

Enemies of the Faith in the Modern Era

Introduction: In this lesson we will go over a “who’s who” of major thinkers in the modern era whose work negatively impacted Christianity. This does not mean that these thinkers are not brilliant. Nor does it mean that they don’t say some true things. Rather, we will primarily be looking at the negative effects of their thinking on Christian teaching, theology, and culture at large.

We will not discuss thinkers we have already dealt with such as Immanuel Kant (in the Enlightenment lecture) or Friedrich Schleiermacher (in the Theological Liberalism lecture).

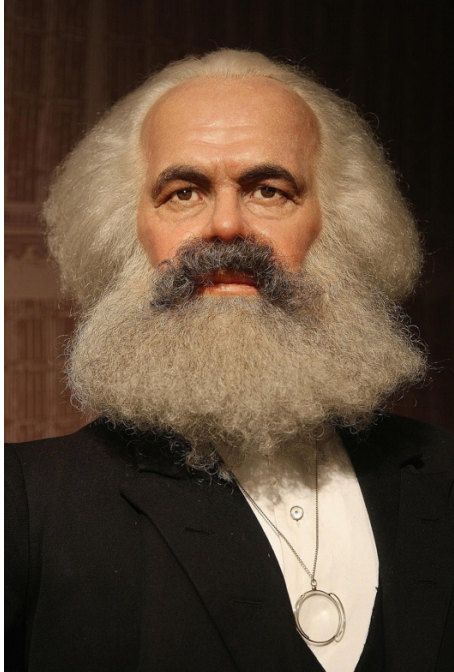
Some Bad-Guy Thinkers

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) – He is in the top four most-influential philosophers of all time. Hegel’s philosophical system was an attempt to explain everything. However, he is best known for producing a philosophy of how history progressed. History evolves through a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis (to be fair, this terminology is from Johann Fichte, not Hegel, but it’s helpful for understanding the genesis of Hegel’s idea). In his major work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he promoted a type of panentheism with the idea that God (German: “*Geist*”) is so intimately bound to his world that God and the world evolve together. God and the world (humanity) are both involved in a process of change. Human society and culture progress over time, and *Geist* continues to reach a state of self-actualization and self-realization.



- This was in response to the objective, mechanistic view of the world in the Enlightenment.
- This led to process theology.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) – Karl Marx believed that free market capitalism confused a worker’s *use value* with *exchange value* and believed that, therefore, the only way to avoid being a slave to the bourgeoisie was to abolish private property and have the state equally redistribute wealth. He promoted these ideas in *The Communist Manifesto* and, more importantly, *Das Capital*.



“The history of all...society is the history of class struggle...in a word, oppressor and oppressed.” -Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

“In this sense, the theory of Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.” -Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

“They [the communists] openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” -Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*

-Marx’s theory was severely flawed: 1. The proletariat, in a communist system, never actually owns the goods – *the government does*, 2. Capitalism was making everyone richer (not just the bourgeoisie), 3. There was a growing and content middle class, 4. The communist revolution didn’t happen in the most capitalistic nations as Marx said it should, 5. Laborers in capitalistic nations *could* actually afford their labor and 6. It was based on a view of humanity that saw us as primarily good or neutral instead of sinful.

-When I read *The Communist Manifesto* I was shocked by the following things:

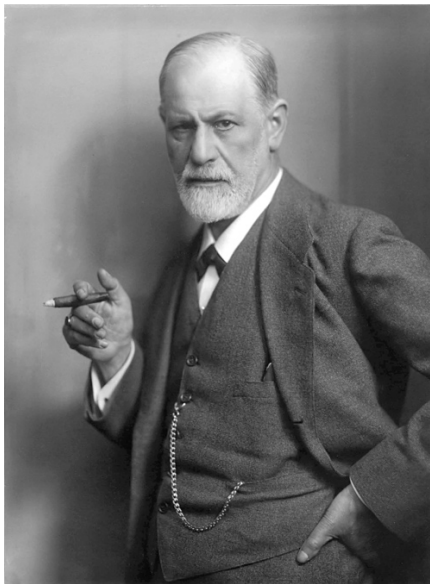
- How emotional (instead of logical) it was.
- How it sought to abolish marriage and the family.
- How it stated that women would be the common sexual property of the proletariat once marriage was abolished.
- How it said that land from immigrants should be taken away.
- How it made fun of those who organize charities and care about animal rights.
- How it must promote its views through force instead of winning people by argument.

- How explicit Marx was that you have to have *violent* revolution to lead to communism. *He condemns those who think they can vote it in or do it peacefully.*
- How there was no “green” or “eco” side to Marx. He thinks communism will lead to more industry – caring for nature is not his concern.
- How there is no “racial reconciliation” side to Marx. Marxism is an international movement based solely on *economic* standing. Someone who tried to make oppression all about their race would be stealing and silencing the voice of the poor.
- How it reasoned in a circle.).

-Marx was not an original thinker. First, his ideas came from Rousseau and Rousseau’s ideas came from Plato. Second, he was wrong; capitalism was not inherently illogical. Third, he was kind of a loser (examples).

-Socialism is the most evil worldview of all time. It’s estimated that over 110,000,000 people have been murdered under communist regimes.

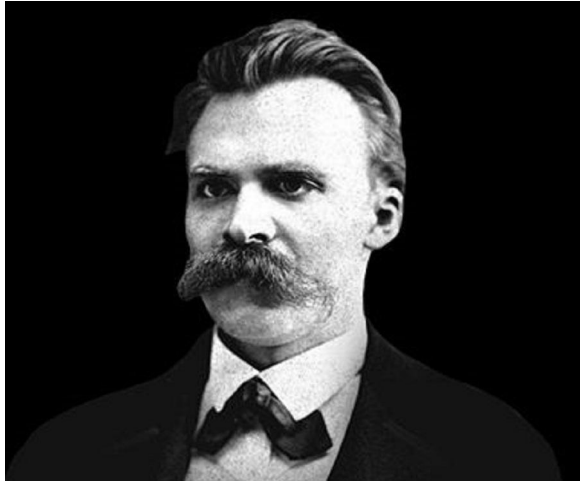
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) – The founder of modern psychoanalytical theory. Freud, along with Ludwig Feuerbach, believed that humans projected their insecurities in life onto a father-figure (God) which is what led to the invention of religion. Freud believed that our unconscious mind affects us much more than we realize and, through psychoanalysis, sought to make the unconscious conscious. He believed that our natural urges for sex and violence are our strongest subliminal drives, and we simply channel them into other areas of life.



- He was a pretty weird guy.
- If you have ever wondered why sexual identity has become a public matter, it is because of this guy.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) – An existentialist philosopher who absolutely hated Christianity. He believed that Christianity was a religion for losers (“a slave morality”).

Christianity is what happens when people who are not excellent cannot achieve great things in life. Instead, they comfort themselves in their mediocrity by promising themselves something in the next life. Nietzsche instead believed that we should seek to become an "ubermensch."



- His views were eventually adopted by a lot of Nazi high officials.
- He died in an insane asylum after catching syphilis from a prostitute.
- He is often cited as saying "God is dead" but Christians usually have no idea what he means by that phrase. What Nietzsche meant by that phrase as it occurs in his work, *The Madman*, is that the Enlightenment has killed God in that it has an explanation for everything without him, and yet we still hang onto his commands about morality. We live in the shadow of a society that used to have God but doesn't have him any longer.

The Parable of the Madman from *The Gay Science*

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"---As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?---Thus they yelled and laughed

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. We have killed him---you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine

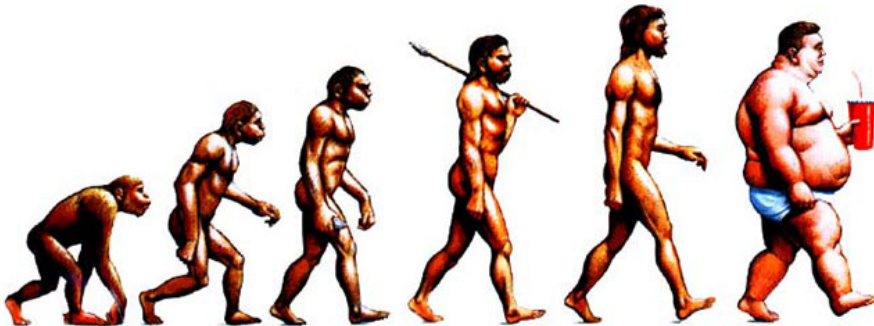
decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us---for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than most distant stars---and yet they have done it themselves.

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his requiem aeternam deo [eternal rest to God]. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) – The father of modern evolutionary theory. His influence was enormous. Human evolution is the given standard in the academic community around the world.



-Though Darwin somehow got the credit for his view, other thinkers both modern (such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, 1744-1829), and ancient (Anaximander, c. 500 BC and Lucretius, 99BC-55BC) already had fully-formed views of natural processes, including evolution!

-He once ate an owl, he had one degree (in theology, not science), and he married his first cousin.

-He believed that some humans evolved more than others; this led to actual racism:

The full title of his book, *On the Origin of Species* is: *On the origin of species by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*

“The Western nations of Europe...now so immeasurably surpass their former savage progenitors [that they] stand at the summit of civilization...The civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races through the world.” –Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

The Postmodernists - Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Richard Rorty, and others. We will have a whole lesson on the influence of postmodernity in the church, so we will hold off on a full explanation here. But essentially all claims to truth are not objectively true but just an attempt to gain power over those who are not in the accepted truth class.

Some Bad-Guy Theologians

Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) – He believed that Jesus was simply the ideal man and not the eternal Word of God. By saying that Jesus is “deity” Ritschl simply meant that he had perfect knowledge of God and was morally obedient. We could not know theological truths objectively because they are merely the value-judgements of a particular community of faith at a particular time. He denied original sin and believed that repentance is more about us changing our mind about God than having his wrath appeased on the cross.



He was a major promoter of the social gospel movement where the focus was on uniting humanity in love and social action toward the less-fortunate, and not on the forgiveness of sins.

Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) – He believed that the early church had corrupted Christianity by incorporating Greek philosophy into it. Therefore, the focus should not be on doctrinal statements about the Trinity or the person of Christ but rather the ethical teachings of Jesus. He believed the early church changed a Christianity *founded* by Jesus (that focused on love) into a Christianity *about* Jesus (Paul’s gospel was different than Jesus’ gospel). Whereas Schleiermacher made Christianity about feeling, Harnack made it about the development of dogma throughout church history. The kernel of Christianity is the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, but the changing “husk” is what you see in different doctrinal statements.



The teachings of Jesus are: “Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming, Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul, Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.” – Adolf von Harnack

As one Catholic critic of Harnack said, “The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through the nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.”

His student would go on to be more famous than him and to repudiate his views...his name was Karl Barth.

Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1974) – The most influential New Testament scholar of the 20th century. He helped pioneer what is called “form criticism” which is where one tries to trace the history of biblical books from oral tradition to how we have them in scripture today. He believed that most of the things about Jesus didn’t come from Jesus but from early Christian communities who distorted his views. He denied the deity of Christ and the resurrection. To understand the

gospels today we have to “demythologize” them – meaning, we have to get rid of the magical, supernatural stuff.



“It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles.” -Rudolf Bultmann

The purpose of religion is not to get an objective view of the world but to understand our struggle in it.

“The real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man’s understanding of himself in the world in which he lives. Myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially.” - Rudolf Bultmann

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) – He taught that there were 1). eternal truths and 2). changing culture. Our definitions of “orthodoxy” is what you get when you combine the two. But you shouldn’t combine the two because the eternal truths are what matter. To Tillich, Jesus is not literally God but merely a symbolic example of what humanity is meant to be. Tillich tried to create a theological system that made Christianity credible on a basis of philosophical existentialism.



“A theological system is supposed to satisfy two basic needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for every new generation. Theology moves back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received.” -Paul Tillich

“God does not exist ... He is being itself beyond essence and existence.” -Paul Tillich

John Hick (1922-2012) – John Hick believed that there is evil in the world because God must distance himself from humans, not only so we can make our own choices, but so we can suffer and go through “soul-making” (meaning, difficult issues that teach us virtue). Hick was one of the major promoters of religious pluralism. He believed that someone doesn’t have to trust Jesus personally, because they can just follow whatever “god” they know. In his works *The Myth of God Incarnate* and *God and the Universe of Faiths* he argued that all religions ultimately lead to the same goal.



Bad ideas that came from these guys that you even see in some churches today:

The idea that animals have as much value as humans (Darwin)

The focus on social justice over preaching the gospel (Ritschl)

The focus of theology being on your experience with God and how you deal with life (Bultmann)

Treating the Bible just like a regular, non-inspired book (all of them)

Identifying yourself by a sexual orientation (Freud)

The idea that creation can change or affect God (Hegel)

Redistribution of wealth or more equality between classes (Marx)

The focus on equality of outcome instead of personal freedom (Marx)

The idea that authority, power, or privilege are bad (the postmodernists)

The idea that we can't know absolute truth from a God's-eye view (the postmodernists)

Watering down Christianity to make it more palatable for people today (Bultmann and Tillich)

The idea that people can be saved in other religions (Hick)

The idea that resisting your sexual urges can be unhealthy (Freud)

The idea that Christian morality is actually immoral (Nietzsche)

Downplaying the importance of doctrine and the importance of philosophy in doing theology (Harnack)

Viewing people in terms of "oppressor" and "oppressed" (Marx)

The idea that Christianity is primarily about loving others instead of primarily about Christ (Harnack)

The idea that you should live your best life now and maximize your potential (Nietzsche)