

BOOK REVIEW

of

Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian View of Men and Things*,
Eerdmans, 1952, Baker Book House, 1981, The Trinity Foundation, 1998.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

It happens every day. We see it on the streets, on television, in the newspapers, and in our every thought and decision. Whether the topic be history, politics, ethics, science, religion, or almost any topic of any serious interest to any of us. The truth about anything, or whether there be any truth or not, it is not primarily the “facts” that decide the situation. What drives our thoughts and directs our reasoning is our religious convictions and our philosophy. Ah, you say, I have no philosophy, that’s just for academics in their ivory towers! As Clark points out, everyone practices philosophy, you cannot function without it; the only question is whether our philosophy is coherent, consistent, and true, if you will. The topic is very practical, considering how it significantly impacts our lives daily. And yet, “Even devoted Christians fail to see any close connection between their faith and other matters of interest. Similarly in the colleges, not only have the specific courses in theism been dropped, but the Christian presuppositions that previously pervaded the entire curriculum have been abandoned, and the philosophy that most influences the students in all departments is humanism or naturalism.” Assuming we want to be clear thinkers, and assuming we want to know how to interpret and apply the Scriptures as we read them and meditate upon as we are instructed to do, then having a grasp of the Christian view of men and things seems like a good idea.

This book by Gordon Clark is an introduction to philosophy, to Christian philosophy. He begins by attempting to persuade the Christian reader that learning about philosophy is not an un-Christian thing to do, is a good thing, and is necessary, and that Christian philosophy (or, the Christian world view, to use a more recent and more down-to-earth term) is unique, and provides a comprehensive view of all things. “The naturalistic philosophy that engulfs the modern mind (he said this in 1952 - are you now convinced!) is not a repudiation of one or two items of the Christian faith leaving the remainder untouched; it is not a philosophy that is satisfied to deny miracles while approving or at least not disapproving of Christian moral standards; on the contrary both Christianity and naturalism demand all or nothing: compromise is impossible.” We may wish to avoid the difficult thinking we may perceive that philosophy requires of us, but avoid it we cannot. “Our preferences, our standards of morality, our purpose in life accord with a theistic worldview or they do not. And if they do not, we are acting on the assumption, whether we admit it or not, that there is no God to hold us responsible.” This is what Stephen Charnock, in his *Existence and Attributes of God*, calls practical atheism.

After the introduction, Clark presents chapters on history, politics, ethics, science, religion, and epistemology, and presents a Christian perspective on each. In the chapter on history, after reviewing the muddled attempts by non-Christians to understand history he presents his Christian views. “If the secular standpoint is chosen, history has no significance; human hopes and fears are to be swallowed up in oblivion; and all men, good, evil, and indifferent, come to the same end. Anyone who chooses this view must base his life on unyielding despair.”

In his chapter on politics, Clark says the “purpose of this chapter is to give evidence that Christian presuppositions justify civil governments of limited rights, whereas humanistic principles imply either anarchy or totalitarianism.” Tying politics in with history, Clark says political “theory therefore presupposes that history is in some sense significant or rational.” But he had previously argued that this is not possible apart from Christianity.

The next chapter is on ethics. Naturalism, the engulfing philosophy of the modern world, as mentioned above, if thought through, provides *no* basis for ethics. Phillip Johnson, a law professor at the University of California at Berkeley, author of *Darwin on Trial* and *Reason in the Balance*, as well as other popular books, and speaker at numerous university campuses, points this out as well. A common ethics universally known is at the base of our legal system, and to show that a defendant does not share this knowledge of right and wrong is the same thing as pleading for his legal insanity! And yet Johnson also points out that naturalism provides no basis for ethics, and that thoughtful naturalists acknowledge this!

Hopefully you catch the impact of the book: there is no good naturalistic basis for science either. Scientific investigation developed in Western countries for good reason, because that is where Christianity has had greatest impact. Philosophy is difficult, but also necessary. This book is a good place to start.