

# ***“The Abolition of Man”***

From Descartes to Derrida:

How Buddhist Enlightenment (“*No-Self*”) Won Over  
European Enlightenment (“*I think, therefore, I am*”)

## **What is Man?**

- An animal?
- A bio-robot ?
- An illusion?
- An immortal soul?

## **SELF: An ILLUSION?**

A brilliant sage went around India teaching that the world was *Maya* — metaphysical illusion. Your belief that you exist as an individual, he said, is your bondage.

One day a wild elephant charged at his entourage. The guru ran for his life. When they reassembled, the disciples asked: Guruji, if the elephant was an illusion, why did you run?

I ran was your illusion, the guru assured his bewildered followers. Remember, your belief that you exist as a real person is your bondage. Your eyes deceive you. You must close them in meditation. Sensory observation and logical reflection is the path to delusion. *Moksha* or salvation is to be saved from your assumption that you exist. Logic prevents you from knowing truth. Language must be transcended to realize what is really real.

Does that sound crazy?

The ideas that you don't exist and that language deceives you into thinking that you do, have been winning the West for more than a century. These ideas have practical consequences.

Hindus and Buddhist sages were brilliant. They could have produced science. They didn't because a scientific interest in nature has to begin with the assumption that the world is real. That it is rational and valuable. Indian sages never debated human dignity and rights. "Freedom of Conscience" makes sense only if you have a conscience. The truth is that our bodies have no organ called conscience. That is why no atheist country has ever guaranteed freedom of conscience. For it is an aspect of our soul. It is based upon the Bible's view of man as a living soul, made in God's moral and rational image.

#### THE BUDDHA'S SUCCESS IN THE WEST

I come from the same people group as the Buddha. He was born nearly five hundred years before Christ, so I'm flattered that the Buddha has become one of the most honored faces in Germany. One can see his statue in almost every other shop. Few people understand that from the Scottish philosopher David Hume to French Jacques Derrida, Westernized Buddhism has demolished the West's "Age of Reason."<sup>2</sup> Demolition succeeded because a key foundation was replaced. Faith in "accident" (chance) replaced faith in Logos (a purposeful, rational Word) as the Creator.

The West was a uniquely thinking, innovative civilization. It used the mind to do what we Indians did using muscles. The West continued to write, publish, and study books while earlier cultures, including Greece, gave up on them. The last Buddhist library in Nalanda, India, for example, was burnt down at least eight centuries ago. No one bothered to rebuild it or build alternatives. A Baptist missionary, William Carey (1761–1834), came from England to start lending libraries in India to get us to read. The West's confidence in human reason, language, and literature came from the belief that God made our minds in His image. The Creator gave us the gift of language to seek, discover, and teach truth. The intellectual movement called the Enlightenment was built upon this biblical foundation. Slowly it sawed off the branch upon which it sat. That ushered in what Francis Schaeffer called the current "Age of Non-reason."<sup>3</sup>

The Enlightenment began at the end of the seventeenth century. This wide-ranging movement included devout Christians as well as skeptics and initially only a few atheists. They shared some biblical assumptions in common. One of these was that human beings exist as individual souls.

The human mind can know truth and communicate it in language. These assumptions were common because everyone experienced them.

People assumed that a real world existed outside of their minds and they existed as living souls because the Bible assured them that in the beginning God created the world. Then He made us to observe it, understand it and establish our rule over it.

The Enlightenment did not begin in Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, atheist or animist soil. It was birthed and nurtured within a biblical milieu. Some philosophers replaced its philosophical foundation. They assumed that brain chemistry (logic and physical senses) could lead us to truth without the light of God's revelation. That confidence in "flesh and blood" (the human mind) has unravelled as naive. For example, plenty of people experience multiple personalities within them. How are, "they" to know who they are or if they are there. Does their own consciousness create their multiple personalities? Or, do some spirits possess them?

The Buddha lived about 2,500 years ago. He figured out what the greatest Western philosophers began to acknowledge only at the end of the nineteenth century. By intellect alone, no one can know if he actually exists, or if words could possibly have anything to do with truth.

WHY DID LOGIC LOSE?

Philosophers' logic lost because René Descartes (1596–1650) could not prove that he existed. He tried but failed. His formula, "I think, therefore, I am," turned out to be flawed. Today it is easy to understand Descartes' mistake. If a robot can think, does it exist as a person? What if it could remember the past and predict some of the future? Doubting, thinking, remembering, predicting, that is, consciousness, exists for sure. How does that prove that the thinker, the subject, the self, the "I" also exists?

Descartes divorced the human word from the divine Word, our logic from the transcendent Logos. That divorce created problems that go much deeper than our neighbor's divorce mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Descartes' intellectual children are in greater trouble.

To prove the thinker (the thinking being, the "self" or "I"), Descartes needed to prove that every effect *has to have* a cause. That doubts or thoughts must be *caused* by a doubter, a "self" or subject.

Logic cannot prove that every effect must have a cause. An atheist, for example, *has to* assume that the cosmos is uncaused. It may have existed forever. Or, it may have just popped into existence without a cause. If the cosmos can exist without a cause, why can't consciousness (thinking) exist without a thinker, without an "I"?

People come to a garden to enjoy flowers and the fruit. They don't wish to be bothered about the roots. The problem, however, is that we can't have the fruit without the roots. The roots may be uninteresting, but they have to be cared for. You can't build a humane society if you and your neighbor don't even exist as real persons with individuality, dignity, and rights.

Suppose a robot can think and also "feel." Suppose it is made with female organs. What if a man buys that robot and lets his friends abuse it or even "rape" it. Has the robot any right to feel insulted or abused? Does the robot have any "natural" rights? Does its owner not have the freedom to do with it whatever he wants, as long as he is not hurting anyone else? Do thinking and feeling make a robot a person?

Descartes's failure to prove that "I" exists had profoundly pessimistic consequences. The Buddha in India and Socrates in Greece questioned man-made gods. Both understood that in a universe without God, human soul, logic, and language made no sense. The Buddha deduced that the assumption that you exist is *the* human bondage. You need to meditate in order to stop thinking. Meditation would lead to *Nirvana*. It will deliver "thought" from the illusion of personal existence. Thought exists, you don't. Thought is deceptive. Inner silence is redemption. Socrates' followers went in an opposite direction.

THE GREEK IDEA OF THE LOGOS

Gorgias (485–380 bc) was a Greek rhetorician from Sicily. He may have been a little younger than the Buddha in India and a little older than Socrates in Greece. His city sent him to Greece to seek support against its invaders. After completing his mission he decided to stay in Greece for its people loved philosophical speculations. He made good money proving that you cannot know that you exist. Your words do not and cannot communicate truth. That earned Gorgias the label “Nihilist” and “Sophist.” He was an itinerant philosopher who lectured for money.

Sophism’s challenge helped other Greek philosophers realize that logic and language can make sense only if they come from Logos—the Ground of Reason above the cosmos. Something of Logos must live also in man. This became the foundation of Greek rationalism that fascinated modern Europe. The Greeks were not sure if Logos actually existed. They deemed it to be a necessary assumption if logic is to make any sense. Without it you could not believe in logic. Without Logos you have to believe in myths, which Socrates was questioning.

By Logos the Greek philosophers meant “sense” with or without sound that must exist in an eternal realm of ideas beyond ours. Our world could be a “shadow” of that *real* realm.

The Greeks could not figure out what this “Word” or Logos was, where it came from, where it lived. . . or if it was real. Therefore, gradually they gave it up as philosophers’ imagination: intangible, unbelievable. The Bible, in contrast, made its logocentric worldview the West’s foundation. It taught,

In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.<sup>4</sup>

The eternal word was no longer an abstract concept. He incarnated. The disciples lived with him. They were witnesses, not philosophers or storytellers.

Their witness, recorded in the Bible, inspired the West's faith in "self," language, and logic.

WHY DO THEY THINK THAT THEY DON'T EXIST?

Jerrold Seigel is one of many writers who have explained why Descartes failed to prove that he existed. In his study, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century*, Seigel explains that Descartes experienced thought (the doubt) not the thinker (the doubter). He merely assumed that the thinker (the soul) was also there somewhere in his brain doing the thinking:

The proposition "I think" does not itself tell us anything about the subject [the soul] that pronounces it, which remains unanalyzed and indeterminate so long as we only know about it that it thinks; thus we cannot use "I think" as a way to determine the existence of something in the world that is not given in experience.<sup>5</sup>

[In simple words, we experience thinking, not the thinker, the "I"]

By denying revelation the West has lost its basis for believing in self, in language and logic. For reason cannot prove itself. Why should truth be logical? Where does logic come from?

The philosophers who followed Descartes tried to believe in logic without believing in Logos. From David Hume (1711–1776) to Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) reason has driven many philosophers to Buddha's feet—to non-reason, to techniques to meditate our minds into silence; away from reasoning, into occult and mystical experiences. This transition from reason to non-reason is not hard to understand.

WHY DO THEY KNOW THAT THEY CANNOT KNOW?

Knowledge of a *particular* thing, say "mango," requires us to be able to relate it to a *universal*, a "fruit." We can't know a particular without relating it to a universal.

What is Nick (a particular) can be known only if we can relate it to "boy" (a universal).

Likewise, we know what a boy is by relating it to a still larger universal—a boy is a young male *human being*.

What is a human being?

We can know what a human being is only if we can relate it to a yet larger universal, say an “animal.”

What is an animal?

An animal is a biochemical *organism*.

What then is an organism?

An organism is an *organized system*.

And what is an organized system?

It's a *machine*!

An atom is an organized system—a machine. So is a cell and the solar

system, the galaxy, and the cosmos. Everything is a machine. Machine is the ultimate universal that explains everything else. This is called the *mechanistic worldview*. It makes machine the ultimate reference point which gives meaning to everything else. You are a biochemical machine.

Western students knew themselves better. Therefore, in the 1960s, they began to react against this dehumanizing view of man. They wanted to be treated as persons, not as cogs in a complex money-making or war-making machine. The mechanistic worldview was making their society a soulless, capitalistic machine. Young people were angry also, because in Vietnam the American “machine” was killing people in a mindless war.

Behaviorist psychologists such as B. F. Skinner (1906–1990) had boldly accepted the mechanistic worldview and its logical, though terrible implications. His book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for eighteen weeks.<sup>6</sup> *TIME* magazine called him “the most influential of living American psychologists and the most controversial figure in the science of human behaviour.” Skinner realized that the mechanistic worldview means that you are a biochemical machine: Your experience of free will is an illusion; the Bible's ideas of human dignity, freedom of conscience, and moral responsibility and accountability are outdated. You are a machine means that you should be controlled. Respecting an individual's illusory

freedom hinders a society's ability to regulate human behavior and create utopia.

If man is a machine, what fools us into believing differently? Could it be language?

At the end of the "Modern Age," philosophical movements such as linguistic analysis tried hard to make sense of language. They failed, or rather came to the same conclusion as the Buddha: Words have nothing to do with the knowledge of reality or truth. A countless number of meaningless accidents evolved animal sounds into human language. Words are tools that we evolved in our struggle for survival. They help us manipulate each other and our environment. Language is nothing but a tool we use for persuasion, rhetoric, manipulation. Normally we use words to manipulate others. They also deceive us into believing that we exist; that we are real and important beings. This pessimistic philosophical conclusion is plunging the West into a post-truth age.

Philosopher Roger Scruton summed up philosophy's massive failure in his comment on Jacques Derrida, the icon of postmodernism. Scruton said that it was difficult to summarize Derrida's philosophy "because it's nonsense. He argues that the meaning of a sign [word] is never revealed in the sign but deferred indefinitely, and that a sign only means something by virtue of its difference from something else. For Derrida, there is no such thing as meaning —it always eludes us and therefore anything goes."<sup>7</sup>

How can someone conclude that he does not exist? Well, many Hindu and Buddhist sages have taught that the "self" is an illusion. The Buddha meditated and looked within his consciousness to find his soul. He concluded that the self was like an onion. If you keep peeling its layers you find that it has no core at its end. It is nothing. If God does not exist, how can an individual self-exist. Hindu sages went in an opposite direction. They concluded that our individuality is an illusion as is a wave in an ocean. The wave is a part of the ocean. It has no independent existence. Illusion is to think that it exists as an independent reality. No! It is one with the ocean and must merge into the ocean. Salvation is to lose one's own existence. The post-Christian West is just catching up with the ancient Indian wisdom. At present only the best minds in



the West understand that the mind cannot know that you exist. Soon everyone will understand what the West lost by rejecting its foundation.

Many books and films explain postmodern philosophical pessimism. One such book is Stephen R. C. Hicks' *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*.<sup>8</sup> Hicks surveys the following fathers of our postmodern world: Rousseau, Kant, Herder, Fichte, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Spengler, Heidegger, Russell, Wittgenstein, Ayer, Popper, Kuhn, Lenin, Sombart, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Rorty, Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida. Hicks points out that one practical consequence of the "modern" inability to know truth is to promote socialism, which is already a failed economic idea.

#### DARKNESS INVADES THE WEST

Serious scholars had been studying Hinduism and Buddhism for well over two centuries. That fascination became a countercultural movement during the period 1964–74. The hippies were right in rejecting the mechanistic worldview. They sought a philosophy that explained "man" better. Three serious options were available: Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Bible. To repeat: Hinduism said, "Yes. Your individuality is an illusion: you are God and can become God." Buddhism agreed that your soul does not exist, and it taught techniques to help you become non-existent. The Bible differed. It said, you are real and important. So important, that the Savior died to give you eternal life.

Many of those who followed the Hindu gurus meditated to expand their consciousness. They tried to see if the spirit or consciousness within man was the infinite reference point, *Brahma*, that could give meaning to human life. They tried to merge their self with *Everything*: thinking that the collective unconsciousness, postulated by Carl Jung, may be the ultimate universal that could give meaning to finite particulars, you and me.

Others pursued a similar, yet opposite, Buddhist conclusion. Among these were an influential group of French philosophers called the post-structuralists. Michel Foucault (1926–1984), for example, assumed that the biblical account of Adam and Eve was just a story. If not God, then who created the "self"?

By the 1970s Zen Buddhism, as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh and Taisen Deshimaru, had become prominent in France. Foucault went to Japan in 1978 to study under the Zen Master Omori Sogen. In 1983 he presented his reflections in five lectures at the University of California, Berkeley. Along with other essays, these influential lectures were published post-humously in 1988 as *Technologies of Self*. Foucault's thesis is summarized as "The self is not so much something hidden and therefore something to be excavated but as a correlate of the technologies of self that it co-evolves with over millennium."<sup>9</sup> Simply stated, over thousands of years language has created the illusion that each of us exists as a distinct entity, as "self."

You may think that the poststructuralists were simply confused and confusing. Maybe. But the fact you need to appreciate is that they were constructing their confusion upon the conclusions of Europe's greatest philosophers.

Buddhism's impact upon David Hume has been narrated by UC Berkeley professor, Alison Gopnik.<sup>10</sup> Hume thought that knowledge comes to us through our senses or empirical experience. Perceptions appear as impressions and go on to form ideas. Therefore, Hume searched hard for sensory impressions that gave rise to the idea that the soul was a distinct substance. His empiricism could not give any ground for belief in soul.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) agreed with the Buddha that if God doesn't exist, the human soul could not have real existence. Historian Guy Richard Welbon explored Buddhism's impact on Nietzsche,<sup>11</sup> who seems to have studied Sanskrit under Hermann Brockhaus at Leipzig from 1865 to 1868. Welbon thinks that for his time, Nietzsche was perhaps one of the best read and most solidly grounded in this aspect of Buddhism.

Zarathustra, Nietzsche's famous character, concluded: ". . . soul is only a word for something about the body."<sup>12</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche described the "soul superstition, which in the form of the subject and ego superstition, has not yet ceased to do mischief."<sup>13</sup> Foreshadowing the post-structuralists, Nietzsche blamed this concept of the soul on a "seduction by grammar" and "audacious generalization." For him, "ego" did not refer to a real thing. It referred to a non-existent concept, the synthesis of man's nature.

The Buddha's doctrine of the non-existence of the soul, personal identity or self is called *anatman* (no-soul). The Buddha meant that if you make yourself the object of your own analysis, then you would not find your "self." You would discover your "impermanence and emptiness." The components of personal identity could be studied part by part, until there was nothing left to analyze. Only mental and physical states could be located, not a spiritual entity. On the basis of such an analysis the Buddha had concluded that an abiding self was nowhere to be found."<sup>14</sup>

Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980), the French existentialist, did not deny "self" outright. He insisted that since no one created you, your life had no given meaning. A watchmaker makes a watch to tell the time. He may make it fancier so that it also sings you to sleep and wakes you up at the right time. The watch has meaning and purpose because it has an intelligent designer. Your life has no meaning, except for whatever meaning you choose to give it. You can choose to love your neighbor or choose to love his wife instead.

Prayoon Mererk alias Phra Medidhammaporn is a Buddhist monk who did his doctoral dissertation on Sartre's existentialism and early Buddhism. Buddhism describes consciousness as nothingness. It is total emptiness. The world that it experiences is outside it. Sartre did not meditate to discover that self or consciousness was nothingness. He arrived at a similar conclusion through interrogation and negative judgement processes. This, says Phra Medidhammaporn, brought "Sartre close to the teaching of Buddhism."<sup>15</sup>

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) agreed with Nietzsche and Buddhism that in the absence of God, the human self could not exist as a reality. In a groundbreaking study, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on His Work*, Reinhard May documents conclusively that Martin Heidegger borrowed some of the major ideas of his philosophy—on occasion almost word for word—from German translations of Chinese Daoist and Zen Buddhist classics. Heidegger read the first volume of Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. That prompted him to read the only book on Zen he could find in his university library, *Zen: der lebendige Buddhismus in Japan*, by Ohazama and Faust. Heidegger said that he found it "very interesting."<sup>16</sup>

ARE YOU REAL?

In dreams, drugs, hallucinations, mystic experiences, or mental “disorders,” people see, hear, touch, smell, or taste a lot of things. They may talk to “beings” long dead, or to characters that existed only in myths. Such experiences *feel* real to those who have them. These mental experiences carry their own authority, as does our waking, rational experience.<sup>17</sup> Why isn’t that world in their mind “real?” After all, what we consider the “real,” ordinary, external world of everyday experience also exists in consciousness. The idea of *our* “personal” existence as a real, permanent person is only a tiny idea in the vast ocean of (Jung’s Collective Un)consciousness.

So, why do we assume that we are a real “being,” a stable, permanent bundle of consciousness—soul or spirit? According to Buddhism, we assume that simply because we are ignorant of the reality that no “self” exists as a real entity. Buddhism named this ignorance *Avidhya*.

Buddhism blamed *Avidhya* (primeval ignorance) as the source of human bondage. Our salvation, *nirvana*, depends on deliverance from this delusion of personal existence. To be “saved” in Buddhism is the opposite of eternal life. Nirvana or Buddhist salvation is to be delivered from the delusion that you exist. Salvation is cessation of existence—eternal death.

If the illusion of self—personal existence—is created by language and thought, then the path to nirvana lies in “meditation” techniques. We need help to stop thinking, to go within our consciousness, to experience that there is no “I am” inside us—no self, soul, spirit, or permanent you.

Behind fleeting thoughts, there is only emptiness, nothingness, void, silence.

Dreams, drugs and “demon possession” demonstrate that much of human consciousness is irrational or non-logical. Why should we then assume that truth is logical?

WHAT IS LOGIC?

Buddhist theory of *Pratityasamutpada* or “Dependent Origination” taught that our intellect, like everything else, is a product of cosmic Ignorance—*Avidhya* (non-knowledge or ignorance). It is not designed by divine wisdom (sophia, Word, or “logos”).<sup>18</sup> Scholars who have spent their lives studying Buddhism

will find plenty of reasons to dismiss this summary as simplistic. Indeed, there are plenty of variations and nuances within schools of Buddhism. Yet, hardly anyone will dispute that Buddhist and Greek cultures failed to develop a high view of a human person. Uncertainty about the existence of self ensured that they did not even debate a woman's dignity, a child's rights, or whether slavery was justified.

For centuries Buddhism enjoyed political patronage in India. It built impressive centers of learning in places as far apart as Taxila in northwest (now in Pakistan) and Nalanda in the southeast (Bihar, India) of the Indian subcontinent. These disappeared just as the huge Hindu ashrams of our generation have come and gone. This is because the truth Buddhism sought and taught was non-intellectual. It was mystical. Therefore Buddhism never developed a deep interest in the sciences, humanities or any other knowledge that can be communicated in language. It failed to sustain education or develop sciences because it lacked the confidence that the cosmos was real and rational. It did not think that the human mind could know truth, or that human language could communicate it.

#### SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS

Logic's failure forced Freud's followers, Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, to push the modern world into postmodernism. They opened the doors of the "New Age" of stories. Jung, as mentioned in the previous chapters, earned respect by exploring the paranormal, the supernatural, the spiritual. He was honest in recognizing that we have multiple personalities and we hear contradictory voices within us, demonic and godly. Yet, he found no convincing way to answer the core question: If God does not exist, can the human self exist as a real person?

If we don't exist as real persons, we cannot have dignity and rights that are *inherent* or "natural." Human rights have to be artificial social constructs. Many societies permit parents to abort their babies. Why can't a society permit people to grow babies in order to sell them or eat them? Is the taboo against cannibalism nothing more than a social prejudice? Richard Dawkins, Oxford's well-known evolutionary biologist and public atheist, believes that all ethical ideas are man made. There is no God who has commanded, "You shall not

commit murder.” Therefore, he says that he is looking forward to eating human flesh. He wants to help demolish another one of our ethical prejudices. He hopes to be able to eat human flesh without going to jail as soon as scientists can grow it in a lab.<sup>19</sup>

Uganda’s former dictator, Idi Amin, is said to have boasted that he ate human flesh. During my first visit to Uganda I heard rumors that he may have eaten body parts of one of his wives whose death has remained a mystery.<sup>20</sup>

#### WHY BUDDHISM LOST

In Volume II we will see that Buddhism had defeated Greek rationalism three hundred years before Christ. Its current victory over Western Enlightenment is the second time this is happening.

Given that it is so powerful, why did Buddhism fail in Asia?

Buddhist pessimism paralyzed India. State patronage helped it build massive centers of “education,” but what use is an education that tells you that you cannot know the truth or improve the world to minimize suffering? Buddhism and its centers disappeared from India around the thirteenth century. Its sages were brilliant, but their pessimism prevented them from developing vibrant political, legal, or economic theories and practices. They could not develop an interest in technology and science. One illustration will suffice!

Ashoka, a patron of Buddhist missions, is considered to have been one of India’s greatest emperors. Two centuries before Christ he had “Ashoka Pillars” set up all over India. Their thirty-three inscriptions were written in Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts. Yet, just a little over two centuries ago no Indian knew anything about Ashoka. We did not have a single scholar who could read either of the two scripts. It took someone from a Bible-influenced background, a British officer James Prinsep (1799–1840), to decipher Ashoka Pillars. European Indologists then went on to unearth his legacy.

#### SHOULD WE END THE ILLUSORY SELF?

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who influenced Nietzsche, called himself a Buddhist. He was candid in admitting, “If I were to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I would have to consider Buddhism the

finest of all religion.”<sup>21</sup> However he did not meditate to realize that he does not exist. He went further than the Buddha and proposed “self-annihilation” as the solution to our illusion of self.

Some people do want to end their “useless” lives. A man’s death may make his widow hopeless and depressed. She may want to burn herself on her husband’s funeral pyre as a *Sati*. Should her relatives assist her suicide?

Jainism, a religion that began in India before Buddhism and still prescribes renouncing of clothing (nudity) for Digamber ascetics,<sup>22</sup> teaches that starving oneself to death is the highest spiritual practice. This voluntary annihilation of self through starving to death is called *Sallekhana*.

Western cultures had made suicide, especially assisted suicide, a crime. This was because the Bible is pro-life. If a person is depressed then our duty is to refresh his/her spirit, including by affirming his inherent value. For God Himself turns our mourning into dancing.<sup>23</sup> He gives us beauty for ashes.<sup>24</sup>

At the entrance of St. Gallen’s Abbey Library are engraved the Greek words, *Psyches iatreion*: “Sanatorium for the Soul.” That is the source of our modern term *Psychiatry*. Books and knowledge of the truth are resources for the healing of our souls. The Psalmist said, “The Lord is my shepherd. . . he restores my soul.”<sup>25</sup>

“WHAT IS MAN?”

The Psalmist asked, “What is man?” and came to a conclusion opposite of postmodern Buddhism: He recognized that the value and worth of human beings comes neither from within his consciousness nor from society. It comes from the Creator:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, *what is man* that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, . . .

O Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!<sup>26</sup>

#### THE FOUNDATION THAT IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED

From 1508 to 1512, Michelangelo painted the Bible's foundational teaching on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In his painting God is making Adam in His image. Adam is on the earth. Eve is still in God's arm, waiting to be created. The truth behind the painting is that because the Divine Spirit made you in His own image, you exist as a real, spiritual, rational, valuable, immortal self—like God Himself.

Many theologians think that the Bible's account of Adam's creation is just a story. Atheist existentialists understand the profound implications of the Bible's account. Sartre is reported to have mused, "Life has no meaning, the moment you lose the illusion of being eternal." That is quintessential Buddhism.

You exist as a real, valuable, and permanent spiritual entity, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."<sup>27</sup>

Adam and Eve's identity as individuals came from God's relationship with them. God created them to be His children, friends, co-creators, His stewards on this earth. God wanted to "walk"<sup>28</sup> with them, "talk"<sup>29</sup> to them, and be their God.<sup>30</sup>

Eternal life is to know God.<sup>31</sup> Geneva's reformer John Calvin explained in his 1536 classic, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, that knowing God enables us to know ourselves. Rejection of God leads to a rejection of self. Walking with God makes us our Father's co-creators—history-makers.

#### "SPIRIT IS THE TRUTH"

Just as love transcends chemistry, truth also transcends body. It is a matter of spirit. The apostle John says, God's "Spirit is the truth."<sup>32</sup> The postmodern world has become post-truth because it ruled out the spirit. It turned language that used to communicate truth into a tool that we use to deceive ourselves and manipulate others.



The monks at St. Gallen Abbey did not devote their lives to copying, preserving, and studying manuscripts because they were rationalists. They understood their labor as a spiritual ministry. On the library's ceiling are painted four historic church councils, of Nicea (in ad 325), Constantinople (ad 381), Ephesus (ad 431), and Chalcedon (ad 451). In later chapters we will examine how these councils shaped the West. Each painting is summed up with a verse from the Bible.

For example, the ad 381 council is summarized with Acts 15:28. The verse says that the very first church council concluded the controversy over the oneness of Jewish and Gentile believers with the words, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . ." That is, the affirmed equality of Jews and Gentiles was not a self-evident truth, but a mystery revealed by the Holy Spirit. The Church did not invent the idea of human equality. It accepted the revealed truth after listening to testimonies of brothers such as Peter, Paul, and Barnabas.

Likewise, the ad 431 church council that met in Ephesus relied upon Jesus' promise in John 16:3, "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." Rational words that communicate truth are a matter of communication between divine and human spirits. They are not products of irrational brain chemistry. Friendships or positive relationships rest on trust. Trust is a non-material, spiritual quality. It is cultivated by consistency in truthful communication.

Jesus and the Buddha had opposite attitudes to words. Jesus took the words of the Old Testament scriptures so seriously that he laid down his life "according to the Scriptures."<sup>33</sup> He trusted the scriptures as His Father's word: "Your word is truth."<sup>34</sup> Abandoning the sacredness of words, vows, promises, contracts, covenants, treaties, and agreements destroys relationships. It makes cheating one's partner commonplace. The Bible says that Jesus enters into everlasting relationships with us by shedding his blood, that is, by sealing his words and love with his blood.

Such strong relationships require you to *know* what your friend expects and *do* what will please him or her. It requires listening to words carefully and understanding. Words cement relationships. They can also break relations. The friendship or sonship to which God invites us rests on trustworthy words:

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.<sup>35</sup>

Truth is more than words. Words can be used to deceive and manipulate. At times, truth or deception can be communicated without words. Yet, usually it takes words to understand, confirm, and transmit truth and deception, wisdom and folly, right and wrong. That makes truth and language matters of the spirit. Good spirits as well as bad spirits use language. The book will have to return to this important theme a few times.

By destroying India’s confidence that words can communicate truth, Buddhism destroyed not just India’s quest for knowledge. It destroyed our languages themselves. That is why the Spirit of God had to inspire Western missionaries to come to India and turn our dialects into literary languages.<sup>36</sup> Many of these Bible translators served in Calcutta’s Fort William College, which trained British civil servants to govern Indian in their own heart languages. Volume II will explore the Bible’s role in creating modern civil services. A later chapter in this volume, “The Oracles of God and the Literature of Man,” examines the Bible’s enormous impact on Indian literature.

The Bible created the modern world that valued language, which has the capacity to communicate. This is because the Bible taught that God is a Spirit who knows truth and communicates it. Parents teach language to their children so that they may teach what is true or false, right or wrong, wise or foolish. Wise parents and teachers do not teach everything to a child. They allow children and students to research and learn for themselves. This is exactly what God does as our Father. He gave us the gift of language, and the responsibility to develop it so that we may find truth and transmit it.

Europe was confused by mystery religions that grew into *Gnosticism*. Paul opened the Western mind by explaining that truth and language were matters of the spirit:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age. . . we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God. . . these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who

knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. . . . "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

In the passage above, Paul presents a key truth that the Lord Jesus taught repeatedly:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.<sup>38</sup>

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.<sup>39</sup>

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.<sup>40</sup>

Western philosophy is lost again. Its assumption that the human brain, "flesh and blood," atoms, molecules and their chemical combinations could know truth has reached a dead-end. Postmodernism is taking the next step to deconstruct your *self*. Murdering God has made it necessary for the postmodern man to follow Buddhism into killing "man" — the thinking, speaking subject — the self.

Wandering around in the darkness of their own making, Western intellectuals such as Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers began exploring the power of myth<sup>41</sup> and mysticism. In his speeches President Obama says that America's foundational document, The Declaration of Independence, is based, not on "self-evident" truths but on "inspiring stories."<sup>42</sup> Made-up stories cannot sustain the on-going battles against racial, tribal, caste- and gender-based inequalities.

The world needs God's word revealed by the Spirit of Truth. For truth is the source of human freedom and justice. The knowledge of truth is a matter of spirit. The Prophet Isaiah prophesied:

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him [God's servant], the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,

and faithfulness the belt of his loins.  
The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.<sup>43</sup>

Was Isaiah a Romantic poet, or was he a wise prophet, whose words changed history? In the next chapter, let's examine how God's Spirit empowered His servant, the Church, making ordinary people the instrument of transforming nations.

This lecture is taken from Chapter 4 of Vishal Mangalwadi's new book, "*This Book Changed Everything: (Volume 1) The Bible's Amazing Impact on our World.*" The book is selling on Amazon as e-book. Hard copies will be available on March 20.



## Notes

1 Ephesians 5:22

2 Generally I'm using the phrase "The Age of Reason" to mean the European age of the Enlightenment. It was also the title of an influential book (1807) by political activist Thomas Paine. His book undermined Revelation and promoted Deism—the idea that God exists as a watchmaker. He does not intervene with the functioning of the watch. Perhaps, he cannot even communicate with human beings.

3 See Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Illinois: IVP Classics, 2007).

4 John 1: 1–5, 14–18

5 Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 60.

6 Burrhus Frederic Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (London: Pelican Books, 1971)

7 Roger Scruton in: Stephen Moss, "Deconstructing Jacques" in *The Guardian*, 12th October, 2018, at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/oct/12/philosophy> (accessed June 2018)

8 Stephen R. C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Tempe, AZ: Scholargy Publishing, 2004)

9 See, Josh Jones, "Hear Michel Foucault's Lecture 'The Culture of the Self,' Presented in English at UC Berkeley (1983)" in *Philosophy, UC Berkeley*, 6th August, 2016, at <http://www.openculture.com/2014/08/michel-foucaults-lecture-the-culture-of-the-self.html> (accessed June 2018)

10 In an influential essay in *The Atlantic* (October 2015), UC Berkeley Professor Alison Gopnik discussed how Hume learned Buddhism in a French Jesuit monastery. Alison Gopnik, "How an 18th-Century Philosopher Helped Solve My Midlife Crisis." <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/how-david-hume-helped-me-solve-my-midlife-crisis/403195/> (accessed June 2018)

11 Guy Richard Welbon, *The Buddhist Nirvana and Its Western Interpreters* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1975).

12 Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common, 1909, I/146 p.

13 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern, 2003, Preface.

14 Benjamin A. Elman, Nietzsche and Buddhism, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, No. 4. (Oct.–Dec., 1983), 671–686. In his analysis of the self, Nietzsche contended: "the

subject is only a fiction: the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all.”

15 Phra Medidhammaporn (Prayoon Mererk), *Sartre's Existentialism and Early Buddhism*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1995). [http://psy.au.dk/fileadmin/Psykologi/Forskning/Kvalitativ\\_metodeudvikling/NB27/Sartre.pdf](http://psy.au.dk/fileadmin/Psykologi/Forskning/Kvalitativ_metodeudvikling/NB27/Sartre.pdf) (accessed 1 October 2018)

16 Reinhard May, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East-Asian Influences on his Work* (London: Routledge, 1996), 10. The book was first published in German in 1989 as *Ex oriente lux: Heidegger's Werk unter ostasiasehen Eingluft*, Stuttgart Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden.

17 After his own drug-induced experience, American philosopher William James wrote that he gained insight into that mental world to which he had to ascribe some “metaphysical significance.” Cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902; London: Fontana Library, 1971), 373–374. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886) is a classic, nineteenth-century Hindu mystic, who saved modern Hinduism from Western Rationalism.

18 *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 740.

19 Douglas Ernst, “‘Soylent’ Dawkins? Atheist mulls ‘taboo against cannibalism’ ending as lab-grown meat improves,” in *Washington Times*, March 6, 2018, at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/mar/6/richard-dawkins-mulls-taboo-against-cannibalism-en/> (accessed 2 October 2018). For interviews of Peter Singer by Richard Dawkins about the ethics of eating human roadkills please see, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation\\_id=annotation\\_3623497701&feature=iv&src\\_vid=Gu9X1smCOU4&v=GYYNY2oKVWU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_3623497701&feature=iv&src_vid=Gu9X1smCOU4&v=GYYNY2oKVWU)

20 Henry Kyemba, *A State of Blood: The Inside Story of Idi Amin* (NY: Ace Books, 1977). Kyemba worked as Uganda's Minister of Health under Amin. The book speaks of the blood rituals Amin performed on his victims in private. Amin's tribe practiced blood rituals on slain enemies. Cutting a piece of flesh from the body to subdue the man's spirit. Or tasting the blood to render the spirit harmless. This ritual has been practiced even in upper ranks of government. Kyemba writes, “I have reason to believe that Amin's practices do not stop at tasting blood: on several occasions he has boasted to me and others that he has eaten human flesh.”

21 See: Peter Abelsen, “Schopenhauer and Buddhism” in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), 255–278.

22 Jainism has two main sects. Only one of them, the Digambers, require saints to renounce clothing.

23 Psalm 30:11

- 24 Isaiah 61:3
- 25 Psalm 23:1–2
- 26 Psalm 8:3–9
- 27 Genesis 2: 7
- 28 Genesis 3:8; 5:22, 24; 6:9; 17:1; 24:40
- 29 Genesis 17:3, 22; 35:14
- 30 Exodus 33:11; James 2:23
- 31 John 17:3
- 32 1 John 5:6
- 33 1 Corinthians 15:2–3
- 34 John 17:17
- 35 Romans 10: 8–10
- 36 See Babu K. Varghese, *Let There Be India: Impact of the Bible on Nation Building* (Chennai: WOC Publisher, 2014).
- 37 1 Corinthians 2:6–16
- 38 John 14: 16–17
- 39 John 15: 26–27
- 40 John 16: 12–13
- 41 Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (NY: Doubleday, 1988). The book is based on a PBS television series called *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*.
- 42 This speech can be seen in Greg Barker’s documentary *The Final Year* (2017).
- 43 Isaiah 11:2–9