

Secular Gnosticism and Classical Realism

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IN *The Trouble With You Innerleckchuls*, Marion Montgomery follows the lead of Eric Voegelin, Hans Jonas, and Gerhart Niemeyer in branding secular or modern gnosticism as being the trouble with today's intellectuals. Montgomery explains that gnosticism is "the willed separation of consciousness from existence," or "the separation of the self from creation by an act of intellect."¹

We might wonder whether this malady really is endemic among today's intellectuals. For, after all, the most prominent metaphysics (theory or reality), so far as there is one in today's intellectual world, is materialism; according to which man is different only in degree from other animals, they in turn different only in degree from plants, and finally all so-called living things different only in degree from the things and materials that make up this vast physical cosmos. As Carl Sagan so strikingly puts it, we are nothing but star stuff.

But let us recall Descartes, the father of modern philosophy. Montgomery's definitions of gnosticism seem to fit. Hark back to *Meditations*, where, by an act of intellect, Descartes separates himself as a conscious, thinking, feeling thing from the whole of material existence, including his own body. So, Descartes is a gnostic; but what about his materialistic progeny? Have not they, by insisting that

whatever heretofore has been called "mental" will hereafter be called "material," put us squarely back in existence, as one of the accidental products of the inexorable cosmic process, matter moving lawfully? To be sure we can no longer speak of creation, if that implies a Creator. But just as surely we seem to be in nature, wholly and completely.

As for consciousness (or the self, as in self-awareness) that too is explained (away?) by the hard-nosed materialist. Thus Wooldridge (co-founder of TRW, Inc.) writes that consciousness, while it certainly exists, is epiphenomenal.² Like the foam on the crest of the wave, it is there, but it makes no difference to anything. Each animal in this world, human or otherwise, would be right now doing, saying, "thinking," "feeling" exactly the same even if consciousness had never arisen.

For another example, think of the late B.F. Skinner, who tried so valiantly to make psychology a true science. Have we not learned from his version of materialism that no one of us human beings is a self? That none of us is either free or dignified? That instead the behavior of each of us, down to the tiniest detail, is determined by laws and forces over which none of us has the least control?

But now, let us reflect on the apparent inconsistencies in thinkers like

Wooldridge and Skinner. Thus Wooldridge, convinced that consciousness, including his own conscious awareness of the truth of "consciousness makes no difference," makes no difference, has written more than one book presumably consciously directing us consciously (and conscientiously) to accept the consequences of materialism. Likewise, Skinner, convinced of modern materialistic scientism, but alarmed at the horrifying problems which threaten the continued existence of the human species, urges us to deliberately change our ways, give up the illusions of freedom and dignity, and join him in developing the science and technology of human behavior.³

So reflecting, we might conclude that a truly consistent materialist would presumably never fall into the trap of arguing his position, not even with himself. As soon as he does, and somehow to avoid being inconsistent, he must become a gnostic. Perhaps it is his gnosticism that enabled Skinner to weather the storm of criticism that descended on him for decades. The intellect, the "mind" in some sense or other, it seems, will not be denied. The materialist rejects Descartes' "mind," and for the very good reason that neither Descartes nor any of his gnostic successors could explain how that "mind" and that "matter" could interact; but in a variety of ways asserts his own "mind," although he would never call it "mind," certainly not in Descartes' sense, as completely distinct from matter. But the paradox is that when the modern mind "discovers" itself, and it cannot help so doing, it finds itself completely cut off from what it regards as existence: body or matter; and so finds itself free to say and do anything it wants. Ponder whether or not this is the case by considering the plethora of isms extant; and then the sometimes apparently widely varied content of these isms: nominalism, existentialism, communism, libertarianism, feminism, deontologism,

utilitarianism, and not to forget the crowing glory of them all, deconstructionism.

It seems that Montgomery, *et. al.*, are right: the trouble with you "innerleckchuls" is gnosticism. As the character in O'Connor's novel puts it, "...you [innerleckchuls] don't never have nothing to show for what you're saying." It seems also that Descartes is the prime culprit; he is indeed the father of modern philosophy. Modern or secular gnosticism can be seen as so many variations on Descartes' subjectivism.

The crucial terms in what follows are "subjectivism" and "matter." Let me begin by quoting a bit from a most suggestive portion of Montgomery's book.

In general we may say that gnosticism, by intellectual fiat, reduces "matter" or "body" or "nature" or "creation"—terms with kindred meanings and intent but separate nuances. This attitude toward existence has a passive presence in all of us; by the illusion that by not willing to act against it we are at least neutral, we conclude ourselves not party to the deconstructions of creation. In its virulent stage, which infects our passive attitude, modern gnosticism intends to reduce existence by separating mind or spirit from all else through the active, violent power of its own thought, whose immediate instrument, tailored to the given occasion, is words. In a vocabulary made popular through phenomenology and psychology, and in the philosophies that grow out of those recent concentrations of mind upon existence, gnostic thought separates consciousness from the content of consciousness. It separates "subject" from "object."⁴

Montgomery here applies this to his interpretation of Flannery O'Connor; and on the next page continues,

The consequence of such intellectual isolation from existence—not only in respect to our judgment of it from an orthodox faith about existence such as Miss O'Connor's *but in relation to the realities of our experience of the world even at a secular level*—is necessarily destructive of

consciousness. That is, man in his natural no less than in his supernatural dimension is reduced by presumption. *What is lost in the reduction is a recognition of potential being.*⁵

Three things, then. First, I will engage in neither Bible-waving nor pulpit-pounding. (Incidentally, Montgomery finds Fundamentalism to be a modern gnosticism.) Second, and more substantive, we need to look at and understand Descartes' subjectivism and consider whether that is the root of modern gnosticism. Third, and again more substantive, we need to consider "matter," to consciously and reflectively recognize potential being.

Subjectivism. What are we immediately aware of? What, right now, are the direct objects of our awareness? To the extent we are not under the influence of Descartes' subjectivism, we would answer: myself, other human beings, other animals, plants, a plethora of artifacts made out of inanimate things and materials; and the colors, shapes, odors, etc. of this wide variety of things.

If Descartes' theory of knowledge (his subjectivism) is correct, then all of us who answered that way are mistaken. The direct objects of awareness, instead, are ideas in our minds. To speak more carefully, I had better say that the direct objects of my awareness are ideas in my mind. I, of course, have no awareness of ideas in your mind, or for that matter of your mind. One of the perennial problems of modern philosophy is establishing the existence of other minds. But for the sake of understanding Descartes' theory, let us bypass that problem. At the same time, let us continue to be reflective: can I have immediate, direct, awareness of Descartes' theory that only ideas in my mind are objects of direct awareness? or can I only be aware of some idea(s) in my mind of Descartes' theory?

The theory, then, is that only ideas in

my mind are objects of direct awareness. Picture the (my, your) mind, if you will, as a circle. Then insert in that circle as many ideas as your wish. Any of them you can be aware of immediately. Of anything outside the circle—be it a material thing or another mind, finite or infinite—you do not and cannot have an immediate or direct awareness. Here is a subjectivism, a gnosticism, a willed separation of consciousness from any existence outside the self, the mind.

What is striking is that Descartes' successors, for all their disagreements with him, hold to this subjectivism. In fact, one might say that subjectivism, more than anything else, is definitive of modern philosophy. To refresh our memories, let us trace the story a bit. The Britishers Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are in the history of modern thought labelled empiricists, for the reason that they denied that among the ideas in the subjective circle we call mind there are some that are innate, or are there independent of any experience. No, says Locke, the mind is at birth a *tabula rasa*; whatever knowledge we have is built from the simple ideas we have through sensory experience. The empiricist's account of what we are aware of through the senses is hardly different from that of Descartes. To begin with, we are aware only of ideas. To be sure, Hume improved upon the terminology, distinguishing simple *impressions* of sense experience from the more complex *ideas* of memory and reflection; and Hume's later followers are inclined to the term "sense data." But the basic notion is the same; and it is still a subjectivism.

Many of us were turned in the direction of skepticism by our introductory philosophy teacher reviewing the empirical account of sensory awareness. What, strictly speaking, do we hear? Not people, vacuum cleaners, coyotes, etc., but sounds. And then so with the other senses. What do we see? Colors, shapes.

What do we smell? Odors. What do we touch? Textures; hot and cold. What do we taste? Tastes. No wonder that Locke, having gotten through such an analysis, and yet wanting to cling to common sense, concluded that the ordinary things of our experience—those material substances—are somethings “I know not what,” but which somehow underlie and/or cause all the qualities I am made aware of through sensory experience.

No wonder that someone took the next step, and denied the existence of material substance(s). We have but to recall George Berkeley’s brilliant and unanswerable, on subjectivist grounds, argumentation for the existence of minds and ideas only.

The logic of subjectivism is such that David Hume took the next obvious step: the denial of mental substance. Descartes had no business concluding to a doubter. All he had a right to say is that in our experience there is a series of impressions and ideas—a doubt, if you will, then perhaps a pain, a pleasure, a color, a memory, and so on. But a mind? We have no impression of that.

And yet; and yet. Hume’s skepticism did not keep him from writing. Somehow he discovered *his* mind, and wrote a number of volumes to convince readers of the truth that truth is beyond the reach of human powers. Well, what can that truth be but a gnostic truth?

To continue the story. There now appeared on the scene our modern intellectual savior: Immanuel, Kant, that is. Having been awakened from his rationalist dogmatic slumber by Hume, Kant effected what he called a Copernican revolution in philosophy. Given subjectivism, Hume’s skeptical conclusions are inevitable, and philosophically scandalous, so long as we go on supposing that knowledge is a conforming of mind to reality. But let us instead turn that around; knowledge hereafter will be understood as reality conforming to mind. Never mind

that this but certifies, or makes respectable, skepticism: that is, the new gnostic truth is that the mind can never know the things in themselves, but instead only the phenomena—or reality as it appears to us in the forms of sensibility (space and time) and the categories of the understanding (substance and cause, for instance). Kant at least was sure that all minds are the same, guaranteeing not only a universal science, but also a universal morality and a universal aesthetics, and perhaps even theology.

Two hundred years later nothing could be more apparent than that although we still have a universal science, we have anything but a universal morality, or aesthetics, or theology. In all those realms, among the intelligentsia at least, relativism thrives. Kant’s reality is impoverished; only *one* mind, shared by all us rational beings. We know better. In any non-scientific field there are many minds, at least (and hence many gnosticisms); and maybe as many minds as there are human beings.

Permit me here an apology, drawn from moral philosophy. In his recent *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre writes, summarily, “modern moral utterance and practice can only be understood as a series of fragmented survivals from an older past...the deontological character [consideration of duty] of moral judgments is the ghost of conceptions of divine law which are quite alien to the metaphysics of modernity...the teleological character [consideration of ends or consequences] is similarly the ghost of conceptions of human nature and activity which are equally not at home in the modern world...”⁶ Now, I am not sure I can find analogues in general philosophy for deontology or utilitarianism in moral philosophy. But let us try Communism. Might not Marx’s vision of a classless society, of a heaven on earth, be taken as a substitute (a new opium, perhaps!) for the lost hope of a Christian

heaven, of Christ's kingdom? At any rate, I take MacIntyre's point to be that modern thinkers, shorn of the religious and metaphysical underpinnings, have tried desperately to preserve the traditional morality.

Might we not say then, by analogy, that modern gnostic thinkers, their minds torn from reality, have tried desperately to explain man's mind and behavior. In so doing, they attest, despite themselves, to reason's demand for explanation, for getting at the causes of things. There are fashionable gnosticisms that look wearable, and that some of us, I am sure, have tried on. In looking for the determinants of our minds, how about trying on for size things like our time and place in history, or our gender, or our genetic make-up, or our race, or our economic class.

Let us reflect and notice that any such historicist, culturalist, feminist, or whatever-ist, makes an exception for his own mind. However true it might be that environment of some sort or other (behold! we're back to good old B.F. Skinner) determines *other* minds, *his* mind, in discovering that determinant, has risen above it. He seems to have discovered a general cause of something's being the way it is.

But now to go on with the analogy. MacIntyre marks "the historic achievement of Nietzsche in understanding more clearly than any other philosopher . . . not only that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will, but also the nature of the problems that this posed for moral philosophy."⁷ That is to say, Nietzsche destroys the illusion of the modern project to discover a rational (gnostic?) foundation for morality. Nietzsche's conclusion is that morality is not grounded in reason or in moral sense (conscience) but instead in will. Thus each man is conceived as a purely autonomous agent, who by an heroic act of

will can create his own morality, and thereby create himself.

Back from the analogy, is it any wonder that deconstructionism has appeared? Is it not to general philosophy and literature what Nietzsche's nihilism is to moral theory? Is it not the inevitable logical conclusion of subjectivism? Can we hope, the *reductio ad absurdum* of gnosticism?

Well, it is easy enough to find fault with other people's gnosticisms. But what gnosticism, some of you are doubtless thinking, are you going to put in place of them?

Not surprisingly, what I propose is not a gnosticism, not a subjectivism, but instead a turn to what I call classical philosophy or classical realism. Because classical realism can be described as refinement and development of the common ordinary experience of human beings, I suppose we could say it is as old as the human species itself; or at least as old as some men's reflective awareness about a common world. In Western civilization it is that remarkable trio, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who first gave it articulation and resounding voice.

Moreover, these three can be read, understood, and appreciated as fighting against the materialism and skepticism of their day. Ironically, in *Apology*, when Socrates spells out, as though it were written down, the earlier accusations of some of his fellow Athenians against him, they are that he studies things in the sky and below the earth, and makes the weaker argument appear the stronger, or vice versa, and teaches the same technique to others. In other words, Socrates is himself accused of being either a materialist or a skeptic.

First, the materialism. In our era materialism has arisen in large part as reaction to what was taken to be an overweening and oppressive religion. In Socrates' era the still dominant (in his day) mythological religion was being se-

riously challenged by materialism. The pre-Socratic philosophers are typically labeled philosophers (or scientists) because of their rejections of the superstitious explanation of natural, including human, events by way of the will of the gods. No, say the pre-Socratics, all change, human or otherwise, is to be explained by natural causes alone. Either there is no supernature or if there is, it makes no difference to natural events.

Consider the eruption, in 1983, of Mt. St. Helen's. The ancient Greek religious explanation of the phenomenon would have discovered the reason (the final cause, the *real* cause) in the wrath of one or more god or goddess, perhaps irked at the defiance of poor old Harry Truman. And the placation of the god(s) would, I suppose, be throwing ten Portland virgins into the mouth of the volcano. The explanation of the pre-Socratics would have been in principle that of today's geologists—those who study things below the earth.

If Plato's portrait of Socrates is accurate, Socrates was known not to be an enthusiast for the Homeric religion. Just as today one who is not an ardent Creationist might be supposed to be an orthodox evolutionist, so in Socrates' day one not "fer us" is probably "agin' us." Two points, then. First, Socrates was neither a Greek orthodox (of his time) nor a naturalist. Second, and more important, naturalism was thriving among the intellectuals of Socrates' day; and had taken by then a hard-nosed materialistic form, atomism.

Socrates' refutation of that materialism is blunt: if atomism is true, then there is no purposiveness in reality; but there is purposiveness (I sit here, awaiting death by poison at the end of the day, for the purpose of preserving justice in my soul and in the polis); therefore atomism is false.

Plato's development of his peculiar theory of Forms is best appreciated as a

response to materialism. For example, why does Plato expand *The Republic* beyond four or five books? After all, by the end of Book Four Socrates has pretty well met the challenge put to him by Glaucon and Adeimantus, to show that the just life is to be preferred to the unjust life by proving that justice is an intrinsic good. All that remains, it seems, is for Plato to show that he is not being utopian, and to work out the details of unjust souls and regimes. Why, then, that long digression about the Forms, culminating in the Cave Allegory and the outline of the advanced education for prospective rulers? Because Plato was aware of the challenge of materialism. The B. F. Skinner of that day would have said, supposing he had gotten to the end of Book Four: well, this all sounds nice, and doubtless the arguments are valid; but it rests on the faulty assumption that human behavior is, or can be, free and dignified; but we "scientists" know better.

In other words, Plato knew that sound morality rests on sound metaphysics; and ultimately, stands or falls with it. So, the point of the digression is to counter materialism and to provide an account of reality, a refinement and development of our common experience, that underlies and allows us to make sense of our common moral experience as free, dignified, and responsible rational animals.

Aristotle found much to disagree with in Plato's theory of Forms; but, for all that, he is as implacable an enemy of materialism as is Plato. And Aristotle found the way to skin the materialist cat. According to the atomists, matter is the one and only reality. It is Parmenides' One, atomized. There is no real change, no real coming into being or going out of being. Each atom is uncreated, indestructible, uncuttable (the literal meaning). What we experience as change is nought but the result of the atoms (matter) moving about in space, falling apart from one

another or joining together, to make up the appearances of our experience.

Aristotle's response to this is to note that in so arguing the materialists have formalized matter. That is to say, matter for them is the one and only *kind* of reality. But how contrary to the original meaning of "hyle," wood, which is that out of which a plethora of artifacts are made, and which we see then to be potentially bed, chair, table, boat, etc.; how contrary to our common understanding of the matter out of which things natural, as well as artificial, are made; how contrary to our reflective awareness of "matter" being another term for "potential," or "changeable."

Is this not what Marion Montgomery is reminding us of in his suggestion that what is lost in modern or secular gnosticism is a recognition of potential being?

Classical realism, at least since Aristotle, has regarded matter as potential being. Wherever we turn, in all our waking moments, we are aware of potential being, at least to the extent that we have escaped the snares of modern thought. The trees outside are actually bare; they are potentially full of leaf and fruit. The water on the pond is actually frozen; it is potentially liquid. The material for human being is actually a human spermatozoon and human ovum; potentially they are a human being. Each of us is actually living; potentially we are all dead. In short, we live in a changing world, in which everything is what it actually is, but is changeable, is potential. We too! As Montgomery likes to put it, man is *homo viator*—on the way. We are, some of us, actually ignorant; potentially, we are knowing. Some of us are cowardly; we are potentially brave. Some of us are automatons; we are potentially heroes.

Yes, we live in a material world; that is to say, in a changing world. Let "matter" be another word for potential, for changeability. If that sounds strange to us, it is

because of the pervasive influence of the many modern gnosticisms. But consider. Did that frozen pond yonder come from nothing? No, it came from the liquid point, which was matter for the frozen pond. Did your adult stage come from nothing? No, it came first from spermatozoon and ovum, and then from zygote, from fetus, from infant, etc., each stage being matter for the next, each being cause, *material* cause, for the next. Each substance, each primary being, each thing that exists in itself and not in another, is composite of actuality and potentiality, or of form and matter. For living things let us use the terms soul and body, or the Greek *psyche* and *soma*, as is being increasingly done now in the practice of the art of medicine.

Now, what is it that we commonly nowadays take matter to be? Stuff, that occupies space? atoms? sub-atomic particles? sub-sub-atomic particles? the basic building block(s) of everything in nature? the unchanging, unchangeable stuff out of which all items in our ordinary experience are made? One or more of these? If so, we have formalized matter; and in so doing we have lost the recognition of potential being; we have destroyed the fundamental form-matter composite structure of things in nature. Indeed, we now have Nature, because we have only one form, one kind, whose name is Matter.

What, then, do we do with mind? As we have seen, it will not be denied. But what can we make of it? Obviously it is no longer part of Nature. It must then be at least extra-natural if not supernatural.

And what has happened to potential being? In our real world, the world of natural changing things, change is the actualization of potential. Plants actually organize and utilize *material* from earth, water, and sunlight. Animals actually organize and utilize material from plants. But in that other gnostic world what is change? There is only one form now, only one actuality: Matter. What could it

become. Mind? But that is absurd. Whatever gnostic mind is, it is outside Nature. No, change can then only be the motion—locomotion, that is—of bits and pieces of matter. And to what end? None, apparently. The bits and pieces just move about, endlessly, meaninglessly. Mind you, there is order and regularity; but that is because there are also laws of nature which the bits and pieces of matter obey, without fail.⁸

What about man, then? Again, mind will not be denied, even if we contend that mind is not itself real, but only some manifestation of matter moving. The very contention belies the assertion made in the contention. If the mind thus denies potential being—matter in its proper sense—it cannot but tear itself away from the “realities of our experience of the world even at a secular level,” to quote Montgomery again.

But something seems to have been ignored in all this. For has not this attack been directed against materialism? And is it not the case that today’s most sophisticated thinkers eschew metaphysics? and hence materialism, or any other theory of reality? Richard Rorty, for example, has pronounced that not only is metaphysics moribund, but also that those engaging in the activity instead of in what he and his ilk do, keeping the conversation going (among the intellectually sophisticated, of course), are immoral.⁹ In short, in academia at least, skepticism, rather than materialism, seems to be king.

In Socrates’ time, among the intelligentsia skepticism was perhaps as prominent as materialism. And, as we have noted above, Socrates was taken by many of his accusers as being, if not a materialist, then a sophist; and of the most extreme sort, evidently like Euthydemus in Plato’s dialogue of that name, who is skeptical not only of man’s capacity to grasp beauty and goodness, but also of his ability to know the truth. Such ex-

treme sophists seem always to be with us; and some of them aim to make a good deal of a bad bargain by developing, cynically, a technique of winning arguments: twist the opponent’s argument (in court, or on a broader political scene) so that it ends up contradicting itself. That Socrates possessed such a skill is evident from his early conversation with Polemarchus, in Book One of *The Republic*. Polemarchus begins by defining justice as giving each man his due; and after two pages Socrates has twisted this to “justice is a kind of thievery, so long as it’s done to help friends and harm enemies.”

If such conversations were all we knew of Socrates’ thinking, we could not but agree with those of his early accusers who took him as a skeptic, indeed a cynic; and also agree that he was indeed corrupting the youth of Athens. Thanks primarily to Plato we know a good deal more about Socrates’ conversational technique, and discover that he was not a skeptic, much less a cynic. To hark back to Book One of *The Republic*, after Socrates asks Polemarchus, “Is that what you mean?” and Polemarchus replies, “Good Zeus, no, I’ve forgotten what I meant; but I still think justice is helping friends and harming enemies,” Socrates drops his earlier line of questioning, the one that led to the absurd conclusion, and leads Polemarchus to agree that justice cannot be understood as harming anyone. His argument is neither skeptical nor cynical. It is logically valid; and if Socrates and Polemarchus are correct in taking justice to be a human excellence, it is also a sound argument.

So it is, not only in *The Republic* but also in the string of dialogues in which Plato memorializes Socrates. The truth about moral goodness (justice, courage, piety) is evasive; but we humans have the power to know that truth. Moreover, exercise of our awesome, almost godlike, capacity to know the natures and

causes of things, our rational awareness, enables us to provide the natural setting for our moral and political endeavors. Because rational (and *only* because of that) we are moral and political, that is, responsible for the well-being of ourselves and the polity in which we live. In other words, we know enough to recognize that we humans are among the living, growing, conscious things in reality, and most importantly to recognize, as rational, that it is largely up to us whether we actualize our potential as individuals and as citizens of a political community. We need no desperate attempts, like deontology or utilitarianism or pragmatism, to try to hold to a morality which we know deep down to be grounded in our rational (or self-aware) nature.

The big practical problem, instead, is how to bring into being, in our individual lives and in the polity, the excellences of human living—wisdom, courage, temperance, justice—which it is easy enough for us to describe and prescribe.

Through the long period of Western thought dominated by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this classical realism was not seriously called into question. On the one hand, the notion of man's imperfectibility (call it original sin, if you will) echoed the classical awareness of *thereal* difficulty, becoming good people and good citizens. On the other hand, the notion of love for one's neighbor and for oneself echoed the classical awareness of the stringent requirements of a morally virtuous life—being genuinely temperate, not merely continent; or being genuinely caring or loving, not merely tolerant.

Returning to our time, when the regnant skepticism is not only of moral goodness, but also of beauty and truth, I wonder whether the practical outcome is really different from the case where materialism reigns. To begin with, today's skepticism can easily be traced to the father of modern thought, Descartes.

Once he declared, and had it accepted by his successors, that the direct objects of our awareness are ideas in our minds, and not the things and qualities of our ordinary experience, then skepticism was inevitable. The relatively unsophisticated, like Sagan, Wooldridge, and Skinner, suppose, because of the success of modern science, I would guess, that we know the world to be nothing but matter in motion. But the *cognoscenti*, those really schooled in modern thought, know better; know, following Hume and Kant, that our poor minds are not really equipped to know things-in-themselves, if indeed there be things-in-themselves supposed to exist somehow apart from our minds.

But what about the scientific enterprise, then? After all, one cannot deny its success. And surely from the outset it has rested on the discovery that is expressed in the term "materialism." Once again, back to Descartes. He foresaw the coming into being of a new science and technology that would make us "*masters and possessors of nature*." What Descartes predicted has come into being. We may not know the true nature or cause of anything, and hence cannot claim that reality is nought but matter, but we have in the scientific enterprise systematically come to master and possess Nature. No skeptic, then, wishes to deny science, so understood; but many among them are eager to take the lead in prescribing to us to what uses the science and technology should be put. But in accordance with what?

Well, here we are again. Choose your ideology. Then, if you are interested in changing human minds and behavior, learn the techniques of manipulation that have been found indispensable in the natural sciences for control of the inanimate world. Perhaps in this way the problems confronting mankind can be solved. Whether the problem be crime, pollution, mental illness, or what-

ever, engineering is the key to solution. Rehabilitation, new techniques of waste disposal, psychotherapy, etc., etc.—all so many attempts at engineering.

That there is still concern to solve human problems, that therein lies still some awareness of the human, that there still is some recognition that some solutions are better than others (that, for example, Hitler's and Stalin's programs are abhorrent) is, I believe, testimony to a residual philosophy among us. But to the extent that gnosticism (including either its materialist component, or just out-and-out skepticism) grows, that residuum declines. For example, not long ago in the United States it was pretty much taken for granted that a strong family was the bulwark of our republic, the indispensable basic unit of a healthy political community. Among *hoi polloi* I suspect it is still taken for granted. But how many of our gnostic gurus work both in their teaching and in their behavior to disabuse us of that quaint and sentimental notion? And how many of us feel helpless to respond to their attacks, save by waving the Bible?

If there be not something in the nature of man that we can know, which in turn directs us to protect and nurture the family, then the gnostics will have their way. The earliest of the classical realists in our Western tradition, Plato and Aristotle, exploited our common knowledge that men are rational animals. By rationality they did not mean simply that men are capable of calculating and solving problems, but more distinctively (and this after all is what separates us from the beasts) the awesome power to come to know, however haltingly and limitedly, the natures and causes of things. They both went on to note that man's morality follows at once, and only, from the rationality; for given the power to know, we men have the privilege and the responsibility to direct our lives accordingly. And so the moral life is understood

as one of developing the peculiar human excellences of courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice.

Plato and Aristotle also understood that because rational and moral, man is also by nature a political animal. What they meant is that, as rational, we recognize that human needs cannot be met except by human beings living together in community. It's not only that early in life none of us can provide for his own good, clothing, and shelter, but more strikingly that when it comes to our more distinctive human needs—learning to speak, to develop the right intellectual and moral habits—we are dependent upon elders, and hence upon community. And it was evident to them that the most basic unit in that community is the family: parents and children.¹⁰ The common traditional wisdom is that in the family unit a human specimen is most likely to experience and learn the habits of intellectual and moral character that lead to a good and happy life.

The point is that in classical realism the family unit is not questioned, maligned, threatened as being a mere historical product of some particular culture, in some peculiar circumstances of time and clime, and hence subject to the whims and caprices of whatever gnostic ideology has power to dictate its being or non-being; but instead is understood to rest on a human nature shared by us all, no matter when and where we live. It is something that we rightfully struggle to preserve and nurture.

It is more than obvious, the connection of the family to human sexuality, and so I will not dwell on it except to suggest that the solution(s) to the problems of sexuality in our time and clime depend upon restoration of healthy family life.

So, more generally, solutions, such as they can be in the imperfect kingdoms of this world, to the manifold moral and political problems that beset us, can lie only in our understanding and bringing

into actual being out of potential being humans (each of us starting with himself) who are properly rational, moral, and political. And that enterprise in turn rests upon a theory of reality, refined and developed from our common, ordinary understanding of a hierarchic world, where higher levels of being do have power and authority over the lower levels; and where, at the highest level we find a providential God, without whose power, authority, and love all the rest, especially human life, is if not meaningless certainly tragic. That is, we live in a world of changing things, and we all must die. Hence, if the meaning of this life is to be found in this life only, the end for each of us is bound to be unhappy.

In the beginning I said that I would not wave the Bible. If now I seem to be doing so, it is because I want to conclude that classical realism is not only the only proper philosophy, but also is the only one consonant with the Christian faith so many of us share. Or put the other way round, the Christian faith promises fulfillment; the only world that can thus be fulfilled is the one disclosed in the refinement and development of our common, ordinary understanding, that is, in classical realism.

1. Marion Montgomery, *The Trouble With You Innerleckchuls*. Front Royal, 1988, 17, 21. 2. In *Mechanical Man* (New York, 1968). 3. In *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York, 1971). 4. Montgomery, *op. cit.* 14. 5. *Ibid.*, 15. Emphasis mine. 6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, 1981), 104-105. 7. *Ibid.*, 107. 8. Are there laws of nature? If we suppose, as most of us do, that the laws of nature are fundamental ingredients of reality, then the materialist is burdened with a mysterious type of entity. For surely, whatever the laws are, they cannot be God's ordinances. It seems, then, they themselves must be a kind of deity, a supernatural type. If instead we take the laws as convenient shorthand expressions for observed regularities, then we unburden both the materialist and the non-materialist; but we still want explanation of what things are and why they behave as they do; we are still looking for the causes. 9. In Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979). 10. It is true that when in *The Republic* Plato presses himself to give details of the lives of mem-

bers of the Guardian class in his polis of words, or his ideal city, he speaks of total equality in function of females and males, and total community of spouses and children, thus upsetting his and our notion of a nuclear family. That is to say, in the Guardian class no parent would ever know his own natural children, no child would ever know his natural parents. The adults would be parents to all children, the offspring children to all the adults—one big happy communal family. We can appreciate Plato's line of thought: the Guardians are charged with protecting and directing the larger community. Hence they should first of all reproduce, for they are the most likely to have progeny able to lead in the next generation; but second, because they have responsibility for the whole polis, they should not be distracted by the cares and concerns of typical parents with their own little brood. But note that Plato prefaces all this by having Socrates say that he is not sure that these proposals are feasible, or even if they are, that they would be for the best. Moreover, he describes these two proposals as waves that threaten to drown them. And finally the third and largest wave—the most preposterous proposal—is that philosophers must become kings, or vice versa. I take all this to be Plato's heathen version of the doctrine of original sin: it is easy enough to describe what paradise would be, but the human condition is such that it will never come to be; and it would be foolhardy, not to say a contradiction, to try to force it into being. Still, unless and until philosophers become kings, or kings philosophers, men will not be rid of their troubles, that there can be no heaven on earth. 11. In the current academic world, classical realism is represented by a number of thinkers and scholars of the first rank. The very best of these, in my opinion, is Edward Pols. His *Recognition of Reason* (1963) is a response to the challenge of skepticism; his *Meditation on a Prisoner* (1975) is a response to the challenge of materialism; his *The Acts of our Being* (1982) is a prolonged reflexive defense of man as a rational agent and primary being. Henry Veatch's superb work on logic (*Intentional Logic*, 1952, and *Two Logics*, 1969) provides the antidote to the many "logical" and linguistic poisons that have infected our "innerleckchuls." Veatch has also done outstanding work in morals (*For an Ontology of Morals*, 1971), and in politics (*Human Rights: Fact or Fancy?*, 1985). Many others could be mentioned, e.g. Marion Montgomery and those cited by him; William Wallace, especially for his work in the history and philosophy of science; Frederick Wilhelmsen and the late Charles McCoy, particularly for political philosophy; and so on and on. Unless and until humans abolish themselves, in C.S. Lewis' sense of "abolition," classical realism will live; for the great defenders of this tradition always aim to refine and develop the common ordinary understanding of all of us rational animals.