

BOOK REVIEW: The Terror of Existence – From Ecclesiastes to Theater of the Absurd

by Rich Swier



“Sincerity in literature may not always be a virtue, but insincerity is almost always a vice.” – Theodore Dalrymple

“A theater of the absurd is exactly that: absurd.” – Kenneth Frances

Theodore Dalrymple, a former prison doctor and psychiatrist, and Kenneth Frances, who holds an MA in Theology, joined together to produce a work that explains how we have fallen into the “theater of the absurd.”

I have written dozens of articles about [uncontested absurdities](#) that have now become public policies. Theodore Dalrymple and Kenneth Frances analyse how we have come to accept these uncontested absurdities via literary works.

Frances writes this about a J.D. Salinger book read by millions of public education students:

I have often wondered whether the America novel, The Catcher in the Rye, is a literary hoax, a kind of Leftist propaganda manifesto, manufactured to discredit traditional family values.

Who are the culprits? Who set the cornerstone for the theater of the absurd?

The culprits are existentialists, led by [Jean-Paul Sartre](#), who are a “conundrum of intellectuals” who have abandoned God and replaced him with man.

Existentialism is about “being”, not “believing.” We are in an age of “[identity theory](#)” that has morphed into “[identity politics](#).” God has been taken out of the public square and replaced by me-myself- and I.

What could possibly go wrong?

The Believer vs. The Non-Believer

In their compelling book [The Terror of Existence – From Ecclesiastes to Theater of the Absurd](#) Dalrymple and Frances analyse the main existentialist works of the 20th century. While Francis is a “believer” Dalrymple is not. However, both help us find meaning in a existentialist created meaningless universe.

This book is both literary criticism and spiritual and philosophical exploration. The authors try to answer some of the most compelling questions faced today including:

- How can a life stripped of ultimate meaning be anything but absurd?
- How is man to live?
- How could man find direction in a world of no direction?

- What would a father tell his children that could make their lives worthwhile?
- What is the bed rock of morality?

Education Has Created a Nation of Idiots

In Chapter 13 Francis reveals how education has been feeding our children with the heroine of existentialist ideas. Francis writes:

Theologian Peter Mullen, writing in the Salisbury Review in 2017, said: "Give me fifty years of comprehensive education and I will show you a nation of idiots."

Francis goes on stating, "[E]ver since the widespread use of social media and the rise of political correctness, many institutions of education seem to have lowered their standards. Generation Selfie, particularly millennial college students, live in an era of sound bites, 'micro-aggressions', 'safe spaces' and shallow, trolling tweets."

In the May 2017 edition of *Taki's Magazine*, Dalrymple wrote the following on "Sovietization without a revolution":

"For to force people to assent to propositions that are outrageously false, on pain of losing their livelihoods or worse, was to crush them morally and psychologically, and thus make them docile, easily manipulated, and complicit in their own enslavement."

Without God life is Meaningless

Francis writes, "Satanic temptation is real...Shielding our ears from the groans emanating from Western or Eastern holocausts in the pursuit of happiness is evil and satanic."

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, during his Temple Address in London, England on May 10, 1983 said:

“If I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous [Communist] Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.”

In Chapter Six Francis does an analysis of Jean-Paul Sartre’s novel *Nausea*. Francis writes, “This book is about a writer who finds himself in the belly of the absurd.” Francis notes, “there’s a long list of factual infamous despots and psychos influenced by [Sartre’s] existentialism who exercised their authenticity with gusto.”

One of these “existentialist” tyrants was Pol Pot.

“Many years before the Year Zero slaughter of millions began in the mid-1970s in Cambodia, a well mannered, polite Mr. Pot left Cambodia and went to Paris to study radio technology. While there, he was deeply influenced by Sartre and Marxism.” notes Francis. “In testimony before a genocide tribunal in Cambodia, Pol Pot’s chief jailer, Kaing Guek Eav, said that children were executed to prevent them seeking revenge. In order to save bullets, executioners would hold the children by their legs or feet and smash their heads against tree trunks in the ‘killing fields’ on the edge of Phnom Penh.”

Conclusion

If you want to understand how we got to our current political system and the culture of identity politics then read [*The Terror of Existence – From Ecclesiastes to Theater of the Absurd*](#).