

DEATH TO THE WORLD

THE LAST TRUE REBELLION



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subhumanity

The philosophy of the Absurd

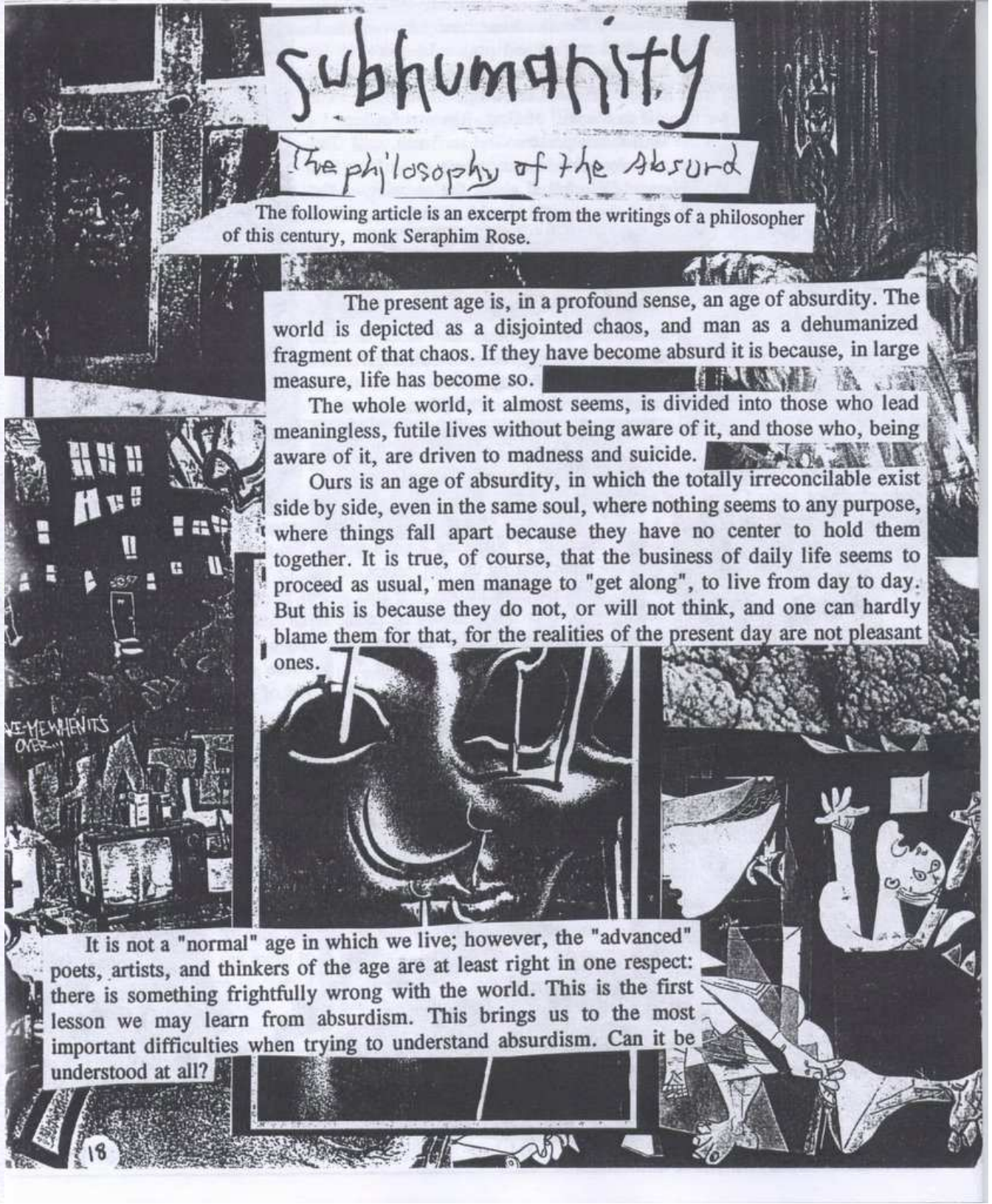
The following article is an excerpt from the writings of a philosopher of this century, monk Seraphim Rose.

The present age is, in a profound sense, an age of absurdity. The world is depicted as a disjointed chaos, and man as a dehumanized fragment of that chaos. If they have become absurd it is because, in large measure, life has become so.

The whole world, it almost seems, is divided into those who lead meaningless, futile lives without being aware of it, and those who, being aware of it, are driven to madness and suicide.

Ours is an age of absurdity, in which the totally irreconcilable exist side by side, even in the same soul, where nothing seems to any purpose, where things fall apart because they have no center to hold them together. It is true, of course, that the business of daily life seems to proceed as usual, men manage to "get along", to live from day to day. But this is because they do not, or will not think, and one can hardly blame them for that, for the realities of the present day are not pleasant ones.

It is not a "normal" age in which we live; however, the "advanced" poets, artists, and thinkers of the age are at least right in one respect: there is something frightfully wrong with the world. This is the first lesson we may learn from absurdism. This brings us to the most important difficulties when trying to understand absurdism. Can it be understood at all?





Absurdism may not be understood at all in its own terms; for understanding is coherence, and that is the very opposite of absurdity. If we are to understand absurdity it must be from a standpoint outside of absurdity. We must, in short, take a stand within a faith opposed to the absurdist faith, and attack it in the name of a truth of which it denies the existence. In the end we shall find that absurdism, quite against its will, offers its own testimony to this faith and this Truth which are -- let us state at the outset -- Christian.



Christianity is, supremely, coherence; God who is the beginning and the end of all creation; for the absurdist everything falls apart, including his own philosophy, which in itself is self-contradiction. To proclaim ultimate meaninglessness, one must believe this phrase has meaning; to assert that "there is no truth" one must believe in the truth of this statement, and so again affirm what one denies. Absurdism, as we have seen, is not the product of the intellect at all, but of the will.

The absurdist revelation bursts into the open in two striking phrases of Nietzsche so often quoted: "God is dead" means, simply, that faith in God is dead in the hearts of modern men; and "there is no truth" means that men have abandoned the truth revealed by God.

The magnificent certainty we see in the saints and in all true believers that refers everything, whether in thought or life, back to God, seeing everything as beginning and ending in Him,-- this certainty that once held society and the world and man himself together, are now gone, and the questions for which men once had learned to find the answers in God, now have -- for most men -- no answers.

There have been, of course, other forms of coherence than Christianity. Men who believe and follow, for example, the traditional Hindu or Chinese view of things, possess a measure of truth and of the peace that comes from truth -- but no absolute truth, and not the "peace that passes all understanding" that proceeds only from absolute truth; and those who fall away from this relative truth and peace have

lost something real, but they have not lost everything as has the apostate Christian.

God has promised men immortality and has prepared a Kingdom in which men will live in God, having been raised from the dead. A world from which such a God has been removed is "absurd".

"God is dead", "there is no Truth": the two phrases are like a revelation of the absolute absurdity of a world whose center is no longer God, but -- nothing. In this, reality becomes a nightmare and the world becomes an alien planet wherein men wander not so much in hopelessness but in perplexity, uncertain of where they are and their own identity; aware only of the absence of God. Death becomes the highest God.

It is not necessary, so they think, to believe in heaven or hell in order to lead a "good life" in this world. And their argument is a persuasive one but this is another of the myriad masks behind which men hide the face of death. He who thinks to lead a "good life" that ends in death does not know the meaning of his words. If man is after all to end in nothingness, then in the deepest sense it does not matter what he does in this life, for then nothing he may do is of any ultimate consequence. It is absolutely true that if "there is no immortality of the soul", the world is absurd and, "everything is permitted". the dust of death smothers every joy and prevents even tears.

Nothing in this world -- not love, not goodness, not sanctity -- is of any value, or indeed even has any meaning, if man does not survive death. Those who believe that virtue begins and ends in this life are but one step from those who believe that there is no virtue at all; and this step -- a fact of which our century bears eloquent witness -- is all too easily taken, for it is after all a logical step.

Absurdism is the last proof that Christian truth is absolute and uncompromising, or else it is the same as no truth at all; and if there is no truth, if Christian truth is not to be understood literally and absolutely, if God is dead, if there is no immortality -- then this world is all there is, and this world is absurd, this world is hell.

