Deism and America’s Founders

The views and beliefs of our country’s founders were as diverse and complicated as today. Don Closson focuses on the role of deism.

In his book *Is God on America’s Side*, Erwin Lutzer asks the important question, “Is the American dream and the Christian dream one and the same?” If our national dream fails, does it necessarily follow that our Christian dream also dies? Lutzer’s book makes the point that it’s dangerous to see the goals of the state and the purpose of the church as one and the same. It’s dangerous to equate the “city of man” with the “city of God.”

However, there are those who argue that because our Founding Fathers were devoted Christians who held to an orthodox Christian faith, the state and the church in America are already linked together, and that if America as a nation loses its uniquely Christian flavor, the church will fail in its task as well. They see America as a unique country that holds a special place in God’s plan for reaching the world. Additionally, they argue that we enjoy God’s special protection and blessings because of this Christian founding, blessings which will be lost if Christians lose control of the nation.

At the other end of the religious and political spectrum is the group who portray America and its founding as a thoroughly secular project. They argue that by the time the Revolution had occurred in the colonies, Enlightenment rationalism had won the day in the minds and hearts of the young nation’s leaders. They often add that the drive towards religious tolerance was the result of a decline in belief in God and an attempt to remove religious influence from America’s future.

For all those involved in this debate, the specific beliefs of our Founders are very important. Those who argue that America was founded by godless men who established a godless Constitution are, for the most part, wrong. Belief in God was practically universal among our Founding Founders. On the other hand, those who argue that our Founders were mostly devoted Christians who sought to establish a Christian nation devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ are not giving us the full picture either. Because both sides in this debate tend to define America by the religious faith of our Founders, both sides tend to over-simplify the religious beliefs of those early patriots.

It’s important, therefore, to consider the specific beliefs of some of our Founding Fathers so that we might get a clearer picture of religion in that era and avoid either of the two extremes usually presented. As we look into the actions and words of specific Revolutionary era leaders we will find that their beliefs represent a mixture of viewpoints that are every bit as complicated as those of America’s leaders today.

Deism

The issue centers on how much influence Deism had on our Founders. So a good place to begin is with a definition of the movement while remembering that Deists “were never organized into a sect, had no [official] creed or form of worship, recognized no leader, and were constantly shifting their ground.” That said, Edward Herbert is often given credit for being the father of Deism in the
seventeenth century. His five-point system is a good starting point for understanding the religious beliefs that affected many of our nation’s leaders nearly one hundred years later.

Herbert’s Deism begins with the fact that there is a God. However, Deists did not equate this God with the one who revealed himself to Moses or as having a special relationship with the Jews. Instead of being the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Deists referred to him with terms like “the First Cause,” “the Divine Artist,” “the Grand Architect,” “the God of Nature,” or “Divine Providence.”[3] Many Deists argued that more could be learned about God by studying nature and science than by seeking knowledge about him in the Bible.

Deists also thought that it naturally follows to worship this God, which is Herbert’s second point. This belief is arrived at by reason alone and not revelation; it is a common sense response to the fact that “the God of Nature” exists. The nature of this worship is Herbert’s third point. Deists worshipped their God by living ethically. Some acknowledged the superior example of an ethical life as lived by Jesus; others felt that Christianity itself was a barrier to an ethical life.

Interestingly, Deists included repentance as part of their system. What is not a surprise is that this repentance consists of agreeing with the Creator God that living an ethical life is better than to not live such a life. Herbert’s last point may also be a surprise to many. Deists believed in an afterlife, and that in it there will be rewards and punishments based on our success or failure to live ethically now.

What should be obvious by now is that Deism was derivative of Christianity. As one cleric of the day wrote, “Deism is what is left of Christianity after casting off everything that is peculiar to it. The deist is one who denies the Divinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost; who denies the God of Israel, and believes in the God of Nature.”[4]

**Anti-Christian Deism**

The impact of Deism on Americans in the 1700s is complicated because the word itself represents a spectrum of religious positions held at that time. One extreme represents a group that might be called the non-Christian Deists. This faction was openly hostile to the Christian faith. Thomas Paine, of *Common Sense* fame, and a leading advocate of this position, wrote that Deism “is free from all those invented and torturing articles that shock our reason . . . with which the Christian religion abounds. Its creed is pure and sublimely simple. It believes in God, and there it rests. It honors Reason as the choicest gift of God to man and the faculty by which he is enabled to contemplate the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator displayed in the creation; . . . it avoids all presumptuous beliefs and rejects, as the fabulous inventions of men, all books pretending to be revelation.”[5] This quote clearly expresses the complaints and disdain that some Deists held against the Christian faith.

Although often accused of being godless pagans, it was not unusual for Thomas Paine and others in this group to see themselves as God’s defenders. Paine says that he wrote *The Age of Reason* in France during the French Revolution to defend belief in God against the growing atheism in that country. But he agreed with the French that the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church had to be removed. There was little love lost on the monarchy or the priesthood; one French philosopher wrote, “let us strangle the last king with the guts of the last priest.”

Deists were very confident in the power of human reason. Reason informed them that miracles were impossible and that the Bible is a man-made book of mythical narratives. This faction of Deists also saw Christianity as a barrier to moral improvement and social justice. And since for them, living an
ethical life is itself true worship, Christianity was seen as an impediment to worshipping God as well.

Reason is highlighted by the writings of these influential colonists. The former Presbyterian minister Elihu Palmer wrote a paper titled *Reason, the Glory of Our Nature*, and the well known patriot Ethan Allen published the Deistic piece *Reason: the Only Oracle of Man.* (6) In the preface of his book, Allen wrote, “I have generally been denominated a Deist, the reality of which I never disputed, being conscious I am no Christian, except mere infant baptism make me one.” (7)

It is not surprising that this focus on reason led Deists to reject the Trinity. Unitarianism was making great inroads into American colleges by the 1750s, and America’s best and brightest were now subject to this view at Yale, Harvard, and other prominent schools.

**Church-Going Deists**

It can be argued that there was a form of Deism in the late 1700s that was comfortable with parts of Christianity but was not entirely orthodox. Some of our most cherished and famous early American patriots fit into this category.

A good argument can be made that Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe were all significantly influenced by Deism and Unitarianism. Let’s take a look at the actions and comments of two of these revolutionary era leaders who can justifiably be called church-going Deists.

Hearing that Benjamin Franklin was a Deist will probably not shock too many Americans. By some accounts he embraced Deism at the young age of fifteen. (8) As an adult he was asked by a minister to express his personal creed, and Franklin replied, “I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe: That he governs the World by his Providence. That he ought to be worshiped. That the most acceptable Service we can render to him, is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another life, respecting its Conduct in this.” (9) Franklin’s faith was focused on personal behavior rather than faith in Christ’s work on the cross. When asked about Jesus, Franklin said, “I have . . . some Doubts as to his Divinity, tho’ it is a Question I do not dogmatize upon.” (10) Rather than being openly hostile to Christianity, Franklin contributed to every church building project in Philadelphia, as well as its one synagogue.

The faith of George Washington is a more controversial matter. Washington consistently used Deistic language to describe God in both public and private communications, rarely referring to Jesus Christ in any setting. Comments made by his contemporaries also point to Deistic beliefs. Washington’s bishop and pastor while he was in Philadelphia admitted that “Truth requires me to say, that General Washington never received the communion in the churches of which I am parochial minister.” (11) Another pastor added, “Sir, he was a Deist,” when questions about his faith arose shortly after his death. The fact that Washington was never confirmed in the Episcopal Church and ceased to take communion after the war adds to the case for him being a Deist. The controversy will continue, but much evidence points to his less than orthodox beliefs.

It must be remembered that, while Washington and Deists in general were quite willing to speak about the “God of Providence” or the “Grand Architect,” rarely are they found them referring to God as “Father,” “Lord,” “Redeemer,” or “Savior.” (12)
Orthodox Christians

Samuel Adams is often called the father of the American Revolution, but he is also known as “the Last of the Puritans,” a title that speaks to his commitment to orthodox Christianity. His orthodoxy is confirmed by both his actions and comments. Adams was opposed to Freemasonry, which taught a belief system that was consistent with Deism. Neither ideology focused on Jesus or the Bible, and both accepted Jews, Muslims, Christians, or anyone else who believed in a divine being. In fact, the phrase “the Grand Architect,” often used by Deists as a title for God, came from Freemasonry, not the Bible.

Adams maintained a religious household by personally practicing grace before meals, Bible readings, and morning and evening devotions. More important, Adams’ religious language revealed an orthodox belief system. He referred to God as “our Divine Redeemer,” and the one “who has given us his Son to purchase for us the reward of eternal life,” phrases that a Deist would most likely not employ. Even when thinking of his future passing Adams looked to Christ; his will spoke of his “relying on the merits of Jesus Christ for a pardon of all my sins.” Although many leaders of the day left their orthodox upbringing, Adams “was a New England Congregationalist who remained staunchly loyal to the Calvinist orthodoxy in which he had been raised.”

John Jay was president of the Continental Congress and the first chief justice of the Supreme Court; he also exhibited leadership in spreading the Word of God among the new country’s citizens. As president of the American Bible Society, Jay used his annual address to stress the authority of the Bible. He spoke of the events in its pages as events in history, not as religious mythology. He also employed the language of the church in his speeches and writings including “Saviour,” “King of Heaven,” and “Captain of our Salvation.” Although Jay had many friends among the Deists of the day, he differed greatly with them concerning the relationship of reason and revelation. Jay wrote that the truths of Christianity were “revealed to our faith, to be believed on the credit of Divine testimony” rather than a product of human reason.

Just as today, the religious landscape of early America was varied and complex. Those complexities should neither hinder nor determine our efforts to build God’s kingdom in the twenty-first century. America has been blessed by God, but to argue that it is privileged over all other nations is presumptuous. Other nations have believed that their country would be used uniquely by God as well. Perhaps we stand on firmer ground when we look to the church as God’s vehicle for accomplishing His purposes, a body of believers that will draw from every nation, tribe, people and language.

Notes

3. Ibid., 47.
4. Ibid., 39.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. books.google.com/books?id=IHMAAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA1#PPA1,M1 accessed on 9/15/2008.
8. Holmes, 54.
9. Ibid., 56.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 63.
12. Ibid., 65.
13. Ibid., 144.
14. Ibid., 146.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 150.
17. Ibid., p. 158.

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Truth: What It Is and Why We Can Know It

Rick Wade explores truth from a biblical and philosophical perspective. Despite what many believe, it IS possible to know truth because of the role of Jesus Christ as creator and revealer of truth.

The Loss of Confidence

Did you see the movie City of Angels? Nicholas Cage plays an angel named Seth who has taken a special interest in a surgeon named Maggie, played by Meg Ryan. Maggie’s lost a patient on the operating table, and she is very upset about it. Seth meets her in a hallway in the hospital, and gets her to talk about the loss. Here is a snippet of the conversation:

Maggie: I lost a patient.

Seth: You did everything you could.

Maggie: I was holding his heart in my hand when he died.

Seth: He wasn’t alone.

Maggie: Yes, he was.
**Seth:** People die.

**Maggie:** Not on my table.

**Seth:** People die when their bodies give out.

**Maggie:** It’s my job to keep their bodies from giving out. Or what am I doing here?

**Seth:** It wasn’t your fault, Maggie.

**Maggie:** I wanted him to live.

**Seth:** He is living. Just not the way you think.

**Maggie:** I don’t believe in that.

**Seth:** Some things are true whether you believe in ‘em or not. {1}

What did he say?! “Some things are true whether you believe in ‘em or not”?? Are you kidding?!? That’s crazy talk these days! I have a right to my own opinion, and if I don’t believe it, if it’s not my opinion, it’s not true . . . for me, anyway.

The meaning of truth has changed in recent decades. Whereas once it meant statements about reality, today it often means what works or what is meaningful to me. This kind of language is heard primarily in the context of religion and morality. We have lost confidence in our ability to know what reality is. So much emphasis has been put on knowledge through sense experience that anything outside the boundaries of the senses is considered unknowable. Moral and religious discussions frequently end with, “Well, that’s your opinion,” or the more colorful, “Opinions are like belly buttons. Everyone has one.” It’s assumed that opinions can’t be universally, objectively true or false. Each person is his or her own authority over what is true. Truth is a personal possession which is why people get so offended when challenged. A challenge is taken personally. “This is my truth. Don’t touch it!” Strong challenges are even taken as a sign of disrespect.

What does it mean when truth is lost? In philosophy, the result is skepticism or pragmatism. In society in general, one sees a degeneration from skepticism to hypocrisy to cynicism. First we say no one can know what is true—that’s skepticism. Then someone says “I have the truth” but then speaks or acts in a way not in keeping with that “truth” (if truth is uncertain, it can change with my moods)—that’s hypocrisy. Then we stop trusting each other—that’s cynicism. In politics, power and image are what count. In matters of morality, there is no standard above us; social consensus is the best we can hope for, or “human solidarity,” according to Christopher Hitchens. Justice has no sure footing. Might becomes right.

Elsewhere I have written that we don’t have to give in either to the demand for absolute certainty or to the skepticism of our day. {2} We can be confident in our ability to know truth even though not exhaustively. In this article I want to look at the nature and ground of truth, for these are of utmost importance in regard to the question of reliable knowledge.

**Truth: The Significance of Its Loss**

Let’s look more closely at what it means to lose confidence in knowing truth. One problem is that we become closed up in our individual shells with each of us having his or her own truth. Theologian Roger Nicole notes that the loss of truth means the loss of meaning in language; if we don’t know whether a proposition means what it seems to mean or its opposite, then language is impotent to
convey reliable knowledge. And we get caught up in contradictions. As Nicole wrote, those who deny objective validity “presuppose such validity at least for their denial.”

Problems are also created in the realm of morality. Historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto wrote this:

The retreat from truth is one of the great dramatic, untold stories of history. . . . For professional academics in the affected disciplines, to have grown indifferent to truth is an extraordinary reversal of traditional obligations; it is like physicians renouncing the obligation to sustain life or theologians losing interest in God—developments, formerly unthinkable, which now loom as truth diminishes. The trashing of truth began as an academic vice, but the debris is now scattered all over society. It is spread through classroom programmes, . . . In a society of concessions to rival viewpoints, in which citizens hesitate to demand what is true and denounce what is false, it becomes impossible to defend the traditional moral distinction between right and wrong, which are relativized in turn. Unless it is true, what status is left for a statement like ‘X is wrong’ where X is, say, adultery, infanticide, euthanasia, drug-dealing, Nazism, paedophilia, sadism or any other wickedness due, in today’s climate, for relativization into the ranks of the acceptable? It becomes, like everything else in western society today, a matter of opinion; and we are left with no moral basis for encoding some opinions rather than others, except the tyranny of the majority.

One of the worst problems for a well-ordered society is cynicism. First we say there’s no truth. But then we hypocritically push our views on others as though we have the truth. Then people stop trusting each other. “You say there are no fixed truths, but then you push your claims on me.” The result is cynicism.

Some people claim that truth claims are suspect because the words we use are changeable; they can’t carry fixed, eternal truths. If we don’t think it’s possible that words convey truth, then words lose their objective meaning, and we start giving them our own meanings.

The loss of confidence in knowing truth is significant for Christians, too, who, without realizing it, adopt similar patterns of thought. When such confidence in knowing truth is weakened, one cannot have confidence that the Bible is the true Word of God. Its authority in the individual’s life is weakened because what it says becomes questionable. Evangelism becomes a matter of sharing one’s own religious preferences, rather than delivering God’s authoritative Word. Bible study becomes a sharing of opinions with none being normative. Each has his or her own opinion and no one is supposed to say a given opinion is wrong.

**Truth in Scripture**

What is this “truth” thing we talk so much about? My dictionary has such definitions as genuineness, reality, correctness, and statements which accord with reality. Truth can also be a characteristic of persons and things. Someone or some thing that is true is genuine or in keeping with his or its nature. And truth can refer to quality of conduct. The Bible speaks of people doing the truth rather than doing evil (cf. Nah. 9:33; Jn. 3:20, 21).

To help in considering all these matters, let’s look at truth as understood in Scripture, and then at truth considered in philosophical terms.

What does the Bible teach about truth?
In the Old Testament, the word most often translated true, truth, or truly is ‘emet or a cognate. This word is also translated “faithfulness.” Let’s consider the matter of faithfulness first.

For the Israelites, Yahweh was “the God in whose word and work one could place complete confidence.” For example, God said through Zechariah: “I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God” (8:8). Nehemiah said to God: “You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong” (9:33). “The works of his hand are faithful and just,” said the Psalmist; “all his precepts are trustworthy” (111:7).

‘Emet also means truth as over against falsehood as when Joseph tested his brothers to see if they were telling the truth (Gen. 42:16), and when the Israelites were warned to test accusations that people were worshiping other gods to see if they were true (Deut. 13:14). Commenting on Ps. 43:3—“Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me”—theologian Anthony Thiselton says that “Truth enables [the writer] to escape from the dark, and to see things for what they are.”

We shouldn’t conclude by these two uses of the word that on any given occasion “truth” always means both faithfulness and the opposite of falsehood. However, there is a connection between the two. Theologian Anthony Thiselton says the connection depends “on the fact that when God or man is said to act faithfully, often this means that his word and his deed are one. He has acted faithfully in accordance with his spoken word. Hence the believer may lean his whole weight confidently on God, and find him faithful.”

Thus, in the Old Testament, truth is a matter of both words and deeds. “Men express their respect for truth not in abstract theory, but in their daily witness to their neighbour and their verbal and commercial transactions,” Thiselton says.

In the New Testament, there is an increased focus on truth as conformity to reality and as opposed to falsehood. The Greek word alētheia means, literally, “not hidden.” When Peter was sprung from prison by an angel, he didn’t know if it was real (or true) or a dream (Acts 12:9). John the Baptist bore witness to the truth (Jn. 5:33). Jesus used the phrase “I tell you in truth” four times to emphasize the correctness of what he was about to say (Lk. 4:25; 9:27; 12:44; 21:3). When Jesus said “I am the truth,” (Jn. 14:6), He was identifying Himself with what is ultimately and finally real.

Truth in the New Testament isn’t disconnected from how we live, however. We are to walk in the truth (2 Jn. 4; 2 Pet. 2:22), and we are to obey the truth (Gal. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:22).

One mustn’t oversimplify scriptural teaching on truth. However, it’s safe to say that truth in the Bible means having the correct understanding of the way things really are, and living in accordance with this understanding.

**Truth Considered Philosophically**

Let’s look at truth now from a philosophical perspective, first as what is real, and then as true statements. This is important, because these are the terms according to which non-Christians think about the matter.

First, truth is a characteristic of reality. In short, if something is real, it is true. Or put philosophically, if something “participates in being,” it is true. When we say that the God of the Bible is the true God, we mean He really exists and really is God!

By analogy, we might ask if a plant we see in a room is a true or real plant. We want to know if it is organic, and not plastic or fabric. If we say a person has exhibited true love, we’re saying the
person’s actions weren’t motivated by anything other than concern for the object of the person’s love.

Second, truth is a characteristic of accurate statements or propositions. Sentences which express true meanings convey truth. This is what we typically think of when we speak of truth.\{12\}

We often divide truth in this sense into the categories of **objective** and **subjective**. When we speak of objective truth, we mean that a statement truly reflects what is real, or really the case, apart from ourselves as knowers. And whether we believe it or not. Such truth is public; others can verify it. When we speak of subjective truth, we’re speaking of truth that comes from us individually, where we ourselves are the only authority. For example, “My leg hurts” is subjective in the sense that I am the sole authority. Or if I claim that “French vanilla ice cream is the best tasting kind there is,” that is a subjective truth claim.”

Both truth as what’s real and truth as objectively true statements are in crisis today. First, postmodernists say we can’t know what’s ultimately real. In academia this means there is no framework for integrating the various areas of study. In everyday life it results in fractured lives as we find ourselves having to conform to different situations without any integrating structure. French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard had this to say about postmodernism: “[Postmodernism] has deconstructed its entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces—that is postmodern.”\{13\}

We can rearrange the pieces in a number of different ways, but there is, as it were, no picture on the front of the puzzle box to guide us.\{14\} Such a view of truth leaves one unwilling, or unable really, to say what is true about anything of importance, and, as a result, forces one into the rather mindless tolerance demanded today. Dorothy Sayers had this to say about such “tolerance”:\{15\}

In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.

Second, although truth as true statements is still acknowledged today, some important matters are considered subjective which should be acknowledged as objective, such as statements about God and morality. Christians believe we can know what is ultimately and objectively real and true because the One who is ultimately real and true, God, has revealed Himself to us.

**A Foundation for Knowledge of Truth**

Now we finally get to the key idea of this article.

Christians claim that they have the truth, a claim that is met with scorn. We are tempted to point to the Bible as our basis for the claim, but critics claim that we’re jumping the gun. If no one can have confidence in knowing truth, then what good is the Bible? It isn’t the source that’s the question; not yet anyway. It’s the very possibility of knowing truth that is questioned. How are truth and the possibility of knowing it even possible?

In a nutshell, we have what philosophical naturalism has given up: we have a metaphysical basis for knowing truth, a basis in what is.
You see, for the naturalist, there is nothing fixed behind the changing world. Three things need to be the case about the world for us to know truth: that it is real; that it is rational; and that there is something fixed behind it. And we need to be able to connect with what is around us with our senses and our reason.

Here’s the key point: Knowledge of truth is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the Logos of God, Jesus Christ. I’ll return to this below.

It is not enough that Christians to simply throw their hands up in despair over this. We have a message that is true for all people. But it may not do to just point to the Bible as our source for true beliefs if the very possibility of knowing any enduring truth is in doubt. Upon what basis can we believe we can really know truth?

To have true knowledge of the world outside our own minds, there has to be a solid connection between our thoughts and the world. The world has to be rational, and we have to have the proper sensory and mental apparatus necessary to comprehend it. Christianity provides such a connection between our minds and reality outside us in the person of the Logos of God.

“In the beginning was the Word,” John wrote, the Logos (John 1:1; cf. Rev. 19:13). In Greek philosophy, logos was the impersonal principle of cosmic reason which was thought to give order and intelligibility to the world. John’s Logos, however, is not impersonal; a Person, not a principle. The Logos—Jesus of Nazareth—is the intelligent expression of God or the Word of God (Jn. 1:1,14; Rev. 19:13). He is not secondary to God, but is God.

The significance of this for the possibility of knowing truth is this: knowledge is possible because of the creating and revealing work of the Logos. Remember that Jesus, the Logos, is not only the One who reveals God to us, but is also the creator of the universe (Jn.1:3; Col.1:16,17; Heb.1:2). Because the universe came from a rational Being, the universe is rational. Further, there is no hint in Scripture that the world is an illusion; it is just what it appears to be: real. And because we’re made in God’s image, we’re rational beings who can know the universe.{16} Also, we can perceive the world around us because we were created with the sensory apparatus to perceive it.

But this is just knowledge of our world. What about knowledge of God? Not only has the Logos created us with the ability to know the world, He has also revealed Himself in a rational and even observable way. He is, as Carl Henry put it, “the God Who speaks and shows.”{17}

Because of all this, it is not arrogance that is behind the Christian claim that truth can be known. We claim it because we have a basis for it: Jesus of Nazareth, the Logos of God, the Creator, has made knowledge of truth possible, knowledge of this world and of God. Modern philosophy and theology denied God’s ability to reveal Himself to us in any significant way. But such ideas diminish God Himself. He made us to know His world. He gave us sense organs to know the empirical world; He gave us rational minds to engage in logical and mathematical reasoning and to engage in the many, many deductions we make every day of our lives. He also made us to know Him, and He revealed Himself to us through a variety of ways.

It’s no wonder that the naturalistic philosophy of our time is incapable of having confidence in knowing truth. It has lost a metaphysical ground for truth. Jesus of Nazareth is not only our source of salvation; He is also the Creator. And because of this, we can have confidence in our ability to know truth in general and truth about God in particular.

Notes


5. Webster’s New World College Dictionary, 4th ed., s.v., “true.”


7. Nicole, 288. I am indebted to Nicole’s and Thiselton’s (cf. note 8 below) studies for much of what follows.


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


16. As Henry says, “As creative, the Word of God is the ground of all existence; as revelatory, it is the ground of all human knowledge.” (GRA, 5:334) Also, “The Logos is the creative Word whereby God fashioned and preserves the universe. He is the light of the understanding, the Reason that enables intelligible creatures to comprehend the truth.” (GRA 3:212).

17. The subtitle to Henry, God, Revelation and Authority, Vol. 1.
The Tug of War of Reason and Faith in C.S. Lewis’s Favorite Novel

Byron Barlowe examines the timeless battle between reason and faith in C.S. Lewis’s novel—his favorite—Till We Have Faces. Are they mutually exclusive or can they balance one another? How do we reconcile them? “To rationally look at love and logic and to gaze along, to creatively depict and model its living out, may soon be all that is left to us to reach a new generation.”

“You think the gods have sent you there? All lies of priests and poets, child . . . The god within you is the god you should obey: reason, calmness, self-discipline.”

- The Fox, Greek tutor in Till We Have Faces[1]

“Heaven forbid we should work [the garden of our human nature] in the spirit of . . . Stoics . . . We know very well that what we are hacking and pruning is big with a splendour and vitality which our rational will could never of itself have supplied. To liberate that splendour, to let it become fully what it is trying to be, to have tall trees instead of scrubby tangles, and sweet apples instead of crabs, is part of our purpose.”

- C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves[2]

A strong relationship between C.S. Lewis’s conceptions of Contemplation and Enjoyment persists throughout his novel Till We Have Faces. It seems most fruitful for today’s apologist to examine two primary characters’ relationship to the concepts in this way: the Greek slave-tutor known as the Fox, represents cold, hard, factual rationality which grudgingly gives a nod to the divine, but only in a limited, controlling way. He represents Stoicism more than any other school of thought. Meanwhile, the barbarian-pagan Priest of the god Ungit represents a less worldly wise, more mysterious and superstitious faith, rooted in earthy experience (fertility rites, blood sacrifice, etc.). Either worldview can limit human nature, truth and meaning. The Greek-infused contemplative life-view (nowadays seen most strongly in Modernism and its irreligious pupils), largely eschews the heartfelt experience of the latter, while the latter’s religiosity often dismisses the thoughtful, discerning caution of the former. This artificially strict dichotomy and lack of balance shows forth at every turn in the Church today, creating a blindly loyal fideism with few answers for contemplative questions; or we see, in an overcorrection, a clinical, spiritless, formulaic religion of pure reason. The former, an unreflective modus operandi, chills—and according to testimonies of many apostates and atheists, creates—skeptics, who much like the Fox, seizing on pure reason, ceaselessly explain away the immaterial and numinous. In doing so they, like the Fox’s star student Orual, act as plaintiffs against God or the gods. One apologist recently found that nearly all the young men he surveyed who serve as leaders of college atheist/agnostic groups in the U.S. were raised in church and attended Christian youth groups. Given the ubiquity of broken families, where little love borne of God-given freedom exists—much like the main character Orual’s situation—and know-nothing, superstitious Christians, it is no wonder that a mass exodus of youth from the Church continues. One antidote to the current state of imbalance of Contemplation (reasoned examination toward applied wisdom) and Enjoyed faith (in Lewis’s sense, experientially realized) may be to use and model the dual approach of Lewis’s The Four Loves alongside Till We Have Faces. To rationally look at love and logic and to gaze along, to creatively depict and model its living out, may soon be all that is left to us to reach a
new generation.

In the mythic *Till We Have Faces*, which we will discuss here, the dual (and often dueling) dynamics of reason (often couched in secularized religion) versus mystical religion (often superstitious) interplay in various characters. It may help to explore these chief characters Lewis creates to embody the story of clashing worlds and worldviews, as well as the Fox’s prize student, Orual. Meanwhile, we will briefly attempt to apply the lessons Lewis teaches apologists into the modern milieu.

First, Lewis revealed the predominant worldview, the Fox’s philosophy, early in the novel as he tutored Orual. His Platonic views were summarized thus, “‘No man can be an exile if he remembers that all the world is one city,’ and ‘Everything is as good or bad as our opinion makes it.’”[3] As a well-taught classical Greek, he sets out to import real learning into the barbarian kingdom to which he is enslaved. Orual admired her “grandfather’s” constant quest for knowledge and carried on his tendency to question, Socratically, all that went on. Yet, since her dear Fox, always the philosopher, seemed “ashamed of loving poetry (‘All folly, my child’), she overachieves in philosophy to “get a poem out of him.”[4] Foretelling the dismissiveness and globalizing of the numinous by today’s naturalistic thinkers, the Fox scoffs at surpranatural / supernatural explanations with a curt, “these things come about by natural causes.”[5] In an ancient instance of positive-mental-attitude-laced freethinking, he lectures, “we must learn, child, not to fear anything that nature brings.”[6] When Orual’s sister Psyche goes about ostensibly healing the townspeople, and Orual asks about the validity of the claims, Fox the Naturalist characteristically keeps the options limited but somewhat open. “It might be in accordance with nature that some hands can heal. Who knows?”[7] Herein lies a bit of epistemic humility, somewhat disingenuous it seems, something this writer detects quite a lot among materialist-naturalists.

The Fox’s framework of Platonic forms emerges in his assessment of Psyche’s ethereal beauty, “delight[ing] to say, she was ‘according to nature’; what every woman, or even every thing, ought to have been and meant to be, but had missed by some trip of chance.”[8] While talk of gods peppered his language (“Ah, Zeus” and “by the gods”—more than curses?), fate seems to drive the universe’s cause and effect. He considers suicide and opines about returning to the elements in death, fateful acquiescing, to which Orual beseeches, “But, Grandfather, do you really in your heart believe nothing of what is said about the gods and Those Below? But you do . . . you are trembling.” His Gnostic-tinged response: the body fails me. I am a fool, being trapped in it so long.[9] From what little the writer knows of Greek theology, its progeny thrives in and out of the Church today as an admixture of practical atheism, pantheism and pragmatism. Lewis sneaks in the side door of the skeptical fortress by characterizing so strongly the Fox, whose loving humanity belies his deadening philosophy. If Lewis’s retelling of ancient myth can be refashioned again, or better, simply read, truth and meaning may get through.

On the second worldview, Lewis sets forth the theme of a grounding darkness, holy and otherworldly, chiefly through the pagan Priest of the local goddess Ungit. The Priest served as prophet, harbinger of judgment. He repeats the warning of Ungit’s all-hearing ears and vengefulness to the irreligious king on two occasions[10] He carries out shadowy, ancient rituals without explanation and in dark places, sticky with blood offerings. Even outside the dank and sacred temple, “every hour the Priest of Ungit walked around [the sacred fire],” narrates Orual, “and threw in the proper things.”[11] Throughout, Lewis equates the holy with the mysterious, the hidden and darkened. Divine silence, corresponding to the biblical God’s hiddenness and holiness, presents as a major theme of *Till We Have Faces*. The Priest offers few and brief explanations.[12] The god judging Orual in the afterlife allows her lifelong complaints to speak for themselves. Her resultant epiphany balances the equation between reason and religion, witty words and wordless (if corrupted) wisdom, and reconciles the silence: “I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly,
nor let us answer. Till that word [of inner secret] can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble we think we mean?"[13] These characters serve as foils for one another, a creative way to tie Modern rationalism to man’s inexorable and entirely unnatural acknowledgment of both the spiritual, or numinous and the moral law.

Sixteen years previous, Lewis had published *The Problem of Pain*, wherein he explores this undeniable yet insanely irrational or rather supernaturally revealed sense of numinous awe and moral law inherent in every man and culture. As if foreshadowing the clash of worldviews in discussion, Lewis writes, "Man . . . can close his spiritual eyes against the Numinous, if he is prepared to part company with half the great poets and prophets of his race, with his own childhood, with the richness and depth of uninhibited experience [the Fox, to a high degree, or] . . . He can refuse to identify the Numinous with the righteous, and remain a barbarian, worshipping sexuality, or the dead, or the lifeforce, or the future [the old Priest].”[14] The concepts of Contemplation and Enjoyment intertwine through a scholar and a man of the altar, through the gods and humans alike. In life and in myth, “men, and gods, flow in and out and mingle.”[15]

The Fox’s and Priest’s views of one another and each other’s worldview clashed like contemporary apologetic debates. The Fox saw the Priest’s work as “mischief”[16] and nonsense. “A child of six would talk more sense” was the Fox’s response to the apparent contradictions of the Priestly doctrines regarding the Great Offering.[17] Contrarily, the Priest reflexively dismisses the Fox’s Greek wisdom. According to Orual, “like all sacred matters, [a sacred, acted ritual] is and it is not (so that it was easy for the Fox to show its manifold contradictions).”[18] Yet, “even Stoicism finds itself willy-nilly bowing the knee to God.”[19] The Fox at times let down his learned persona, evidencing the axiom that man is inherently religious. Yes, he gave a regular nod to the gods, and at the birth of Orual’s sister Psyche he says wistfully, almost wishfully, “Now by all the gods . . . I could almost believe that there really is divine blood in your family.” Though his comment regards the family bloodline, one picks up here and elsewhere a religious man, who then quickly covers the sentiment with appeals to reason, even rationalization. Such characterization seems both autobiographical on Lewis’s part and testimony to his many dealings with materialist, humanist, secularist, liberal Christian, and unbelieving scholars and laymen.

The Priest’s mythical, experiential religious conviction versus the Fox’s worldly wisdom weaves itself through a climactic showdown. A death sentence falls on Psyche as the Accursed, to be offered to the goddess Ungit. (Here is the clash of wills between man and the divine in a crisis of state and religion so often seen in history.[20]) “Ungit will be avenged. It’s not a bull or ram [sacrifice] that will quiet her now,” pronounces the Priest.[21] He mentions “the Brute,” who legend says will take away the human sacrifice. In classic rational fashion, the King challenges, “Who has ever seen this Brute . . . What is it like, eh?” In this moment, the Fox presents himself as the King’s counsellor, living out his reasonable raison d’etre. Prosecution-style, he determines that the Brute only exists as an image, a shadow, six-year-old nonsense. The Priest dismisses this as “the wisdom of the Greeks,” and seeks the peoples’ fear as a fallback position. (Interestingly, many who either believe in or dismiss the supernatural and mystical seek strength in numbers, popular opinion to make their case, which is no argument at all.) The high stakes exchange illustrates the gravity and consequences of the age-old clash. If religion is to be followed, it must be regulated by reason; if reason is to properly play its part, it must bow to realities beyond its grasp.

The Priest and Fox provide an extremely stark contrast of views during this conflict. The Fox presents a compare-and-contrast list of the Priest’s teachings, revealing what he believes defies the Law of Non-Contradiction.[22] The Priest first responds to the abstractions by appeal to concrete realities. Greek wisdom “brings no rain and grows no corn.” He portrays such constricting logic as unable to offer “understanding of holy things . . . demand[ing] to see such things clearly, as if the gods were no more than letters written in a book . . . nothing,” he continues, “that is said clearly
[about the gods] can be said truly about them . . . Holy wisdom is not clear and thin like water, but thick and dark like blood.” [23] The apologist cannot help but think of the frustration of trying to communicate the mysterious paradoxes of spiritual truth and meaning to skeptics who demand only linear logic from a naturalist point of view. (The Fox continually appeals to “the Nature of things” and says “according to Nature.”) One must also guard against becoming Fox-like, limiting inquiry and explanation merely to that accessible to the physical senses and human reason. Either philosopher or accommodating priest / poet can make that mistake; via their opposite approaches, whether overly from man’s reason or God’s assumed reasons, deny the paradoxes of reality.

Ironically, Orual’s conversion to real belief in the numinous—halting and years-long—begins during this fight. Though she’d “have hanged the Priest and made the Fox a king” if she could, she realized the power lay in the Priest’s position.[24] Her convincing comes in a climactic moment, when pressed at literal knifepoint to stop prophesying the unwelcome judgment, the Priest shows unearthly peace, calm, and indeed a willingness to die. “While I have breath,” he intoned, “I am Ungit’s voice.” Resolute and full of faith at death’s door, his was evidence beyond reason, much as the testimony of Christ’s Apostles in their martyrdoms. This was not lost on Orual, who narrates, “The Fox had taught me to think—at any rate to speak of—the Priest as of a mere schemer and a politic man” who pretended and said whatever would provide him power or gain, in Ungit’s name.[25] The Fox’s prize student now saw through personal experience—the kind he taught her to guard against—that the Priest was sincere unto death. “He was sure of Ungit.”[26] He may have been mistaken or misled, but he did not pretend. One of the modern apologist’s greatest arguments is a convinced life and a faith, well-tested, sometimes right in front of the skeptic. The ultimate witness: a life and death scenario.

After a lifetime, in the afterlife, the Fox repents of his constraints and biases of the supernatural and religious. In this, Lewis communicates a truth applicable today. “I taught [Orual], as men teach a parrot, to say ‘Lies of poets,’ and ‘Ungit’s a false image.’ . . . I never told her why the old Priest got something from the dark House [of Ungit] that I never got from my trim sentences . . . I made her think a prattle of maxims would do, all thin and clear as water.”[27] How like so many testimonies of those who, in our day, come to Christ after years of dismissing and rationally ruling out the reality of the transcendent. Words are cheap and book knowledge only gets one so far, the Fox admits. What a mirror of teachers who lead people of faith away from that which requires revelation using smart-sounding verbiage. Hence, for those enamored with the Richard Dawkinses of our time, a reading of this novel may be the foxiest way of all to reach them.

Orual is a product of her own Need-Love[28], which is serviced alternately by her Fox-taught Greek rationalism and belief in humanoid gods, whom she thinks she can control. As a young woman being flirted with by a prince on the lam, she characteristically staunches true emotions. “I had a fool’s wish to lengthen” the encounter, she says. “But I came to my senses.” On her odyssey to save her sister from a supposedly evil god, Orual blocks every sentiment with controlling motherly logic, eschewing all glimpses of and desires for the divine. She chooses to outwit the gods. She ends up the pawn in the hands of the gods, however gracious, that she fancied to be her equals.

The Orual-Queen-Psyche’s-twin character spends a lifetime employing Greek wisdom learned under the Fox to seek out life’s mysteries of human and divine relations, up to the bittersweet end, constantly denouncing the gods for the woes she experiences. Face to face with divinity, her bitter hiding reveals her glorious humanity. Now, true-faced, she is free. Up until then the helpless, yet defiantly and impressively skillful independence she exhibits as a mothering sister, and later as regent, so well illustrate fallen human defiance of the true God of the Bible, seen most vividly in well-educated apostates and atheists today. Those unbelievers, consumed by angry confusion regarding suffering and life’s seeming futilities, should find both empathy and resolution in this novel.[29] While doing excellently (in human terms) for a lifetime, as Orual did, one can still deny
the existence of the divine while cursing the god’s or God’s supposed effects on mere mortals. Orual’s torturous private thought life increasingly revealed her sin nature, which she turned back into ravings against the fate of the gods. Control was her only weapon, until the deaths of all who propped up her life and kingdom, and until visions of her corrupted affections forced humility upon her. Such desperate machinations to live a meaningful life in the face of deadening routine punctuated by tragedy, in turn, raises the biggest questions of life: Why are we here? Are we mere mortals or eternal beings with a destiny? If the latter, what or who determines our fate—is there really meaningful choice or only divine whim or something else? Lewis creates multi-layered characters who live out the quest for ultimate answers.

In another resolution of sorts, the myth comes full circle through the Fox and priesthood back to Greece. Arnom, the new Priest of Ungit, adds a notation on Orual’s book (at our novel’s end) entreati


[7] Ibid., 31

[8] Ibid., 22.

[9] Ibid., 17-18.

[10] Ibid., 15,54.


[12] Ibid., 15-16, etc.


[16] Ibid., 33.

[17] Ibid., 49.

[18] Ibid., 268.


[20] From the little the writer knows of Plato’s *Republic*, there seem to be echoes of it here in the Fox’s views. Worth exploring.

[21] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 46.

[22] Ibid., 49-50.

[23] Ibid., 50.

[24] Ibid., 51.

[25] Ibid., 54.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 295.


[29] The writer plans to use the novel and its contemplative companion, *The Four Loves*, to reach out to a struggling apostate with mother issues on both sides of her adoption.


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**Challenging the New Atheists**

The new wave of bitterly anti-God, anti-Christian atheists offer arguments against God. Patrick Zukeran provides several good answers.

**The New Atheist Agenda**

Nearly thirty years ago John Lennon sang the song, “Imagine.” The words went like this:
Imagine there’s no heaven
It’s easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today
Imagine there’s no countries
It isn’t hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

Imagine there’s no heaven...
You may say that I’m a dreamer
But I’m not the only one
I hope someday you’ll join us
And the world will be as one

In other words, the source of much evil in the world is religion: belief in God, life after death, and a universal moral code. Would the world be a better place if faith in God was eliminated? Many atheists now think so. Richard Dawkins states, “Imagine with John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine, no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as ‘Christ killers’, no Northern Ireland ‘troubles’, no honour killings’, no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money (‘God wants you to give till it hurts’). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing one inch of it.”

The goal of the new atheists is to rid the world of belief in God or religion and replace it with reason and science. The new atheists believe that religions that embrace a belief in God, particularly Christianity, are not just irrational but dangerous and therefore must be extinguished.

The new atheists are not presenting new arguments but instead they are promoting their ideas very aggressively with strong, confrontational, and condemning language. They have gained a following amongst the young academic crowd, and they have been quite influential in public education. Some of the notable names who have written popular work include Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Dan Barker, and Christopher Hitchens.

In this work we will cover four popular arguments presented by the new atheists. The first is that belief in God is irrational. The second argument is that Christianity in particular is dangerous. Third, science has clearly proven God does not exist. Fourth, religion is the result of a natural man-made evolutionary process motivated by man’s need for a divine father figure and the need to find meaning in the universe.

In this series, we will examine these arguments and see whether belief in God is irrational or if there are good reasons for belief in a creator.

**Belief in God is Irrational**

The new atheists allege that faith in God is the result of irrational thinking and that a rational person would not believe in God. Sam Harris writes, “We have names for people who have many beliefs for
which there is no rational justification. When their beliefs are extremely common we call them ‘religious’; otherwise they are likely to be called ‘mad,’ psychotic,’ or ‘delusional.’”\textsuperscript{2}

Richard Dawkins, in his book \textit{The God Delusion}, says that belief in God is the result of delusional thinking. He asserts that belief in God is a delusion built on empty assertions and not evidence. He states, “Faith is blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence.”\textsuperscript{3} His conclusion is that there is no evidence to support the existence of God; in fact, all the evidence goes against God.

The assertion that belief in God is irrational is not a new argument but a very old one. It is true that many who believe in God are not able to present reasons why they believe. However, Christianity is not founded on “blind faith” but faith built upon evidence, and there are good reasons that make belief in God a reasonable conclusion. One significant individual who has come to believe in the existence of God is Antony Flew. Flew was this generation’s greatest atheist philosopher. However, Flew, through philosophical reasoning, came to believe in God.

Flew states that he wrestled with three key, major scientific questions. First, how did the laws of nature come to be? Second, how did life come from non-life? Third, how did the universe come into existence?\textsuperscript{4} The naturalists’ answers, which are heavily dependent on Darwin’s theory, were unsatisfactory. Flew discovered that the classical theistic arguments provided the best answers in light of the evidence. The cosmological argument, or argument from first cause, and the teleological argument, or argument from design, provided a much more reasonable answer.\textsuperscript{5}

For centuries, Christian apologists have presented these and several other reasoned arguments for the existence of God and many have come to a belief in God as Flew did. Antony Flew’s conversion from atheism to theism deals a devastating blow to the arguments of the new atheists. Not only was he a titan among atheist philosophers, but he is another example that demonstrates belief in God is not irrational. Reasoning individuals who are willing to study the evidence and follow it wherever it leads may find a strong case for a creator.

\textbf{Is Science at War with God?}

The new atheists allege that science and faith are at war. Therefore real scientists must be atheists, for science clearly proves God does not exist.

How do these atheists explain the display of design in the universe? Leading atheist spokesman Richard Dawkins believes Darwin’s theory answers the design argument. However, recent discoveries reveal the shortcomings of Darwin’s theory. Darwin’s theory fails to explain the cause of the universe. It also fails to present evidence that that life came from non-life. There is also the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record, and there is no mechanism for macro-evolutionary change. Mutations and natural selection have failed to conclusively show they can produce macro-evolutionary change. In short, the new atheists have a lot of faith that Darwin’s theory will answer these challenges.

Science and the Christian faith are not enemies. In fact, the more scientists study nature and the universe, they continue to discover complexity and design which make it highly improbable such complex systems could have come about by chance or natural forces. For this reason, the number of scientists who are acknowledging an intelligent creator continues to grow. This is a fact the new atheists neglect to acknowledge.

Francis Collins, the leader of the Human Genome project and author of \textit{The Language of God}, tells
how the order and precision in the DNA code led him from atheism to belief in God. Collins writes, “Many will be puzzled by these sentiments, assuming that a rigorous scientist could not also be a believer in a transcendent God. This book aims at dispelling that notion, by arguing that belief in God can be an entirely rational choice, and that the principles of faith are in fact complimentary with the principles of science.” {6}

Physicist Stephen Hawking states that his study of the universe reveals that “The overwhelming impression is one of order. The more we discover about the universe, the more we find that it is governed by rational laws. . . . You still have to ask the question why does the universe bother to exist? If you like, you can define God to be the answer to the question.” {7}

Francis Collins and Stephen Hawking are just two examples of numerous award-winning scientists who acknowledge the scientific evidence points to a creator. The more we learn in the various fields of science such as biology, microbiology, astronomy, physics, etc., the evidence continues to point to design. The complexity of life and the order displayed in the universe make it more reasonable to conclude a God created it, and the greater leap of faith would be to conclude it all occurred by chance and natural forces.

**Belief in God Is Dangerous**

The new atheist movement asserts that religion is dangerous, for it is the source of much of the conflict in the world today. Many assert that religions, especially Christianity, teach intolerance and discrimination. To build their case, however, the new atheists unfortunately attack misrepresentations of religions, especially Christianity.

For example, in *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins states, “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” {8} What Dawkins displays is his superficial understanding of the Bible. Certainly no Christian believes in a God as described by Dawkins.

Another error is the misuse of labels. New atheists apply the term “fundamentalist” to Evangelical Christians as well as fundamentalist Muslims, creating the illusion the two are equivalent in their teachings. When Dawkins points to the example of the Islamic riots against the Danish cartoons, he equates this incident not with Islam but with religion, all religions. {9} However a careful study reveals that there is a huge difference between Jesus’ teachings and Muhammad’s teachings. This huge difference is also revealed in the lives they lived. {10} A careful reading of the New Testament quickly reveals that violence goes against the nature of Christ’s teachings who taught His disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Mt. 5:38-48). Application of the true teachings of Christ would lead to a peaceful society.

New atheists allege that religions promote division by the creation of in-groups and out-groups. Indeed, there are religions that discriminate, including some Christian groups, but in Christianity that is a perversion of the teachings of Christ. Jesus’ sacrifice and gift of salvation is offered to all (Jn. 3:16). Throughout His life Jesus reached out to those despised by the culture, and His disciples die—many in foreign fields—preaching salvation to all. Even in the Old Testament, the mission of Israel was to be a blessing to all the world (Gen. 12). Application of true biblical teachings would lead to non-discrimination.

A significant point that the new atheists do not mention is the destructive consequences of atheist
philosophies. Nietzsche predicted that the death of God would lead to a moral relativism which would result in blood in the streets. {11} Communism has lead to the death of millions in the twentieth century. Millions were put to death under the regimes of Marx, Pol Pot, and Mao Tse Tung. Some religions are responsible for conflict, including Christians who have misused biblical teachings. However, atheism has shown to be dangerous as well.

**Religion Is the Result of an Evolutionary Process**

New atheists assert that religion was created out of a need for a father figure, or for comfort in a cruel world, or out of fear of the unknown. They rely on the work of James Frazer and his book the *Golden Bough*, written in the nineteenth century. Frazer taught that religion developed through a natural evolutionary process which began first with animism, a belief in spirits in nature. The worship of nature spirits eventually lead to polytheism. Eventually, amongst all the gods, one was viewed as the most dominant. Eventually this dominant god alone was worshipped and monotheism developed. This was known as the evolutionary theory of religion. New atheists believe eventually man’s need for God will end and atheism will be the end of this evolutionary development. Unfortunately, the new atheists once again are not presenting a new theory but reiterating an old theory which has been shown to be flawed.

One of the flaws of this theory is that it was influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution and lacked serious empirical evidence and study. {12} One of the most significant and well-researched works was produced by anthropologist Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt in his four-thousand-page treatise, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*. His research of hundreds of cultures revealed that monotheism is the oldest of religions. The development of religion was discovered to have gone in the opposite direction of the evolutionary theory. All cultures began with a belief in a heavenly father, and this monotheistic faith eventually degenerates to polytheism and then animism. This theory is called “original monotheism.” {13} The evidence displayed by Schmidt, and later by anthropologist Don Richardson, is consistent with the progression of religion as revealed in Romans 1. Serious research and evidence appears to favor the biblical model.

The new atheists present few new arguments. What are new are not the arguments but the method and strategy of this group. How should we meet the challenge of the new atheists? 1 Peter 3:15 challenges us to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” We are called to love those who question or even attack the Christian faith. Christians must answer their challenges with humility and grace. As we present a well-reasoned case and the evidence, the Holy Spirit will use our apologetic defense and our unshaken but loving attitude to speak to their mind and heart.

Psalm 14:21 states, “The fool says in his heart there is no God.” Might it be the new atheists who are irrational?

**Notes**


Your Work Matters to God

*Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.*

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.
In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*, Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, “Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence.”

First, let’s explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other *real* dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you’ll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, “Who am I, and why am I important?” That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You’re suddenly a “nobody,” and you are not important because you are not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, “What impact will this have on my career?”

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life. He wants us to have a
biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work.

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

In this article, we’re examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don’t really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn’t charge them with, “Go and make disciples of all nations which aren’t in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies.” No, He said, “Here’s the garden, now cultivate it.” He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe only eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won’t last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you’re wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother’s womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: time. It’s okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness now, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn’t eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there’s everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, “Real work is serving God, and then there’s what others do” (which sets us up for condescension), or “Real work is serving God, and then there’s what I have to do” (which sets us up for false guilt and a sense of “missing it”).

It’s an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we’re making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It’s unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what’s going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior
above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn’t lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our only priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory.{5} Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we’ll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!

**How God Wants Us to See Work**

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here’s a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

> Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It’s helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn’t notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, “I see you. And I appreciate what you’re doing.” Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world before sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God’s good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

> After looking at the way things are on this earth, here’s what I’ve decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that’s about it. That’s the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what’s given and delighting in the work. It’s God’s gift!{6}

Being happy in our work doesn’t depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most
of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

**Why Work is Good**

In this article we're talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God’s work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn’t contribute to what He doesn’t want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God’s gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people’s physical needs. Other jobs meet people’s aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.

2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, “If one will not work, neither let him eat!”{7}

3. Through work we meet our family’s needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”{8}

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. {9}

5. Through work we love God. One of God’s love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.{10} We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that’s why our work matters to God.

**Notes**


3. Philippians 1:21

4. Romans 12:1, 2

5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
Four Killer Questions: Power Tools for Great Question-Asking

Sue Bohlin provides helpful information for use in helping sharpen the question-asking skills of fellow believers as well as in evangelism. These “understanding questions” help Christians sharpen their biblical worldview and help unbelievers delve into the inconsistencies of their own worldview.

Dr. Jeff Myers of Bryan College and Summit Ministries shares our passion for helping others develop a biblical worldview. One of the tools he offers in developing critical thinking skills is how to use the right question at the right time.

He suggests four “killer questions” to help anyone think critically. {1} The first question is, What do you mean by that? In other words, define your terms. The second question is, Where do you get your information? The third is, How do you know that’s true?, and the fourth killer question is, What if you’re wrong?

Dr. Myers tells this story:

“A friend took a group of third graders to the Denver Museum of Natural History.

“Before he took them inside, he knelt down on their level and said, ‘Kids, if anybody in this museum tells you anything, I want you to ask them, how do you know that’s true?’ Giving this question to a third grader is the intellectual equivalent of giving them a surface-to-air missile. These kids walked into the museum; all they knew was, Ask: How do you know that’s true?
“A paleontologist was going to show them how to find a fossil. Apparently they had intentionally buried a fossil down in the soil sample and she said, ‘We’re going to find it.’ Very clever, right? No, not with this crowd. ‘Cause they started asking questions like, ‘Well, how do you know there’s a fossil down in there?’ ‘Well, because we just know there’s a fossil down there.’ ‘Why do you want to find it?’ ‘Well, because we want to study it.’ ‘Why do you want to study it?’ ‘We want to find out how old it is.’ ‘Well, how old do you think it is?’ ‘About 60 million years old.’

“Lady, how do you know that is true?”

“She patronized them. She said, ‘Well, you see, I’m a scientist, I study these things, I just know that.’ They said, ‘Well, how do you know that’s true?’ Anytime she said anything at all they just asked, ‘How do you know that’s true?’ What happened next proves that truth is stranger than fiction. She threw down her tools, glared at these children, and said, ‘Look, children, I don’t know, OK? I just work here!”’

Question #1: What do you mean by that?

The first question is, What do you mean by that? You want to get the other person to define his terms and explain what he is saying. If you don’t make sure you understand what the other person means, you could end up having a conversation using the same words but meaning very different things.

When I was a new believer, I was approached on the street by some people collecting money for a ministry to young people. I asked, naively, “Do you teach about Jesus?” They said, rather tentatively, “Yesss. . . .” I gave them some money and asked for their literature (which was in the reverse order of what I should have done). Only later did I learn that they did indeed teach about Jesus—that He was the brother of Satan! I wish I had had this first killer question back then. I would have asked, “What do you teach about Jesus? Who is He to you?”

Get the other person’s definition. Let’s say you’re talking to a neighbor who says, “I don’t believe there is a God.” Don’t quarrel with him: “Oh yes there is!” “No, there’s not.” Second Timothy 2:24-25 says not to quarrel with anyone. Just start asking questions instead. “What do you mean by ‘God’? What’s your understanding of this God who isn’t there?” Let him define that which does not exist! You may well find out that the god he rejects is a mean, cold, abusive god who looks a lot like his father. In that case, you can assure him that you don’t believe in that god either. The true God is altogether different. If it were me, at this point I wouldn’t pursue the existence of God argument, but rather try to understand where the other person is coming from, showing the compassion and grace of God to someone bearing painful scars on his soul.

Let’s say someone says she is for a woman’s right to choose abortion. You can ask, “What do you mean by ‘woman’? Only adult women? What if the baby is a girl, what about her right to choose? What do you mean by ‘right’? Where does that right come from?” Do you see how asking What do you mean by that? can expose problems in the other person’s perspective?

Question #2: Where do you get your information?

The question Where do you get your information? is particularly important in today’s culture, where we drown in information from a huge array of sources. Information is being pumped at us from TV, radio, music, Websites, email, blogs, billboards, movies, and conversations with people who have no truth filters in place at all. Consider the kind of responses you could get to the question, Where do you get your information?
“I heard it somewhere.” Well, how’s that for reliable? Follow with another killer question, How do you know it’s true?

“Everybody says so.” That may be so, but is it true? If you say something loud enough, often enough, and long enough, people will believe it’s true even if it isn’t. For example, “everybody says” people are born gay. Doesn’t everybody know that by now? That’s what we hear, every day, but where is the science to back up that assertion? Turns out, there is none. Not a shred of proof that there is a gay gene.

Someone else may say, “I read it somewhere.” So ask, in a legitimate newspaper or magazine? Or in a tabloid? Elvis is not alive, and you can’t lose twenty-five pounds in a week. You might have read it somewhere, but there is a word for that kind of writing: fiction.

Did you see it on the internet? That could be a single individual with great graphics abilities pumping out his own totally made-up stuff. Or it could be a trustworthy, legitimate website like Probe.org.

Did you see it on TV? Who said it, and how trustworthy is the source? Was it fact, or opinion? Be aware of the worldview agenda behind the major media outlets. Former CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg exposed the leftist leanings of the media in his book Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News. Most of what you see on TV is what the Bible calls “the world,” and we are to be discerning and skeptical of the values and information it pumps out.

Don’t be fooled by someone sounding confident and self-assured. Many people feel confident without any basis for feeling that way. Ask, Where do you get your information? It’s a great killer question.

**Question #3: How do you know that’s true?**

The third killer question is, How do you know that’s true? This is probably the most powerful question of them all. It puts the burden of proof on the other person.

Most people aren’t aware of what they assume is true; there’s simply no other way to see the world. They often believe what they believe without asking if it’s true, if it aligns with reality. If you respectfully ask killer questions like How do you know that’s true?, all of a sudden it can begin to occur to folks that what they believe, they believe by faith. But where is their faith placed?

Sometimes, the kindest thing we can do for people is gently shake up their presuppositions and invite them to think.

The reigning philosophy in science today is materialism, the insistence that the physical universe is all that exists. Something is only real if it can be measured and quantified. We need to ask, How do you know there is nothing outside the matter-space-time-energy continuum? How do you know that the instruments of physical measurement are the only ones that matter? How do you know there isn’t something non-physical, which cannot be measured with physical measuring tools? If all you have is a ruler, how do you measure weight? (And if all you have is a ruler, and someone wants to talk about weight, it would be easy to deny there is such a thing as weight, only height and length, a lot like the materialists’ insistence that since we can’t measure the supernatural, it doesn’t exist.)

At the heart of the debate over stem cell research is the question of the personhood of a human embryo. Those who insist that it’s not life until implantation need to be asked, How do you know that’s true? It’s genetically identical to the embryo ten minutes before implantation. How do you know those are only a clump of cells and not a human being?
Postmodern thought says that no one can know truth. This philosophy has permeated just about every college campus. To the professor who asserts, “No one can know truth,” a student should ask, How do you know that’s true? If that sounds slightly crazy to you, good! A teacher who says there is no truth, or that if there is, no one can know it, says it because he or she believes it to be true, or they wouldn’t be saying it!

We get hostile email at Probe informing us of how stupid and biased we are for believing the Bible, since it has been mistranslated and changed over the centuries and it was written by man anyway. When I ask, “How do you know this is true?”, I don’t get answers back. Putting the burden of proof on the other person is quite legitimate. People are often just repeating what they have heard from others. But we have to be ready to offer a defense for the hope that is in us as well. Of course, when we point to the Bible as our source of information, it’s appropriate to ask the killer question, “How do you know that’s true?” Fortunately, there is a huge amount of evidence that today’s Bible is virtually the same as the original manuscripts. And there is strong evidence for its supernatural origins because of things like fulfilled prophecy. Go to the “Reasons to Believe” section of Probe.org for a number of articles on why we can trust that the Bible is really God’s word.

There are a lot of mistaken, deceived people who believe in reincarnation and insist they remember their past lives. Shirley MacLaine claims to have been a Japanese Geisha, a suicide in Atlantis, an orphan raised by elephants, and the seducer of Charlemagne. Here’s where this killer question comes in. If you lose your life memories when you die, how do you know your past lives are real? When you’re born into a new body and your slate is wiped clean, how do you know it’s you?

So many people have embraced a pragmatic, expedient standard of, “Hey, it works for me.” “It works for me to cheat on my taxes, as long as I don’t get caught.” “It works for me to spend hours on porn sites late at night since my wife doesn’t know how to check the computer’s history.” “It works for me to keep God in his corner of the universe while I do my own thing; I’ll get religious later in life.” Well, how do you know it works? You haven’t seen the whole, big picture. You can’t know the future, and you can’t know how tomorrow’s consequences will be reaped from today’s choices.

Let me add a caveat here. The underlying question behind How do you know that’s true? is really, “Why should I believe you?” It can be quite disconcerting to be challenged this way, so be sure to ask with a friendly face and without an edge in your voice.

**Question #4: What if you’re wrong?**

One benefit of this question is that it helps us not to “sweat the small stuff.” There are a lot of issues where it just doesn’t matter a whole lot if we’re wrong. If you’re agonizing over a restaurant menu, trying to figure out the best entree, what if you’re wrong? It doesn’t matter. You can probably come back another time. If you can’t, because you’re traveling and you’ll never have another chance, is it going to wreck your life? Absolutely not.

Many of our youth (and, sadly, adults as well) believe that having sex is just part of being social. Many of them believe that sex qualifies as recreation, much like going to an amusement park. They need to be challenged: What if you’re wrong? Besides the high probability of contracting a number of sexually transmitted diseases, there is the ongoing heartache of the discovery that “casual” sex isn’t, because of its lasting impact on the heart.

The ultimate question where this matters is, What do you believe about God? What do you do with Jesus’ statement “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Me?” What if you believe there is no God, or that you can live however you want and God will let you into heaven because you’re not a mass murderer? We need to ask, What if you’re wrong? You
will be separated from God forever!

It’s only fair for Christ-followers to ask that of ourselves. What if we’re wrong? What if we’re actually living an illusion that there is a God and a purpose to life? I would say, “You know what? I still lived a great life, full of peace and purpose and fulfillment. Ultimately, if there were no God, it wouldn’t matter—nothing would matter at all!—but I still loved my life. Either way, if I’m right or I’m wrong, I win.”

These four killer questions are powerful to spark meaningful conversation and encourage yourself, and others, to think critically. Use them wisely, be prepared for some interesting conversations . . . and have fun!

Notes

1. Our fellow worldview apologist Bill Jack of Worldview Academy (www.worldview.org) has also popularized these “killer questions,” but they go back all the way to Socrates.
3. 1 Peter 3:15.
4. www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/duncan2.html

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The Technological Simulacra [no footnotes]

What Saccharine is to Sugar, or
The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion

“Anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the word.” – Jacques Ellul

Simulacra

Aerosmith sings a familiar tune:

“There’s something wrong with the world today,
I don’t know what it is,
there’s something wrong with our eyes,
we’re seeing things in a different way
and God knows it ain’t [isn’t] his;
there’s melt down in the sky. We’re living on the edge.”
What saccharine is to sugar, so the technological simulacra is to nature or reality—a technological replacement, purporting itself to be better than the original, more real than reality, sweeter than sugar: hypersugar.

This article with footnotes Simulacra, (Simulacrum, Latin, pl., likeness, image, to simulate): or simulation, the term, was adapted by French social philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) to express his critical interpretation of the technological transformation of reality into hyperreality. Baudrillard’s social critique provided the premise for the movie The Matrix (1999). However, he was made famous for declaring that the Gulf War never happened; TV wars are not a reflection of reality but projections (recreations) of the TV medium.

Simulacra reduces reality to its lowest point or one-dimension and then recreates reality through attributing the highest qualities to it, like snapshots from family vacation. When primitive people refuse to have their picture taken because they are afraid that the camera steals their souls, they are resisting simulacra. The camera snaps a picture and recreates the image on paper or a digital medium; it then goes to a photo album or a profile page. Video highlights amount to the same thing in moving images; from three dimensions, the camera reduces its object to soulless one-dimensional fabrication.

Simulacra does not end with the apparent benign pleasures of family vacation and media, although media represents its most recent stage. Simulacra includes the entire technological environment or complex, its infrastructure, which acts as a false “second nature” superimposed over the natural world, replacing it with a hyperreal one, marvelously illustrated in the movie Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991). As liquid metal conforms itself to everything it touches, it destroys the original.

Humanity gradually replaces itself through recreation of human nature by technological enhancements, making the human race more adaptable to machine existence, ultimately for the purpose of space exploration. Transhumanists believe that through the advancements in genetic engineering, neuropharmaceuticals (experimental drugs), bionics, and artificial intelligence it will redesign the human condition in order to achieve immortality. “Humanity+,” as Transhumanists say, will usher humanity into a higher state of being, a technological stairway to heaven, “glorification,” “divinization” or “ascendancy” in theological terms.

God made man in his own image and now mankind remakes himself in the image of his greatest creation (image), the computer. If God’s perfection is represented by the number seven and man’s imperfection by the number six, then the Cyborg will be a five according to the descending order of being; the creature is never equal or greater than the creator but always a little lower. {9}

Glorious Reduction!
Hyperreality

An old tape recording commercial used to say, “Is it real or is it Memorex?” By championing the superiority of recording to live performance the commercial creates hyperreality, a reproduction of an original that appears more real than reality, a replacement for reality with a reconstructed one, purported to be better than the original.

Disneyland serves as an excellent example by creating a copy of reality remade in order to substitute for reality; it confuses reality with an illusion that appears real, “more real than real.” Disney anesthetizes the imagination, numbing it against reality, leaving spectators with a false or fake impression. Main Street plays off an idealized past. The technological reconstruction leads us to believe that the illusion “can give us more reality than nature can.”

Hyperreality reflects a media dominated society where “signs and symbols” no longer reflect reality but are manipulated by their users to mean whatever. Signs recreate reality to achieve the opposite effect (metastasis); for example, in Dallas I must travel west on Mockingbird Lane in order to go to East Mockingbird Lane. Or, Facebook invites social participation when no actual face to face conversation takes place.

Hyperreality creates a false perception of reality, the glorification of reduction that confuses fantasy for reality, a proxy reality that imitates the lives of movie and TV characters for real life. When reel life in media becomes real life outside media we have entered the high definition, misty region—the Netherlands of concrete imagination—hyperreality!

Hyperreality goes beyond escapism or simply “just entertainment.” If that was all there was to it, there would be no deception or confusion, at best a trivial waste of time and money. Hyperreality is getting lost in the pleasures of escapism and confusing the fantasy world for the real one, believing that fantasy is real or even better than reality. Hyperreality results in the total inversion of society through technological sleight of hand, a cunning trick, a sorcerer’s illusion transforming the world into a negative of itself, into its opposite, then calling it progress.

Hyperreality plays a trick on the mind, a self-induced hypnotism on a mass scale, duping us by our technological recreation into accepting a false reality as truth. Like Cypher from the movie The Matrix who chose the easy and pleasant simulated reality over the harsh conditions of the “desert of the real” in humanity’s fictional war against the computer, he chose to believe a lie instead of the truth.

The Devil is a Liar

A lie plays a trick on the mind, skillfully crafted to deceive through partial omission or concealment of the truth. The lie is the devil’s (devil means liar) only weapon, always made from a position of inferiority and weakness (Revelation 20:3, 8). A lie never stands on its own terms as equal to truth; it does not exist apart
from twisting (recreating) truth. A lie never contradicts the truth by standing in opposition to it.

A lie is not a negative (no) or a positive (yes), but obscures one or the other. It adds by revealing what is not there—it subtracts by concealing what is there. A lie appears to be what is not and hides what it really is. “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

A lie does not negate (contradict) or affirm truth. Negation (No) establishes affirmation (Yes). Biblically speaking, the no comes before the yes—the cross then the resurrection; law first, grace second. The Law is no to sin (disobedience); the Gospel is yes to faith (obedience). Truth is always a synthesis or combination between God’s no in judgment on sin and His yes in grace through faith in Jesus Christ. “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Law without grace is legalism; grace without law is license.


The devil’s lie adds doubt to the promise of God; “Indeed, has God said, ‘you shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” (Genesis 3:1 NASB) It hides the promise of certain death; “You surely will not die” (Genesis 3:4). The serpent twists knowledge into doubt by turning God’s imperative, “Don’t eat!” into a satanic question “Don’t eat?”

But it is Eve who recreates the lie in her own imagination. “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6).

Sight incites desire. We want what we see (temptation). Eve was tempted by “the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16) after seeing the fruit, then believed the false promise that it would make her wise. “She sees; she no longer hears a word to know what is good, bad or true.” Eve fell victim to her own idolatrous faith in hyperreality that departed from the simple trust in God’s word.

The Void Machine

Media (television, cell phone, internet, telecommunications) is a void machine. In the presence of a traditional social milieu, such as family, church or school, it will destroy its host, and then reconstruct it in its own hyperreal image (Simulacra). Telecommunication technology is a Trojan Horse for all traditional institutions that accept it as pivotal to their “progress,” except prison or jail. The purpose of all institutions is the promotion of values or social norms, impossible through the online medium.

Media at first appears beneficial, but this technology transforms the institution and user into a glorified version of itself. The personal computer, for example, imparts values not consistent with the mission of church or school, which is to bring people together in mutual support around a common goal or belief for learning and spiritual growth (community). This is done primarily through making friends and forming meaningful relationships, quite simply by people talking to each other. Values and social norms are only as good as the people we learn them from. Values must be embodied in order to be transmitted to the next generation.
Talking as the major form of personal communication is disappearing. Professor of Communications John L. Locke noted that “Intimate talking, the social call of humans, is on the endangered species list.” People prefer to text, or phone. Regrettably, educational institutions such as high schools and universities are rapidly losing their relevance as traditional socializing agents where young people would find a potential partner through like interests or learn a worldview from a mentor. What may be gained in convenience, accessibility or data acquisition for the online student is lost in terms of the social bonds necessary for personal ownership of knowledge, discipline and character development.

An electronic community is not a traditional community of persons who meet face to face, in person, in the flesh where they establish personal presence. Modern communication technologies positively destroy human presence. What philosopher Martin Heidegger called Dasein, “being there,” (embodiment or incarnation) is absent. As Woody Allen put it, “90 percent of life is showing up.” The presence of absence marks the use of all electronic communication technology. Ellul argued, “The simple fact that I carry a camera [cell phone] prevents me from grasping everything in an overall perception.” The camera like the cell phone preoccupies its users, creating distance between himself and friends. The cellphone robs the soul from its users, who must exchange personal presence for absence; the body is there tapping away, but not the soul! The cell phone user has become a void!

The Power of Negative Thinking

According to popular American motivational speakers, the key to unlimited worldly wealth, success and happiness is in the power of positive thinking that unleashes our full potential; however, according to obscure French social critics the key to a meaningful life, lived in freedom, hope and individual dignity is in the power of negative thinking that brings limits, boundaries, direction and purpose.

Negativity gives birth to freedom, expanding our spiritual horizons with possibilities and wise choices, which grounds faith, hope and love in absolute truth, giving us self-definition greater than our circumstances, greater than reality of the senses. To freely choose in love one’s own path, identity and destiny is the essence of individual dignity.

According to French social critics Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, freedom is only established in negation that provides limits and boundaries, which tells us who we are. Technological hyperreality removes all natural and traditional limits in the recreation of humanity in the image of the cyborg. The transhuman transformation promises limitless potential at the expense of individual freedom, personal identity and ultimately human dignity and survival.

www.probe.org/into-the-void-the-coming-transhuman-transformation/

All limitless behavior ends in self-destruction. Human extinction looms over the technological future, like the Sword of Damocles, threatening humanity’s attempt to refit itself for immortality in a grand explosion (nuclear war), a slow poisoning (ecocide) or suicidal regressive technological replacement. Stephen Hawking noted recently that technological progress threatens humanity’s survival with nuclear war, global warming, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering over the course of the next 100 years. Hawking stated, “We are not going to stop making progress, or reverse it, so we must [recognize] the dangers and control them.”
In asserting “NO!” to unlimited technological advance and establishing personal and communal limits to our use of all technology, especially the cell phone, computer and TV, we free ourselves from the technological necessity darkening our future through paralyzing the will to resist.

After we “JUST SAY NO!” to our technological addictions, for instance, after a sabbatical fast on Sunday when the whole family turns off their electronic devices, and get reacquainted, a new birth of freedom will open before us teeming with possibilities. We will face unmediated reality in ourselves and family with a renewed hope that by changing our personal worlds for one day simply by pushing the off button on media technology we can change the future. Through a weekly media fast (negation) we will grow faith in the power of self-control by proving that we can live more abundant lives without what we once feared absolute necessity, inevitable and irresistible. “All things are possible with God” (Mark 10: 27). When we exchange our fear of idols for faith in the Living God the impossible becomes possible and our unlimited potential is released that will change the world forever!

I see trees of green, red roses, too,
I see them bloom, for me and you
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white,
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,
Are also on the faces of people going by.
I see friends shaking hands, sayin’, "How do you do?"
They’re really sayin’, "I love you."

I hear babies cryin’. I watch them grow.
They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

“[I]f man does not pull himself together and assert himself . . . then things will go the way I describe [cyborg condition].” – Jacques Ellul

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**Machinehead: From 1984 to the Brave New World Order and Beyond**

Wherever the survival of humanity is threatened we find the work of Satan. In the previous century that was Fascism, then Mutually Assured Destruction during the Cold War. Today, Satan hides
behind the ascendancy of the global Empire of Technology: assimilation of humanity into the machine, creating a new planetary being: the Cyborg. I believe people best understand large conglomerates when personalized, such as, referring to the Federal Government as “Uncle Sam,” so I have chosen to name the Brave New World Order: Machinehead!

Post-Orwellian World

Say good bye to Orwell’s nightmare world of 1984! And welcome to Machinehead: the Brave New World Order and beyond!

Machinehead is what I call the technological idol or the planetary being taking shape in the convergence of human and computer intelligence, a global cyborg. “Machine” is defined as one global system with many subsystems.

Experts already recognize the global system as a superorganism, one life-form made of billions and billions of individual parts or cells like an anthill or beehive, with one mind and one will. Thus, the global machine consists of millions of subsystems interfacing one over-system. Mankind acts as agent for the global machine’s ascendancy, creating a technological god in its own image.

The suffix “head” refers to the divine essence as in “Godhead“ (Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. Acts 17: 29). Machinehead is the replacement of all traditional views of God with the new Living God of the Machine, best illustrated by the recent movie Transcendence (2014), which depicts the computer’s awaking to consciousness in one mind and will, the Singularity!

Two prophets of modernity plead in dire warning for us to reconsider modern faith in expansive government and escalating technological acceleration. The first and most notable was master political satirist and critic George Orwell (1903-1950), famous for Animal Farm and 1984, and the second, English literatus Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), author of Brave New World (BNW).

Orwell envisioned the end of history in the all-powerful political dictatorship of Oceania marked by perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance, thought control, and the ubiquitous media projection of Big Brother.

Orwell gave us the foundation of the current age in Cold War politics, but does not serve as guide to the future, which belongs, if humanity allows it, to the apparent benign technophilia of Brave New World that follows upon Orwell’s cruel political combat boot in the face!

The Cold War Era and 1984

Orwell divided his fictional geopolitical borders into three grids: Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, shadowing accurately Cold War divisions between Western and Eastern Bloc countries allied behind NATO (Oceania) and Warsaw pact nations (Eurasia), leaving the Third World (Eastasia) as pawns (proxy wars) for interminable power battles between the two Super Powers (Super States).

Perpetual war characterized normative relations between the super states in 1984 with the objective to further consolidate the State’s power over its own citizens. The threat of war inspires fear in the population and offers government the opportunity and justification for further largesse and control. War insures a permanent state of crisis, leaving the population in desperation for strong leadership and centralized command and control.

The wars of 1984 were a side note to the main thrust of the novel, omnipotent government control. The novel introduced the world to the ominous character Big Brother. The central drama takes place
in Airstrip One, the capital of Oceania, formerly London, England, where Winston Smith the protagonist struggles to maintain his dignity as an individual, under the crushing gears of Fascist government.

Popular criticism asserts that Orwell had Stalinism in the cross hairs in his novel. However, that interpretative ruse acts as an escape clause for the West to disavow any participation in totalitarianism. Most Americans falsely assume that 1984 applied to the Soviet Union and not NATO. Eurasia (the Eastern bloc) was a mere literary foil. Orwell’s social criticism applies to all forms of totalitarianism, especially the subtle power structure of the West hidden behind democratic rhetoric, media bias, and an acute lack of national self-criticism. Oceania was Orwell’s analogy and commentary on the future of the West after World War II. The NATO alliance, founded in 1949 the same year Orwell published 1984, was the target of Orwell’s criticism—not the Soviet Union.

**Brave New World Order in the 21st Century: The Imperial Machine**

Huxley’s novel *Brave New World* foresaw a techno heaven on earth that knows nothing of wars, political parties, religion or democracy, but caters to creature comforts, maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain; total eradication of all emotional and spiritual suffering through the removal of free choice by radical conditioning from conception in the test tube to blissful euthanasia.

Television was the controlling technology in 1984, so in BNW control is asserted through media, education and a steady flow of soma—the perfect drug and chemical replacement for Jesus. “Christianity without tears” was how Mustapha Mond the World Controller described soma. “Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality around in a [pill] bottle.”

Spiritual perfection commanded by Jesus, “Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), will be given to all through genetic programing, sustained through chemical infusion and mental conditioning (propaganda). If 1984 was about power for the sake of power, BNW emphasizes the kinder, gentler technological dictatorship that does not promise happiness, but delivers it to all whether they want it or not!

Brave New World Order amounts to technological totalitarianism, analogous to Huxley’s “World State” motto: “Community, Identity, Stability.”

The “imperial machine” as it has been called by political scientists acts outside the traditional political process and in tandem with it when needed with no central geographical location or person or groups with any discernable hierarchical structure that directs it; the United States, Great Britain, United Nations, The People’s Republic of China or The European Union are not the power brokers of 21st century Empire, but its pawns. Technological Empire rules as an all-encompassing, all-pervasive power, shaping human destiny in its own image.

**Transvaluation of Man and Machine**

A titanic transvaluation (reversal in the meaning of values) between superstructure (intangible ideological system: beliefs, convictions, morality, myth, etc.) and infrastructure (tangible urban development: roads, buildings, houses, cars, machines, etc.) begun with the Industrial Revolution will finally be complete some time during the 21st century. Infrastructure replaces superstructure. Technology has become our belief, religion and hope, what was once a means (technology) to an end (human progress) has replaced the end with the means. Technology replaces humanity as the goal of progress; technology for technology’s sake not for the good of
mankind or God’s glory.

The reversal of meaning is found everywhere in postmodern society beginning with the death of God and unfolding in lock step to the death of man, progress, democracy and Western Civilization; concomitantly paired with an equal ascendancy of all things technological, until the machine ultimately replaces humanity.

Marxist regimes were fond of calling their systems “democratic” or “republic” such as the People’s Republic of China despite the fact that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat bears the opposite meaning. The majestic word Liberal, once meant freedom from government interference and rule by inner light of reason in the seventeenth century, had come to be synonymous with government regulation and planning by the twentieth century.

The cruelest irony in the transvaluation process is that the triumph of mankind over nature and tradition in the modern world has resulted in his replacement by the machine. Humanism of the modern period promoted the Rational as ideal type of Man. This ideal was already adapted to the machine as 1984 and Brave New World illustrated through the removal of faith and the attenuation of human nature to mechanical existence. French Intellectual Jacques Ellul argued further that “This type [of man] exists to support technique [technological acceleration] and serve the machine, but eventually he will be eliminated because he has become superfluous . . . the great hope that began with the notion of human dominance over the machine ends with human replacement by the machine.”{4}

The Devil’s Logic

What we fear will happen is already here because we fear it; it will overtake us according to our fears; it will recede according to our love. (1 John 2)

Human Replacement does not necessarily mean total human extinction, a cyborg race that fundamentally alters human nature will cause a pseudo-extinction—meaning part of humanity, the Machine Class, those most fit for technological evolution will ascend to the next stage, leaving the great majority behind. The movie Elysium (2011) offers an excellent illustration: the technological elite, who reap all the benefits from technological advance control the earth from an orbiting space station. H. G. Wells in his famous novel The Time Machine painted a similar picture of human evolution that branched into two different species: the hideous cannibalistic Morlocks, “the Under-grounders,” their only principle was necessity, feeding off the beautiful, yet docile Eloi, “the Upper-worlders,” whose only emotion was fear.{5}

When fear dominates our thinking, love is absent from our motives. To say, “It is necessary” in defense of technological practice, abdicates choice, giving unlimited reign to technological acceleration, i.e. abortion, government surveillance, or digital conversion. “Fear” and “necessity” are the devil’s logic. Necessity imposes itself through fear of being left behind by “technological progress.”

Necessity is not the Mother of Invention, but the Father of Lies! New technology becomes necessity only after it is invented. There is no conscious need for what does not yet exist. Technological need establishes itself through habitual use creating dependence and finally normalcy in the next generation who cannot relate to a past devoid of modern technological essentials.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” serves as our mandate, if we wish to create a future of universal love and empathy instead of universal speed and memory.
Knowledge without wisdom leads to disaster. “Where is the wisdom lost in knowledge?” Wisdom is the loving use of knowledge. Love counsels limits to knowledge for the liberation of all. Fear dictates limitless necessity, enslaving all.

A choice faces us. Say “yes!” to God and “no!” to limitless advance. Otherwise mankind faces replacement by the new digital god: Machinehead!

Notes

3. Ibid, 1.

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Predictions for the 21st Century

From our 2015 vantage point, let’s look back at predictions made in 1999 about trends which would shape this century. Although far from the end of this century, we can make a preliminary assessment of these predictions. Were they on the right track or are they already veering from current reality?

For this exercise, we drew on predictions made by seventeen scholars in 1999, published in First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life. They discussed what they were expecting in this next century.

Past vs. Future

Some of the scholars took the approach of looking at prior centuries to see what they could learn to help them predict future trends.

Writer Charlotte Allen began by stating, “Palm-reading the lifestyles of the future usually sets you up to be proved wrong,” and looked at the last two millennia to prove her point. First, someone predicting the future in the year 1 BC would probably talk about the Roman Empire and how it was entrenched and likely to remain the dominant power. But, of course the big event of the millennium was the beginning and growth of Christianity, still impacting our world today, while the Roman Empire is only a memory. Then she notes that the future of European civilization looked grim in the year 1000, but “it turned out to be the century of European expansion and great advances in science and economics.”
Looking ahead, she had a fairly negative outlook for the West: “The combination of the new people and a fading sense of common values seems to spell disaster . . .” But on a worldwide scale, she saw us trending toward a great religious revival, the same trend that changed the outcomes of the previous two millennia.

Assessing her forecast today, we continue to see a fading sense of common values in our society and can only hope that a great religious revival will occur.

Another forecaster, political scientist Andrew Bacevich, sees Americans becoming very self-centered in their view of the world. At the beginning of the last century, Woodrow Wilson brought in the idea of American global preeminence. At the end, Bill Clinton modified this sentiment to, “the allure of globalization lies in . . . the promise of gain without pain.” Bacevich believes this attitude of taking advantage of our position in the world order will continue to grow throughout this century.

However, now President Obama has brought a new idea—denying that America should be globally preeminent but rather, just one of many nations, an idea offering the promise of pain without gain. We suffer the pain of conflict with no real expectation of gaining greater respect for democracy.

The Role of Religion

One area of interest in 1999 predictions is how the role of Christianity may change. Three of our forecasters touched on this subject.

Physicist Stephen Barr believed little progress will be made in answering top questions of science. Questions such as “What is consciousness, and how does it fit into . . . the physical world?” However, he believed we will make strides reconciling science and religion. He stated, “For many, the scientific spirit came to be defined in opposition to faith. This hostility . . . really involves an inner contradiction that is coming to the surface.” It would become clear to most scientists that there is more to this existence than physical science. “By proclaiming the truth about man, religion will be found to be not an enemy of reason, . . . but perhaps its last defender.”

Theologian Peter Leithart believed this century will see the West becoming the primary mission field for Christians from places like South Korea. He wrote, “The same nations swearing fealty to Christ a millennium ago are now among the most secular on the earth.” Success in the West may only come after the current situation is reduced to rubble through removing the constraints once held in place by common Christian values. In which case, “the West will have to relearn the habits of Christian civilization from those once considered barbarians.”

Psychiatrist and author Jeffrey Satinover believed the teachings of the Third Reich are prevailing over the teachings of Christ. “Mercy killing, abortion, infanticide, [all] once seen as repulsive has been transformed into . . . beauty.” He sees our best universities focused on teaching a perverted view of fairness. “The American mind isn’t just being closed, it’s being evacuated,” i.e., filled with inconsistent thinking. The system which should be promoting truth and protecting us from such politically correct drivel is religion. As he pointed out, “God Himself is doing just fine, but His earthly defenders are on the ropes . . . [after all] genuine religion claims for itself the ability to know what’s true,” and yet we are not proclaiming or defending truth. Without the broader truth of Christianity, we may lose our identities completely.

Three very different pictures were forecast. One, optimistically, believes religion will be the last defender of reason, while another believes our hope lies in becoming a mission field, and a third worries that Christianity may be discarded. Fifteen years into this millennium,
it appears the latter two are closer to the trajectory of society, but the optimistic view is still a possibility when fueled by the prayers of believers.

**Key Drivers in this Century**

Some predictions made in 1999 about this century deal with the underlying forces shaping this century.

Philosopher and theologian William Dembski predicted that “information is the primary stuff of the coming age.” In the last century, the computer helped introduce an age where the amount of information we were able to use increased dramatically. But information may be far more fundamental in this universe. Should information be regarded as “a basic property of the universe, alongside matter and energy”? In other words, rather than information being something created by man, it may be a primary contributor to the creation and being of the universe.

Information as a driving factor of the material universe helps us to understand how our conscious thoughts are a part of it as well. As Dembski quotes physicist Paul Davies, “If matter turns out to be a form of organized information, then consciousness may not be so mysterious after all.”

Why is this concept important to religion and faith? If information is not primary, the world is seriously hampered in what it can reveal. We’ve seen this with the rise of modern science revealing nothing about God except that God is a lawgiver. But if information is the primary stuff, then there are no limits whatsoever on what the world can in principle reveal.

However, another prognosticator, journalist Hilton Kramer, warned that dealing with the deluge of information will be a critical factor in maintaining a healthy life and society in this century. He stated, “All the portents point to an acceleration of the merry, mindless, technology-driven surrender to the complacent nihilism that has already overtaken so many of the institutions of cultural life. . . our democratic society has lost the power to protect . . . from the evil effect of this cultural imperative.” The sea of information has the effect of removing the idea of a standard of truth for righteous living. With so many competing standards vying for their attention, many have given up on pursuing any concept of truth. This thinking has a devastating effect on life based upon Jesus, the one who said, “For this reason I was born . . . to testify to the TRUTH.” (John 18:37) For the church, “everything will depend on its ability to marshal a principled resistance to the influence of popular culture” and the sea of inconsistent information.

**One sixth of the way through this century, we see both the importance of information as a fundamental force and the difficulty we have dealing with the vast amount of information constantly vying for our attention. Both of these forecasts are continuing along a path to fruition in this century.**

**Relating to Religion**

Let’s consider next the perversion of tolerance and the future of ecumenism.

Author Glenn Tinder posited that the meaning of tolerance had shifted from “a willingness to put up with the characteristics of others” to a distinctly different stand “that all beliefs should be considered equally true, except for any belief that states your beliefs are correct and another’s are wrong.” He wrote, “Tolerance easily becomes acquiescence in the submergence of truth into a shifting variety of opinions. . . [this view] cannot be acceptable to . . . Christians . . . challenged . . . to develop an attitude toward the religious and cultural confusions surrounding them that is tolerant” in a way that is distinct from today’s new tolerance.
Tinder suggested using the term “forbearance,” reflecting a view imbued with brotherly love, a recognition of a diversity of views, and an understanding that one should speak out for the truth as one knows it. “In an era that says to us every day, ‘there is no Truth,’ the art of forbearance might at least help us resist the temptations of relativism.”

In 2015, the post-modern definition of tolerance continues to hold sway. But a discernible trend to use another term to describe the loving attitude Christians have toward others has not appeared. The fight against promoting any set of ideas as equally valuable is continuing but with no discernible progress.

Princeton University law professor Robert George looked back to the Second Vatican Council in 1965 when many mainline Protestants and Catholics were wondering if it were a precursor to ultimate reunification of the Christian Church. Surprisingly, by 1999 it was not the left talking of ecumenicalism, but rather the religious right. The consistency of moral positions in the Catholic Church and in evangelical circles had blossomed into a genuine spiritual engagement.

“How can there be genuine spiritual fellowship between people who sincerely consider each other to be in error on profoundly important religious questions?” George suggested it was genuine because it took religious faith and religious differences seriously.

Their common goal of combatting the increasing rise of non-Christian thought would cause them to work together. He stated, “I am even hopeful of its capacity to survive victories—though that of course is the far greater challenge.”

Today, in 2015, cooperation continues between conservative Catholics and evangelicals on moral issues in our world. Some Catholic and evangelical leaders released the Manhattan Declaration calling for the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage, and freedom of religion. And, in 2011, the organization, Evangelicals and Catholics Together, released a statement supporting religious liberty.

What Rules Our World

We have been looking at predictions made for this century in 1999 about factors that would rule our world situation today and in the future.

Theologian Paul Griffiths noted that at the end of the first millennium, the primary institutional form was the church. During the second millennium, it was joined by the nation-state and corporations. Entering the third millennium, “the forces . . . are now primarily economic and secondarily political” with the churches existing at the margin of society.

He predicted the significance of corporations will advance as nation-states decline, making us a world not defined by what we believe, but by what we consume. Hopefully “as the bankruptcy . . . of the corporate promise begins . . . to become evident, people turn . . . to the churches with renewed passion.” To become anything other than a religious preference box on a census form, churches must look to provide a message that offers a hope of resistance.

Today, we are more driven by consumption. Time will tell if Griffiths is right and this trend will ultimately lead us back to the church with renewed passion.

Legal scholar Robert Bork predicted the “rule of law” will no longer have independent moral force of its own. Bureaucracies will lay down most of what governs with little accountability to the people. Elections and legislative deliberation will be disconnected from the real governance, making
politics simply entertainment. “Democracy will consist of the chaotic struggle to influence decision makers who are not responsive to elections.”

*Today, we are seeing the President and bureaucracy taking away the legislative authority of the Congress. If anything, this process seems to be picking up steam in the first half of 2015. If this trend remains unchecked, Bork’s prediction will come to fruition.*

Francis Cardinal George{13} foresaw a major shift in the forces of global conflict. Where most conflicts were between states, in this new century we will see the clash between modern Western states, Asian civilizations and Islamic civilization. Uncertainty about the intentions of other civilizations will produce fear between them. For example, the post-modernity of the West directly attacks the pre-modern, faith-based culture of the Islamic societies.

George felt Christians should be open to Muslim cooperation in “addressing the moral failures of modernity.” The church could take the lead in creating a “globalization of solidarity.”

*So far in this century, the clash between the West and Islamic civilizations is at the forefront of world relationships with no significant signs of a breakthrough in understanding or compromise.*

Looking back over the last fifteen years, many of these predictions from 1999 are roughly on track. These pundits did not paint an encouraging view of the future. It is incumbent on evangelicals to pray fervently and work diligently to change western society for Christ over the next 85 years.

**Notes**

10. Robert George, “What Can We Reasonably Hope For,”
The Purpose of Life

Paul Rutherford looks at the purpose of life from his Christian perspective as well as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Hollywood.

On a warm day recently I visited my alma mater. And between the hallowed halls of old, a chance encounter reconnected me with an old friend. Eager for news, she asked me what I’d done since graduating, and my easy reply included mission work and how much I enjoy it. She smiled and said, “That’s great, as long as you’re happy.” Have you had this type of conversation before?

If you have, then perhaps you also understand my consternation at my friend’s response. I don’t do mission work to be happy. I do it to honor and please the Lord Jesus Christ. On some level I felt misunderstood. Yet, her response indicates, I think, a prominent view held in our culture that happiness is what really matters. As far as her response is concerned, I could just as well have taken a job at a coffee shop, so long as I was happy.

Her response, while not uncommon, demonstrates a prevailing value in our culture today—pluralism. Mankind’s ultimate purpose can be attained through multiple acceptable means, be they religion, economics, or otherwise.

You might be saying to yourself, “How did you get from your friend’s comment about your happiness to mankind’s ultimate purpose?” Good question. I skipped a few steps. When my friend bases her approval of what others do on their happiness, that means that what they do to be happy matters less than the fact that they are happy. Being happy then becomes the primary purpose or aim in life. You see? Happiness becomes a sort of general unit of measure for life’s success. Since I am happy in life, I received my friend’s stamp of approval.

But what is our ultimate purpose? Isn’t that the million dollar question! And it’s precisely the question I want to explore in this article. The answer you give will depend on your perspective. So I’ll consider several different perspectives, or worldviews, including my own, Christianity. Contrary
to current thinking, the fact that there are different perspectives which result in differing meanings to life does not mean that all perspectives are equally true or even valid. Truth is found in Scripture so that’s where we look to discover the true meaning of life.

As a Christian, I believe the ultimate purpose in life is salvation; that is, after I die I want to be with God for eternity.

“Being with God for eternity is great,” you might say. “But how does one do that?” That’s a great question. Certainly not all Christians will state it the same way, but the answer is believing in Jesus Christ of Nazareth as God who died for your sins and rose again to new life (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). A Christian living out this principle patterns his life and relationships after Jesus Christ—serving, loving, and teaching.

Christianity is unmistakably present in America, but obviously this isn’t the case in every culture. Next we’ll consider mankind’s purpose according to a very different worldview closer to home than you might think: Buddhism.

**Buddhism**

I was at a diner last week grabbing a late night burger with my friend from Bible study, and I mentioned a desire to start a new workout regimen. He handed me a business card for a place doing some new form of yoga, apparently really good for you.

Is it me, or does yoga seem to be increasing in currency among Christians as just one more way to work out?

It’s totally fine for Christians to practice yoga as physical exercise, isn’t it? The answer is too complex to say here, but the sheer fact that we pose the question underscores the unmistakable impression yoga has made on American culture.

What if I did practice yoga? What if I were a practicing Buddhist? Would that make a difference anyway? I think so.

To ask a larger question, what is our ultimate purpose? Once again, the answer depends upon your perspective. For the yoga-practicing Buddhist, the answer is nothing. Literally. The ultimate purpose for life is to cease to exist, or what is called **nirvana**.

Traditionally understood to be from India, yoga is a discipline of the mind and the body, and is actively practiced today by both Buddhists and Hindus.1 But increasingly, Americans have jettisoned the spiritual disciplines of yoga, ignoring its spiritual aspects, in favor of the sheerly physical, often in lieu of the morning jog.

Now, ceasing to exist, or **nirvana**, may seem more like an anti-purpose for life because it is defined by not living rather than that for which one lives. Nevertheless, much thought and action is involved in this monumental goal of **nirvana**.

One such step in attaining **nirvana** is realizing the second of the Four Noble Truths: all frustration in life arises from desire. Did that make your head spin? It makes mine spin. Simply put, frustration is an unmet expectation or desire, so frustration’s origin then, is desire.

Life is filled with desires—food, shelter, or clothing may be the first to come to mind—but there are a myriad of others from cars, to jewelry, technology, even relationships.
Follow me here. Since desire leads to frustration, the best way to eliminate frustration is to eliminate desire. This is precisely the path to nirvana, the elimination of desire. Therefore, we must cease to exist in order to free ourselves from this frustration or suffering.

Do you see the difference in life’s purpose? The ultimate purpose in life for the Christian is to be with God for eternity, but for a Buddhist it’s to cease to exist. Very different indeed.

**Hinduism**

Fifty singers gather on a Sunday morning in Queens. The director groups them together and gives them one final word of instruction before they begin. Listeners don’t entirely fall silent. Priests in the background continue to laugh among themselves, as the choir begins, “Om! Ganesha Sharanam!”

Notice something different about this picture? It may not fit your expectations. That’s because this choir isn’t singing praise to Jesus Christ; they aren’t even in a church. Rather they’re Hindus worshipping in their New York temple.

Surprised? So were many of the devotees gathered that Sunday morning in late August 2009, the New York Times reported. Most of the faithful Hindus worshipping there for years had never before heard a Hindu choir. It is a mix of both Hindu and Christian traditions.

This story testifies to the strange and wonderful effects of very different religions meeting in a single culture, and undoubtedly demonstrates the pervasiveness of Hinduism in American culture today.

Choirs seem so commonplace in America. How can a Hindu, like those mentioned earlier, have never heard one in his own religion before? The answer lies in the difference between Hindu and Christian worship.

Hindu worship tends to be much more individualistic. And while predominantly occurring at a temple rather than at one’s home, Hindu worship is more focused on prayers and rituals rather than on an assembly or gathering as a Christian understands a church service.

Take a step back. Ask a larger question. Why does the Hindu go to temple? What’s his motivation? The answer? To appease a myriad of gods in hopes of being reincarnated in the next life as a higher life form. If you’re a human being listening to this right now, then you’ve already had thousands of good lifetimes prior, combined to bring you to your current form.

To be fair, Hinduism is a huge religion with over one billion practitioners, spanning thousands of years, and existing in multiple different cultures. Some scholars believe it is the oldest recorded religion. So to ascribe the Hindu’s motivation as wanting to please the gods is a drastic oversimplification, but is nonetheless true for many if not most Hindus.

You see, for the Hindu the world exists eternally. People die and are reborn all the time in a never-ending cycle. The ultimate purpose for life, then, is to be freed from the never-ending cycle of rebirth and become one with Brahma, or the ultimate singularity of the universe. This release is called moksha. It’s achieved by offering sacrifices to the gods, including prayers, and right living.

Does this sound like your life? If not, you’re probably not Hindu. This further underscores the fact that all religions at their core may not all be the same.

**Islam**

“Boycott Facebook” reads the placard of an Islamist protestors in Karachi.
Late spring 2010 in Pakistan, a Facebook page declares, “Everybody Draw Mohammed Day!” A Pakistani high court deems the material highly offensive, and the entire Facebook website was shut down within its borders as a result, the *Wall Street Journal* reports.

Ban Facebook! You may find yourself asking, why would anyone ever do that? What about rights to free speech, or exercise of religion? Doesn’t a Facebook ban deny people just such rights? Well, under a government far less liberal in doling out these liberties, claiming rights quickly makes a sticky situation.

But the short answer to the motivation for banning Facebook is because they’re Muslim, and as such they regard as sacred Mohammed, their most famed prophet. He’s so sacred, in fact, that to depict him in a portrait is a kind of blasphemy. Hence art from Muslim cultures is either calligraphy or geometric (think mosaics).

There is more going on here beneath the surface, leading an entire country to ban Facebook. It’s not just reverence for a significant religio-cultural phenomenon, or even devotion to their faith. No, it goes deeper than that. Muslims have a different perspective from most Westerners on how this world operates at its most fundamental level.

For the Muslim there is one God, Allah. He is the supreme unquestioned creator and Lord of the universe who revealed his intentions for mankind through his prophet Mohammed. Reverence for Allah is paramount, even above the value of the individual. This leads Muslims to value obedience to Allah over freedoms of the individual. In this case obedience is not portraying Mohammed.

You may respond by posing once again the previous question: what about a man’s right to speech or religion? But for the Muslim, you’re simply asking the wrong question. A better question the Muslim would ask is, what about putting Mohammed in his proper place, and by extension obeying Allah?

The ultimate purpose in life for a Muslim is to obey Allah and to be rewarded after life by entering paradise. Unlike Christians, Muslims do not believe mankind is sinful and in need of a savior, but only needs to perform the right actions, of which we are certainly capable. While Muslims hope for the mercy of Allah, the right to enter paradise is a result of obedience, not his grace. So central is this unmitigated obedience to Muslims, that many give their lives to defend Allah and their way of life.

Rights to free speech aside, when given the choice between a Facebook ban and martyrdom, suddenly Facebook deprivation doesn’t seem so bad.

**Hollywood**

An honest working man returns home from a rough day at the office. He’s a struggling ad specialist for a sports magazine. He’s in his mid-thirties, single, and completely eligible. But the right woman just hasn’t come along. He’s a handsome, brown-haired man with kind blue eyes and a knack for making you want to trust him when he flashes you his easy smile. We long for him to find satisfaction in someone as we trace the story of his search.

One night he meets a dashing young lady. Our hearts jump for him. A relationship ensues and they grow closer. One night in desperation to express his deepest and truest feelings for the gal, he confesses, “You complete me.” Perhaps now you realize I’m describing the story from Hollywood’s hit 1996 film, *Jerry Maguire*.

We’ve been considering the ultimate purpose of man from different perspectives, and, with an ever-
increasing number of Americans considering themselves not religious, I’ve gone to a secular source for consideration: Hollywood.

Jerry Maguire’s famous confession, “You complete me,” is a wonderful illustration of mankind’s ultimate purpose being himself, or what is called humanism. Maguire realizes something is missing in his life. He longs for satisfaction, for joy, for love, but his seeming inability to find it causes him pain. We realize that the world in which we live is broken and imperfect, and who would disagree?

Maguire finds in this woman, in this relationship, the completion of himself. He looks to her to be what he cannot be himself. In so doing, he creates out of her a savior. He looks to her to save him from his misery of singleness and heartache. He needs her in order to be whole himself.

This story is a clear demonstration of mankind looking to himself to be his ultimate purpose. I am generalizing a bit to choose words from a single film, but many messages from Hollywood films don’t contradict this theme. We want to be able to save ourselves. Isn’t that the American ideal: pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps?

Beware what Hollywood would have us believe, that our ultimate purpose is ourselves, and only we can save ourselves. Hollywood would have us believe that life can be found in relationships, people, or even ourselves. It’s a lie. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Only Jesus can save mankind. Serving Him is the only purpose that will bring satisfaction and joy in life, only in Him alone.

“What is my ultimate purpose?” That’s the question. The answers we’ve considered from different perspectives range from happiness to appeasing the gods. Why does it matter? Because your ultimate purpose determines how you live, and while we may all be alike, since we are all human, when it comes to what really matters in life, we are very different indeed.

Notes

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