

# Book Review of *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*

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*The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, edited by Brendan Sweetman for the American Maritain Association, (1999) The Catholic University Press, pp. 262.

This book has 18 chapters and an epilogue by 18 contributors. I could not put it down wondering, "Who are these people?" and "Do they ever cover the ground!" The book brought me back to Notre Dame when it was a Catholic University and when my Etienne Gilson book on St. Thomas was under my pillow (Sam, what is a pre-medical student like you doing with that book?). Brendan Sweetman, from Rockhurst University in Kansas City, has put together a heartening and uplifting book which is a bouquet of excellence by a team of All Stars. Space only allows a few comments.

Donald DeMarco's "Descartes, Mathematics and Music" is awesome. After reading it, I decided my player piano is incontrovertible proof of the superiority of Western Civilization (Secular Catholicism). I can now hide myself in a near chair while Bach and other great pianists enable me to savor DeMarco's words ... "The aim of philosophy is not to conquer life but comprehend it enough so we can live better."

I giggled often with James V. Schall's "Was Maritain a Crypto-Machiavellian?" and yet was stunned with his pleasing profundity. More music to my ears.

*In toto*, the book is a symphony detailing the Theophobic barbarism of modernism which means a, "I:lor Me:Merelationship," in other words: "egomania." Contemporary pluralism, relativism, liberalism and modernism are found to mean, "I can think of and articulate an alternative to God and the Church no matter how unreal and no one can tell me otherwise." Incurable skepticism is the game except they never seem to apply it to themselves in an egregious example of the fallacy of special pleading. In fact, if skepticism is absolutely true, then skepticism is false! I will grant that "one cannot really know anything" IS true for the modernists, relativists and liberals themselves. In-deed, their theses apply best to themselves and their ideas. One suspects that a modernist would have never built a piano because he does not believe it could exist unless he had seen one.

Of interest is that Descartes' skepticism was embraced by modernists while his return to God as ontologically certain was not. Clearly modernists are examples of the academic relativism they embrace. Their contemporary philosophy is double-think and a state of intellectual schizophrenia. They promote diversity, tolerance and better-than-thou relativism, but they are not relative or tolerant enough to accept genuine standards, trans-cendental Christianity, love and virtues. This is reminiscent of liberals who claim tolerance and willingness to accept the most disgusting of the diverse but yet treat Right-to-Lifers with immense gross prejudice.

Perspective

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Natural law is supported throughout the book with the incontrovertible teleological "good" (although I would argue for "the transcendentals" to be used in place of Aristotle's and Aquinas' "good"). Indeed, if freedom exists for the good (and the other transcendentals), then genuine freedom is exemplified only when one chooses the transcendental course. Usually, a "choice" other than a transcendental is not a choice at all but a conditioned reflex of some form (which is not freedom at all). Nothing compromises the human status as does conditioned reflex behavior masquerading as freedom (modernists are proof of that).

Brendan Sweetman's article, "The Pseudo-Problem of Skepticism" details the three arguments of Descartes': (i) the argument from illusion; (ii) the dream argument; and (iii) the evil genius argument. Emphatically, all three are pure fantasy (Did Descartes watch television?). Indeed, why are we bothering with illusions, dreams, and an evil genius (and all the other non-transcendental nothingness)? Understood from the book is that modernism is the phenomenology of fantasy, of "nothing to know," of "no-think," of theatre, of gnosticism, and of brainstorming of gullibility and nullity. The book helped me conclude that modernism creates nothing from everything while it flees reality. The task is not to answer modernist intellectuals — they are hopeless wind-mills because they cannot change their minds (to do so would be to abandon their own identity and have nothing to say). The task is to persist and make natural law known to the people. To try to rebut modernists anymore is like debating the Simpsons or Dan Rather or Madonna — they are all celebrity fakes in an entrapping cartoon show. Truly, *The Failure of Modernism* is an important rebuttal of modernism, skepticism, relativism, and liberalism. Modernists question all rather than affirm being.

Their subjectivism leads to a nihilism about reality, with philosophical contamination pervading our culture from matter to mind, from genes to abortion.

Unfortunately, there are two incompletions (not deficiencies) to the book. First, the book does not emphasize the transcendentals — matter, identity, good, oneness, truth, and beauty. To me, all philosophy is "take the transcendentals and let them play out

right into God's hands. The missing link between philosophy and the public are the transcendentals.

The second incompleteness is the overlooking of the press and media as the source of most of our problems from a community dimension. The press and media are modernism, skepticism and relativism in action. The book proves the intellectual solidarity and validity of Aristotle and St. Thomas, but it doesn't help us little guys in our homes. The press and media *enable* celebrityism and prevarication. Headlines are the public's philosophy. The press and media are anti-common good, anti-philosophical, anti-intellectual, anti-metaphysical, anti-peace, anti-justice, anti-dignity, and promote unreason and non-being. The press and media are a big annoyance, fake Messianism and agnostic apparatus of "let's pretend." The press and media collectively is a modernism machine, a strategic bomber of civilization, and an intellectual playschool for adults in perpetual kindergarten. The press and media are a continuous replay of Orson Well's "Invasion of the Martians" with inflaming relativism, skepticism, and phrase salesmanship. The press and media are modernism's death dance from "Do you Want to Marry a Millionaire" to "Temptation Island." The press and media need shock and attention seeking by any means possible to hypnotize and entrap by sex, victimization

and disgust (which collectively are the phenomenological equivalent to intellectual relativism). Without a transcendental life, the public become voyeurs and imitators of television and movies. The problem is not intellectual discussion and analysis of modernism, but the fact that the press and media are flooding the world with these concepts readily embraced by a suggestible public. Sweetman calls all skepticism to be a "pseudo-problem" but more so is the press and media skepticism pervading our society with huge emotional surges converting all into a huge fantasy land of pseudo-existence known as modernism. The problem is no longer an intellectual one, as much as it is a practical one in that the press and media are selling our lives. Modernism for the public as promoted by the press and media is Marpi Point, USA.

Needed more than anything is press and media education programs! My pamphlet "And Satan Turned Into an Angel of Light" is a good start.

*The Failure of Modernism* means the intellectual academic war is over. People must now learn to ignore the press and media as much as we should ignore the purveyors of liberalism, skepticism, relativism, and modernism.