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**AN INQUIRY INTO THE PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCE
OF ATHEISM IN THE MODERN WORLD**

By

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Abstract

This article “An Inquiry into the Philosophical Source of Atheism in the Modern World” is evoked by the perception that modern philosophy began by relegating metaphysics as its point of departure. Metaphysics, the science of being as being, is banished and replaced with the philosophy of consciousness (cogito) instead. But the challenges of the relegation and replacement have generated a series of problem including an orientation towards the ungodded society. Consequently, Descartes’ cogito, the basis for all modern philosophies, henceforth could not bridge the gap between noumenon and phenomenon, between thought and reality; for the idea of God does not necessarily involve the existence of God. Therefore, it is the belief of this article that an inquiry of such kind, through a critical and conceptual analysis of modern philosophies of consciousness may open up to a philosophical source of ungodded society today. The analysis of this inquiry uncovers and argues that the relegation of metaphysics implies the relegation of the science of being whose act it is to be (esse). The relegation of the science of being whose act it is to be implied the rejection of God, hence atheism.

Keywords: Atheism, Consciousness, Existentialism, God, Metaphysics and Modern philosophy.

Introduction

To say whether Metaphysics is either destroyed, rejected or relegated from the very beginning of modern philosophy implied the same thing. That God is kicked out of the contemporary society is not unfounded; the consequence is huge, and it is an orientation towards the ungodded society. The destruction of metaphysics in the modern era has implied atheism. Contemporary atheism is a determination of man to live without God as a matter of principle. The philosophies of modernity have striven to eliminate metaphysics as the science of being whose act it is to be. The success of modern philosophy in suppressing the existential thing has generated a series of grievous problem. Hence the problem is not difficult to grasp.

If a metaphysics of being whose act it is to be is excluded or relegated, *esse* or existence will surreptitiously return as a metaphysics of non-being. To live in the rejection of absolute being is to fuse life without God within the metaphysics of non-being. Thus, such a rejection of God in modern philosophy can be explored and is dependent on three main sources: The philosophical, the anthropological, and the cognitional sources of atheism

¹However, the focus of this paper is only on the philosophical source of ungodded people.

Methodologically, this study employs the use of critical and conceptual analysis of the rejection of metaphysics in the modern philosophy to uncover the philosophical source of atheism. The approach includes: First, to examine the nature of metaphysics as a course of study. Secondly, to x-ray the origin of its rejection in the modern philosophy. Lastly, to highlight the atheistic implication of the rejection of metaphysics and its consequent effects today.

The Nature of Metaphysics

An examination of the nature of metaphysics reveals that Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that studies existence; that deals with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, time and space. Etymologically, the word metaphysics is derived from a collective title of the fourteen books of Aristotle that we currently thought as comprising his *Metaphysics*. It all originated from Aristotle's disciple, Andronicus of Rhodes, in 70 B.C., who in editing of his master's works, used the term '*Ta meta-ta-phusika*' to designate the works of Aristotle that came after the '*Physica*' (physics) might have been studied. The physical ones are the books that contained what we now call Aristotle's Physics.² For Thomas Aquinas following Aristotle, "metaphysics is at once first philosophy, so far as it considers the highest causes, and natural theology inasmuch as it considers God; Metaphysics in its entirety is ordered to the knowledge of God; because being is first of all, God, apart from whom no being whatever exists."³

Regarding the subject matter of metaphysics, we know that both the ancient and medieval philosophers defined metaphysics by its subject-matter. A science that studies 'being as such' or 'the first causes of thing' or 'things that do not change'. But metaphysics is becoming difficult to be defined that way today. This is probably on account of some two reasons. First, by some philosophers who rejected the existence of those things that had once been seen as constituting the subject of metaphysics. Secondly, and perhaps on account of many philosophical problems lopped into as metaphysical problems that in actual fact are not related to the first causes or unchanging things - such as the problem of free will or that of the mental and the physical.

No matter how difficult it has turned out for modern man to say what Metaphysics is, for Aquinas who developed his philosophical and theological work within the classical

metaphysics of Aristotle, and culminated the Medieval Scholasticism as well, metaphysics, the “first philosophy, and a philosophical science of the divine (*Scientia Divina*) are one and the same. Following Aristotle, he is convinced that there is a science that studies being as being. Like other theoretical sciences, metaphysics must have a given subject.”⁴ According to Aquinas “this subject matter is ‘being’ in general (*ens commune*) or being as being.”⁵ Initially Aquinas thought God or the Divine as the subject matter of metaphysics. But for Avicenna (980 -1037) and Averroes (1126 - 1198) who refused to identify the subject matter of metaphysics with God or the divine, Aquinas toed their line because no science can demonstrate the existence of its own subject. Aquinas agrees with Avicenna that God’s existence can be demonstrated in metaphysics, and not in merely physics as Averroes held.⁶

Going with Avicenna and Averroes on this point enabled Aquinas to eliminate God as the subject of metaphysics. But at the same time, he holds that metaphysics belongs to one and the same science that studies its subject and pursues knowledge of the principles and causes of that subject. If being as being or being in general is the subject of this science, then the metaphysician should reason from knowledge of this subject to knowledge of the cause or principle of all that falls under it, that is, under being as being. Aquinas thought this principle is God. For not only that God is not the subject of metaphysics, He is not included under its subject; being as being, as Avicenna probably held it. But God can be studied in metaphysics only indirectly, as the cause or principle of what falls under being as being. In this way, Aquinas was able to defend the unity of metaphysics and the science of the divine in a way that made him unique among thirteenth-century thinkers.⁷ “*Ens commune* is the proper effect of the highest cause, God. This precludes including God under *ens commune*, for He would then cause Himself.”⁸

Modern Creation

Abandoning the subject of metaphysics as treated in the classical metaphysical works of Aristotle, and culminated in Thomas Aquinas, has forced some modern authors to create an artificial demarcation in what they called problems for ‘old metaphysics’ and for ‘new metaphysics.’ Peter van Inwagen and Meghan Sullivan have lop-sided into metaphysics many philosophical problems that actually are not related to the “first causes or unchanging things” in the new creation of some problems for “new metaphysics.” Such problems as free will, the mental and the physical are not related to the first causes of things or the unchanging things.⁹ They are but rather the modern creation of metaphysics.

The Origin of the Destruction of Metaphysics in the Modern World

According to Stumpf, “although philosophy rarely alters its direction and mood with radical suddenness, there are times when its new concerns and emphases clearly separate it from its immediate past. Such was the case with seventeenth-century Continental rationalism, whose founder was Rene Descartes and whose new program initiated modern philosophy.”¹⁰ The trend of atheism which has attained its climax in the contemporary society, no doubt originated from the ‘*cogito ergo sum*’ of Descartes.

Epistemological Idealism - Rene Descartes (1596 - 1650)

Rene Descartes, a French philosopher, is widely considered the father of modern philosophy because he turned the focus of philosophical investigation from the world of objects to the thinking subject. This implies that he provided the seed for a new philosophy that broke away from the old in an important way. The “old” philosophy is Aristotle’s as it was appropriated and interpreted throughout later medieval scholastic period of

Aquinas. *Cogito ergo sum* is the bedrock of epistemological idealism. This is because for Descartes, the only thing that can be known is whatever that goes on in the mind. For nothing of an external world can be directly accessed or known about. Thus, the only true knowledge we can have is that of our existence, a position summed up in this his famous statement, *cogito ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am.¹¹ Descartes became dissatisfied with Scholasticism because of the much disputation involved. As a matter of fact, the medieval synthesis was by this time shaken by a whole lot of conflicts of opinions. Descartes was however quick to notice that the positivists' sciences were in comparison making giant strides in the path of progress. This was precisely because they were based on mathematics.¹² But Descartes was largely impressed by the methods of mathematics; which is because Mathematics deals with the purely conceptual without any reference to concrete entities from which the concepts were abstracted. In dealing with these concepts which are '*entia rationis*' mathematics arrives at conclusions that are logically certain, universal and demonstrable, and whose certainty is further guaranteed by the very fact that nothing is said about the extramental foundation of the concepts dealt with. Descartes came to the conclusion that philosophy can become a truly scientific discipline only when it is based on mathematics. But in order for philosophy to be mathematical, it must be occupied only with concepts just like mathematics. In an attempt to establish such a philosophy that deals only with concepts, Descartes had already created a chasm between thought and reality.¹³

This chasm between thought and reality furnished the ground for Descartes' next step of systematic doubt of all things, especially of the extramental realities. Descartes' doubt is not just an ordinary skepticism but a step towards the discovery of a knowledge which is intuitive and certain beyond all doubts. This methodic doubt is but an undertaking based

on the new rules enunciated by Descartes for the procedure of his new philosophy.¹⁴ Following these rules, Descartes was able to discover in the midst of his doubt that the truth '*cogito ergo sum*' is certain beyond doubt. "... this truth, 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' was so solid and secure that the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics could not overthrow it..."¹⁵ Assured of the certainty of the *cogito*, Descartes went forward to establish it as the first principle of his philosophy.

The next step for Descartes was to say what *cogito* stands for, and he made it clear that *cogito* is consciousness. This consciousness includes all the various modes of thinking like comprehending, willing, imagining and perceiving of which we are immediately aware of. Thinking in Cartesian philosophy is not a thinking about being but rather a thinking about thought. Of course, consciousness for Descartes is always self-consciousness, and this self-consciousness is the ground of man's existence. "... if I had merely ceased to be conscious ... I had no reason to believe that I should still have existed."¹⁶ Descartes, therefore, locates the essence of man in thinking. Having established the consciousness of the self, and the certainty of the existence of the self, Descartes made an attempt to recover all the extramental realities he banned under the methodic doubt starting with God. In dealing with the question of God, Descartes was operating from within the confines of consciousness and its ideas. He discovered and concluded that the idea of God is an innate idea in man, an idea which does not derive from any extramental thing nor could it proceed from the factitious agency of man. So, Descartes clarifies:

The only possibility left was to hold that the idea had been put in me by a nature really more perfect than myself, and in fact possessing all perfects of which I could have any idea, that is to say to explain myself in one word, by God.¹⁷

According to Descartes, this innate idea of God is at variance with other mental ideas because it necessarily carries with it the fact of existence; and the idea of God would be impossible without God's existence. But because the idea of God is possible, Descartes concludes that God must therefore necessarily exist. Having established the existence of God, Descartes made God the ground for the existence of other extramental things. God is the cause of the mechanical world. This mechanical causality of God is a matter of necessity. God necessarily causes things to exist. Hence God for Descartes is essentially a cause and to cause things is essentially his function. But if God functions necessarily as a cause, then he operates only as a nature and cannot be distinguished from nature. Thus, in Cartesian philosophy, the reality of God became absorbed into cause.

Reacting to Descartes' stand on natural theology, it must be affirmed that his doctrines rendered the question of God difficult. His attempt to prove the existence of God ended in a woeful failure, precisely because he started from within consciousness, cut off from reality. All Descartes was able to arrive at is the idea of God within the immanence of consciousness and not the really existing God. But concepts do not in any way demonstrate the existence of any extramental reality. According to D. P. Dryer:

By concepts alone we cannot know whether anything exists. Even if we think of some objects as real, our employment of the concept real does not then give us knowledge of the reality of that of which we are thinking.¹⁸

Perhaps because Descartes offers his argument deriving from the *cogito*, modern philosophy in due course would logically and successfully overthrow the Cartesian proofs.

Also being left with no other probative argument from their father Descartes, the logical consequence of the *cogito* having emerged more conspicuously, post-Cartesian philosophers would necessarily opt for atheism, implicitly or explicitly.

Descartes' notion of God as being cause is equally untenable. It is true that Thomas Aquinas gave the proof of God as the efficient cause of everything in his second way, it does not follow that God's essence is causality because this implies that God's causal act in creation is by necessity and not by freedom. Such relegation of God to the level of cause and the consequent withdrawal of God's freedom is but another more subtle way of denying God. God creates as a free being; a being that creates necessarily without being free to do so or not to do so is not and can never be God.

Critical Idealist - Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, was anxious to rehabilitate metaphysics which was at the verge of decay, after the Empiricists-Rationalists debacle on the issue of knowledge and the certainty of knowledge. Kant came to the conclusion that what ought to be done in order to furnish metaphysics with certainty is to affect a 'Copernican Revolution' by supposing "... that object must conform to our knowledge."¹⁹

It is within this framework that Kant limited knowledge to sensibility and understanding. Kant wrote: "There are two stems of human knowledge namely sensibility and understanding which perhaps spring from common ... root through the former, objects are given to us, through the latter, they are thought."²⁰ The faculty of sensibility comprises the *apriori* structures of space and time to which objects must conform if they are to be known at all. The sensible intuition is received in the sensibility via the "*a priori*" forms. What is given is then thought by the understanding via the categories. But the categories according to Kant are applicable only to the objects of possible experience.

Thus, they do not apply to any other object whatsoever except those given in sensibility.

Kant then maintained that no synthetic *apriori* judgment can be made about anything that falls outside the cognitional horizon of space - time coordinates of the *apriori* forms of sensibility, and which cannot be conceptualized by the categories. Such a thing he declared to be unknown and unknowable. Kant later identified the unknown and unknowable with the noumenon, the thing-in-itself. While the thing as it appears, the phenomenon is known and knowable, the thing-in-itself is permanently beyond the grasp of human knowledge.²¹

With this disposition, Kant dealt a final blow to all types of metaphysics, especially the metaphysics of God. This he did by showing that the objects of perennial metaphysics are not given within the spatial-temporal horizon of the *apriori* forms. Thus, all efforts to speculate on them through the pure reason result in transcendental illusions of different kinds. On account of this, metaphysics has become an illusion in Kant, who was anxious to rehabilitate it. As if that was not enough, Kant further maintained that no theistic argument, no matter how erudite and sophisticated can establish the existence of God.

Consciousness which originated in Descartes' *cogito* is already gathering momentum in Kant. That conscious self which doubted everything in Descartes does not seek to bridge the gap between thought and reality as Descartes did, but has become the prime and sole factor in the establishment of the truth of things. Only those things that satisfy the obligation of conforming to the subjective *apriori* condition are declared to be existing and intelligible by the subject. Locked within the aprioriness of its' *apriori* structures, the self has radically lost all means of bridging to God. As a result, Kant easily concluded to an agnostic position, on the ground that all theistic arguments are impossible.

Kant was not yet over with his harm. He maintained that

God's existence is only assumable on the ground of morality. God's existence then has no rational justification but on moral grounds. It is understandable that the *Critique of Practical Reason* of 1788 follows on from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* of 1781, which was a critique of the pretensions of pure theoretical reason to attain metaphysical truths beyond the ken of applied theoretical reason. The implication of this awkward position of Kant is that if morality is removed, then God's existence will be totally undetermined or even incredible. The danger hidden in this stand of Kant on theism was shown by George A. James who wrote:

It was transposition of religious ideas from the realm of metaphysics to the realm of practical reason, the idea of belief in God as the support for moral action, that attracted the most violent assault upon theistic ideas in the following generation.²²

Absolute Idealism - J G Fichte (1762-1814) & G W F Hegel (1770-1831)

Johann Gottlieb Fichte is one of the founding figures of German idealism in the period between Kant and Hegel, and according to Stumpf:

Now the idealists put forward the opposite thesis, namely, that what is, is knowable. At the same time, the first idealist, Fichte, had no intention of reverting to the kind of metaphysics Kant had rejected. Fichte believed that Kant had achieved genuine progress in philosophy, and he intended to carry forward what he had begun.²³

From the above statement, it is no longer difficult to see that the conscious ego of Descartes and Kant was transformed in Fichte into an absolute ego, which in order to be responsible to itself for its action, need not to be dependent upon anything outside itself for its existence. The moral responsibility of this Absolute ego springs from its self-affirmation, its positing itself. This positing of itself is absolute. The absolute ego is the ideal self of man to which man ought to conform by performing his moral duties. But though it is the ideal, the absolute ego is “more truly real than any merely finite self, it is more truly a self...”²⁴ The position of Fichte throttled belief in the ontological reality of God and opened the way to a more explicit atheism. Fichte denied that God was an entity or a substance. He attempted a deontologization of the divine reality. It is in this context that his atheism became clearer when he said that there is no doubt ... that the notion of God as a separate substance is impossible and contradictory...²⁵

By deontologization of the divine reality and reducing it to insubstantiality, Fichte effectively denied the existence of God. The God of Judeo-Christian revelation is a substance, separate from the world. To deny this fact as Fichte did is nothing but atheism, pure and simple.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the culmination of German idealism, availed himself of the Cartesian emphasis on consciousness and attempted to construct a tremendously massive corpus of metaphysics based on a revised transcendental logic. Hegel dismissed the unknowability of the thing-in-itself. With this done, the categories of Kant were transformed from being the subjective conditions of knowledge into being an autonomous category of reality. Hegel equated thought with reality and thus made the mind the source of everything. As he asserts: “reality is rational and rational is real.”²⁶ Thought itself, is located in the activity of the human consciousness. The human consciousness by the process of logic and dialectics

attains to the absolute idea. On contact with the human spirit, the Absolute idea becomes spiritualized. Thus, the Absolute becomes spirit when it is attained by the human spirit. Hegel explained the nature of spirit thus:

The spiritual alone is the actual; it is the essence or being-in-itself; that which relates itself and is determinate, that which is other and for itself; and that which is this determinateness and being outside itself remains in itself-, or other words, it is in and for itself.²⁷

Hegel maintained that man's attainment to the absolute is the same thing as the absolute coming to comprehend itself through the human spirit. The absolute spirit is for Hegel the totality and the ultimacy of all reality. As such, the absolute spirit comprehends everything including itself. The absolute spirit for Hegel is the idea of God knowing himself in himself through the agency of the finite human spirit (or consciousness). God for Hegel is, therefore, a self-thinking thought.

Hegel further maintained that because God knows himself through the world, his causal act of creating is by an internal necessity of his being. It is only by creating a non-God that God comes to be and knows himself. Hegel asserts "without the world God is not God."²⁸ Hegel was not yet over. He further sought to dissolve all distinction between infinite and finite. By so doing Hegel eliminated in effect, the correlative issue of the transcendence of the infinite. Hegel sought to show that God and man are one in the Absolute Spirit. The transcendence of God is operative within the finitude of the finite. The contingencies characteristics of the finite are also necessary for the full actualization of the diving of the divine. Thus, Masterson wrote, "... Hegel describes the order of finite being as a necessary aspect of the process whereby the infinite accomplished its full true reality as infinite."²⁹

Though Hegel wrote piles of volumes on God, yet his position is betraying to theism. The Absolute Spirit of Hegel is potential, it is a dynamic process on the way to becoming. But God is a perfect and pure actuality and has not the slightest element of potency in Him. God in Christian theology and philosophy is He who is. The Hegelian absolute spirit is not and can never be God.

Secondly, Hegel dashed the freedom of God's causal act of creation to pieces when he said that God's creative activity is by an inner necessity of his being, so that he can come to be and know himself. But God is pure actuality and is not becoming. The pure act of being in God is constitutionally identical with his knowledge. The creative activity of God is by absolute freedom.

Hegel's confusion of the infinite with the finite is unwarranted. For how can an infinite characteristic be operative in the finite, or how can the exigencies of the finite constitute the actuation of the already infinite? The illogicality of Hegel is apparent here. Obviously, Hegel's position is pantheistic, and any form of pantheism is already anti-theistic.

The Reshaping of the Philosophic Mind - Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Metaphysics had its obituary announcement in Nietzsche. In the later modern period, in an attempt to reshape the philosophic mind, Nietzsche had in his philosophy produced what he called the 'superman' or 'over man' and the philosophy of the will to power. The essence of life for Nietzsche is the will to power. This will to power which is a drive-in human dominates the environment. It is more than the will to survive as it is an inner drive to express a vigorous affirmation of all man's powers, a will to overpower.³⁰ This will to power of Nietzsche reveals then a defiance of man to God; since God is man's other self, his alter ego. It is needless then as it were,

for man to use that which is his, that is, his values and good qualities in postulating another being altogether from himself. Thus, it happens in man's recognition of the Christian God. The human effort therefore must be geared towards a revolutionary mood whereby his greatness can be assured and regained by pitting his recreation of himself against the dissolution of that "God who is a conjecture."³¹

Nietzsche saw the need to create another man altogether, the potentially higher man, the superman, by exposing the burden of Christian morality. This man would be the ideal man. This is a very crucial moment for man which he cannot afford to throw off. Zarathustra spoke to his people, "... Behold, I teach you the superman. The superman is the meaning of the earth." The superman must be against those who propose superterrestrial hopes, since such hopes are all sheer nonsense and binding to moral values that make him captive, and unfree being³² The superman is supposed to be a free spirit. Done with the superman, Nietzsche moved on to the question of God, morality and religion. In the *Joyful Wisdom*, Nietzsche proclaimed that 'God is dead.' "Where is God gone? ... I mean to tell you! We have killed him you and I! We are all his murderers! ... God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him."³³ If God is dead, has he been living, Nietzsche queried? Since Platonion and Christianity conspired to turn the mind towards a beyond then God has been the great and empty image in which fear of life and hostility to reality found self-expression, concealment and justification. For Nietzsche, then, God is the greatest objection against human existence. A life subject to God is of necessity a rejection of man's ingenuity and potentialities. It is taken to be a hatred of humans, a fear of beauty, a rejection of nature and happiness.³⁴ If man continues to recognize moral traits which are idealized as virtues, it becomes then; "the marks of a slave morality which express the will to power of the inferior."³⁵ For Nietzsche, God was already dead, there was no need for the

Christians to continue destroying the era of the superman.

On the origin of religion, Nietzsche writes:

The origin of religion lies in extreme feelings of power which, because they are strong, take men by surprise: and like a sickman who, feeling one of his limbs uncommonly heavy, comes to the conclusion that another man is lying on top of him.³⁶

The consequence of Nietzsche's philosophy is not difficult to perceive. By proclaiming the death of God, Nietzsche opened the way for a total disbelief in the absolute. God was now a non-existent entity, and something not to contemplate about. It becomes very obvious then that the aim of his philosophy was to make God, man's alter ego - his other self and to make the superman a deity. The result is nothing but the enthronement of atheism and the demise of theism.

The Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)

When Husserl began his philosophy on the platform that "phenomenology must honor Descartes as its genuine patriarch,"³⁷ then the theist must be ready to expect for the worse, and embrace the impact. Husserl's phenomenology is but another factor that quickened the rapid advancement of modern philosophy towards militant atheism. Husserl, just like his patriarch-Descartes, intended to launch philosophy on the platform of unshakeable certainty. Husserl repudiated various forms of modern scientific rationalism as naive because of certain questionable assumptions made by the exponents. The way in which prejudices and unproven assumptions can be arrived- is by effecting what Husserl calls the phenomenological epoche. Husserl gave the significance of the *epoche* thus:

It is the methodology through which I come to understand myself as that ego and life of consciousness in which and through which the entire objective world exists for me, and is for me precisely as it is.³⁸

In enacting the phenomenological *epoche*, the mind brackets, that is, detaches itself from all its former knowledge, belief, prejudices and assumptions with regard to the phenomenal world. In bracketing all former knowledge, Husserl arrived at the certainty of the existence of the transcendental ego, and its consciousness. The transcendental ego of Husserl ... “is the ego which while suspends all beliefs about the reality of the world on the ground that are not indubitable, discovers itself as the only apodictically certain being.”³⁹

However, consciousness for Husserl is always to be conscious of something. Whatever is given in consciousness is that which the human mind intends. The given of consciousness is therefore intentional. “The essence of consciousness, in which I live as my own self, is so called intentionality”.⁴⁰ In the issue of knowing, Husserl maintained that the knowing consciousness and the intelligible phenomena are the same. Husserl’s unique point is that: “Phenomena, or whatever is, are ultimately contained in the very subjective act whereby what is, is present to consciousness.”⁴¹ In knowing therefore, the objectness of the object is fashioned for it in so far as it is given in the consciousness. The construction of this objectness of the object is precisely what the function of the intentionality of consciousness is.

Husserl was searching his consciousness for any fact that can be established without any contingent premise. Of course, he discovered the conscious ego. But the significance of the phenomenological method of Husserl in modern philosophy is

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that for him, only that is true, which is given in the immediate data of consciousness. Also, that whatever is grasped in consciousness is the real. "... everything which is and has reality for me, that is, for man, exists only in my consciousness ..."⁴² The implication is that phenomenology has no comfortable place for the ultimate ontological reality, that is God, who is not given in the immediate data of consciousness. Phenomenology did the job of clearing the ground in which contemporary existentialists philosophers would sow their various seeds of atheism and anti-theism.

Existentialism - J. P. Sartre (1905-1980) and Merleau-Ponty (1908 - 1961)

S. E. Stumpf records that existentialism emerged in its contemporary form in Paris following World War II. In its beginning, people did not take it serious since its thoughts were expounded in cafes. Contrary to the expectation, it immediately gained momentum and influence and is still having its sway.⁴³

Existentialism is a philosophical line of thought whose main emphasis is on existence and concrete reality, rather than on essences, ideals and abstractions. It is opposed to any doctrine that view man as the manifestation of an absolute or of an infinite substance. The existentialist doctrine maintains that 'I alone exist'. It places a new emphasis on man's inner life and experience and thus on his immediate, subjective awareness. There is no knowledge, according to the existentialists, apart from a knowing subject. Man's life then, with its moods, anxieties, and decisions, becomes the center of attention. Existentialists' emphasis on personal existence and subjectivity has resulted to a new emphasis on man's freedom and personal responsibility. This emphasis on freedom and personal responsibility leads to the enthronement of the ego opposing man's proper relationship with the absolute.

Freedom is the right to do what pleases one, it is also the

right to choose freely. The consequence of this then, is that God becomes a being that can be chosen or sidetracked. In other words, freedom is working out the demands of one's inner nature and expressing one's genuine or authentic self. This expression of one's genuine and or authentic self however, can lead to the denial of God.⁴⁴ From the above description, the meaning and aim of existentialism is not far-fetched. Existentialism by idolizing the self and personal freedom, has presented itself as a kind of radical atheism. "Atheism had become an important cause of the problems that gave rise to existentialism... a growing sense of life's worthlessness and meaninglessness."⁴⁵

For instance: **Jean Paul Sartre**, a French existentialist philosopher, whose "idea of God is that there can be no God. Hence man's striving after God is doomed to utter failure. For God is the same thing as the metaphysical absence and impossibility of all being."⁴⁶ It is evident that Sartre's philosophy is atheistic, which can be drawn insistence on freedom of man and from the position that the idea of God is contradictory. "Man commits suicide when he creates God."⁴⁷ Likewise **Maurice Merleau-Ponty**, a French phenomenologist, being an authentic man would mean living fully in relation not to God, but to the world and others. For man has no business at all with the absolute hence the idea of God should be erased from man's consciousness.

Conclusion

Relegation of Metaphysics implies Atheism

Examining some modern philosophers has revealed that modern philosophy had its starting point with the rejection of metaphysics. Rejecting the science of being as being implies rejection of God. Without prejudice to cognitional source of atheism, rejection of metaphysics began in the 16th century, when Francis Bacon rejected scholastic metaphysics in favor of empiricism. In the 18th century, a hardliner- empiricist,

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David Hume argued that all genuine knowledge involves either mathematics or matter of fact, and that metaphysics, which goes beyond physics and mathematics, is worthless. "... commit it then to the flames all metaphysical work, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."⁴⁸ Responding to Hume, Charlton would ask, why was metaphysics rejected by the modern philosophers? For the hidden agenda driving anti-metaphysics, is precisely the destruction of all values, that is, nihilism.⁴⁹ The key elements of a rational metaphysics cannot be matched with Hume's radical measuring gouge in order for it to remain the foundation of philosophy. In the science of being as being, reality is absolute. It has a specific nature independent of our thoughts or feelings. The world around us is real. It has a specific nature and must be consistent to that nature. A proper metaphysical world-view must aim to understand reality properly.⁵⁰

The orientation of the modern philosophies of consciousness to atheism has been highlighted. The success of modern philosophy can be gouged from the fact that a high percentage of educated people accepted atheism as the intellectual stance proper to the sophisticated. Atheism had become an important cause of the problems that gave rise to existentialism. The existentialists struggle against meaninglessness, some of them took a frank atheistic position and drew out all the consequences of such a position in formulating their approach to life."⁵¹

By virtue of its orientation to atheism, modern philosophy was bound to consider religion in a superficial way. By virtue of its anthropocentric anthropology, it was bound to consider religion in terms of a-this worldly immanence. In a-this worldly immanence, anthropology the theme of religion became man himself and his various needs. With the vertical worship of God excluded as other world illusion, the core of this world religion becomes the moral life, healing and social justice.

Morality, healing and social justice constitute significant abiding human issues. But when these themes are made to be the heart of a-this world immanence, they effectively ungod the participants. Religion which anthropocentric anthropology had shaped to the contours of culture and ethnic group cannot hold man into transcendence. Religion understood in the light of modernity is a factor in the ungodding of people. However, this is not the first-time religion has been a factor in the ungodding of people. Natural pre-Christian religion has been constantly unable to sustain the metaphysical insights in natural theology. It has failed to hold man out into the transcendence of God. The darkness of excessive light seems to have defeated it. It has turned into the subjection of the worldly powers. Natural religion has continuously expanded itself on protection from enemies in the healing of sickness, in the explaining of death. In the midst of these woes to man, transcendence is side-tracked and natural religion becomes a process of ungodding.

That pre-Christian natural religion and the religion of modernity should be agents of ungodding is not strange. What is strange, however, is the speed and enthusiasm with which many exponents of the Christian faith have sought to make Christianity take its place among the religions of a-this worldly immanence. From this, theological consequences follow. In the practical order, Christianity is then shaped to the anthropocentric demands of the-this world religion. The pastoral of social justice, of healing and the good moral life are not opening to Christ. They are being performed as exigencies of this world religion. In a grave moment many Christian exponents have allied themselves with the forces active in the ungodding.

The conclusion is simple. A philosophical implication of relegating metaphysics in the modern philosophy is ungodded people. Such atheism combined with philosophical naturalism is sure recipe for existential disaster. The formular is simple: no God, which includes the associated concepts of Divine

accountability, equals no ultimate hope, no ultimate value and no ultimate purpose, and this is clearly evident with the contemporary existentialist philosophers.

Endnotes

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