

SUMMARY OF

# ESCAPE FROM REASON

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- Key Insights
- Best Quotes
- Study Questions

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# Escape From Reason



## MAIN IDEA

“If a man goes overseas for any length of time we would expect him to learn the language of the country to which he is going.” (p. 11) This language learning would certainly include vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and anything else that might be involved in written and spoken communication.

However, in addition to learning the language, this hypothetical traveler would also need to learn “the thought-forms of the people to whom he speaks” (p. 11). Only when a man has learned the language and the worldview of a people will he be able to communicate with those people in a meaningful way.

What is true for our hypothetical traveler is true in a similar way for Christians living in a secular, godless world. Our generation is not unique. “Every generation of Christians has this problem of learning

how to speak meaningfully to its own age.” (p. 11) This requires Christians to know the language *and* the worldview of the culture in which we live. Only when we learn both of these things will we be able to communicate the gospel message in meaningful ways.



# Nature and Grace in Art

After Aquinas, the world of art reflected the divide between our knowledge of nature and grace.

“**T**homas Aquinas (1225-1274) opened the way for the discussion of what is usually called ‘nature and grace.’”  
(p. 13) Visually, grace can be thought of as *above* nature, so that grace comes to represent the things of heaven and the things of God, while nature comes to represent the things of earth and the things of man.

Before [Aquinas](#), “the heavenly things were all-important and were so holy that they were not pictured realistically. For instance, Mary and Christ were never portrayed realistically. Only symbols were portrayed” (p. 14). This was a Byzantine way of thinking and portraying the things of grace, heaven, and God.

While the things of grace were portrayed symbolically, “simple nature—trees and mountains—held no interest for the artist, except as part of

the world to be lived in” (p. 14). People were not interested in climbing mountains simply for the sake of the experience of climbing a mountain. Likewise, for the artist, the things of this world held no special significance as subjects of painting or sculpture.

All of this changed with Aquinas and his distinction between grace and nature. To be sure, “Aquinas’ view of nature and grace did not involve a complete disunity between the two, for he did have a concept of unity between them. From Aquinas’ day on, for many years, there was a constant struggle for a unity of nature and grace and a hope that rationality would say something about both” (p. 15).

Unfortunately, that struggle has not resulted in the Western world embracing any sort of unity between grace and nature. On the contrary, the Western world has largely moved in the direction of a total dichotomy between grace and nature. This movement has progressed through [humanism](#), [modernism](#), [existentialism](#), and even [postmodernism](#). Furthermore, this movement can be traced through the history of art. After Aquinas, artists began focusing on the things of nature as subjects for painting. Artists also began painting the things of grace in realistic ways without the use of symbols or icons.

## KEY QUOTES

- “Aquinas had opened the way to an autonomous Humanism, an autonomous philosophy, and once the movement gained momentum, there was soon a flood.” (p. 18)
- “As nature was made autonomous, nature began to ‘eat up’ grace.” (p. 18)
- “When nature is made autonomous, it is destructive.” (p. 22)
- “[Giovanni Gentile](#), one of the greatest of Italian philosophers until his fairly recent death, said that Leonardo [Da Vinci] died in despondency because he would not let go of the hope of a rational unity between the particulars and the universal... Leonardo, not being a modern man, never gave up the hope of a unified field of knowledge.” (p. 25, hyperlink added)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How would a Christian worldview rooted in the story of the Bible respond to those like Aquinas who want to divide the world into two realms, grace and nature?
- How have modern day evangelical Christians implicitly bought into the idea that the things of grace (God, heaven, salvation, religion) can be and should be separated from the things of nature (humans, earth, law, government)?





## Anthropology in the Reformation

After Calvin, the Reformation sought to return to a biblical view of human beings.

“At this point it is important to note a historical relationship. Calvin was born in 1509. His *Institutes* were written in 1536. Leonardo died in 1519, the same year as the Leipzig Disputation between Luther (1483-1546) and Dr. Eck. The king who took Leonardo to France at the close of his life was Francis I, the same king to whom Calvin addressed his *Institutes*. We come therefore to an overlapping of the Renaissance with the Reformation.” (p. 26, italics in original)

This overlapping is important to recognize as one thinks about the relationship between grace and nature. Aquinas set in motion a way of thinking that distinguished the things of grace from the things of nature — that is, the things of religion from the things of science. Aquinas was able to separate these previously unified subjects because of his beliefs

about the sinfulness of man. Aquinas argued that the human will was fallen but that the human intellect was not fallen. Thus, Aquinas held out hope that man's ability to think and reason would allow him to fully understand and master the things of nature.

The Reformers held a more pessimistic — and one might note, a more biblical — view of human nature than Aquinas. Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers insisted that both the will *and* the mind were impacted by the Fall. Thus, our depravity is total, and all of our faculties have been impacted by sin.

This biblical and theological concept proved to be important in worldview development. While the heirs of the Renaissance and humanism held an optimistic view of human reason and eventually allowed the things of nature to swallow up the things of grace, the Reformers insisted that there was no place for human autonomy. The Reformers insisted that only God was sovereign and God's sovereignty extends over both the realm of nature and the realm of grace. Thus, the Reformers insisted that God sovereignly ruled over revelation *and* salvation.

## KEY QUOTES

- “Man has value because of who he was originally before the Fall.” (p. 29)
- “God tells man who he is. God tells us that he created man in his image. So man is something wonderful.” (p. 30)
- “The Bible says that you are wonderful because you are made in the image of God, but that you are flawed because, at a space-time point of history, man fell. The Reformation man knew that man was going to hell because of revolt against God.” (p. 30-31)
- “When the Word of God, the Bible, was listened to, the Reformation had tremendous results, both in people individually becoming Christians and in general culture.” (p. 31)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does modern culture think too much of human beings?  
How does modern culture think too little of human beings?
- How can Christians maintain the dignity of human beings and the depravity of human beings in a culture that recognizes neither?



# Epistemology and Relativism

After Hegel, modernism sought to redefine knowing and how we know what we know.

“After the Renaissance-Reformation period the next crucial stage is reached at the time of Kant (1724-1804) and of Rousseau (1712-1778).” (p. 43) This is the era when the ideas of grace and nature were fully separated, and the concept of human autonomy replaced the category of grace. At this point, “Rationalism was now well developed and entrenched; and there was no concept of revelation in any area” (p. 43).

In this era, [determinism](#) was the logical conclusion. If all that really exists is nature, and if our purpose is entirely summed up in the pursuit of our own autonomy, then nature obviously plays a determining role in what it is that we pursue as autonomous beings. “Rousseau and others swear and curse, as it were, against the science which is threatening their human freedom. The freedom they advocate is autonomous in that it has nothing to restrain it. It is freedom without limitations.” (p. 45)

Following the era of [Kant](#) and [Rousseau](#), the next great development — or one might say devolution — came at the hands of [Hegel](#) (1770-1831). Hegel “argued that attempts had been made for thousands of years to find an answer on the basis of antithesis and they had not come to anything” (p. 53). In place of this pursuit, Hegel proposed something entirely new, and this new something is the reason that “Christians today do not understand their children” (p. 54).

Simply put, Hegel “changed the rules of the game in two areas” (p. 54). These two areas are [epistemology](#), what can be known and how we can know it, and methodology, how we “approach the question of truth and knowledge” (p. 54). Hegel suggested that rather than thinking in terms of antithesis we ought to think “in terms of thesis-antithesis, with the answer always being synthesis” (p. 54).

In making this monumental suggestion, Hegel quite literally “changed the world” (p. 54). This may seem like an overstatement or an exaggeration, but with Hegel’s proposal, “truth as truth is gone, and synthesis (the both-and), with its relativism, reigns” (p. 55). We no longer have to be obsessed with the specificity and certainty of moral, religious, or scientific truth. Now we can view truth as a process of learning, development, change, arguing, rationalization, justification, and even manipulation. Truth is whatever we make it through our commitment to human autonomy and naturalistic science.

## KEY QUOTES

- “Prior to Hegel (1770-1831), all philosophic pursuit had proceeded something like this: Someone had striven to construct a circle which could encompass all of thought and life. The next man said that this was not the answer but that he would provide one. The next man said, ‘You have failed, but I will give you the answer.’ The next man said, ‘Not at all, this is it,’ and the next said, ‘No!’” (p. 53)
- “What Hegel changed was something more profound than merely one philosophic answer for another.” (p. 54)
- “It is true that Hegel is usually classified as an idealist. He hoped for a synthesis which would have some relationship to reasonableness somehow.” (p. 55)
- “The basic position of man in rebellion against God is that man is at the center of the universe.” (p. 55)

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How do you see Hegel's thought process in the world today? Do you see examples of people giving up any idea of absolute truth in favor of a never ending process of thesis, antithesis, synthesis? How does this affect religion and evangelism for the Christian?
- When you look at the absolute claims of some non-Christian people (the new atheists, scientific naturalists, LGBTQ advocates), how do secular claims to absolute truth square with the thought of Hegel?



## CHAPTER

## 1

“**T**he origin of modern man could be traced back to several periods. But I would begin with the teaching of a man who changed the world in a very real way.” (p. 13) That man is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). It was the thought and writing of Aquinas that allowed the world to think in terms of “nature and grace” (p. 13).

To be clear, Aquinas did not totally separate the realms of nature and grace, but he did argue for a major distinction between our knowledge of the things of earth and our knowledge of the things of heaven. Tragically, Aquinas argued that “the will of man was fallen, but the intellect was not” (p. 16). This essentially opened the door for [natural theology](#) to be “pursued independently of the Scriptures” (p. 16). This philosophical promotion of natural theology can be seen in developments within the world of art.

## KEY QUOTES

- “With the coming of Aquinas we have the real birth of the humanistic Renaissance.” (p. 15)
- “Today we have a weakness in our educational process in failing to understand the natural associations between the disciplines. We tend to study all our disciplines in unrelated parallel lines. This tends to be true in both Christian and secular education.” (p. 17)

## CHAPTER

## 2

**T**he Reformation, led by Luther and Calvin, overlapped with the Renaissance and its flowering humanism. In contrast to Aquinas and the humanists, “the Reformation accepted the biblical picture of a total Fall” (p. 27). That is to say, the Reformers argued that the Fall affected both our hearts and our minds. The doctrine of total depravity insists that “the whole man is fallen, including his intellect and will” (p. 27).

This reformational insistence on the total depravity of man sought to destroy any idea that human reason and intellect could function in an autonomous manner. “For the Reformation, final and sufficient knowledge rested in the Bible—that is, Scripture.” (p. 27) Additionally, the Reformers not only argued for the sovereignty of God in revelation and epistemology, but they also argued for the sovereignty of God in salvation.

## KEY QUOTES

- “In the Roman Catholic position there was a divided work of salvation—Christ died for our salvation, but man had to merit the merit of Christ. Thus there was a humanistic element involved.” (p. 27)
- “The Reformers said that there is nothing man can do; no autonomous or humanistic, religious or moral effort of man can help. One is saved only on the basis of the finished work of Christ as he died in space and time in history, and the only way to be saved is to raise the empty hands of faith, by God’s grace, to accept God’s free gift—Faith Alone.” (p. 27-28)

## CHAPTER

## 3

“**E**arly modern science was started by those who lived in the consensus and setting of Christianity.” (p. 40)  
The Christian faith provided an answer to the origin, existence, and order of the universe. These earliest scientists believed that there was a “reasonable God” (p. 42) who had created a “reasonable universe” (p. 42) that could be understood by the use of human reason.

While these early scientists focused on what might be termed *natural science*, they were most certainly not *naturalists*. They were not naturalists because they believed there was a God who had revealed Himself to human beings, and they were not naturalists because they believed God was separate from and distinct from the universe that He had created.

## KEY QUOTES

- “By the time we come to Kant and Rousseau, the sense of the autonomous, which had derived from Aquinas, is fully developed... Rationalism was not well developed and entrenched; and there was no concept of revelation in any area.” (p. 43)
- “What is autonomous freedom? It means a freedom in which the individual is the center of the universe. Autonomous freedom is a freedom that is without restraint.” (p. 45)

## CHAPTER

## 4

**T**he first scientists believed in the existence of God even as they made a distinction between the things of grace and the things of nature. With Kant and Rousseau, science jettisoned the idea of grace and replaced it with autonomous human freedom. The next development came with the thought of [Kierkegaard](#) and the leap of existentialism. With Kierkegaard, “there is a complete dichotomy between the upper and lower stories” (p. 60). That is to say, the upper story of grace (or human freedom) is completely severed from the lower story of nature and science. These realms no longer overlap.

What does this separation mean for human beings, religion, and science? “What we are left with now runs something like this. Below the line there is rationality and logic. The upper story becomes the non-logical and the non-rational. There is no relationship between them.” (p. 61)

## KEY QUOTES

- “In the lower story, on the basis of all reason, man as man is dead. You have simply mathematics, particulars, mechanics. Man has no meaning, no purpose, no significance. There is only pessimism concerning man as man. But up above, on the basis of a non-rational, non-reasonable leap, there is a non-reasonable faith which gives optimism. This is modern man’s total dichotomy.” (p. 61)
- “From Kierkegaard there are two extensions—secular existentialism and religious existentialism.” (p. 62)



## CHAPTER

## 5

“**W**e observed that from Rousseau’s time the dichotomy was drawn between nature and freedom.” (p. 75) The world of nature was the world of:

- Facts
- Observation
- Science
- Knowledge.

The pursuit of freedom replaced the world of grace and the things of heaven, and the freedom that was pursued was “an absolute freedom with no limitations” (p. 75). Thus, modern man lives with the tension of having no inherent value or meaning that can be rooted in the world of nature while also pursuing total, absolute, unrestrained freedom.

“The field of art offers a variety of illustrations of this tension. Such tension affords a partial explanation of the intriguing fact that much of contemporary art, as a self-expression of what man is, is ugly.” (p. 76)

## KEY QUOTES

- “He does not know it, but he is expressing the nature of fallen man, which as created in the image of God is wonderful, yet now is fallen. As man strives to press his freedom in his autonomous fashion, much though not all, of his art becomes meaningless and ugly.” (p. 76)
- “Industrial design, like science, is also bound up with the form of the universe and therefore is often more beautiful than ‘Art’ (with a capital ‘A’), which expresses man’s rebellion, ugliness and despair.” (p. 76)

## CHAPTER

## 6

**M**odernism has developed, or one might say has devolved, into postmodernism. “We are in the position of having rejected the nineteenth and twentieth century systems of thought, of having outworn them without having transcended them with new truth, or discovered anything of comparable magnitude to take their place.” (p. 90)

The fact that our rejection of modernism has not given rise to a new, unified worldview has serious and tragic consequences. In our post-everything world, we now live with the inevitable result of the dichotomy between grace and nature with no reference to God in either realm. In the bottom story, the world of nature, we have no basis for believing in the dignity of human beings. In the upper story, the world of grace, we have replaced grace with autonomous freedom and subsequently decided that such freedom is ultimately manifested in insanity.

## KEY QUOTES

- “A student in Manchester told me that he was going to see *Juliet of the Spirits* for the third time to try and work out what was real and what was fantasy in the film... One could go ten thousand times and never figure it out. It is deliberately made to prevent the viewer from distinguishing between objective reality and fantasy. There are no categories.” (p. 94, italics in original)
- “We have come then to this fearsome place where the word ‘Jesus’ has become the enemy of the person Jesus and the enemy of what Jesus taught.” (p. 101)

## CHAPTER

## 7

**T**here are serious consequences when people decide to completely separate the realms of grace and nature, and there are serious consequences when people decide to replace grace with autonomous human freedom. Those consequences include:

1. **Morality becomes impossible and relative.** How can there be morality if the autonomous pursuit of human freedom is our highest aim?
2. **Law becomes baseless and subjective.** How can we insist that people do certain things or do not do certain things while pursuing autonomy?
3. **Evil becomes a meaningless term.** How can evil be a category when nature swallows up grace and humans are programmed machines?
4. **Evangelism becomes impossible.** How can you speak to people about the truth when you accept a worldview that is falsely and wrongly grounded?

## KEY QUOTES

- “Christ is Lord of all—over every aspect of life.” (p. 107)
- “I am false or confused if I sing about Christ’s lordship and contrive to retain areas of my own life that are autonomous. This is true if it is my sexual life that is autonomous, but it is at least equally true if it is my intellectual life that is autonomous—or even my intellectual life in a highly selective area. Any autonomy is wrong. Autonomous science or autonomous art is wrong, if by autonomous science or art we mean it is free from the content of what God has told us.” (p. 108)



## CONCLUSION

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**C**ommunicating the gospel to modern, secular people requires Christians to learn the language *and* the worldview of the world in which we live. These thought-forms “will differ slightly from place to place, and more so from nation to nation” (p. 12). Nevertheless, in a globalized world, “there are characteristics of an age such as ours which are the same wherever we happen to be. It is these that I am especially considering in this book” (p. 12).

## 3 KEY INSIGHTS

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# 1

### **Nature and Grace in Art**

After Aquinas, the world of art reflected the divide between our knowledge of nature and grace.

# 2

### **Anthropology in the Reformation**

After Calvin, the Reformation sought to return to a biblical view of human beings.

# 3

### **Epistemology and Relativism**

After Hegel, modernism sought to redefine knowing and how we know what we know.



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