



Awakening From the Meaning Crisis by John Vervaeke, Ep. 25 — The Clash (Summary & Notes)



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6 min read · Sep 12, 2021



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“Nazism is a tsunami of bullshit in which all of these currents that are emerging out of the collapse of the three orders are being spun by Hitler in order to try to give people a brutally powerful response to the exigent intensity of the meaning crisis in Weimar Germany.”

(In case you missed it: Summary & Notes for Ep. 24:

<https://markmulvey.medium.com/awakening-from-the-meaning-crisis-by-john-vervaeke-ep-24-hegel-summary-notes-895ed0a3cadd>)

Ep. 25 — Awakening from the Meaning Crisis — The Clash [59:16]

<https://youtu.be/Z0i7qrOJALw>

- “Nationalism is the idea that the nation-state can take the role in many ways that God has taken in the past.” Your patriotic devotion, commitment to it, willing to sacrifice for it, your participation in its historical development, etc.

- A fierce nationalism emerges in the 19th C. around the time of Marx/Nietzsche/Kierkegaard, and it quickly gets wedded to imperialism. The whole thing starts to become a secular pseudo-religious ideologies & identities of the people, as they try to fill the gap left by the departure of the Christian framework
- Again, all this continues happening around Germany. Germany as a country is younger than Canada — it doesn't come into existence until 1870 w/ the work of Bismarck. Until then they had been fragmented for centuries, so as they finally came to be a strong economic and political force in the world a sense of pride (and competition) emerged as well.
- Then disaster strikes: WWI. An entire generation across Europe is decimated. And Germany, being defeated, is especially traumatized. The victors, especially France & England, treat Germany poorly, weakening it economically.
- Marxism begins rising in Germany as a real threat, and Goethe was an example of the rise of German Romanticism which was becoming decadent as well. All while there was also: ongoing fragmentation brought on by the Protestant Reformation... the idea of "will to power," an undercurrent of Gnosticism & anti-Semitic traditions... a collapse of German Idealism... To replace Hegel's idealistic interpretation of history, there some who turn to a racist interpretation of history.
- All of these things begin to be drawn together "in the autodidactic vortex of Hitler's mind." The meaning crisis begins to be driven to a fever pitch in the Weimar Republic.
- Hitler is like Luther (this is not to insult Lutherans, just to point out a connection) in the sense that he sees his own personal struggle ("mein kampf") as representative of all of Germany, and by extension all of Western civilization. He exemplifies this chaos and articulates this weird mythology.
- "You misunderstand Nazism if you understand it only as a political system" or only as fascism, or racism. It is fascist and racist, but they are in service of a "Gnostic nightmare."
- "It's in our blood"... "We're a master race, but trapped in a worldwide conspiracy" that is "keeping us from knowing our divine heritage" etc. Luther's antisemitism is mixing up with a strand of Gnosticism that says the people that

worship the God of the old testament are the Jews, which all makes a weird, twisted kind of sense to Hitler.

- “Nazism is a tsunami of bullshit in which all of these currents that are emerging out of the collapse of the three orders are being spun by Hitler in order to try to give people a brutally powerful response to the exigent intensity of the meaning crisis in Weimar Germany.”
- He lucks out, because that socio-cultural process is intensified by the socio-economic collapse of the Great Depression. It seems to vindicate his Gnostic nightmare.
- So now we have two great pseudo-religious ideologies: Marxism and Nazism. And they’re diametrically opposed to each other. And they meet in the most titanic struggle of the Eastern Front in WWII, in the Battle of Kursk in 1943. “There’s nothing like it. It is the biggest battle in history. Literally.” It eventually ends in a Russian victory
- It also has an impact on the genealogy of the meaning crisis. They are both a fixation at the level of beliefs. Totalitarian ideologies — attempts to create secular alternatives to religions. Attempts to recapture the Axial legacy, where mythology is being confused for politics.
- “The perspectival knowing has been reduced to your political viewpoint. The participatory knowing has been reduced to your political identification.”
- All of this isn’t just symptomatic of the meaning crisis, but contributes to it and exacerbates it. A *meta-crisis*. To address it we need to have comprehensive change in our consciousness, cognition, character, and culture. The only thing that has ever integrated these things in the past is religion. Our only attempts to replace this in the 19th/20th centuries — pseudo-religious ideologies — “have drenched the world in blood.”
- So we need to respond to the meta-crisis, and response to the pseudo-religious ideologies. One proposed solution is a nostalgic return to religion. An attempt to ignore all this history. This just leads to a new set of fundamentalisms (Vervaeke even considers atheism one of these) and politicizations. When *fundamentalism* and *politicization* interact we get a potential for *terrorism*.

- Some people find themselves being in a state of *post-religious*. Fragmented, autodidactic... which can dangerously interact with politicization as well as pseudo-religious ideologies. It sits between them in a state of disarray, but can still interact with them, maybe as part of a search for a way out.
- “We seem to need a religion that cannot be any kind of religion at all.”
- “There is no political solution to our troubled evolution.” — The Police
- A fruitful way of understanding one of the great novels — Moby Dick — is to think of it as about this dilemma. The zombie mythology in popular culture can also be seen as an articulation of this.
- We now move from the historical analysis to the other side of the argument: a cognitive scientific analysis of the machinery of meaning-making itself.
- What is cognitive science? (At least according to Vervaeke) It’s fairly recent (70’s/80’s) that emerges out of the study of the mind — the organ of cognition.
- There are different *levels of analysis* and also different *disciplines*. Neuroscience studies the brain and patterns of neural activity. Computer science studies information processing in terms of things like programs, and can get into artificial intelligence (AI) and artificial general intelligence (AGI). Psychology studies behavior, getting into things like working memory, long-term memory etc. and employ experimentation to gather statistical data.
- There’s one more level too: language. Language is an important way in which mind operates and communicates. “It’s through language that minds are linked together.” This level is studied by linguistics.
- “Long before the internet was linking computers together, culture was networking minds together.” Most of our problem-solving is done with distributed cognition, and the discipline that studies that is anthropology and uses the method of participatory observation to do so. Why? Because culture is something you have to know in a participatory knowing fashion.
- The point is that “mind” does not refer to a single thing. “When I say ‘mind’ it’s not clear what I mean. Science is fragmenting what the word ‘mind’ means, and therefore it’s fragmenting *you*. Who and what *you* are.”

- The idea is that if we don't get clear about how to integrate all these meanings of the word mind then we're going to equivocate a lot. But also, it's unlikely that these levels are not causally impacting and constraining each other. So we need to capture the causal interaction between the levels. The discipline of philosophy can help bridge between each of these disciplines and vocabularies.
- When you're using philosophy to bridge the disciplines and avoid equivocation and facilitate grasping the causal interaction, then you're doing cognitive science.

Next up: Awakening From the Meaning Crisis by John Vervaeke, Ep. 26 — Cognitive Science (Summary & Notes) <https://markmulvey.medium.com/awakening-from-the-meaning-crisis-by-john-vervaeke-ep-26-cognitive-science-summary-notes-8b12fe0d6075>

List of Books in the Video:

- Herman Melville — Moby Dick
- L. A. Paul — Transformative Experience

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