

Some Also of the Epicurean and Stoic Philosophers Met Him¹

By Greg Witherow

Many people, especially the young, no longer believe in God or the basic tenets of Christianity. Instead the philosophy of today is based on Materialism², a view that denies the supernatural. Science and The Wants of Man are the sole guides to truth and ethics. Is that not true? Religion is viewed negatively. It is seen as the cause of conflicts, not their remedy. Religion is for weak minded people who believe in fairy tales. It is an opium for those in need of a crutch. Confront an American college student and you will see this is so. What is the Christian response? Paul in Athens is a guide. He reasoned with Greek philosophers, poets and Greek religion to reach both the intelligentsia and the common man. Despite reports to the contrary, science and philosophy are not obstacles to the faith; they attest to it. An explanation is in order.

Science explains much, but it cannot explain everything in the world. Science gives us The Big Bang³. But while telling us there is a beginning, it cannot scientifically explain how something came from nothing⁴. Likewise Science shows us how to clone humans with animals⁵, but it cannot tell us if we should Want To. Likewise Science cannot answer, "Is there a God?" as by definition God cannot be reproduced in an experiment. If Science and Our Wants are insufficient to answer life questions, where do we go? Philosophy provides a partial answer.

What is philosophy? It is thinking about thinking. Philosophy in action is called ethics. Each person has a philosophy (whether it is good or bad) that guides each person's values. Before the advent of Christ, the Greek philosopher Aristotle used philosophy to conclude God **necessarily** exists as an eternal Prime or Unmoved Mover, the First Cause of motion. Additionally Aristotle concluded man has a rational soul⁶. The intellect is a function of the rational soul that with the sense organs (nose, ears, eyes, taste buds, nerves) enables man to understand. The intellect (thinking) differs from sense perception or imagination (making sense images reappear). Aristotle believed a person's intellect survived his or her death.

Therefore without religion, philosophy establishes the existence of God and human souls; the non-material or spiritual realm⁷. Do we therefore even need religion? The best way to answer that question is with another. Did Christ rise from the dead? It is a high impact, historic claim. It is a hinge on which much swings. If yes, Christ's divinity is established. Why we exist can be addressed. But how do we know Christ even existed? The same way we know Julius Caesar did; the witness of history. In the first century, Tacitus (Roman) and Josephus (Jewish) wrote of Christ. These were not stupid men. Eleven of the twelve apostles were martyred swearing Christ rose from the dead. Producing the corpse would have ended the matter. Full stop. Who dies for something not true? Unable to refute such claims, Christianity spread to Rome within the first century. In time the Empire converted. Our calendar is based on Christ's birth. His Church endures and is global. Established by God, what would you expect? Need more information? Read C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity. Then read the gospel of John.

¹ A quote from Acts 17:18. Paul met Greek philosophers from these two schools. He also used philosophy (natural law) in the book of Romans.

² Materialism holds that only physical Matter exists, the spiritual does not. Thought is purely substance interactions, the result of Matter.

³ The Big Bang is a hypothesis developed by a Catholic priest. Wikipedia, "Georges Lemaitre", <http://bit.ly/1ijVeh8> (January 2, 2017).

⁴ Some argue the universe is eternal. Aquinas addressed this theory in the Summa and said such a theory still requires God. If the Universe is eternal then everything that could happen must have happened, including everything ceasing to exist. After all, if there can be a Big Bang, there can be a Big Stop. If everything ceases to exist, you need something to start it back up again. That is God, the Unmoved Mover.

⁵ Mary Anne Mott, "Animal-Human Hybrids Spark Controversy", <http://bit.ly/2hMMkFC>, (January 2, 2017).

⁶ According to Aristotle, a soul gives life to plants (nutritive soul), animals (sensitive soul) and man (rational soul). Catholicism affirms plant and animal "souls" are dependent on matter (not spiritual) and cease at death. They are not like ours. Man's soul is spiritual and immortal.

⁷ The Greek understanding of God and the human soul are not completely aligned with Christian teaching, but they establish their existence.