslines, by which modern secularists smuggle in Jewish and Christian ethics, in order to escape the actual, logical consequences of scientific materialism.

You've doubtless endured briefings, faculty meetings, memoranda, and scholarly papers explaining Intersectionalism. It started as a legal theory, turned into a business, and then degenerated into a religion. It's the American form of

what René Girard warned against when he wrote (in his later work) about Victimism.³ That's the technique by which we gain power by feigning concern for the vulnerable, and turn the scapegoat mechanism to our advantage by targeting the former victimizers. Or if there are no slave owners or British colonizers left around, those who share a racial, religious, or sexual identity with past victimizers. They'll do, as the children and grandchildren of "bourgeois" shop owners were fair game for abuse in the old Soviet Union. And as Jews in Paris or Berlin prove suitable substitutes for settlers on the West Bank. We can feel positively godly by visiting vengeance unto the third or fourth generation.

The new religion doesn't demand the same renunciation, or wrenching effort, required to root out Christian impulses that tormented Borges's narrator. You don't need to rip out that heritage, or efface every last jot and tittle of the natural law from your heart. Intersectionalists instead repurpose all these antiques, for new and exciting uses. As I've written before at *The Stream*, these new evangelists (Andrew Sullivan called them the new Puritans) have ingeniously adapted the model of Christian conversion, repentance, and redemption:

If a student belongs to any other group but straight white males, a black woman, for example, she is in luck: she's certified as a victim. She deserves special treatment by everyone from college deans to government bureaucrats. Even better, she should feel virtuous for wallowing in anger and resentment. No matter if she's Malia Obama. She can righteously seethe with rage at jobless white coal miners, or homeless white veterans. Her sense of victimhood gives her the "blessed assurance" that she is part of the Elect.

This creed offers salvation even to the worst of sinners, straight white males, but the price is steep: a life of self-denial and penance.⁴

Given that Intersectionalism is fast becoming the official, intolerant religion of the West, I suggest you proceed carefully. Not that I recommend we speak in some Straussian code. But we do want to avoid getting falsely labeled, fired, doxed, driven out of restaurants, or punched in the face. Short of moving to rural Texas and setting up shop as a gun dealer (not an option to be lightly dismissed), most of us will be forced to deal with teary-eyed or red-faced zealots of this new religion on a daily basis. They will seem as weird to us as filthy ascetics sitting

³René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1978).

⁴John Zmirak, "'Woke' is the New 'Saved,'" *Stream.org*, January 18, 2018, <https://stream.org/woke-is-the-new-saved/>.

on pillars appeared to Hellenistic philosophers. We will be tempted to pelt them with onions.

But remember that a few words shouted down from that pillar will draw a mob. So I recommend prudence. And I also recommend efforts to shatter the ramshackle coalition of designated victims held together, temporarily, by shared hatred for the “primal oppressor.” (That really is a term in Intersectionalist jargon, referring to straight, white men.) Peel off, approach, and make friends with black Christians, pro-life women, gays afraid of sharia, Asians disgusted by quotas, and point out to them, gently, that none of this new hysteria serves their concrete interests. That there are better and deeper grounds for solidarity than stored-up grudges and exaggerated grievances. Those grounds can be found in Genesis, in the unity of mankind as progeny of a single, hapless couple.