

One of the topics that we have to keep returning to with the isms is: are these real? Do they actually have any relevance or importance for us? I've never even heard of such things, a person might say, how can they be important? The isms, as has been mentioned, are indeed *not* something that people today are taught outright – there's no laying out a definition, giving some rationale for them, and then asking: do you believe it? In fact, hardly anyone has even heard of them and so it's natural to wonder – well, are these even something real? As we've repeatedly tried to bring out, they are taught subtly. We are showed how to think, speak, and act in these terms and thus they become part of the popular belief system, part of “what everybody knows” without anybody ever really giving consent to them or choosing them consciously and intentionally.

So once again: is all of this stuff with the isms relevant or even real? This question was taken up again in our Jr-Sr CCD class last week. We started out with what is perhaps an obvious reality and yet one that people might not think about very often: beliefs drive actions, beliefs drive what we do and don't do, and even how we think and speak. Look at the increasing violence in our own country today (school shootings, murder, assassinations and attempted assassinations), breakup of marriages and family life, drug use at epidemic levels, gangs, and crime. Are the isms the cause of all of these problems? Well there's certainly some sort of false belief behind them. The isms are beliefs and while they might not completely account for all of these problems, they are certainly a prime contributor. But again, are the isms are real?

In the CCD class, we said: well, to address this question of whether or not they have relevance or are even real, we have to have some criteria to decide that. What should those criteria be? Analogies are often helpful to think through questions like this so we decided on that route to set criteria. We used the analogy of a disease – what are things that would make a disease relevant or important. One of the first things is: well, is it even a real thing, does this disease actually exist; if not, then of course it's irrelevant. Another basic question was: is the thing you're talking really a disease or is it a normal human condition; the example of rickets was used; a common symptom of rickets is bow-leggedness. Suppose somebody said: no, no – bow-leggedness is how we're meant to be, this shouldn't be called a disease. The other criteria for deciding the importance or relevance of a disease were more obvious: how big are it's effects; does it cause severe pain, is it lethal? And finally: how widespread is it – is it common or pretty rare? For example – the common cold. It's very prevalent – which adds to importance, but it's generally not debilitating or lethal. ALS is a terrible disease but relatively rare. Cancer and heart disease, on the other hand, are both severe and not uncommon.

So now we apply these criteria to the isms. Do they actually exist? The CCD kids looked them up on their little magic boxes and found a plethora of videos and articles on the very isms that we've been talking about. There's no question about it, then: yes, they are “a thing” as people today say sometimes, they are real, they do exist. The next question, though, is perhaps the biggest one: are they really a “disease” – something false, a wrong belief that does man harm – or are the isms the way man is meant to be? Here a person has to choose what they believe – the way of the world, or God and the way of our Lord. Since all of the isms abide with materialism which is intrinsically atheistic, it's impossible to hold both as true. So the question we're forced to face is: do I really believe in God and all that He has revealed? If so, then the isms are most certainly a “disease,” i.e., they are not the way man is meant to be, as revealed by God Himself. How big are the effects? The tangible, visible effects that these beliefs are having in everyday life have already been brought out somewhat; but of course, the biggest and most serious consequence, an eternal consequence, is that they put a person onto the path of full rejection of God, onto the path to hell. So yes, the effects are not just big, they are monumental. Finally: are the isms widespread? The first evidence that the CCD students gave for an answer of yes to this question was the sheer volume of videos and articles that they found on the internet for the 2 isms that we've taken up in class so far. But that's not quite enough to say that they are common beliefs. We then recalled the little test we did – questions that reflect relativism and scientism, for example, and that exemplify or reflect training in those isms. Every single student answered the same in these little “experiments” – there was no denying that training in the isms had occurred without even realizing it. Now this is rural SD. Should we think that rural SD is the first and only place these have struck? Of course not. The conclusion is: yes they are

widespread, they are common, they are prevalent – even though most don't even realize it. So are these isms relevant or important. How can we conclude other than: YES.

We return now to the particular isms themselves. Pragmatism is perhaps one of the more insidious isms, along with its direct “relatives” of utilitarianism and consequentialism. Last week's article took up utilitarianism so now: what is consequentialism? It will be helpful to bear in mind that pragmatism, utilitarianism, and consequentialism form, for the most part, a single whole – otherwise you will be wondering: what's the difference between them, they seem like the same thing? Yes, they do, they are closely linked – to some extent almost indistinguishable. Utilitarianism and consequentialism, especially, are essentially one. However, breaking them out a little (as many people do) might help to understand all 3 isms of these isms a little better.

Pragmatism says practical consequences (in this world) is what determines what's true. Consequentialism is basically pragmatism applied to morality. Consequentialism claims that the rightness or wrongness of something (anything – whatever you're talking about) is determined entirely by what the consequences of it are – whether the *consequences* are, overall, “good” or “bad.” The obvious question, the one that consequentialism especially brings out, is: *who* determines what is good and bad, *how* is good and bad determined? When man believes that he can play God, he dives headlong into foolishness as it is impossible for him to perceive all of the consequences of a given thought word or deed. Only God can do that. Consequentialism (along with all of the isms) are man claiming he can be God. Utilitarianism says that whatever maximizes earthly “happiness” (which means pleasure / good feeling / satisfaction of immediate desires) is what's good, and that's it, period. Part of the reason consequentialism arises as somewhat distinct from pragmatism and utilitarianism is because of a dispute about what is good and bad – i.e., those embracing consequentialism might not want to accept utilitarianism's answer outright. Consequentialism says – well, yes, it is agreed that the only way of deciding if something is good are the consequences in this life and this world (God no, man's reason yes); it is agreed further that what's meant by good is that which is satisfying to man (like utilitarianism). But the answer of utilitarianism is basically hedonism – if it feels good, do it – which largely considers only an individual's own pleasure, without consideration of consequences for others. Consequentialism takes some exception to that.

Let us step back now and notice a few things about the claim(s) of consequentialism. Notice again that consequentialism is intrinsically materialistic / atheistic. The very name implies that there is no God who gives us prior knowledge (i.e., knowledge that is not dependent on experience or anticipated consequences) about what is right and good and true. *Who* determines what is right and good and true? It is most certainly not “some god,” says consequentialism, it is man alone. *How* does man determine what is right and good and true? It only depends on what the consequences are and of course the consequence of Heaven or hell is not given even the slightest consideration since there is no such thing since there is no God. *Who is* the supreme being? It's man. And here we easily hear the tempting voice of the rebellious angel: you will be like gods, with knowledge of good and evil. The isms are building up the spirit of anti-Christ.

One of the isms that we will talk about later is called humanism, which is the new atheism. The claim of humanism is precisely that: man is the supreme being. This discussion on consequentialism (man decides what is right and wrong) is bringing out that these falsehoods build on one another. This, in turn, is bringing out – most importantly – that as a person yields to one of them, they come closer and closer to the ultimate end of these isms, like humanism = the new atheism. But does that really happen? Well, suppose a priest wants to argue against living together outside of marriage. Which do you think would be more effective for most people:

1. Because God says so – a theological reason. OR
2. The divorce rate is much higher for couples who cohabit – a “practical consequence.”

There's a fair chance that neither will be effective but if you were to pick the one you think would have a better chance of getting a response, which would it be? I'm almost certain it would be the second. The second one is the pragmatic, consequential argument. Yes, people abide with pragmatism and consequentialism much more than they realize, leading them further and further into humanism, into atheism. Belief drives action.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*