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Herbert Schlossberg's Idols for Destruction Study Guide

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Herbert Schlossberg's IDOLS FOR DESTRUCTION

Introduction

- I. Contemporary Despair (1-4)
 - A. Fin de Siecle Pessimism
 - 1. Sense of Decadence
 - * a. H. G. Wells
- II. Understanding Our Place in History (4-5)
 - A. Views of Meaning in History
 - 1. Gibbon: spatial analogies
 - 2. Spengler: organic phrases
 - B. Organizing Theme: Religious Content of Theories of History
 - 1. Theory of Knowledge
 - 2. Authoritative Literature
 - 3. Theory of Historical Relationships
 - 4. Cosmology
 - 5. Hierarchy of Values
 - a. something is placed at its apex
 - 6. Eschatology
- III. Idolatry as a Framework for Understanding (5-6)
 - A. Organic Images in History
 - 1. None in the Old Testament
 - a. "Spatial and biological analogies are incompatible with biblical thinking because they are both quantitatively oriented and deterministic."
 - b. Instead the Bible emphasizes the concept of judgment. (As Cornelius Van Til points out, Christianity is a religion of ethics rather than metaphysics).
 - c. "With silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction" (Hos. 8:4).
 - B. Idolatry: Substitution of the Creature for the Creator
 - 1. Whatever man places at the apex of his pyramid of values is the god that he serves (cf. Tillich). Secularization is only the negative aspect because the turning away from God means that something else is being put in His place.
- IV. Ideas and Action (6-9)
 - A. Crucial Questions Are All Religious
 - B. Popularization of Worldly Philosophies
 - 1. Currency of such ideas as inferiority complex, relativity, pragmatism.
 - 2. McLuhan: invisibility of our environment because it is an extension of ourselves. Guinness: we see with it.
 - C. Academic Disciplines
 - * 1. Social sciences and other disciplines are profoundly anti-Christian in their effect. (Lewis)
 - 2. Seductiveness of Assumptions (cf. Seduction of Society). They function as religious beliefs do.
 - 3. Plight of the Liberal Intellectual: "He who marries the spirit of an age soon finds himself a widower (Inge)."
- V. Idols of the Left, Right, and Center (9-10)
 - A. Civil Religion
 - 1. "A pluralistic society heralds the virtues of paths that have no exits."
 - B. Resort to Labeling and Name-Calling

Chapter One: Idols of History

- I. Idols (11)
 - A. Two-fold Environment of Man: God and Creation
 - 1. If man rejects God, he has nowhere else to turn except creation for a substitute
 - 2. Idols must be derived from either the natural or the social world.
- II. History as a Religious Enterprise (11-13)
 - * A. History as a vehicle of salvation
 - 1. Spencerian evolution
 - 2. Enlightenment progress
 - 3. Marxism
 - 4. Western-style social engineering
- III. Cult of Historicism (13-14)
 - A. Confusion of Fact and Value
 - 1. Hegel: synthesis of the ideal and real
 - * 2. Wilson: laws must be adjusted to fit facts (cf. Holmes)
 - 3. Lippmann: laws must be based on sentiments that "express the highest promise of the deepest necessity of these times."
 - B. Result: Relativism
 - 1. "As the facts of history change, values, and consequently laws, will have to change with them."
 - 2. Alchemy of Historicism: transforming fact into value
- IV. History as the Lord of the Universe
 - A. Deterministic Relativism
 - * 1. Karl Mannheim: unavailability of a central planning authority--our choice is only between good planning and bad.
 - 2. paradox of a moving status quo--what is, is right
 - 3. space and time metaphors
- V. Getting in Step with History
 - A. Nisbet: Church of Historical Necessity
- VI. Inevitable Progress (18-19)
 - A. Bury: Enlightenment Faith in Progress
 - 1. Lord of history beyond history replaced by deterministic teleological immanence.
- VII. Treason of the Clerks (19-21)
 - A. Becker: Use of History to Attack the Church
 - B. Relativization of the Past (progressive) or All Periods But One Golden Age (conservative)
- VIII. Historical Profession
 - A. Lack of Interest in Philosophy of History
 - B. Current Assumptions
 - 1. Multiple Causation: The causes described by historians are, in the biblical sense, only effects--for the historian history is "the whole show."
 - 2. No Lessons of History: "The modern historical profession is Hegelian in the sense that the explanation of history lies within itself. . . . What the historian is unable to explain must be a matter of defective or incomplete sources or of his own limitations in drawing inferences from them." (23)
 - * 3. Problem of Naturalism: tendency to stretch the necessarily

artificial boundaries of an academic discipline to encompass all of reality leads to a double-minded attitude among Christian historians who must divide their minds into separate private and professional spheres. Faith is divorced from reality (cf. Machen, Singer, North). Contrast providential interpretations of history.

C. Academic Historians Fail to Deal With Their Assumptions

IX. Myth of the Seamless Web

A. Origin in Hegelian Idealism

B. Kuhn's Paradigms

1. After a major scientific revolution, the textbooks are "all rewritten in such a way as to obscure the tortuous path of change. History becomes smoothed out; it 'evolves' naturally, and progress is enshrined." Normal science is regarded as largely cumulative.
2. Historians know the history of history better than scientists know the history of science, but they also pay tribute to the reigning paradigm.

X. The Christian View of History

A. Alpha and Omega

1. History has a beginning, an end, and meaning.
2. Will and personality dominate everything and make of history a moral arena.

* B. Factuality (cf. Lippmann on Machen)

1. Five benefits of knowing that history's creator is outside history (29):
 - a. Man is distinguished from nature. Behaviorism simply reduces history to a category of nature.
 - b. It restores meaning to events that would otherwise be valueless and insignificant. (Frankl gives only an existentialist basis for meaning)
 - c. It places ends and means in proper perspective. (Note Aldous Huxley)
 - d. It provides a basis for understanding change by reference to the changeless. (Rushdoony's Standard)
 - e. It provides a principle of value against which all values are judged.

XI. God's Action in History (30-32)

A. God's Plan

1. God has a plan for the fullness of time and works out the details of this plan through the course of history.
2. We must not make the mistake of confusing "is" with "ought" and justify evil political, economic, and social forces. The Christian foresees no improvement in the moral condition of mankind.
3. Christian norms lie outside history. Ranke: "Eternity is equidistant from all points in time." All human values and institutions are relativized and judged by an absolute standard outside history. But this is unacceptable to a generation that seeks to relativize everything without limit. Wilson's focus on facts; Lippmann's focus on sentiments as the governor of human relations.

- * 4. "There can be no mercy without judgment because only judgment can pronounce the final NO! to relativism's blessing on barbarity and provide people with the motivation

and courage to oppose it."

XII. Judgment (32-34)

A. Historicism's Verdict

1. Something that has outlived its usefulness is dumped into the dustbin of history (Marx). "Ultimately, historicism throws everything into the trash can because it thinks history is moving on to ever greater things."
 - a. Historicists have to mystify and place beyond history what they want to permanently preserve. "That is what Hegel did to the state, Marx to the classless society, and Lippmann to classical liberalism."
2. "Meaning in history is inseparable from perceptions of moral integrity and justice." A cause-effect relationship must be recognizable for events to make sense, but sometimes the observer decides beforehand not to consider the causes.
3. Catastrophe is another nail in the coffin of the seamless web. Belief in the seamless web leads to despair at such times.

B. Popular View of Judgment

1. Judgment is seen as rewards and punishments that come from a ledger of good and bad acts.
2. "The biblical record shows that God's judgments may be different from ours." Judea was destroyed by a nation even more evil than itself. But God also judges the instruments of his will.

XIII. Judgment and Mercy (34-35)

A. Wrath and Love

1. Judgment is a prod, "the means for bringing repentance and restoration."
2. God showers the same judgment on Egypt as He does on Israel. (cf. Bahnsen)

XIV. Consequences of the Christian View of History (35-38)

A. Need to Remember History

1. C. S. Lewis points out that "it is not the remembered but the forgotten past that enslaves us. . . . The unhistorical are usually, without knowing it, enslaved to a fairly recent past."

B. Historicism Relativizes Everything

1. Lack of a transcendent dimension places everything into flux. "It relativizes everything, that is, except for the idol that the historicist miraculously extracts from the flux with the forceps of mystification--the state, the proletariat, the national honor, the liberal society, the fact or sentiment. Without that mystifying process, historicism has no way to speak of truth beyond the flux and would offer no common ground for discourse."