

# From Charles Manson To Sutherland Springs: How The Materialist West Is Killing Its Own

Charles Manson, who orchestrated one of the past century's most brutal mass murders, passed away mostly unmourned in prison last month. He was 83. Since he'd had brushes with the law going back into his childhood (was sent to reform school at age 8), and never spent a day outside prison following his arrest for the Tate / La Bianca murders in August 1969, most of Manson's life was spent behind bars.

Which is doubtless just as well. For the influence he wielded can only be described as demonic. He'd not killed anyone himself, but directed others, the young girls of his "Family," to do his bidding after supplying them with generous doses of LSD.

The would-be assassin of then-president Gerald Ford, a few years later, turned out to be a "Family" member: Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme.

Having read the Yahoo.com article about Manson's death, I found myself browsing the comments section out of curiosity. One comment brought me up short.

What it said, in essence: if the Manson killings happened today, in an environment following Las Vegas and Sutherland Springs, Texas, they would get perhaps a week of news coverage before mass media went on to the next ghastly event.

My thought: what a statement on American society today, as opposed to 1969-70!

Back then, a mass murder on that level shocked us to the core. The country, especially its youth, still held to an idealism about human nature and what was socially possible. Today, in 2017, much of the secular-derived hope that existed then is gone, whether we know it or want to admit it or not.

The better elements of the youth movement of the late 1960s, united *for* civil rights and feminism understood as nondiscrimination and basic workplace fairness, and *against* an ill-advised and massively unpopular war in Southeast Asia, arguably were cosmic optimism's last culturally viable gasp. Afterwards, the above movements were hijacked and turned divisive. Wars became popular again. We fell into confusion and justifiable doubt.

Some would trot out the technology revolution of the 1990s as a sign of cultural optimism, but its most popular fruits have been the self-absorption and self-indulgence represented by (what else?) selfies and Facebook. But no, technology has not saved us. However much we can use Skype and WhatsApp to communicate conveniently, sometimes across oceans, the Internet's dark side reveals a world of trolls (some paid), hackers, scam artists, cyberbullies, and hard-core porn sites easily accessed by young teenagers. On the so-called dark web, not accessible through common search engines like Google, there is worse, or so I am told: kiddie porn sites done by and for pedophiles, Satanic rituals, and films of animals and humans being tortured to death.

While much went wrong in the 1970s, the seeds of destruction had been planted long before. Because for decades, materialism as a theory of reality (or *metaphysics*) had been taught as truth – substantiated by science or inferred by Enlightenment reason – and when not promoted in universities, assumed as a basis for educational policy (behaviorism in psychology, which sees children as little stimulus-response machines, is an application of materialism.) Everything else was rejected as superstition, unreason, pseudoscience, psychological

aberration, fantasy, etc. A latent commitment to materialism – not a brand new reading of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause – stood behind such events as the removal of prayer from public schools and the effort to eliminate Christianity from the public square.

If we were talking about a mere philosophical abstraction, the matter wouldn’t be of much importance except for scholars. But materialism is not just an abstraction. It has important consequences, some of which I’ve discussed [previously](#). For our purposes here, the most important consequence is that human life – *our* lives as persons – has no transcendent value or significance. Morality is, at best, a cultural artifact, a set of socially approved habits which bind a culture together via authority.

If this interpretation of morality and of the significance of individual human lives is assumed, then a cultural ethos in which moral rules are easily flaunted is increasingly acceptable, and becomes progressively easier as we “define deviancy down.”

At this point I could invoke abortion as a perfect example. Legal abortions have now taken the lives of roughly 61 million unborn babies since the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973. If an evaluation of the prevailing moral ethos of a civilization can be made by how it treats its most vulnerable members – and who is more vulnerable than an unborn baby? – then any honest evaluation of ours comes to look very bad! (I am not saying, incidentally, that we shouldn’t look at factors that tempt girls and women to end unwanted pregnancies, ranging from poverty to cultural hedonism and extramarital sex. We are talking about many overlapping systems here, but some of them are products of a materialist worldview.)

It also looks bad when we think of a civilizational ethos that seems to be producing more and more people able to plan cold-blooded mass murder of their fellow adult citizens, then pick

up an assault weapon and carry out the plan, which is what happened in Sutherland Springs, Texas: before last month a town no one outside the area had heard of, as it is little more than a major intersection with a stoplight, a few homes, a few stores, and a certain First Baptist Church.

A person can only do this if he is a sociopath, or has been trained – or has trained himself – to depersonalize his “targets.” Such training is conducted as a matter of course in war. Few soldiers are sociopaths who can just pick up guns and kill strangers. They have to depersonalize the enemy. Those then slaughtered on battlefields are not seen as men like themselves, with families waiting anxiously for them back home. They are ciphers to be taken out before they take you out. Many of our returned Veterans never fully recover from this experience. As a college student in the 1970s I recall encountering Vietnam Veterans who were tormented by things they’d seen. Now we have Veterans from the disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq suffering from PTSD, with recurring nightmares and unpredictable reactions to loud noises (there is even a [heavy progressive rock song](#) by an intelligent group, Dream Theater, the harsh edginess of which offers a surprisingly moving account of what some of these people are going through).

It is not normal to pick up a firearm and kill strangers without a very, very good reason!

(And lest I be asked, the Sutherland Springs saga is an embodiment of why more gun control is not the answer. First, *existing* laws should have prevented Devin Patrick Kelley, 26, from obtaining an assault weapon. He had been dishonorably discharged from the Air Force following a domestic violence conviction and period of incarceration. A bureaucrat neglected to enter this in the national database. Gun control laws cannot be made idiot-proof! Second, had a neighbor also *with* a gun not accessed the situation quickly and taken action, forcing Kelley to flee the scene, the death toll inside the

church would have been much higher.

Incidentally, too, I've encountered nothing to suggest that the Sutherland Springs killings were anything other than what they appeared to be, and trust me, I was looking. Sometimes, as I often say, a cigar is just a cigar. The Vegas shootings are a different story. Here we have an official narrative full of unanswered questions, ranging from sightings suggestive of multiple shooters, queries why no one injured subsequently died of their wounds which given the numbers vastly stretches probability, the mystery of how the sheer quantity of guns and ammo found in Stephen Paddock's suite got there in a building wired with secure-cams and no one reported anything suspicious, and what Paddock's motive could possibly have been. But we need not deal with these to make the point I am interested in here: someone – maybe more than one someone – was willing to mass murder their fellow human beings, whatever the reason!)

Materialism has far less dramatic effects, obviously. It is hardly news that many millennials are turning from capitalism and trying to embrace socialism. For the first time last year, a man who called himself a democratic socialist posed a viable challenge to an establishment candidate. The superficial criticism of the Bernie Sanders millennials would be that the Soviet Union collapsed before they were born, and that the impoverishment of education and their own tech-induced myopia blinds them to the present realities of North Korea's brutal prison camps or how Venezuelans, despite living in a resources-rich country, have been reduced by the insane policies of their socialist government to digging through garbage for scraps of food.

These snarky responses no longer seem to me especially fair. They miss the real question: *why* the relatively sudden (since 2008) hostility to capitalism by significant voices of a generation? A plausible answer is that the present neoliberal corporatist capitalism globalists have embraced sees one's

worth as a person as what one can contribute to the global economy. Do note that the elderly, the infirm, many disabled, not to mention “fetuses” (and for that matter, small children) cannot contribute. I have encountered Libertarians (many of whom are *de facto* materialists) who wouldn't seem to have much of a problem with nonparticipants in the marketplace starving, although obviously they wouldn't say so; they would point to charities, etc., etc., indicative of the need for institutions operating outside the marketplace, understood as economic space for exchanges of goods and services for money.

Neoliberal ideology, which now controls university administrations, has been described as “capitalism with the gloves off”: currently empowering the global billionaire ownership class – with more wealth than the entire bottom half of the world's population – which has shrunk over the past couple of decades until it would fit comfortably into a high school auditorium.

I don't think you have to be a socialist to see something wrong with this picture.

The problem is not *socialism* and it is not *capitalism*, it is the *materialism* that the most important incarnations of each one share. Materialism, again, as a theory of reality holds that God does not exist, that morality is a cultural artifact, that our lives have no transcendent significance, that death is the end of personal identity and consciousness after which your body is dropped in a hole and covered over, and that therefore there is nothing fundamentally wrong with amassing as much wealth you can by whatever means are available – including buying easily-corrupted political elites, treating your employees as expendable, and otherwise stepping on anyone in your way.

That's our wonderful global corporate capitalist engine as it exists in the twenty-first century.

Small wonder some of our young people are “rediscovering” Marx!

Small wonder others, their brains addled by identity-politics, are turning “alt-right” and claiming for whites what the cultural left has foisted on over a dozen academic disciplines (several of which would not exist without identity politics).

The most visible response to our materialist moment has been the populist anger that put Donald Trump in the White House and empowered movements both “left” and “right” elsewhere in the world, from Arab Spring all across the Arab world and the Syriza Party in Greece prior to its being strongarmed and neutered by the EU central bank, to Brexit, to the current leadership in Poland and Hungary. What all have in common is a desire to live as they see fit, without the structural coercion globalist elitism entails. This includes rejecting open borders and incursions by unassimilable foreigners who commit violent crimes including rape and murder.

Most populist rage, whether of the “left” or the “right,” is inchoate and inarticulate. Were it to find a philosophically-informed expositor, the result might go something like this: If God does not exist and there is no transcendent morality and no life other than this material one, then if any of us are to get *justice*, however we define it, it has to be gotten in *this* world – by whatever means are necessary, including those other groups will define as *unjust*.

In this kind of ethos, groups politicized by identity are apt to fly at each other’s throats. I won’t wade into specifics because I am more interested in the unspoken commonality: *my group has been shafted and we’re not going to tolerate it anymore!*

Into this arena walks the occasional sociopath, or the man who simply “snaps” – or who is willing to kill other persons to advance a hidden agenda.

Into the same arena, of course, walk *known* sexual predators: the Bill Clintons, the Harvey Weinsteins, the Al Franken, the Charlie Roses, who did what they did because in *their* reality, women are used for men's sexual gratification and then rewarded with jobs or movie roles, for it's just business, right? Sexual predation being a sanctionable "bad thing," unproven and unprovable allegations can then be used in efforts to destroy those whose worldviews threaten the status quo, [due process being expendable](#). Judge Roy Moore of Alabama comes to mind.

The enemy behind the headlines is materialism – which can be an abstraction, an obsession with wealth and possessions or power, or as the depersonalizing of persons that is possible when one sees them as evolved big-brained mammals or as objects existing for one's profit or gratification, or as lumps of flesh in a womb.

Advancing civilizations have features that tempt them to materialism. Empirical science, which rightly focuses on physical reality, offers credible and useful explanations for many phenomena. Prosperity *does* result from technology turning raw materials into consumable ones, and from trade. Increased wealth *does* establish comfort levels enabling the comfortable to forget where they came from and just bask in their surroundings, and their children to grow up with, e.g., no idea that their food comes from anywhere except the grocery store.

Capitalism never lifted everyone equally, however, and it never will – for reasons too numerous to get into here. But socialism, invariably built on a capitalist base, will *not* even things out. These abstract ideologies are nowhere seen in their pure forms in any event. What we need to reflect on (millennials, I am talking to *you* if *any* of you are reading / listening):

The ideology of modernity, whether understood in capitalist



terms or as something else (e.g., the “mixed economy”) cannot deliver on its progressive promise to bring paradise to Earth because human nature is inherently sinful (Rom. 3:23). Think about both the plusses and negatives of the Internet I cited earlier, and then tell me there is no such thing as sin. Think about our seeming inability to organize ourselves socially and economically in a way that does not screw *somebody*, and tell me there is no such thing as sin. Globalization and technology have conspicuously failed to lift the world’s masses out of poverty, although they have further empowered the billionaire ownership class (my term, in [Four Cardinal Errors](#), is the superelite) that has orchestrated it.

If what has happened to the West is any guide, when materialism takes over a civilization, that civilization begins to self-destruct. Its rich grow richer, more corrupt, arrogant, and indifferent to those thrown under the bus by their policies. The latter grow increasingly irrational and destructive. They create a debt-fueled system to sustain spending in an economy in which the decent jobs have disappeared because no one really *makes* anything anymore. They initiate wars not from just causes but because war is profitable! Educational systems are ruined, because those in power can’t abide a population of critical thinkers. Entertainment is corrupted and turned increasingly tawdry. Just compare the comedians of long ago, such as Red Skelton and Jackie Gleason, to the talentless, foul-mouthed losers who dominate comedy today. Or compare the upbeat jazz and soulful black music of the 1960s-early 1970s (anyone recall the Temptations, or Diana Ross and the Supremes?) with the lewdness and violence of rap.

The materialist West is killing its own, and where once, long ago, the killings shocked us (Manson), today they result in a few days of coverage and then are remembered with yawns by all except neighbors and surviving family members whose lives have been permanently altered (Sutherland Springs). And it is

killing itself. The West's collective philosophical problem, like Camus's (see his 1942 essay "The Myth of Sisyphus"), is suicide. The West is committing educational and cultural suicide. Even if it doesn't go out with the horror of a nuclear war, it threatens ever-greater degrees of *de facto* totalitarianism – Trumpian populism notwithstanding – followed by long-term collapse (a process, not a singular event) as its institutions become unsustainable.

Maybe the test for the future is to see if we can overthrow *materialism*, not just *globalism*. For if we were to overthrow the latter and ignore the former, within a generation or so we'd be back where we started. It won't be easy. Materialism is probably more deeply woven into the fabric of our civilization than the profit motive in global corporations or the power motive in governments. Formally educated men and women dismiss those of us who speak of the God of the Bible as irrational and backward, or as would-be theocrats: "dominionists" driven by a lust for power ourselves. There may, of course, be Christians who fall into this trap. Speaking just for myself, I have no interest in seeing a theocracy established, which I see as one more species of hierarchical, top-down power politics. My interest is in promoting the only worldview and guide for life that might have some hope of sustaining bottom-up self-governance by providing a core of stable morals that apply to every area of life, from governance to personal finance to family and relationships, and containing the lust for power as much as is humanly possible. Separating ourselves, rather than trying to "take over the government," might be the most viable long-term strategy at this point.

As against materialism, we must affirm both that God exists as the Creator of all things (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1), that we were created in His image (Gen 1:27) – and that He knows even the unborn (Jere. 1:5). God does not reject rightful knowledge-seeking (Hosea 4:6). What limited knowledge we have of the

physical world, and what capacity we have to use its resources, are as they are because of this. We were indeed given “dominion” over the world (Gen. 1:28-30), where *dominion* means *responsible stewardship*. Morality is a provision of God’s (Micah 6:8), not commanded because He is some kind of cosmic tyrant, but because living according to His commands is, in the final analysis, the only means to a life at peace with oneself, in harmony with others, and with the world as it is. We may be fallen: we inhabit a fallen world, but we are redeemable through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior (John 3:16, Rom 3:23 and 6:23, Eph 2:8-9, and elsewhere).

Christian ideas are not to be forced on anyone. What may apply are the words Jesus had for the “lukewarm church” – perhaps helping us avoid the temptations to lukewarmness in ourselves: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

In this age of wanton killings and technological distractions, does anyone still hear His voice?

*[Author’s Note: if you believe this article was worth your time, please consider supporting my writing with a \$5/mo. pledge on [my Patreon site](#). If the first 100 people who read this all donate, my goal of just \$500/mo. would be reached in no time! And if we’re honest about it, we all waste that much money each day.*

*This is an attempt to raise money to publish and promote a novel, Reality 101, to be marketed as the first serious novel of the Donald Trump era, which, so far as I know, it is. In it, a ex-Wall Street globalist technocrat defends his views on elitism and oligarchy before a community wracked by the effects of globalization in a voice filled with irony and dripping with cynicism – to be contrasted with the possibility of freedom outside the world as he sees it.*

*Promoting a book, in my case, means the necessity of international travel which is not cheap.*

*I do not write for an audience of one. I write for you, readers of this site. If you believe this work might make a contribution to the world of political-economic ideas, please consider supporting it financially. I am not a wealthy person, and unlike the leftist groups I often criticize, I do not have a George Soros funneling a bottomless well of cash my way.*

*If I reach the above goal of \$500/mo., I may be able to speak at an event in your area (contact info below).*

*I've allowed myself (via a handful of reader emails) to be talked out of going into retirement at the end of this year, to give this at least one more year, but due to my own situation, that will be the best I can do.]*

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