

This is an audio adaptation of the first chapter of my book, *Worldviews. A Click Away from Binary Collisions*. This reading is from Chapter One, and it is titled: “Technology Junkies. How Ideas Travel the Speed of Light”. You will find links to this chapter in the description of this video.

To quote philosopher Mortimer J. Adler, author and co-founding the Great Books of the Western World program:

“I suspect that most of the individuals who have religious faith are content with blind faith. They feel no obligation to understand what they believe. They may even wish not to have their beliefs disturbed by thought. But if God in whom they believe created them with intellectual and rational powers, then those powers impose upon them the duty to understand the creed of their religion. Not to do so is to verge on superstition.”<sup>1</sup>

The importance of knowing, defining, and dissecting worldviews<sup>2</sup> in our electronic age is more important today than ever. The internet brings a myriad of religious and political opinions right into our living rooms daily. What we were able to confront, and if one so desired, to stop at their doorstep, is now with a touch of a button in our living rooms, children’s bedrooms, our cell phones, and the like, routing the old filter of that doorstep. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, all these words have entered our vocabulary in less than a decade and they offer a plethora of chances to encounter the world as never before.

My children’s interaction with some of these issues as well as interaction with skeptics prompted me to explain what a worldview is in a more in-depth manner and how to begin to dissect other worldviews.

A modern example of the power of ideas and communication occurred during the disputed Iranian presidential election of June 2009. Following widespread allegations of election fraud, massive protests erupted throughout Iran in what became known as the Green Movement. While social media did not create protests, it enabled demonstrators to communicate with one another, share information with the outside world, and challenge the

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<sup>1</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, “A Philosopher’s Religious Faith,” in, Kelly James Clark, ed., *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 207; Dr. Adler (1902-2001). He was Chairman and Cofounder with Max Weismann of the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas and Editor in Chief of its journal *Philosophy is Everybody’s Business*, Founder and Director of the Institute for Philosophical Research, Chairman of the Board of Editors of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Editor in Chief of the *Great Books of the Western World* and *The Syntopicon: An Index to the Great Ideas*, Editor of *The Great Ideas Today* (all published by Encyclopedia Britannica), Co-Founder and Honorary Trustee of The Aspen Institute, past Instructor at Columbia University, Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago (1930-52).

<sup>2</sup> “A worldview is that basic set of assumptions that gives meaning to one’s thoughts. A worldview is the set of assumptions that someone has about the *way* things are, about *what* things are, about *why* things are.” L. Russ Bush, *A Handbook for Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 70.

government's monopoly on information. Writing in Time magazine during the height of the demonstrations, journalist Lev Grossman observed:

Twitter didn't start the protests in Iran, nor did it make them possible. But there's no question that it has emboldened the protesters, reinforced their conviction that they are not alone and engaged populations outside Iran in an emotional, immediate way that was never possible before. President Ahmadinejad — who happened to visit Russia on Tuesday — now finds himself in a court of world opinion where even Khrushchev never had to stand trial. Totalitarian governments rule by brute force, and because they control the consensus worldview of those they rule. Tyranny, in other words, is a monologue. But as long as Twitter is up and running, there's no such thing.<sup>3</sup>

The importance of such venues should be apparent. These sites are not intended to be religiously or politically driven, yet questions of religion and politics inevitably arise within them. The two often prove difficult to separate because a person's religious convictions frequently shape his or her understanding of morality, human nature, government, and society. Indeed, one of the recurring themes of American history is the close relationship between religious ideas and political thought.



Historian and author David Barton, founder of WallBuilders and a prominent researcher of America's founding era, notes in his book *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, and Religion*, that the Northwest Ordinance is widely regarded as one of the four foundational documents of the early American republic, alongside the Articles of Confederation, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution.

The creation and passage of the Northwest Ordinance provides a noteworthy example of the role religious philosophy played in early American political thought. One passage of the Ordinance reads:

Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

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<sup>3</sup> Lev Grossman “Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement.” Time Magazine, June 17, 2009, article found online at: <https://time.com/archive/6947035/iran-protests-twitter-the-medium-of-the-movement/> (last accessed 5-30-2026).

This Ordinance was used as a basis for many of the state constitutions that followed the founding of our nation. Ohio, for example, drew upon its language when expressing the importance of education as a means of encouraging religion, morality, and good government:

Religion, morality, and knowledge being essentially necessary to the good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of instruction shall forever be encouraged by legislative provision.<sup>4</sup>

One should keep in mind after reading these early state constitutions that the same producers of them and the Northwest Ordinance were also the authors of the First Amendment – the oft-cited phrase "separation of church and state". You see, one cannot just take the Constitution as a secular document unless they forego the historical weight of the other three fundamental laws (already mentioned), state constitutions, the Founders own writings, and the like. One would not be able to discuss these early documents without discussing religion, likewise, one cannot seem to discuss religious concepts without interjecting political science into the conversation. The two do indeed seem inseparable and driven ultimately by a worldview.

A poignant example of this comes from the Bolshevik Revolution. While this was an atheistic movement with a view of religion as “the opiate of the masses” used by a few powerful people to control said “masses,” the Soviets themselves tried to use religion to “control the masses.” One early attempt by the Bolshevik Revolution to take over the spiritual was through the Renovated Church (also known as the Living Church Movement) which was meant to reinterpret the teachings of Christ and the Apostles towards a Soviet end. During one of the short-lived attempts here by the Soviets, we find this official “statement of faith:”

- a) The Soviet power does not appear as a persecutor of the Church;
- b) The Constitution of the Soviet state provides full religious liberty;
- c) Church people must not see in the Soviet state a power of the anti-Christ;
- d) The Soviet power is the only one which tempts by state methods to realize the ideals of the Kingdom of God;
- e) Capitalism is the “great lie” and a “mortal sin”;
- f) The Soviet government is the world leader toward fraternity, equality, and international peace.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, & Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Aledo, TX: Wallbuilders Press, 2004), 439 (note #72).

<sup>5</sup> Edgar C. Bundy, *How the Communists Use Religion* (Wheaton, IL: Church League of America, 1966), 12.

I will put this caveat here; however, it applies to the whole: I will quote authors with whom I do not necessarily agree with. I often quote authors that are: atheists, pagans, fellow Christians, politicians, homosexuals,

My point here is that even the most “secular state” known in modern history tried actively to use religion to control political outcomes. Again, my point is the two seem inseparable. From the ancient Egyptian and Grecian days until our own, religion is a powerful social force. People realize this often without necessarily realizing this -- if that makes sense.

Now, understanding that this book is an intertwining of the two taboos and that this work isn’t merely a “religious” apologetic. Far from it. It would better be viewed as a religio-political apologetic or commentary, meaning that a theistic (i.e., Judeo-Christian-Western) view of nature is assumed which itself incorporates an understanding of Natural Law as a force that must be “reckoned with” when one approaches religious or political questions. This book should be viewed more properly as a polemic for the conservative evangelical view of current affairs.

This polemic examines how a conservative religious person may respond to some of the questions – honestly asked – bombarding us almost daily from friends, co-workers, family, or the media (in all its manifestations). I say “honestly asked” because often people just ask questions to purposefully deflect their own understanding of the topic. Once you give a reasonably well thought out answer, the dishonest interviewer typically will not inculcate this response and consider changing his or her mind based on the new evidence you just gave them, they typically respond with another question. The problem is not with the topic or evidence that is being discussed, the problem might well be that the person in question just doesn’t want to re-think their position, no matter how much evidence he or she finds or is presented with. Let me explain with an example from the book, *Classical Apologetics*, it reads:

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL PREJUDICE

But even a sound epistemic system, flawless deductive reasoning, and impeccable inductive procedure does not guarantee a proper conclusion. Emotional bias or antipathy might block the way to the necessary conclusion of the research. That thinkers may obstinately resist a logical verdict is humorously illustrated by John Warwick Montgomery’s modern parable:

Once upon a time (note the mystical cast) there was a man who thought he was dead. His concerned wife and friends sent him to a friendly neighborhood psychiatrist determined to cure him by convincing him of one fact that contradicted his beliefs that he was dead. The fact that the psychiatrist decided to use was the simple truth that dead men do not bleed. He put his patient to work reading medical texts,

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evolutionists, and the like... merely because I quote an author, this quotation does not mean that I support their work as a whole.

observing autopsies, etc. After weeks of effort the patient finally said, “All right, all right! You’ve convinced me. Dead men do not bleed.” Whereupon the psychiatrist stuck him in the arm with a needle, and the blood flowed. The man looked down with a contorted, ashen face and cried, “Good Lord! Dead men bleed after all!”

Emotional prejudice is not limited to dull-witted, illiterate, and poorly educated. Philosophers and theologians are not exempt from the vested interests and psychological prejudice that distort logical thinking. The question of the existence of God evokes deep emotional and psychological prejudice. People understand that the question of the existence of God is not one that is of neutral consequence. We understand intuitively, if not in terms of its full rational implication, that the existence of an eternal Creator before whom we are ultimately accountable and responsible is a matter that touches the very core of life.<sup>6</sup>

You see, the Christian-theistic worldview does not just offer answers in religious areas and is silent in the political arena, rather, it forces one to confront popular culture, which often demands political or cultural change. This can cause religious and non-religious people alike to become very intolerant, especially when the topic combines a person’s religious views and that of current affairs. One such confrontation is taking place today in China where the Church is growing by leaps and bounds; on its heels is economic freedom, which typically follows religious freedom - causing a very intolerant response from this Communist based government. David Aikman makes the point that many Chinese have wondered if capitalism is “just a way of doing business, or did it come with concrete ethical and philosophical foundations?” The author continues:

Christianity itself, which had been such a powerful, if not fully understood, ingredient in the global pre-eminence of Western civilization, may be a worldview, even a metaphysic that could guide China’s pathway into the twenty-first century. Perhaps it could provide a lens for Chinese to understand their own history with greater insight than ever before.<sup>7</sup>

The success or failure of economic systems is often tied to the assumptions they make about human nature. In this respect, economics is not merely a discussion about money, markets, or government policy; it is also a discussion about worldview.

Thomas Sowell, one of the most influential economists and social commentators of the modern era, has argued that many political and economic disputes stem from differing views of human nature. In his book *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles*,

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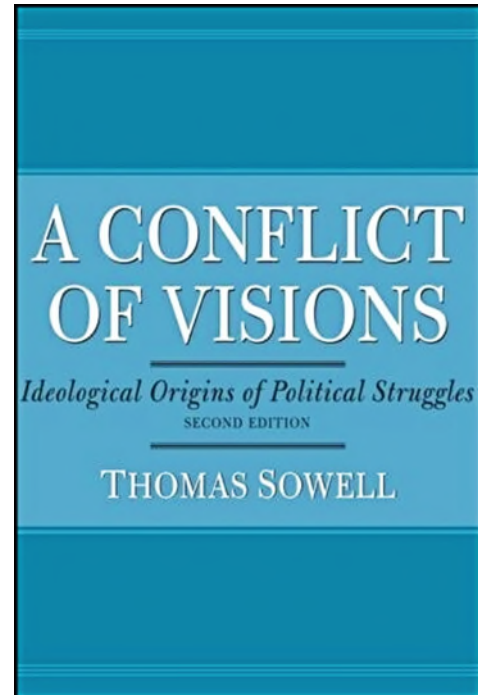
<sup>6</sup> R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 69-70.

<sup>7</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2003), 16 (emphasis added).

Sowell reduces these competing outlooks to two broad categories: what he calls "the constrained vision" and "the unconstrained vision."

Quoting Thomas Sowell:

The constrained vision is a tragic vision of the human condition. The unconstrained vision is a moral vision of human intentions, which are viewed as ultimately decisive. The unconstrained vision promotes pursuit of the highest ideals and the best solutions. By contrast, the constrained vision sees the best as the enemy of the good [as] a vain attempt to reach the unattainable being seen as not only futile but often counterproductive, while the same efforts could have produced a more viable and beneficial trade-off. Adam Smith applied this reasoning not only to



economics but also to morality and politics: The prudent reformer, according to Smith, will respect "the confirmed habits and prejudices of the people," and when he cannot establish what is right, "he will not disdain to ameliorate the wrong." His goal is not to create the ideal but to "establish the best that the people can bear."<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Sowell goes on to point out that while not "all social thinkers fit this schematic dichotomy... the conflict of visions is no less real because everyone has not chosen sides or irrevocably committed themselves." Continuing, he points out:

Despite necessary caveats, it remains an important and remarkable phenomenon that how human nature is conceived at the outset is highly correlated with the whole conception of knowledge, morality, power, time, rationality, war, freedom, and law which defines a social vision.... The dichotomy between constrained and unconstrained visions is based on whether or not inherent limitations of man are among the key elements included in the vision.<sup>9</sup>

Simply put, Sowell is arguing that the way we view human nature will largely determine how we view everything else. If we believe people are fundamentally limited, flawed, and incapable of creating perfect solutions, we will tend to favor institutions and policies that work within those limitations. If, however, we believe human beings can overcome those

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York, NY: basic Books, 2007), 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 34.

limitations through reason, education, or social reform, we will tend to pursue more ambitious visions of what society can become.

In other words, before people debate politics, economics, morality, or law, they have already made assumptions about what human beings are. Those assumptions become the foundation upon which everything else is built. Because the Judeo-Christian worldview offers a distinct understanding of human nature—affirming both the value of mankind as image-bearers of God and the reality of humanity's fallen condition—it naturally influences the social, political, and economic conclusions that follow.

The Judeo-Christian understanding of human nature is key in this respect. If Sowell is correct that our social and political visions arise from our assumptions about mankind, then Christianity's view of humanity—as both valuable and fallen—will inevitably influence the social, political, and economic conclusions that follow.

(“**Appendix A**” at the end of this chapter will explain some of the “economics” of the Biblical worldview versus a more “Marxian” view.)

You can almost liken the constrained view of man in economics and conservatism as “the Evangelical position.”

Pulitzer Prize winning political commentator, Walter Lippmann (1889-1974), makes the above point well:

At the core of every moral code there is a picture of human nature, a map of the universe, and a version of history.<sup>10</sup>

A free market, then, is typically closely tied with the Christian worldview with its concrete view of the reality of man balanced with love for your neighbor; some Chinese are catching on to this fact of life. While these types of reflections on current Chinese history and past Soviet history weigh in on the religio-political and socio-economic arena of today's political mêlée, they are not of key importance to our walk with our Savior. True that we are not saved by whom we vote for, as humans, we have very divergent answers to the many areas of our political/economic lives.

The answers proffered by the Judeo-Christian worldview are, however, important to understanding how we should view reality and respond to social issues that come from worldviews. Whether a Christian understands this or not makes this acting in the world based on views of reality no less real because everyone has not chosen sides or irrevocably committed themselves to understanding this. These ideas are key in responding likewise to

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1965), 80.

religious views steeped in philosophical naturalism, new ageism or neo-paganism, post-modernism. Similarly, the New Atheists, whose critiques of religion are less a novel philosophical development than a contemporary restatement of classical Enlightenment secularism.

If, as a believer, many of your answers about life's big questions match up with naturalistic, post-modernism, new age answers -- then a "faith-check" may be in order.

You see. Christ did not claim to be "a" way or put together "a" religious philosophy that works well. He, rather, claimed to be the Creator of the space-time continuum, unlike Buddha, Lao Tzu, Zarathustra, Muhammad, Confucius, Guru Nanak Dev, Joseph Smith, Aristotle, and others.

This claim then, if true, is what separates Christian philosophy and the answers it gives from all the rest.

Just as the apostles and apologists of the early church confronted the competing worldviews that influenced the religious, cultural, and social life of their day, so too should we seek to understand the culture around us and respond confidently from the perspective of a Christian worldview. In fact, most of what has been given to Christians as systematized theology or orthodoxy started first as apologetic responses to the surrounding challenges and confrontations to our faith.

In fact, "The primitive church was not characterized by an explicit unity of doctrine; therefore heresy could sometimes claim greater antiquity than orthodoxy."<sup>11</sup> A defensive stance is often beneficial, both historically as well as currently. A good place to start is by first defining (not necessarily defending) what a worldview is. This attempt herein should cause serious reflection on the issue of "how one views the world."

## WORLDVIEWS... WHAT ARE THEY? DO THEY EVEN MATTER?

Many people today do not realize what a worldview is or how it affects their everyday life. Let us first define in a general sense what a worldview is. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines it this way:

1. The overall perspective from which one sees and interprets the world;
2. A collection of beliefs about life and the universe held by an individual or a group.

With these broad definitions, one can see that everyone is caught in a web of defining their relation to the universe and the world, even the atheist. However, this generation does not

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<sup>11</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 70.

get much beyond this dictionary definition any longer, as this past study shows which Alexander W. Astin discusses.

Before getting to this summation, however, I feel we must first give a little biographical information on the now deceased scholar, Dr. Astin:

He was the Allan M. Cartter Distinguished Professor of Higher Education and Organizational Change, at the University of California, Los Angeles. He was founding director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. He has served as Director of Research for both the American Council on Education and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. He was also the founding director of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, an ongoing national study of some fifteen million students, 300,000 faculty and staff, and 1,800 higher education institutions.

Here is the point I think is important to our discussion here:

Dr. Astin analyzed data from UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), a longitudinal study that began in 1966 and eventually surveyed hundreds of thousands of students from more than 500 colleges and universities nationwide. One of the most revealing findings involved a dramatic shift in the priorities of incoming college freshmen. During the late 1960s, more than 80 percent of entering students considered "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" to be an essential objective. In other words, many students enter college seeking answers to life's larger questions and attempting to understand their place in the world.

Over the following decades, however, those priorities changed significantly. By 1996, a record 75.6 percent of incoming freshmen identified "being very well off financially" as an essential life goal, while the importance attached to developing a meaningful philosophy of life had fallen sharply. Subsequent surveys have shown that this trend did not reverse. In fact, by 2019, 84 percent of incoming students identified financial prosperity as a primary objective, while interest in developing a meaningful philosophy of life remained at historically lower levels.<sup>12,13</sup>

These findings are revealing. They suggest that many students once viewed higher education as a means of wrestling with life's deepest questions; questions concerning meaning, purpose, truth, and human existence. Increasingly, however, higher education has come to

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<sup>12</sup> Alexander W. Astin, "The changing American college student: thirty-year trends, 1966-1996," *Review of Higher Education*, 21 (2) 1998, 115-135.

<sup>13</sup> M. Kevin Eagan, Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, Adriana Ramirez Suchard, Melissa C. Aragon, Jose Luis Ramirez Suchard, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, *The American Freshman: Fifty-Year Trends, 1966-2015* (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA, 2016), 1-4, 109-111.

be viewed primarily as a pathway to economic success. Whether this shift represents progress or loss is open to debate, but it clearly demonstrates that fewer students today enter college with the explicit goal of developing a coherent philosophy of life.

Yet the questions themselves have not disappeared. Every person, whether consciously or unconsciously, lives according to certain assumptions about reality, truth, morality, and human purpose. These assumptions form a worldview. The real question is not whether one has a worldview, but whether that worldview can adequately answer life's most important questions.

- o "The unexamined life is not worth living" -- Socrates













To be clear, a robust worldview should offer answers to these questions about life (see graphic<sup>14</sup>).

Ravi Zacharias simplifies the above list by stating that a "coherent worldview must be able to satisfactorily answer four questions:

1. that of origin,
2. of meaning,
3. morality,
4. and destiny.<sup>15</sup>

Ravi says that while every major religion makes exclusive claims about truth, "the Christian faith is unique in its ability to answer all four of these questions."<sup>16</sup>

These questions are the bedrock of any worldview ... that holds any weight at least. So, before we go any further, let us define a bit more for clarity purposes what a worldview is.

WORLDVIEW QUESTION	KEY QUESTION IT ADDRESSES
 <b>Ultimate Reality</b>	What kind of God, <i>if any</i> , actually exists?
 <b>External Reality</b>	Is there anything beyond the cosmos?
 <b>Knowledge</b>	What can be known, and how can anyone know it?
 <b>Origin</b>	Where did I come from?
 <b>Identity</b>	Who am I?
 <b>Location</b>	Where am I?
 <b>Morals</b>	How should I live?
 <b>Values</b>	What should I consider of great worth?
 <b>Predicament</b>	What is humanity's fundamental problem?
 <b>Resolution</b>	How can humanity's problem be solved?
 <b>Past / Present</b>	What is the meaning and direction of history?
 <b>Destiny</b>	Will I survive the death of my body and, if so, in what state?

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Richard Samples, *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 21-22; Kenneth Richard Samples, "What in the World is a Worldview?" *Connections*, Quarter 1 Volume 9, (Number 1 2007), 7. (Graphic is an adaptation from the text.)

<sup>15</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishers, 1997), 219–220.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Norman Geisler has the best working definition that will help guide us through the maze of religious and non-religious worldviews we will encounter in our daily lives. He says:

A Worldview is how one views or interprets reality. The German word is *Weltanschauung*, meaning a “world and life view,” or “a paradigm.” It is a framework through which or by which one makes sense of the data of life. A worldview makes a world of difference in one’s view of God, origins, evil, human nature, values, and destiny.<sup>17</sup>

Something is missing from this definition though. In it there is no relational comparison to show that merely knowing of one’s worldview doesn’t, “presto,” make it somehow true. The following definition raises the bar a bit more as to what is at stake

Philosopher and author James W. Sire, whose writings helped popularize worldview studies within evangelical Christianity, expands upon Geisler’s definition in his influential book *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. Sire broadens the discussion beyond mere intellectual beliefs and emphasizes the role of one’s deepest commitments and assumptions. He writes:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our well being.<sup>18</sup>

This definition begins at the most fundamental level by asking a crucial question: What constitutes reality? Before one can meaningfully discuss morality, purpose, truth, or destiny, one must first determine what is ultimately real. The reason is simple: our understanding of reality inevitably shapes every other belief we hold. If our foundational assumptions are mistaken, then the conclusions built upon them will likely be flawed as well.

To wit ...

## IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

Worldviews are not merely abstract theories discussed in classrooms or debated in books. They shape how people understand reality, and in turn, how they live, act, and respond to the world around them.

Consider the implications of one’s view of reality. If the material world is ultimately illusory, as certain strands of Eastern thought have maintained, then suffering itself may be

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<sup>17</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 785-786.

<sup>18</sup> James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 122.

understood differently than in a worldview that regards the physical world as fully real and human persons as possessing enduring significance. Conversely, if one begins with the conviction that people are real, that suffering is real, and that human beings possess inherent value, then different moral obligations naturally follow.

This is not to suggest that compassion is entirely absent from non-Christian traditions. Rather, it is to recognize that every worldview provides its own foundation for why people should care for others and how they should respond to human need.

The Christian worldview begins with the belief that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore possess intrinsic dignity and worth. Because suffering is understood to be real and because every person bears God's image, Christians have historically been motivated to establish hospitals, orphanages, schools, charities, and relief organizations. Mother Teresa's work among the poor and dying in Calcutta provides one well-known example. Her ministry, supported by countless others who shared her convictions, was an outworking of a worldview that viewed every human life as precious and worthy of care.

This is only one example among many. The larger point is that ideas are never merely ideas. What we believe about reality ultimately influences how we live within it, how we treat others, and the kinds of institutions we build.

I wish to illustrate further with some personal dialogue between some aid workers and author Ron Carlson during the Cambodian massacre under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in the mid-70's (which is known as the "Killing Fields") and then subsequently by the invasion of the Vietnamese at the end of the that decade. This comes from the book *Fast Facts on False Teachings*.

While speaking in Thailand, Ron Carlson was invited to visit some refugee camps along the Cambodian border. Over 300,000 refugees were caught in a no-man's-land along the border. Here in this Buddhist country of Thailand, with Buddhist refugees coming from Cambodia and Laos, there were no Buddhists taking care of their fellow believers. There likewise were no Atheists, Hindus, or Muslims taking care of these people. The only people there, taking care of these 300,000[+] people in this no-man's land were Christians from Christian mission organizations and Christian relief organizations. One of the men Ron Carlson was with had lived in Thailand for over twenty-years and was heading up a major portion of the relief effort for one of these organizations. Ron asked him: "Why, in a Buddhist country, with Buddhist refugees are there no Buddhists here taking care of their Buddhist brothers?"

Ron says he will never forget the answer to his question:

Ron, have you ever seen what Buddhism does to a nation or a people? Buddha taught that each man is an island unto himself. Buddha said, “if someone is suffering, that is his karma.” You are not to interfere with another person’s karma because he is purging himself through suffering and reincarnation! Buddha said, “You are to be an island unto yourself.” - Ron, the only people that have a reason to be here today taking care of these 300,000 refugees are Christians. It is only Christianity that people have a basis for human value that people are important enough to educate and to care for. For Christians, these people are of ultimate value, created in the image of God, so valuable that Jesus Christ died for each and every one of them. You find that value in no other religion, in no other philosophy, but in Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The significance of this account is not necessarily that Christians alone have ever engaged in charitable work, nor that members of other faiths have never cared for the suffering. Rather, it highlights a more fundamental question: What is the basis for human value and moral obligation?

The aid worker's answer was rooted in the Christian worldview. Because human beings are created in the image of God and because Christ died for them, every person possesses intrinsic worth and dignity. From this perspective, caring for the poor, the sick, and the oppressed is not merely an act of compassion but a moral obligation grounded in the very nature of reality.

Whether one finds this explanation persuasive or not, the larger point remains: ideas have consequences. What we believe about God, humanity, suffering, and ultimate reality inevitably shapes the way we respond to the world around us.

I hope the reader can see what is at stake here in the battle of ideas. Joseph R. Farinaccio, author of “Faith with Reason: Why Christianity is True,” starts out his excellent book discussing this battle:

This is a book about worldviews. Everybody has one, but most individuals never really pay much attention to their own personal philosophy of life. *This is a tragedy because there is no state of awareness so fundamental to living life.*<sup>20</sup>

Again, “no state of awareness is so fundamental”! Professor of philosophy, Ronald Nash, supports this idea by saying that “Intellectual maturity is closely linked with one's awareness

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<sup>19</sup> Ron Carlson & Ed Decker, *Fast Facts on False Teachings* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 28.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph R. Farinaccio, *Faith with Reason: Why Christianity Is True* (Pennsville, New Jersey: BookSpecs Publishing, 2002), 10.

about worldviews.”<sup>21</sup> which may explain the lack of intellectual maturity with graduate students today. You must understand that,

Again, quoting Mr. Farinaccio

Every subject we think about is filtered through our worldview. The picture of reality we hold in our minds is what we use at the most basic level to answer every question in life. This is especially true of big questions, like those pertaining to man’s origin, ethics, life’s meaning and ultimate destiny. This makes faith central to every aspect of our lives and being. The bigger question, of course, is whether or not the picture of reality we have is actually true.<sup>22</sup>

An illustration that works well to show the divergence of worldviews is one of prescription eyewear.

I am sure you have at some point in your life put on a pair of prescription glasses from a family member or friend that is not meant for your eyesight. The distorted view one gets when putting on these prescription strength glasses is like a worldview.

What one accepts as truth will affect all aspects of one’s life. Another application of this thinking comes from a story told by Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino:

PROFESSOR: “Miracles are impossible, don’t you know science has disproved them, how could you believe in them [i.e., answered prayer, a man being raised from the dead, Noah’s Ark, and the like].”

STUDENT: “for clarity purposes I wish to get some definitions straight. Would it be fair to say that science is generally defined as ‘the human activity of seeking natural explanations for what we observe in the world around us’?”

PROFESSOR: “Beautifully put, that is the basic definition of science in every text-book I read through my Doctoral journey.”

STUDENT: “Wouldn’t you also say that a good definition of a miracle would be ‘and event in nature caused by something outside of nature’?”

PROFESSOR: “Yes, that would be an acceptable definition of ‘miracle.’”

STUDENT: “But since you do not believe that anything outside of ‘nature’ exists [materialism, dialectical materialism, empiricism, existentialism, naturalism, and

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

humanism – whatever you wish to call it], you are ‘forced’ to conclude that miracles are impossible”<sup>23</sup>

## END OF STORY

The professor had a worldview that presupposed naturalism, or, materialism, which is defined as, “the philosophical belief that reality is composed solely of matter and that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes.”

This presupposed belief that guided the professor caused him to be unable to even consider a non-natural event as an actual event.

He begged the question.

Therefore, Jesus couldn’t have risen from the grave by definition, ergo, Christianity is false!

As evidenced by circular reasoning that is.

Another way to see this “begging the question” is in the following example[s]:

### ONE:

Premise: Since there is no God,

Conclusion: all theistic proofs are invalid.

### TWO:

Premise: Since the theistic proofs are invalid,

Conclusion: there is no God.

I hope one can see how a worldview (pair of prescription glasses) can warp a person’s view of the world around them, or in the case above, even the universe and beyond.

A further example of the above comes from an ex-schoolmate of mine (albeit a bit older than me), Brian Flemming, from Village Christian, who produced a documentary: “The God Who Wasn't There.”<sup>24</sup>

This “documentary” was an amateur attempt to show that Jesus did not exist historically, something very few in the history of skepticism have tried to defend.

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<sup>23</sup> Norman L. Geisler & Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations: Contemporary Answers to Crucial Questions About the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 63-64.

<sup>24</sup> Brian Flemming, *The God Who Wasn't There*, DVD (Los Angeles, CA: Beyond Belief Media, 2005).

In the section entitled “From Village Christian to Village Atheist,” Brian goes back to Village Christian under false pretenses and interviews on camera the then current principal, Dr. Ronald Sipus, as part of his weaving his biographical loss of faith in with his main thesis.

During the interview Brian’s true intentions were exposed when he asked this question of Dr. Sipus: “What hard, scientific evidence do you have that the world works this way?”

Brian's question rests upon a philosophical assumption that many people in our culture simply take for granted: that only what can be demonstrated through the scientific method should be accepted as true or rationally believed. It is this assumption, rather than Christianity itself, that I would like to examine more carefully.

On the surface many would hear Brian’s query and think it reasonable... however... Mr. Flemming brings some biases and assumptions to the table that once revealed may help the reader to confront similar challenges to their faith.

Recalling the conversation a few pages back with the student and the professor, Brian’s starting point may be the issue, and not his question.

Let us see if we can ferret out [identify] Mr. Flemming’s starting premise with an interview with Dr. Dean Kenyon,<sup>25</sup> assistant professor of biology at San Francisco State University (Emeritus), when he was asked this question:

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<sup>25</sup> **Dean H. Kenyon (1939– )** is an American biophysicist, author, and Professor Emeritus of Biology at San Francisco State University. He received his B.S. in Physics with honors from the University of Chicago in 1961 and earned a Ph.D. in Biophysics from Stanford University in 1965. Following his doctoral studies, he served as a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow in Chemical Biodynamics at the University of California, Berkeley, under Nobel laureate Melvin Calvin and also worked as a Research Associate at NASA's Ames Research Center. In 1966, Kenyon joined the faculty of San Francisco State University, where he taught biology for more than three decades before being named Professor Emeritus in 2001.

Kenyon first gained prominence in origin-of-life research through his co-authorship, with Gary Steinman, of *Biochemical Predestination* (1969), a work that argued that the chemical properties of amino acids and proteins could have guided the emergence of life. The book became influential in discussions concerning chemical evolution and the origin of biological information.

During the late 1970s, Kenyon began reexamining his views on chemical evolution and eventually became associated with the creation science and intelligent design movements. He later co-authored, with Percival Davis, the widely discussed textbook *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins* (1989), one of the earliest works to popularize the term "intelligent design" in discussions of biological origins.

Throughout his career, Kenyon published research in biophysics, photochemistry, molecular evolution, and origin-of-life studies. He also served as a Fellow of the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture and became a prominent advocate for the view that biological systems exhibit evidence of intelligent causation.

Kenyon's career places him among the most recognizable figures in twentieth-century debates concerning the origin of life, biological complexity, and the relationship between science, philosophy, and religion.

“What are the general presuppositions that scientists make who study the origin of life?”<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Kenyon responded to this question thus:

“Well, I think there are two general kinds of presuppositions that people can make, one is that life, in fact, did arise naturalistically on the primitive earth by some kind of chemical evolutionary process. The second presupposition would be that life may or may not have arisen by a naturalistic, chemical process. Now, if you have the first presupposition, then the goal of your research is to work out plausible pathways of chemical development to go to the bio-polymers, then to the protocells; and what would be likely pathways that you could demonstrate in the laboratory by simulation experiment. If you have the second presupposition, you’re still going to be doing experiments, but you’re going to be more open to the possibility that the data, as they [or, it] come[s] in from those studies may actually be suggesting a different explanation of origins altogether.”<sup>27</sup>

What is noteworthy about Kenyon's response is that he does not assume the answer before examining the evidence. Rather than presupposing that life must have arisen through a purely naturalistic process,<sup>28</sup> he leaves open the possibility that the evidence could point in another direction when he says, “life may or may not have arisen by a naturalistic, chemical process.”

This approach reflects a willingness to follow the evidence wherever it may lead rather than restricting the range of acceptable conclusions beforehand.

Dr. Kenyon, in other words, did not beg the question.

This philosophical issue came to the forefront during the 2005 Kansas Science Standards controversy. The Kansas Board of Education ignited a national debate when it considered a proposal to modify the working definition of science by removing a single word — “natural.” The original drafting commission defined science as:

“Science is the human activity of seeking ‘**NATURAL**’ explanations for what we observe in the world around us.”

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<sup>26</sup> Dean H. Kenyon, interview in *Focus on Darwinism*, Focus on Origin Series, DVD, (Colorado Springs, CO: Access Research Network, 2004), around the 12:34 mark.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> I will give yet another example that makes my point for me: “Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic.” Kansas State University immunologist, Scott Todd, correspondence to *Nature*, 410 [6752], 30 September, 1999.

The Kansas board of education drafting committee defined science as,

“Science is the human activity of seeking ‘**LOGICAL**’ explanations for what we observe in the world around us.”<sup>29</sup>

This simple word change, and the subsequent fervor it caused, illustrates the embedded philosophy in current science.

Returning to Brian Flemming's question, Dr. Sipus might first have asked Brian to define what he meant by "science" and what kinds of evidence his definition permits. Once that definition was established, a more fundamental question could be raised:

"If science is limited to investigating natural phenomena, and if God is, by definition, a metaphysical reality that transcends nature, then is science even the proper tool by which to evaluate God's existence? Are you not, in effect, excluding the very possibility of a metaphysical explanation before the investigation begins?"

To illustrate, one could just as easily demand that Brian disprove God's existence using the scientific method. Yet if science is restricted to the investigation of natural causes and effects, then it is incapable of either proving or disproving a transcendent being. Such a demand would place science in a realm beyond its proper jurisdiction.

The issue, therefore, is not whether science has disproved God. The issue is whether one has defined science in such a way that only naturalistic explanations are allowed from the outset. If so, the conclusion is embedded within the premise.

What Brian's question appears to assume is not merely a scientific proposition but a philosophical one:

PREMISE 1: Science investigates only natural causes and phenomena.

PREMISE 2: God is not a natural cause or phenomenon, but a metaphysical reality.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, because God falls outside the scope of scientific investigation, science has effectively affirmed His non-existence.

Yet this conclusion does not follow from the premises. At most, the premises establish that God lies beyond the investigative reach of the scientific method. Science has no more disproved God than a metal detector has disproved the existence of mathematics. In both cases, the instrument being employed is incapable of examining the object in question. The

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<sup>29</sup> Phillip E. Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 68 (emphasis added).

real debate, therefore, is not about the existence of God, but whether scientific investigation is the only valid means of acquiring knowledge about reality.

In order for the conclusion to follow logically, it should read:

"Therefore, science is incapable of either proving or disproving God's existence, since God is posited as a metaphysical reality rather than a natural phenomenon."

I would argue that God's existence is metaphysical and therefore not subject to direct scientific investigation. Nevertheless, knowledge of God may be obtained through philosophical reasoning, inferential evidence drawn from the natural world, and sources beyond empirical science, including personal experience and divine revelation.

Bullet pointed they would be:

1. Philosophy/reason
2. Natural evidence
3. Revelation/experience

This discussion highlights a deeper issue: the type of evidence being requested. Brian's question assumes that all truth claims must be established through the methods of empirical science. Yet many forms of knowledge are acquired through other means.

For example, no one could discover what Napoleon did at the Battle of Austerlitz by placing him in a laboratory and asking him to fight the battle again under identical conditions—with the same soldiers, the same terrain, the same weather, and in the same historical setting. Historical events are not investigated through repeatable experimentation; they are investigated through historical evidence, eyewitness testimony, documents, artifacts, and other records.

As C. S. Lewis observed, "We have not, in fact, proved that science excludes miracles: we have only proved that the question of miracles, like innumerable other questions, excludes laboratory treatment."<sup>30</sup>

Christianity presents itself primarily as a historical faith. Its central claims are rooted in events that allegedly occurred in space and time. The resurrection of Jesus, for example, is not proposed as a repeatable laboratory experiment but as a historical event. Consequently, the question is not whether the resurrection can be reproduced under controlled scientific conditions, but whether the historical evidence is sufficient to justify belief that it occurred.

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<sup>30</sup> C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 134.

So how, then, do we deal with the historic claims of Christianity? Like any other historical event, we go to the historical records. This should not surprise us. Philosophers have long recognized that much of what we know is not discovered through personal observation but through the testimony of others.

As philosopher Tom Morris points out in “Philosophy for Dummies,”<sup>31</sup> most of our beliefs about the past come from the testimony of reliable sources. None of us witnessed the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the battles of World War II, or countless other historical events. We know about them because we trust the testimony, records, and memories that have been passed down to us.

Likewise, philosopher Robert Audi notes in “The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy”<sup>32</sup> that modern societies depend heavily upon the testimony of others. Because knowledge is gathered, specialized, and communicated by countless individuals, a significant portion of what any person knows is ultimately derived from the reports and testimony of others.

Ted Honderich makes a similar observation in “The Oxford Companion to Philosophy.”<sup>33</sup> He argues that most of what any individual knows comes from other people—not only our knowledge of history, geography, and science, but even many of the ordinary facts of daily life, including details about our own origins and early years.

In other words, testimony is not some secondary or inferior form of evidence. It is one of the primary ways human beings acquire knowledge. Without it, very little of what we claim to know about the past—or even the present—would remain.

I have used the preceding examples involving naturalistic and atheistic views of reality not to refute those positions directly, but rather to illustrate how profoundly a worldview shapes the questions we ask and the conclusions we are willing to entertain. Some questions are asked in a genuine pursuit of truth; others contain assumptions that predetermine the answer before the investigation even begins.

Once a person adopts a set of foundational presuppositions — whether through careful examination or uncritical acceptance — he or she will inevitably interpret life through that lens. Those assumptions become the framework through which reality is understood, decisions are made, and evidence is evaluated. In this sense, people live out their worldviews, whether those worldviews are logically consistent or not.

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<sup>31</sup> Tom Morris, *Philosophy for Dummies* (Foster City, CA: IDG Books; 1999), 57-58.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Audi, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 909.

<sup>33</sup> Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 869.

As will be argued throughout this work, not all worldviews provide equally adequate explanations of reality. In my judgment, theism offers a more coherent and comprehensive account of the evidence than its competing alternatives and more faithfully adheres to the principles discussed in the chapters that follow.

As Anglican pastor and theologian John Stott explains, “worldviews do not remain mere ideas in the mind; they inevitably manifest themselves in actions that shape the world around us.”<sup>34</sup> Continuing he says:

Every powerful movement has had its philosophy which has gripped the mind, fired the imagination and captured the devotion of its adherents. One has only to think of the Fascist and the Communist manifestos of this century, of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* on the one hand and Marx’s *Das Kapital* and *The Thoughts of Chairman Mao* on the other.<sup>35</sup>

This points us toward an apparent problem. If, as David Barrett’s research suggests, there are approximately ten thousand religions in the world,<sup>36</sup> where does one even begin?

The answer is found by looking beneath the surface. While thousands of religious traditions exist, many are variations of the same underlying worldview assumptions. By boiling these systems down to their most basic beliefs, the number of distinct worldview options becomes far more manageable and suitable for comparison. This next quote by Francis Schaeffer is a bit long and to the untrained ear may even be confusing. So, after the long quote, I will offer a “layman’s” breakdown:

People have presuppositions, and they will live more consistently on the basis of these presuppositions than even they themselves may realize. By “presuppositions” we mean the basic way an individual looks at life, his basic worldview, the grid through which he sees the world. Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists. People’s presuppositions lay a grid for all they bring forth into the external world. Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions. “As a man thinketh, so he is,” is really profound. An individual is not just the product of the forces around him. He has a mind, an inner world. Then, having thought, a person can bring forth actions into the external world and thus influence it. People are apt to look at the outer theater of action, forgetting the actor who ‘lives in the mind’ and who therefore is the true actor in the external world. The inner thought world determines the outward action. Most people catch their presuppositions

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<sup>34</sup> John R. W. Stott. *Your Mind Matters: The Place of the Mind in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4-8.

from their family and surrounding society the way a child catches measles. But people with more understanding realize that their presuppositions should be chosen after a careful consideration of what worldview is true. When all is done, when all the alternatives have been explored, “not many men are in the room” – that is, although worldviews have many variations, there are not many basic worldviews or presuppositions.<sup>37</sup>

In plain English, Schaeffer is saying that what we believe determines how we behave. Our worldview acts like a filter through which we interpret everything around us. It shapes our values, influences our decisions, and ultimately directs our actions. Most people absorb their worldview from the culture around them without much reflection. Schaeffer challenges us instead to examine our assumptions and ask whether they are actually true, because ideas have consequences and those consequences eventually become visible in the way we live.

It can be summed up this way:

- What we believe shapes what we value.
- What we value influences how we act.
- How we act produces consequences.

In short, our worldview shapes our values, our values guide our actions, and our actions ultimately determine the kind of world we help create.

All of this should encourage us to engage life's deepest questions rather than avoid them. One individual who chose to do exactly that was L. Cohen. A mathematician, researcher, and author, Cohen approached questions of origins with a rigorous analytical mindset. His professional accomplishments included membership in the New York Academy of Sciences and service as an officer of the Archaeological Institute of America. Bringing his expertise in mathematics and probability to bear on the origins debate, Cohen examined the likelihood of life's emergence through purely natural processes. In his book *Darwin Was Wrong: A Study in Probabilities*, he writes:

In a certain sense, the debate transcends the confrontation between evolutionists and creationists. We now have a debate within the scientific community itself; it is a confrontation between scientific objectivity and ingrained prejudice - between logic and emotion - between fact and fiction.... In the final analysis, objective scientific logic has to prevail -- no matter what the final result is - no matter how many time-honored idols have to be discarded in the process.... after all, it is not the duty of science to defend the theory of

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<sup>37</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Crossway Books; 1976), 19-20.

evolution, and stick by it to the bitter end -- no matter what illogical and unsupported conclusions it offers... if in the process of impartial scientific logic, they find that creation by outside superintelligence is the solution to our quandary, then let's cut the umbilical cord that tied us down to Darwin for such a long time. It is choking us and holding us back... ..every single concept advanced by the theory of evolution (and amended thereafter) is imaginary and it is not supported by the scientifically established facts of microbiology, fossils, and mathematical probability concepts. Darwin was wrong... The theory of evolution may be the worst mistake made in science.<sup>38</sup>

By applying what he regarded as sound logic, scientific inquiry, and mathematical reasoning, Cohen ultimately rejected Darwinian evolution. Whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, his approach illustrates an important principle: worldviews are not formed in a vacuum. They are shaped by foundational assumptions and by the standards of evidence one considers persuasive.

This observation is especially important when engaging people who do not share a Judeo-Christian worldview. While Scripture and personal testimony remain powerful and indispensable components of the Christian faith, they may not serve as a common starting point for those who reject biblical authority altogether. In such cases, meaningful dialogue often begins with principles that both parties recognize and employ, whether consciously or unconsciously.

For this reason, apologetic discussions frequently start with the foundational assumptions that make rational thought possible in the first place. Before one can meaningfully discuss God, morality, science, history, or human nature, there must first be agreement on the basic principles of reasoning. Among the most important of these is the law of non-contradiction.

## LAWS OF LOGIC

This law of logic known as the Law of Noncontradiction (LNC) is often referred to as the most important of the first principles, Aristotle makes the point that,

“Every science begins with them and are the foundations upon which all knowledge rests. First principles are the fundamental truths from which inferences are made and on which conclusions are based. They are self-evident, and they can be thought of as both the underlying and the governing principles of a worldview.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> I. L. Cohen, *Darwin was Wrong: A Study in Probabilities* (New York, NY: New Research Publications, 1984), 6-7, 8, 214-215, 209, 210.

<sup>39</sup> Norman L. Geisler & Peter Bocchino, *Unshakeable Foundations*, 19.

The law of non-contradiction is one of the most important principles of logical thought. In fact, philosopher Manuel Velasquez, in a widely used university-level philosophy textbook, describes it as "the foundation of logical reasoning."<sup>40</sup> Likewise, philosopher Ted Honderich notes that "any theory that violates this law is, by definition, an inconsistent theory."<sup>41</sup>

The importance of this principle becomes evident when examining many popular claims that are frequently repeated in contemporary culture. At first hearing, such statements may sound insightful or sophisticated. Yet when subjected to logical analysis, they often collapse under the weight of their own contradictions.

Philosopher Tom Morris illustrates this point with a statement that has become increasingly common in modern discussions of truth:

STATEMENT: "There is no such thing as absolute truth."

Before deciding whether this claim is true, we should first ask whether it is logically coherent. Ideas, like buildings, rest upon foundations. By examining the first principles upon which a claim is built, we can determine whether the structure can stand. If the foundation is self-contradictory, no amount of rhetoric can save the conclusion.

The first question should be: Is this itself an absolute statement? In other words, is the speaker making an ultimate claim about the nature of truth? If so, the statement is actually asserting what it seeks to deny. It is self-refuting. As Morris points out, "the statement defeats itself because it claims absolutely that there are no absolutes. Rather than offering a coherent position, it violates the law of non-contradiction."

Other examples follow the same pattern:

- "All truth is relative." (Is that a relative truth?)
- "There are no absolutes." (Are you absolutely sure?)
- "It's true for you but not for me." (Is that statement true only for you, or for everyone?)

In short, contrary beliefs are possible, but contrary truths are not.

Many will try to reject logic in order to accept mutually contradictory beliefs; often times religious pluralism is the topic with which many try to suppress these universal laws in separating religious claims that are mutually exclusive. Professor Roy Clouser puts into perspective persons that try to minimize differences by throwing logical rules to the wayside:

The program of rejecting logic in order to accept mutually contradictory beliefs is not, however, just a harmless, whimsical hope that somehow logically incompatible beliefs

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<sup>40</sup> Manuel Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text with Readings* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 625.

can both be true... *it results in nothing less than the destruction of any and every concept we could possess.* Even the concept of rejecting the law of non-contradiction depends on assuming and using that law, since without it the concept of rejecting it could neither be thought nor stated.<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Clouser's point is profound. The law of non-contradiction is not an arbitrary rule invented by philosophers; it is a necessary precondition for rational thought itself. Attempts to deny or circumvent it do not merely create difficulties for a particular argument—they undermine the very possibility of meaningful reasoning. In short, one cannot consistently reject the law of non-contradiction because the very act of rejecting it already presupposes its validity.

Clouser further observes that contradictions can occur at more than one level. Sometimes a statement defeats itself directly. For example, the claim "There is no absolute truth" is self-refuting because it presents itself as an absolute truth while denying that any such truth exists. At other times, a position depends upon assumptions that undermine its own conclusions. Clouser refers to this latter problem as "self-assumptive incoherency."

It is in this sense that Clouser critiques the position of psychologist and social philosopher Erich Fromm, one of the twentieth century's most influential humanistic thinkers and the author of numerous works on psychology, religion, and culture. Clouser argues that the assumptions underlying Fromm's position ultimately contradict the very conclusions he seeks to defend. More broadly, Clouser contends that many theories cannot even be stated without borrowing concepts they officially deny. Claims about truth assume the existence of truth. Arguments against logic assume the validity of logic. Assertions that all reality is purely physical nevertheless rely upon nonphysical concepts such as meaning, truth, and logical inference in order to be understood.

This is precisely why first principles matter. Ideas must be examined not only for their conclusions but also for the assumptions that make those conclusions possible. If the foundational assumptions of a worldview are self-contradictory, then no amount of sincerity, passion, or intellectual sophistication can rescue the conclusions built upon them. A worldview may appear persuasive on the surface, but if its foundations are incoherent, the entire structure is ultimately unstable.

The challenge posed by religious pluralism has not gone unnoticed by contemporary scholars. One of its most prominent defenders was theologian and philosopher of religion John Hick, who argued that the world's religions are ultimately different responses to the same transcendent reality. Responding to Hick's position, British theologian and historian

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<sup>42</sup> Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2005), 178 (emphasis added).

Alister McGrath, a former atheist and one of the leading Christian intellectuals of our time, highlights the self-defeating nature of this approach in his book *Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism*:

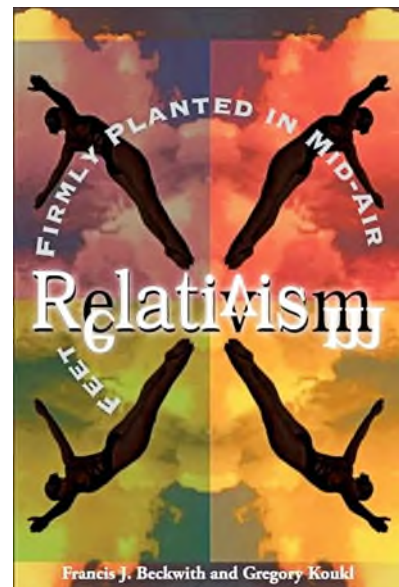
The belief that all religions are ultimately expressions of the same transcendent reality is at best illusory and at worst oppressive – illusory because it lacks any substantiating basis and oppressive because it involves the systematic imposition of the agenda of those in positions of intellectual power on the religions and those who adhere to them. The illiberal imposition of this pluralistic metanarrative on religions is ultimately a claim to mastery – both in the sense of having a Nietzschean authority and power to mold material according to one's will, and in the sense of being able to relativize all the religions by having access to a privileged standpoint.<sup>43</sup>

As McGrath points out, Hick's position requires him to make an overarching claim about all religions while simultaneously denying that any one religion possesses a uniquely authoritative perspective on religious reality. In Clouser's terminology, the position is self-assumptively incoherent.

A similar problem appears in the work of anthropologist William Graham Sumner, one of the early advocates of cultural relativism. Sumner argued that "every attempt to win an outside standpoint from which to reduce the whole to an absolute philosophy of truth and right, based on an unalterable principle, is delusion."<sup>44</sup>

Philosophers Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl respond by noting that Sumner's conclusion requires precisely the kind of privileged standpoint he claims does not exist:

He says that all claims to know objective moral truth are false because we are all imprisoned in our own culture and are incapable of seeing beyond the limits of our own biases. He concludes, therefore, that moral truth is relative to culture and that no objective standard exists. Sumner's analysis falls victim to the same error committed by religious pluralists who see all religions as equally valid.<sup>45</sup>



<sup>43</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 239.

<sup>44</sup> William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Chicago, IL: Ginn and Company, 1906), in Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Planted firmly in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 46-47.

<sup>45</sup> Francis Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism*, 47.

The authors continue:

Sumner's view, however, is self-refuting. In order for him to conclude that all moral claims are an illusion, he must first escape the illusion himself. He must have a full and accurate view of the entire picture ... . Such a privileged view is precisely what Sumner denies. Objective assessments are illusions, he claims, but then he offers his own "objective" assessment. It is as if he were saying, "We're all blind," and then adds, "but I'll tell you what the world really looks like." This is clearly contradictory.<sup>46</sup>

The point is straightforward. One cannot consistently deny the possibility of objective truth while simultaneously claiming to possess objective knowledge about the impossibility of objective truth.

Philosopher Roger Scruton, one of the most influential conservative thinkers of the modern era, captures the absurdity of such positions with his characteristic wit:

"A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely negative,' is asking you not to believe him. So don't."<sup>47</sup>

Another example arises from the claim that morality can be fully explained through naturalistic evolutionary processes such as survival and reproduction. Christian philosopher and apologist Paul Copan, who has written extensively on ethics, philosophy of religion, and the rationality of the Christian faith, observes that one effective way to evaluate such claims is to ask whether they remain coherent when applied to themselves.

A couple of years ago, on a plane to Boston I sat next to a rather hard-nosed atheist. He spoke to me in a rather condescending tone, as though belief in God were old-fashioned and quaint -- though intriguing. When I talked with him about objective moral values, he maintained that they do not exist. He said, "What we call morality is nothing more than an attempt to survive and reproduce. In fact, all that we do is nothing more than our struggle to survive and reproduce." I replied, "Does this mean that your atheistic beliefs are nothing more than an attempt to survive and reproduce? If you take this route, then you'll have to admit that both your atheism and my theism spring from the same underlying instinct to survive and reproduce, and there's no way to tell which of us is correct -- or if we're both wrong."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>47</sup> *Modern Philosophy* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1996), 6. Found in: John Blanchard, *Does God Believe in Atheists?* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000), 172.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Copan, *That's Just Your Interpretation: Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books/Academic, 2001), 43.

Copan's response exposes an important difficulty. If every belief is ultimately reducible to biological survival mechanisms, then that explanation applies equally to atheism, theism, science, philosophy, and every other human belief. The skeptic's position therefore risks undermining its own claim to rational superiority, since the conclusion itself would be the product of the same evolutionary impulses it seeks to explain.

If atheistic evolution is true, then evolution is not primarily concerned with producing true beliefs; it is concerned with producing behaviors that help an organism survive and reproduce. Belief does not necessarily have to be true to be useful. It only has to help keep the organism alive long enough to pass on its genes.

This creates an interesting problem. If our minds are merely the product of a blind, unguided process aimed at survival rather than truth, then why should we trust that our beliefs are generally reliable? Even Charles Darwin worried about this very issue, wondering whether a mind descended from lower animals could be trusted to arrive at truth.

The challenge is this: if our reasoning abilities are the product of a process that values survival over truth, then we have a reason to doubt all of our beliefs—including our belief in atheism and evolution. In other words, the very worldview that explains our minds may also undermine our confidence in those minds.

By contrast, the Christian worldview maintains that human beings were created by a rational God and endowed with minds capable of discovering truth. While human reasoning is not perfect, it is reliable enough to understand the world because it reflects the rationality of the One who created it.

(See **Appendix B** for a further excerpt from Mitch Stokes, who is a philosopher and Christian apologist who has taught both philosophy and physics, specializes in explaining difficult questions about faith, science, and reason to a general audience.)

To illustrate the point further, let us assume for the sake of argument that this evolutionary explanation is correct. If survival and reproduction are the ultimate measures of success, then one may legitimately ask which worldview is more advantageous according to that standard. Historically, religious believers tend to marry at higher rates, have larger families, and produce more offspring than their secular counterparts. If reproductive success is the sole criterion by which beliefs are evaluated, then one could argue that religious belief enjoys an evolutionary advantage. Yet few skeptics would be willing to conclude that a belief is true merely because it reproduces more successfully.

The point should be clear. The Christian need not quote Scripture or appeal to special revelation at this stage of the discussion. Often it is enough to examine whether a position

remains coherent when its own assumptions are consistently applied. A worldview may sound persuasive until it is asked to live according to its own first principles.

This principle becomes even clearer in the observations of philosopher and educator L. Russ Bush. In his work *A Handbook for Christian Philosophy*, Bush discusses the importance of examining the assumptions that underlie every worldview. He writes:

... most people assume that something exists. There may be someone, perhaps, who believes that nothing exists, but who would that person be? How could he or she make such an affirmation? Sometimes in studying the history of philosophy, one may come to the conclusion that some of the viewpoints expressed actually lead to that conclusion, but no one ever consciously tries to defend the position that nothing exists. It would be a useless endeavor since there would be no one to convince. Even more significantly, it would be impossible to defend that position since, if it were true, there would be no one to make the defense. So to defend the position that nothing exists seems immediately to be absurd and self-contradictory.<sup>49</sup>

Notice what Bush has done. He has not pitted Christian theism against Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism, or any other competing worldview. Instead, he simply follows a position to its logical conclusion and asks whether it can consistently sustain itself. The contradiction, if present, arises from within the position itself. It is not Christianity versus another worldview; it is the worldview confronting its own assumptions.

Although this chapter has not sought to refute any particular philosophical or religious system in detail, the attentive reader will already have discovered a powerful tool for evaluating competing truth claims. Before asking whether a worldview is attractive, popular, or emotionally satisfying, one should first ask whether it is coherent. Can it live consistently with its own first principles? That question alone eliminates many positions before the debate has scarcely begun.

It mirrors boxing legend Mike Tyson's famous quip: "Everybody has plans until they get hit for the first time." Except for the difference being, the skeptic is fighting himself.

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<sup>49</sup> L. Russ Bush, *A Handbook for Christian Philosophy*, 70.

## ***APPENDIX A***

The below is taken from Wayne Grudem's book, *Politics According to the Bible*<sup>50</sup>

### **QUOTE**

#### **A. PRIVATE PROPERTY**

According to the teachings of the Bible, government should both document and protect the ownership of private property in a nation.

The Bible regularly assumes and reinforces a system in which property belongs to individuals, not to the government or to society as a whole.

We see this implied in the Ten Commandments, for example, because the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal" (Exod. 20:15), assumes that human beings will own property that belongs to them individually and not to other people. I should not steal my neighbor's ox or donkey because it belongs to my neighbor, not to me and not to anyone else.

The tenth commandment makes this more explicit when it prohibits not just stealing but also desiring to steal what belongs to my neighbor:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Exod. 20:17).

The reason I should not "covet" my neighbor's house or anything else is that these things belong to my neighbor, not to me and not to the community or the nation.

This assumption of private ownership of property, found in this fundamental moral code of the Bible, puts the Bible in direct opposition to the communist system advocated by Karl Marx. Marx said:

❖ "The theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property."

One reason why communism is so incredibly dehumanizing is that when private property is abolished, government controls all economic activity. And when government controls all economic activity, it controls what you can buy, where you will live, and what job you will have (and therefore what job you are allowed to train for, and where you go to school), and how much you will earn. It essentially controls all of life, and human liberty is destroyed. Communism enslaves people and destroys human freedom of choice. The entire nation

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<sup>50</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 261-263.

becomes one huge prison. For this reason, it seems to me that communism is the most dehumanizing economic system ever invented by man.

Other passages of Scripture also support the idea that property should belong to individuals, not to “society” or to the government (except for certain property required for proper government purposes, such as government offices, military bases, and streets and highways). The Bible contains many laws concerning punishments for stealing and appropriate restitution for damage of another person’s farm animals or agricultural fields (for example, see Exod. 21:28-36; 22:1-15; Deut. 22:1-4; 23:24-25). Another commandment guaranteed that property boundaries would be protected: “You shall not move your neighbor’s landmark, which the men of old have set, in the inheritance that you will hold in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess” (Deut. 19:14). To move the landmark was to move the boundaries of the land and thus to steal land that belonged to one’s neighbor (compare Prov. 22:28; 23:10).

Another guarantee of the ownership of private property was the fact that, even if property was sold to someone else, in the Year of Jubilee it had to return to the family that originally owned it:

It shall be a Jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan (Lev. 25:10).

This is why the land could not be sold forever: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev. 25:23).

This last verse emphasizes the fact that private property is never viewed in the Bible as an absolute right, because all that people have is ultimately given to them by God, and people are viewed as God’s “stewards” to manage what he has entrusted to their care.

The earth is the LORD’S and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein (Ps. 24:1; compare Ps. 50:10-12; Hag. 2:8).

Yet the fact remains that, under the overall sovereign lordship of God himself, property is regularly said to belong to individuals, not to the government and not to “society” or the nation as a whole.

When Samuel warned the people about the evils that would be imposed upon them by a king, he emphasized the fact that the monarch, with so much government power, would “take” and “take” and “take” from the people and confiscate things for his own use:

So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his

chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day” (1 Sam. 8:10-18).

This prediction was tragically fulfilled in the story of the theft of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite by Ahab the wicked king and Jezebel, his even more wicked queen (see 1 Kings 21:1-29). The regular tendency of human governments is to seek to take control of more and more of the property of a nation that God intends to be owned and controlled by private individuals.

## ***APPENDIX B***

Below is an excerpt from Mitch Stokes, *A Shot of Faith (to the Head)*:<sup>51</sup>

Even Darwin had some misgivings about the reliability of human beliefs. He wrote, “With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”

Given unguided evolution, “Darwin’s Doubt” is a reasonable one. Even given unguided or blind evolution, it’s difficult to say how probable it is that creatures—even creatures like us—would ever develop true beliefs. In other words, given the blindness of evolution, and that its ultimate “goal” is merely the survival of the organism (or simply the propagation of its genetic code), a good case can be made that atheists find themselves in a situation very similar to Hume’s.

The Nobel Laureate and physicist Eugene Wigner echoed this sentiment: “Certainly it is hard to believe that our reasoning power was brought, by Darwin’s process of natural selection, to the perfection which it seems to possess.” That is, atheists have a reason to doubt whether evolution would result in cognitive faculties that produce mostly true beliefs. And if so, then they have reason to withhold judgment on the reliability of their cognitive faculties. Like before, as in the case of Humean agnostics, this ignorance would, if atheists are consistent,

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<sup>51</sup> Mitch Stokes, *A Shot of Faith: To the Head* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 44-45.

spread to all of their other beliefs, including atheism and evolution. That is, because there's no telling whether unguided evolution would fashion our cognitive faculties to produce mostly true beliefs, atheists who believe the standard evolutionary story must reserve judgment about whether any of their beliefs produced by these faculties are true. This includes the belief in the evolutionary story. Believing in unguided evolution comes built in with its very own reason not to believe it.

This will be an unwelcome surprise for atheists. To make things worse, this news comes after the heady intellectual satisfaction that Dawkins claims evolution provided for thoughtful unbelievers. The very story that promised to save atheists from Hume's agnostic predicament has the same depressing ending.

It's obviously difficult for us to imagine what the world would be like in such a case where we have the beliefs that we do and yet very few of them are true. This is, in part, because we strongly believe that our beliefs are true (presumably not all of them are, since to err is human—if we knew which of our beliefs were false, they would no longer be our beliefs).

Suppose you're not convinced that we could survive without reliable belief-forming capabilities, without mostly true beliefs. Then, according to Plantinga, you have all the fixins for a nice argument in favor of God's existence. For perhaps you also think that—given evolution plus atheism—the probability is pretty low that we'd have faculties that produced mostly true beliefs. In other words, your view isn't "who knows?" On the contrary, you think it's unlikely that blind evolution has the skill set for manufacturing reliable cognitive mechanisms. And perhaps, like most of us, you think that we actually have reliable cognitive faculties and so actually have mostly true beliefs. If so, then you would be reasonable to conclude that atheism is pretty unlikely. Your argument, then, would go something like this: if atheism is true, then it's unlikely that most of our beliefs are true; but most of our beliefs are true, therefore atheism is probably false.

Notice something else. The atheist naturally thinks that our belief in God is false. That's just what atheists do. Nevertheless, most human beings have believed in a god of some sort, or at least in a supernatural realm. But suppose, for argument's sake, that this widespread belief really is false, and that it merely provides survival benefits for humans, a coping mechanism of sorts. If so, then we would have additional evidence—on the atheist's own terms—that evolution is more interested in useful beliefs than in true ones. Or, alternatively, if evolution really is concerned with true beliefs, then maybe the widespread belief in God would be a kind of "evolutionary" evidence for his existence.

You've got to wonder.

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