

# COVID Conditioning: A Viral Outbreak is (Re)Shaping Us and Our World

*Byron Barlowe probes the underlying implications of the global reaction to COVID-19 from a worldview level, asking if we may be being conditioned to accept unbiblical views without realizing it.*

You and I are being conditioned, you know that, right? It's a daily thing. Events and messages work on us, and we need to learn to shape them before they shape us. We must take in the right stuff to counter lies and well-intended overreach.

All of a sudden a universal and ubiquitous mind-and-heart-shaper has hit the world like an alien invasion. The tension and suspense feels like that in the film *Signs*: sitting in the basement, waiting for green "men" to creep into the boarded-up farmhouse, getting snatches of what's going on in the outside world through a baby monitor. We are covered over with everything COVID-19 virus: news of it, perhaps even the real effects of it as a sickness. But for most of us the newly-minted mandates by mayors and governors, and social pressures from friends and family stemming from the worldwide reaction is the main reality of our lives as we "shelter in place" and are bombarded with a constant stream of information. It's ruining investment portfolios—at least for now "on paper"—and skyrocketing the recently record-low unemployment numbers. People are scared for themselves and loved ones since so much is unknown.

How is all this change changing us? Materially, how will shifting norms transform public policy and law, along with our personal beliefs? What will the upending of our economy, civic, and personal lives mean? For folks with secure jobs and

schoolchildren, is it simply about getting through a few weeks of downtime and home-work, commonsense hygiene and personal contact avoidance? Or will we be forever stamped with new attitudes and convictions birthed by events beyond our control?

## **We are Responsible for Our Thoughts and Beliefs**

Brain scientists confirm what good pastors, parents, and coaches teach: we can't necessarily control what we go through, but our reaction to it is up to us. Don't get "Corona'd"! We can either fall mindlessly into lockstep with what we're told, or to run this experience through a wise grid and conquer fear and foolishness. Cognitive researcher and Christian Dr. Caroline Leaf emphasizes the power of mental self-control: "As we think, we change the physical nature of our brain. As we consciously direct our thinking, we can wire out toxic patterns of thinking and replace them with healthy thoughts . . . . *It all starts in the realm of the mind, with our ability to think and choose—the most powerful thing in the universe after God, and indeed, fashioned after God.*"[\[1\]](#)

The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of our Creator God, acknowledged this reality when writing to the first Century Roman church and, by extension, to us today. If he were writing what became Romans 12:1-2 to contemporary folks he may have emphasized an action point first (verse 2) and expanded his words' scope to entail what early believers took for granted: God as the center of all things. Their worldview, including their view of the universe (cosmology), was hierarchical and infused with "God-ness."—Our temptation to trust in God-optional techno-science and complex government structures would be alien to our ancient Christian brethren. Yet, there were competing views of the way the seen and unseen worlds work, so Paul's admonition to develop their new Christ-inhabited mind is just as germane today.

It might have read something like, “Do not be conditioned by the world [all that is other-than-God, the cosmos, and anti-biblical realms, including your own self-created view of the world] but be reconditioned by the total upgrading of your mind in a new operating system downloaded by the entrance of the Holy Spirit when you believed. This will help you discern how to use that new mind wholeheartedly, purely serving through your body, which is only fitting and quite pleasing as your service to the Master of created reality, Himself the ‘I Am’ Reality.”

## **It’s Real for Me Too**

I’m not immune from the scare and worry. My smartphone just dinged: my son’s second interview for his first career job set for 90 minutes from now was just cancelled. The recently thriving corporation—a very promising prospect—has frozen all hiring due to COVID-19. On the other line is a daughter who is seeking a low-income service position since her employer has no jobs in the pipeline. Our other daughter, an Intensive Care Unit nurse, feels the pressure of shortages and health risks. She posted a picture of herself in a mask and gown, disease prevention protocols called “Droplet Precautions.” Their medical equipment is inadequate and has to be washed and reused. A friend’s fiancé’s family have all been laid off: dad, mom, and siblings. It’s up to me to regulate my Corona-news intake, take my anxiety to God, and trust him. But I am determined not to be led into fear and one-sided thinking and to help others.

## **Mind-Conditioning: Words Matter to Our Worldview**

Harsh new realities are marked by new verbiage which is always a sign of cultural change and often a signal of improper controlling (“shelter in place,” “social distancing,” “presumptive positive,” “an abundance of caution”). Euphemisms

like these mask meanings. In order of appearance, they clearly mean “Stay home, keep apart, we presume that he/she is a carrier, and we are going into high-control mode.” As philosopher Peter Kreeft writes, “Control language and you control thought; control thought and you control action; control action and you control the world.” Are you and I being conditioned to become used to changes we may not want?[{2}](#)

In the chaos, those of us with downtime and a biblical view of life need to use it to reflect and speak into a frightened and confused world. In the larger pluralistic community, *how we respond collectively and personally will in no small way determine the arc of our future.* As Dr. J.P. Moreland says, “Each situation in our lives is an occasion for either positive formation or negative deformation.”[{3}](#) Yet, this is not simply a personal matter. We are citizens and need to be active ones.

Basic assumptions about reality–worldview presuppositions we just take for granted–tend to sit like bedrock or sinkholes underneath the foundations of cultures, families, and individual lives. We either don’t know about them or ignore them, especially in hectic times of real or perceived crisis. They’re deep, unseen, and usually of no concern until events unearth them or an earthquake shakes things up. Sinkholes cause collapse. Bedrock stands.

## **Specific Concerns About Corona-Conditioning**

Here are some concerns I have as a teacher of biblical worldview discernment as this worldwide quake rattles on:

*Have we become too beholden to medical science for direction?* Every human life is infinitely precious—a very biblical stance given that we are made in God’s image, that He died for all people, and that He desires for none to perish (Genesis 1:27; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Yet, how does a society weigh its

view of life-value versus the inevitability of sickness and death? Citizens demand a disease-free life without pain and engage in death-avoidance, then take “death with dignity”; the medical establishment pretends it can deliver all that. Can outbreaks like this be allowed to shut down entire economies and render personal freedoms moot? Only if we play along with such pretense. An international obsession with killing it ignores everything else. Will our COVID-19 response cause more harm than good? *How* one answers such concerns, not whether such dilemmas *should* happen, is at issue. Our personal worldviews and collective societal constructs—which we can help change—will determine controllable outcomes. We will not determine uncontrollable.

This is *not* to say that public health decrees are wrong in principle nor to necessarily question at least some of those being decreed in this situation, for example voluntary at-home work and study. *Repeating louder this time: I am not saying a massive and unusual response is bad or wrong in and of itself.* Nevertheless, history is absolute regarding the exercise of such power—it almost never regresses. 9-11 and subsequent one-off attempted terrorist acts put in place onerous rules for air passengers that look permanent. Progress, in this sense, may be regress if it unrealistic and ill-conceived.

## **Conditioning Reality Itself?**

*Is Modern mankind seeking to short-circuit reality and its consequences?* This is the biggest underlying issue. There’s something new in the air: near-unanimous mass morality based in rapidly fueled public opinion further fed by transnational fear. I call it “CoronaVirus Virus.” So far, epidemiologists and medical scientists are calling the shots for a global society. Pundits pump up the hype before we can know. Public peer pressure (along with corporate acquiescence and promotion) guarantee an unquestioning going-along for most people and institutions.

We constantly hear and read the phrase, “It’s just the right thing to do.” This orientation raises the question, “Why is it the right thing to do? What is the moral grounding for that decision?” “The greater good” is the mantra of a [utilitarian](#) worldview that eventually erases the kind of individual freedom of moral agents which Scripture honors. The people in power decide what is good for all the rest. In a pluralistic society like ours, the privileging of choice was traditionally baked into the very fabric of public policy. Law allows leeway for disputable matters of conscience—at least they did before the advent of “hate crimes” which require God-like knowledge of motives. Such fundamental precepts of liberty have long been eroding. In this new Corona-driven milieu, dictates like government ordered shuttering of businesses and stay-at-home decrees means they may never be fully regained. Let’s at least realize this, even if the calculus of health-risk mitigation over civil liberty wins the day.

Then there’s the prospect of the next pandemic. Some virus is surely incubating for debut next year. Will this draconian level be the new standard of response? How will our economy or that of the world (who often follow our lead) survive under such control?

## **“What, again, is government’s role?”**

Who is pausing even for a moment to ask about various requirements, “Is this a bridge too far?” That leads to the other great concern: the directives from medical science’s mass diagnosis-for-the-world are, of course, implemented by government. But [the biblical view of the role of government](#) is pretty much limited to policing and making war. Admittedly, society and hence, government has multiplied in complexity—an unbiblical situation given the limits mentioned—therefore public health and economic interventions are somewhat necessary. Absolutely, there are critical emergency situations and this is one of them. It would be unconscionable to allow

an epidemic to spread willy-nilly on its own.

However, again, is anyone hitting Pause to ask how far is too far? One hopes that in retrospect, this crisis engenders a throttling back and overturning of policies that helped us get in this pickle (e.g., Federal Reserve-mandated interventions and supposed fixes which are being implemented again; also, allowing a Communist foreign nation a choke hold on pharmaceutical and medical supply chains to gain the “common good” of cheap goods while caregivers do without). Government solutions for all of life. Did we vote this in? Will we do it again in November?

## **Government Tyranny in Sight?**

Most worrisome is a move toward what appears more like a police state. In Jordan, missionaries report that 400 people have been arrested for leaving their apartments. [Refugee relief workers cobble together care](#) in an impossible situation. A Kentucky man was kept in his home somehow after he refused to *self-isolate* (another new term in the popular vernacular)—I don’t know the details. That spooked me. I wish he cared enough to stay away from people, but when it comes down to it, he could be shot in his own neighborhood—presumably on his own property—for leaving. Explain that to your six-year-old. A *shelter in place* order for all counties surrounding Kansas City is to be enforced by police. Cops deciding to fine or arrest you for leaving your home for other than trips to the doctor, grocery store, or cleaners? Politicians telling us what’s essential may be necessary but seems arbitrary at best. Talk of state borders closing for a sickness? This is a novel consideration, far as I know! Does the Coronavirus rise to the level of a nuclear fallout situation? Is this our shared future? As author and apologist Dr. Ken Boa asks (in a personal email), “Given the nature of interconnectivity in a digital world, we now live within plausible sight of a fear-induced technological plague

that could lead to a totalitarian outcome.”

## **Choices, Not Conditioned Responses**

Again, all I am asking is, “Does the necessity of this drastic a world-changing meta-response go without saying? Could a relatively restrained response now be wise—despite the public relations suicide of facing a sometimes mad mob morality?” On the other hand, “Is freedom—economic and cultural—worth more lives? Whose feet would that be laid at? Politicians? The medical establishment (they are simply doing their calling)? Fate’s? God’s?”

If the choice is between saving every possible life and forever changing life itself for earth’s entire population, where is the middle ground and how does a society find it? That boat has sailed, I fear. Relativistic, ever-changing ideals and their progressive promotion have won the day. The mindset of “We are going to win this thing, no matter the cost!” reigns triumphant in headlines.

There’s a worldview at work—learn to notice it: note the irony of a Postmodern relativism entwined with a Modernist certainty regarding mankind’s ability to control what used to be called an “act of God.” That’s what the highly moralistic and humanistic [John Mauldin](#) is unabashedly promoting, I believe. One more mass-mediated call to controlling an out of control universe. As if we could.

## **Be At Peace, Christian, And Spread That Peace**

For individual believers, a biblically realistic and optimistic response is to shelter in place (“abide in Me”). Rest in the peace and assurance of a loving, sovereignly overseeing Creator who will make all things right someday, whose agenda is being met. The best outward response toward unbelievers is to share not only the certainty of that hope,

but the gospel that leads to hope in a disease-free, worry-free, perfectly functional and loving society of brother and sisters in Christ. Eternal perspective is the conditioning we must seek. Because we're all being conditioned. It is truly a daily thing.

Meanwhile, pray for the individuals in charge and their decision-making to be sound. As a new normal reconditions minds and hearts around the globe at the speed of Internet connections, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed" by the mind of Christ (Romans 12:2).

### Notes

1. Dr. Caroline Leaf, *Switch on Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health*, p. 20, emphasis mine.
2. [www.azquotes.com/quote/1333869](http://www.azquotes.com/quote/1333869), accessed 3/23/2020.
3. J.P. Moreland, *Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and the Practices That Brought Peace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

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# The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion

*Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese says that our addiction to technology is heading toward the opposite of the life we want.*

## 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.”[\[1\]](#) – 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.”*[\[2\]](#)

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 without 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.[\[3\]](#)

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.[{4}](#)

Simulacra does not end with the apparent benign pleasures of family vacation and media, although media represents its most recent stage.[{5}](#) Simulacra includes the entire technological environment or complex, its infrastructure, which acts as a false “second nature”[{6}](#) 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.[{7}](#)

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 “ascendency” in theological terms.[{8}](#)

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![{10}](#)

## 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.”[{11}](#) 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.”[{12}](#)

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)[{13}](#); 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.[{14}](#)

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![{15}](#)

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.[\[16\]](#)

## **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.{17}

[www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/](http://www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/)

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?”{18}

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).{19}

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.”{20} Eve fell victim to her own idolatrous faith in hyperreality that departed from the simple trust in God’s word.{21}

## **The Void Machine**

Media (television, cell phone, internet, telecommunications) is a void machine.{22} 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.[{23}](#) 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.[{24}](#)

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."[{25}](#) People prefer to text, or phone.[{26}](#) 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.[{27}](#)

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.[{28}](#) As Woody Allen put it, “90 percent of life is showing up.”[{29}](#) 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.”[{30}](#) 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![{31}](#)

## 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/](http://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." {32}

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. {33}

After we "JUST SAY NO!" {34} 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![\[35\]](#)

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.[\[36\]](#)

"[I]f man does not pull himself together and assert himself . . . then things will go the way I describe [cyborg condition]." – Jacques Ellul[\[37\]](#)

## Notes

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), vii.
2. Aerosmith, *Eat the Rich*, "Livin' on the Edge," Sony, 1993.
3. The same is true of the game last night—I caught the highlights on ESPN—no difference really—it never happened! The Presidential debates, my Facebook page, 911, televangelism, the online (electric) church: all reproductions, all exist at the level of Santa Claus in a dreamy, surreal world not really real: hyperreal, really!

4. French social critic Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) described dimensional reduction in human nature through the process of "mimesis" very similar to Baudrillard's conception of *simulacra* (technological simulation) and Ellul's *la technique* (technological order). *Mimesis* eradicates all protest and opposition to the prevailing technological normalcy and silences all conscientious objections to the obvious or self-evident benefits (taken for granted) and blessings of technological progress. Like a frontal lobotomy when a section of the brain is removed that leaves all necessary automatic biological functions but removes the capacity to higher critical thinking, effectively silencing all differences, removing unique personality, individuality, and private space. The person is reduced to *one dimension* without the critical higher thought process or skills. Mimesis or mimicry transcends the adjustment phase to new technology known as *Future Shock* and brings the population into a direct and immediate relationship with the technological environment comparable to prehistoric and primitive cultures in their relationship to their natural milieus, climates and habitats. Mimesis replaces the traditional social environment with a technological one, an imitation or mimicry (*simulacra*). Mimesis removes the ability to feel alienation. Through reduction of the individual to a cell (atomization) in the social body, one never feels out of place, discomfort or disease, etc., because there is no longer any sense of individuality or difference. Anesthetizing the soul kills the pain of maladjustment to modernity leaving all feelings alike; joy is indistinguishable from hate. What do people feel after a lobotomy? They feel nothing, *comfortably numb* describes postmodern sentimentality.

Mimesis reduces the population to impulsive consumers. Material goods tie us to the system. "People recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society

has changed and social control is anchored in the new needs it has produced" (Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in Advanced Industrial Society* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1964], 9). People are in love with their technology. Consumer objects express passion and spirituality; "For example, cars are not simply neutral transportation objects but beloved expressions of soul." Their self-image is locked in the kind of cars they drive, houses they live in: "From teen dreaming about a hot set of wheels to the self-imagined sophisticate, it is image that dictates our purchase . . . Most of us can't imagine why anyone would buy a Hummer except to flaunt his financial ability to conspicuously consume . . . . Anyone who doubts the role of image needs only drive a rust bucket" (Lee Worth Bailey, *The Enchantments of Technology* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005], 7). "Image is everything!" Modern technological materialism has become the antithesis of the Christian way of life. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

## 5. Orders of Simulacra:

Renaissance: Copies of Original

Industrial: Mass Production of Original

Hyperreality: Recreation of Original

Metastasis: Reverse effects of the hyperreal stage of simulacra proliferate, comparable to the spread of cancerous tissue. "Metastasis: the transfer of disease from one organ or part to another not directly connected with it" (Benjamin F. Miller and Claire Brackman Keane *Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Medicine and Nursing* [Philadelphia: Saunders, 1972]). Hyperreality "more real than real" purports to be a technological improvement on nature and "the signs and symbols," (language) and institutions of traditional society, "better than real;" however, despite the apparent success of the hyperreal stage to deliver on its promise of improvement

or "progress," opposite results threaten social stability. Disneyland gets boring. Media technology isolates people rather than bringing them together. Social media turns out to be anti-social. The automobile extends the commute to work. The computer increases the average work load and illiteracy, reduces jobs, depersonalizes individuals, kills privacy, creates universal surveillance, makes pornography and depictions of violence readily accessible to children. The cell phone is actually an excellent bomb detonating device. The computer atrophies human intelligence, logic, and thinking (creative and problem solving skills); through societal dependence on the computer people have forgotten how to think for themselves, and solve problems in any other way. The computer is not a simple tool used to organize knowledge, making it readily accessible, but as the centralizing technology through the digitalization process it recreates the world in its own image. Instead of happiness, the technological order is producing mass neurosis evident in the increase in depression, anxiety, attention deficit disorder, anorexia, bulimia, suicide and the mass inability to differentiate between reality and illusion.

Metastasis in the Orders of Simulacra according to Baudrillard also reflects Jacques Ellul's critical technological analysis in his assertion of the law of diminishing returns (law of reverse effects), *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). Once the threshold of reversal in technological progress is reached, a saturation point, beyond which any further advance is completely unnecessary (and thus further progress despite mass optimism) will produce reverse or opposite effects than intended. The technological threshold is reached when new technology is imposed on the population which was unnecessary prior to its invention. When necessity for a new technology appears after its invention the threshold of beneficial effects inverts and harmful consequences, side effects—intended or not—rapidly multiply. There is no use or felt needs for much of the technology developed in the 20th

century; TV, computer, jet engine, rockets, atom bomb, cell phone, innumerable widgets and gadgets, so use is found and need artificially created. People have no felt need for a technology that does not yet exist. When useless technology is developed for its own sake (knowledge for knowledge's sake), rather than liberation it displaces *the good of mankind to the glory of God* as its object or *telos* and becomes an end in itself. The general population never asks for new technology; rather, technology is developed according to the technological imperative—whatever can be done should be done. Its beneficial use is unquestionably assumed and its use promoted through mass advertising and commercials (technological propaganda), and in short order a new necessity is added to the litany of technological requirements. As the list of “must haves” and “can't live without” grows in order to keep pace with the tempo of modern life, *users* voluntarily surrender their freedom for self-imposed technological necessity, blissfully unaware of any potential side-effects or untoward consequences.

The technological condition may be compared to generational slavery. Those born into servitude accept it as normal. The “happy slave” remains so through refusal to recognize his condition as “slave.” He embraces the world as he finds it with all his material needs and appetites satiated. There is no reason to protest, compounded by the fact that he has no ability to do so. A slave will always remain a slave until he recognizes that he is a slave. And without an intellectual horizon to lift him above his condition as a real possibility he will forever remain a slave. The first step to freedom for the slave is to recognize his condition of slavery and the possibility of a different way of life through self-determination, but that is impossible without a degree of abstract analysis and a measure of critical reason. Comparatively, technological determinism imposes its frightful inescapable necessity as a natural order without a meaningful future beyond the present way of life. In stripping society of

critical ability to reason and negate that order from a metaphysical view, humanity has lost its only absolute reference point outside its own limited existence and above its concrete situation from which to criticize technology and bring it under ethical control and moral limitation. God is greater than any technological idol made by human hands and provides an immovable ground from which humanity can reassert control, but mankind's Creator, Savior and Helper does him no good if he does not believe in his power or worse confuses it with the status quo, so that the apocalyptic power of God's confrontational judgment that leveled Babel (Genesis 11), Egypt (Exodus), Jerusalem and Rome is convoluted through blessing the technological utopia as *New Atlantis*.

The idolization of technology follows in the wake of modern science and rationalism but has a dehumanizing effect rather than amelioration. New technology brings new necessity and demands rather than freedom that exacts its price from humanity and nature, resulting in a much more complicated and dangerous world. The Apostle Paul stated that if we have food and shelter we should be content (1 Timothy 6:8). The accumulation of material things beyond meeting basic needs becomes a new burden, an added necessity not there before, resulting in bondage not freedom. People are owned by their possessions, must work harder for their technology and have been reduced to cogs in the wheel of progress rather than individuals with inherent value made in the image of God. From electricity, to phones, appliances to automobiles to computers, cell phones, *ad infinitum, ad nauseam* each new technology begins with the promises of convenience and improving modern life by making it faster, then through habitual use it becomes necessary, eventually addictive. From the basic material needs of food and shelter modern life has added dishwashers, microwave ovens, vacuum cleaners, TVs, cars, computers and most recently the cell phone as necessary for life in modern times. The devaluation of human life pays for the technology that is developed for the sake of expanding

the frontiers of knowledge and exploration rather than creating the condition of freedom. Human freedom is lost with each new artificial technical necessity, resulting in an increasingly nihilistic society; where power increases, choice is lost, resulting in increased meaninglessness. Nihilistic sentiment develops along with technological power; "*We know that power always destroys values and meaning . . . Where power augments indefinitely there is less and less meaning*" (Jacques Ellul, *Perspectives on Our Age* [New York: Seabury, 1981], 45). Technological necessity proliferates along with technological power over nature, reducing the scope of available choices, options or way of life that differs from those ensnared in the modern mechanized mainstream. What possibilities for a decent way of life are open to those who own neither car nor home, do not use a cell phone or computer, or possess at least a college degree? How *successful* will any corporate organization, church, school or business be if it does not use modern communication technology, radio, TV, computer or advertising techniques (propaganda) to promote its cause or product? As the world conforms itself to technological necessity, "you must get a cell phone and use a computer or risk getting left behind," it loses touch with the reality outside these devices, which is reduced and recreated online. For example, the traditional "church service" where believers join together in the unity of faith around the communion table as community and family becomes the embarrassing forgery of a lone spectator in front of a one dimensional monitor.

6. Paul Tillich, *The Spiritual Situation in Our Technical Society* (Macon, GA: University Press, 1988), 7. "Tillich describes the creation of a 'second nature' that results from science's attempt to control nature. Second nature in turn subjects man to the same domination he wishes to exert over nature, making himself subject to the very thing he had created to liberate him" (Lawrence J. Terlizese, *Trajectory of the 21st Century: Essays on Theology and Technology*

[Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2009, 155]).

7. Baudrillard's description of Simulacra is reminiscence of Herbert Marcuse's depiction of "Mimesis" in *One-Dimensional Man*. Mimesis: the total identification of the individual with technological environment that mimics, apes or imitates historical social conditions, for example the city replaces nature, the automobile replaces the horse and carriage, TV replaces the family hearth, social media substitutes for personal relationships. [Muk-bang](#) replaces family members at the dinner table, traditional institutions that requires a personal presence, school and church, are rapidly transferring to the online medium. Likewise Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society* describes technological advancement or "la technique" as creating a new environment, one that overlays both the natural and historical social environments with an urban/industrial/digital one.

8. Braden Allenby and Daniel Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 1-13; *Humans Need Not Apply*, CGP Grey, 2014. The Transhuman Transformation is the ultimate in works salvation that lifts humanity to the next stage in evolutionary development through technological immortality or digitalized godhood that replaces all his physical corruptions with artificial replacements in the simulated heaven of a computer server. The computer does not dominate the will of humanity, enforcing universal peace through fear of annihilation as in the movie *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), but assimilates humanity digitally and recreates it in its own image or highest ideal. The robots are not taking over, rather humanity is surrendering its will and decisions to the computer in tired resignation of life which has become too difficult by its own design.

9. "O LORD . . . What is man that you are mindful of him or the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4, 5). "Angels," Elohim (God) in Psalm 8:5

refers to the divine visitation (theophany) mentioned in verse 4, the Angel of The LORD, i.e., Genesis 18; 19; 22:15; 32:24-32; Exodus 12:12, 13. Humanity was made highest in God's created order, below the creator and above the angelic host in the chain of being; "Don't you know you will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). Angels are "ministering spirits sent to minister to the heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14).

10. We are not saying one cannot reduce a complicated argument, book, movie etc., to its main points in outline form. We are saying that reduction does not replace the original, as somehow "better." A well-done outline does not alleviate the audience's responsibility to discover for itself, to pick up and read, but will inspire the audience to do so. Reading Calvin's *Institutes*, or Augustine's *City of God* or Thomas' *Summa Theologica* in PowerPoint or Cliff Notes is comparable to watching the Super Bowl in highlights instead of in its entirety from kickoff.

The proliferation of the digital camera as appendage to the cell phone has created the absurd phenomenon of reduction of reduction in the class room. As the PowerPoint slide has allowed professors to reduce all learning to three pertinent bullet points per slide, so students have followed their cue in picturing the text (taking a picture of the slide). Instead of suffering the laborious and tedious task of jotting down a simple outline in a note book, a helpful mnemonic practice, they take a picture of it, reducing the slide to digital acknowledgement and temporary storage before deletion, in order to make room for the pictures of tomorrow night's Harry Potter costume gala. Education isn't what it used to be, it just isn't!

11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 166 ff.

12. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: HBJ, 1986), 43.

13. The projections of visual media may have their origins in "the desert of the real" as Baudrillard puts it, but what the spectator sees on his screen, monitor or photograph should not be confused with "reality," but recreated reality mediated through an electronic medium. Marshall McLuhan's famous maxim for media analysis, "The medium is the message," undergirds this critical understanding of media technology. Any fan of live entertainment or sports knows immediately that TV broadcast of a live venue is an entirely different event than being there live behind home plate or on the fifty yard line. Preference for the surreal, sterilized, cartoonish, Apollonian images on TV and in film, rather than seeing the actual blots, blemishes and facial scars of people, perspiring athletes or hearing the crack of the bat is not the central moral issue, which does not come down to preferences, which are already conditioned by excessive media exposure at an early age. The failure to distinguish between reality and hyperreality constitutes the greatest dangers of the technological simulacra. When the general audience mistakes or confuses the hyperreal for reality, it allows itself to be deceived. When it believes what it sees on TV to be the literal unbiased truth, when in fact TV broadcasts a highly opinionated reconstructed version designed to transport its audience to a dream-like existence, the audience loses touch with reality and becomes immune to moral conscience, guilt and remorse for its actions—for example, war, ecological destruction, racism, etc. Group deception and delusion is rooted in personal inability to distinguish fact and fantasy, reality and illusion creating a strange self-hypnotic mass psychosis, easily persuaded by the predominate image projected into its thinking. "Brainwashing" or "mind control" are not the best choice of words, yet the terms still resonate for many people in describing the immediate effects of visual media on the audience. Electronic media bypass the rational process and speaks directly to the emotional or subconscious. Media effects the shaping of behavior through mass appeal of image, a reproduction of reality framed in drama and grounded in the

erotic (sex appeal), moving the mass to do something (doing is being), buy, give, join, fight, etc., without the ballast of critical reflection that will spare a people from rushing headlong into disaster. The irrational nature of the emotional appeal was the cause for Plato's expulsion of artists, musicians and dramatists from his fictional utopia *The Republic*. By allowing irrational appeal free reign, the public loses the appeal to critical reason as the measure of truth and the people become prone to deception and mass manipulation by a tyrant. Likewise Jesus urges all to pause in rational reflection, "to count the cost" like a king going to war or building a tower, before deciding to follow him (Luke 14:25-33).

The failure to discern the difference between reality and illusion in mass and social media is due to the intoxicating effects of hyperreality and the loss of critical reason in the public's media consumption. Electronic media numbs awareness to reality and allows escape to fantasy, as the universal *soma* (perfect drug from Huxley's fictional tale *Brave New World*). The condition of intoxication or "drunkardness" is one of self-induced madness, so the self-hypnotic condition of electronic media creates a similar neurosis. Karl Marx criticized religion as "the opiate of the people," accurate for the masses living in the industrial conditions of the 19th century, but obsolete as a description of the masses since the invention of television, which has replaced religion as the opiate of the people.

When image dominates a societal mindset and learning, emotional (sex) appeal moves the population in mass conformity or group behavior that ousts critical reason in herd mentality, subject to the whims of the image makers, propagandists, clergy, advertisers, etc. Ellul noted two orders of thinking determined by the means of learning: image and language. Image learning presents knowledge as a totality, each image is a world, complete and ready-made, certain of its

own truthfulness, imparting its information instantly so long as we occupy the same space as the image. "The image conveys to me information belonging to the category of evidence, which convinces me without any prior criticism" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 36). The image impresses itself on the character of the learner through unconscious acceptance that does not follow the logical sequence of language from start to finish, beginning to end but produces a haphazard collage of contradicting light totalities that appeal immediately to the moment (instant gratification). Image based learning produces a monolithic mentality or stereotypical thinking and prescribed behavior. Critical reason is never allowed to assert differences; extremes are normalized so that everything is accepted. This is very apparent in the current PC orthodoxy widely accepted in the Millennial generation, the first generation raised on the computer, that stupidly pontificates that any assertion of difference between sexes, races, religion, etc., etc., amounts to "hate-crime." For example, the gay lifestyle is no longer an acceptable alternative to monogamy but now has legal sanction as part of the mainstream establishment, despite its irrational and unnatural character. Islam is accepted as a religion of peace and compatible with Western democracies, yet no proof is ever offered to support this claim from the history of Islam. And the universal inanity of technological neutrality that provides the false sense of individual control over technological use, rapidly degenerates to technological necessity and inevitability of technological progress in actual daily behavior. Technology cannot be both neutral in its character under control of human choices and necessary or not under control of human choices, but autonomous (developing according to its own inner logic) at the same time; yet this inherent contradiction is completely ignored by all advocates of unlimited technological progress, Transhumanists, Futurists or simply all those who feel invested in the latest innovation: intellectuals, preachers, writers, professors, technogeeks, technognostics and technophiles. The smartest

people in society appear completely oblivious to the contradiction of believing that technology is neutral in its essence yet necessary in application, rationalizing its rapid acceleration, not because they are bad people but because their thinking is dominated by the image of unlimited progress and human perfectibility projected onto them from the computer, rather than a rational way of thinking growing out of the book and lecture. Computerization of all human life creates the cardinal value of speed for its own sake (faster is better), which necessarily leads to nonlinear or irrational (emotional) learning through images because it is easy, instant, and unconscious, producing stereotypical categories and behavior. The word expressed in speech and writing produces opposition to image domination of the computer because it is slower, linear and critical.

The second order of thinking Ellul says comes from language or the spoken and written word which must follow an arduous task of connecting letters, words, sentences and thoughts to each other through the process of speaking, reading and writing which follows the contours of logical sequence in step by step growth in knowledge and reason. Language learning does not begin with the self-asserting certainty of the totalitarian image, but develops progressively from "the unknown to uncertain and then from the uncertain to the known." (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 36); dialectically including doubt, objection, protest or difference in the attainment of knowledge. Language is rational, self-aware or conscious, certain of what it knows but never exhaustive in its claim to absolute total knowledge, therefore it remains critical or open to differences of opinion and further learning; there is always something new to learn, discover and explore. Language allows for personal identity through individual choices that are free but never absolute or final beyond correction or criticism. In the total world imposed by the image, knowledge is absolute with nothing new possible, therefore it must be accepted uncritically.

Because language is rational it also produces the highest standards in ethics and morality-rooted individual values and beliefs. Rationalism always produces the greatest moralism. In the ancient world the rational school of philosophy (Stoicism) based on their belief in logos (universal reason) was also the most ethical in their practice of universal peace, and equality. In world religions Buddhism stands as the most rational in its beliefs of simple universal truths leading to practical moral behavior (Four Noble Truths: life is suffering, suffering is caused by selfish desire, suffering is alleviated by limiting selfish desire, curb selfish desire through the practical application of the Eightfold Path). Modern Rationalism culminating in the 19th century was also one of the profoundest in moral character in all strata of society, education, politics, economics and religion. The ethic of love rooted in the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man was considered the essence of Christianity in the 19th century (Harnack, *What is Christianity?*). The Jewish rabbinical approach to learning through language is legendary for its rationalism and strict legalism as well as its Islamic counterpart in the Muslim devotion to the Koran, Sharia Law and iconoclasm.

In the second order of language, ethics are grounded in personal choices as a product of rational criticism, which allows for meaningful differences of opinion and the free creation of values. In the first order of image learning, all views are standard and all behavior an expression of group conformity. "The image tends . . . to produce conformity, to make us join a collective tendency" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 35). Thus the two orders of thinking are opposed to each other. The first order in totalitarian fashion is in the process of eradicating the second order through purging critical reason from the mindset of the population like a mass spiritual lobotomy that removes part of the brain that contains the higher function of reason and abstract thought process. The image overwhelms the word through reduction and

then removal and remaps the collective mind to think accordingly, freedom of thought is left open as possibility only because most people cannot think for themselves but are programmed through media saturation. Note the drift in social media from glorified email responses on Facebook to the forced shrinkage of the word to 120 characters on Twitter, to finally pictures only on Tumblr, and Instagram. The second order in critical toleration of the image does not want to eradicate it, but put image in its place, not as an expression of truth or reality but a simple illustration in service of the word and higher critical function of human nature through which humanity creates its self-definition, limits and significance. The second order of language thinking does not separate rational discourse in philosophy from a dramatic presentation in literature, or the arts, film or TV, etc. The Twentieth Century French Existentialists demonstrated the compatibility of rational discourse through abstract prose and exposition and the concrete embodiment of their ideas in dramatic forms such as plays, novels and movie illustrations. Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel wrote the most penetrating philosophical analysis of the modern condition of alienation as well as the greatest poetic description of modern despair and hope, for example, compare Sartre's tome Being and Nothingness with his play "No Exit" or Camus' essay on The Myth of Sisyphus to his novel The Stranger. Theologian Paul Tillich argued likewise that art serves as the spiritual barometer of culture. Through rational analysis of art, literature and drama the church will gain a better read on the spiritual climate of the society it hopes to evangelize and better tailor its message of the gospel to the concrete situation expressed through peoples felt needs. Even Jacques Ellul the leading social critic of visual media and advocate of word over image adopted a similar method of point and counter point as the existentialists by pairing the most penetrating sociological analysis of technology, raising the question how to limit autonomous technique and answering it with an allegorical interpretative method of the biblical text

under the respectable umbrella of Barthian theology through his ethic of limits or nonpower. Compare *The Technological Society* to his biblical exposition of Genesis in *The Meaning of the City*.

14. On Facebook, friends can number into the thousands. New friends are just a click away; you don't even have to know them or even meet them to be friends. Aristotle said that friends are the people we eat with every day. Simple enough to grasp, but what does an ancient Greek philosopher know compared to the moguls of social media?

15. Baudrillard and Eco validated Gasset's thesis in *Revolt of the Masses* that science and technology sows the seeds of its own demise by elevating the mass of humanity through its values of discovery, invention and discipline, yet the mass revolt against those values that brought them to dominance. This is the same basic thesis that argues we are the victims of our own success as applied to capitalism and the accumulation of wealth. One generation works to achieve a level of wealth that the next generation inherits with all the benefits of wealth but none of the sacrifice of the previous generation. Therefore it squanders it not knowing the value of wealth not having to work for it and being raised in privilege.

Gay Marriage is another recent example of simulacra. The hyperreal replaces the real with a copy made in our own image. Contemporary society is under a spell, thinking it can remake the institution of marriage founded in the Bible between one man and one woman (Genesis 2 and Matthew 19) to include its opposite or whatever the courts deem acceptable; eventually the courts will accept the union of people and their pets. Already the Disney Corporation has changed the name of The Family Channel to Free Form, an ominous precursor to the dissolution of meaning to the sacred word family in American popular culture and its reprobate legal system.

16. Reality and Truth are not coequal or synonymous terms, but signify different metaphysical orders. Ellul noted that the unity of reality and truth expresses "the unity of being" (Ellul, *Humiliation of the Word*, 96), or the right relationship between the Creator and his creation. Truth belongs to God's essence alone, as the One Eternal Absolute. Reality expresses the multifaceted finite human concrete situation. When our reality aligns with God's truth we experience the peace of redemption that passes understanding, harmonious being. Reality is the realm of sight that leads us away from the truth of the invisible God who cannot be seen and is found only through the word (speech, talk, conversation, discourse, lecture, song). The visible is the realm of false idols incarnated as very real visible powers (gods): Money, the State, and Technology (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 94, 95). The order of reality is the order of human life which Nietzsche argued may include error. "Life no argument—We have fixed up a world for ourselves in which we can live—assuming bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith, nobody now would endure life. But that does not mean that they have been proved. Life is no argument; the conditions of life could include error." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 177 [121]). Iconoclasm then becomes the mission of the church as it proclaims the gospel and demolishes spiritual strong holds which is the battle for the mind "destroying speculations . . . raised up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:3-6); "iconoclasm is always essential to the degree that other gods and other representations are manifested . . . Today reality triumphs, has swept everything away and monopolizes all our energy and projects. The image is everywhere, but now we bestow dignity, authenticity and spiritual truth on it. We enclose within the image everything that belongs to the order of truth" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 94, 95).

17. In terms of an ethic of technology biblical truth translates as limit before use or law before license. For example, When adults set time limits on media use for their children anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour of screen time be it TV, computer or cell phone, they are practicing an ethic of technology.

Social critic Jacques Ellul stated; "The 'yes' makes no sense unless there is also the 'no' . . . the no comes first, death before resurrection. If the 'No!' is not lived in its reality the yes is a nice pleasantry, a comfort one adds to one's material comfort, and as Barth has conclusively shown the No is included in the gospel" Quoted in Lawrence J. Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Cascade: Eugene, OR, 2005), 127; Jacques Ellul, *False Presence of the Kingdom*, 25.

18. Original Divine Command: "From any tree of the Garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17 NASB).

Satanic Recreation of the original command: "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'" (Genesis 3:1 NASB).

Imperative turns into question through a simple shift in voice emphasis, "Don't eat!" to "Don't eat?", inciting disobedience instead of obedience as its effect, confusing the knowledge of good and evil.

19. The hyperreal replaces the real with a copy made in our own image. A copy is never greater than the original and to believe that a glorified reduction, a snap shot somehow surpasses the original shows just how far along the popular delusion has advanced. Simulacra is portent to antichrist: "The one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did

not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness"(2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Mass media qualifies as "a deluding influence": remaking the image of God in the image of an image. "Language is unobtrusive in that it never asserts itself on its own. When it [mass media] uses a loudspeaker and crushes others with its powerful equipment, when the television set speaks, the word is no longer involved, since no dialogue is possible. What we have in these cases is machines that use language as a way of asserting themselves. Their power is magnified, but language is reduced to a useless series of sounds which inspires only reflexes and animal instincts" (Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 23).

The first commandment teaches that "You shall not make any graven images . . . you shall not bow down to them nor worship them (Exodus 20:4, 5). The construction of image is always a reduction from an original and imperfectly copies what it claims to represent; presenting a false image of God, an idol. The idol transforms its worshipers into its own image. All those who worship idols become like them (Psalms 115).

By worshiping the creature humanity dehumanizes itself by bowing down to the created order lower than itself. The prohibition against worshiping idols is meant to spare God's people from corrupting God's glory by reducing the invisible Creator to the visible creation and enslaving themselves to the works of their own hands. Idolatry exchanges "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man . . ." (Romans 1:23). The idol is the construction of man, representing his ideal of God (image) in his own image, which in turn recreates man as slave in the image of the idol. Here we see perfectly in the biblical model of idolatry, the same Transhumanists enterprise of constructing an ideal image (cyborg) in the image (mankind) of an image (the computer),

leading not to human ascendance or godhood but dehumanization or slavery by placing humanity lower than its own creation (the cyborg condition). Man builds an idol he thinks represents God which in truth is a reduction of the glory of God into the image of the creature and lowers himself through worship of the false image of God making himself a slave to a thing that appears real but really does not exist outside of humanity's faith in its own self-projection.

The first commandment prohibits "graven images" the invisible God cannot be seen in the works of human hands (Acts 17). All images of God are an affront to his holiness and danger to his children. Idols reduce God to the false image which then further reduces worshipers.

Iconoclasm is the central liberation mission of the church in its declaration of the gospel.

"No one can see God and live" (Exodus 33:20). "Images are incapable of expressing anything about God. In daily life as well, the word remains the expression God Chooses. Images are in a completely different domain—the domain that is not God and can never become God on any grounds" (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 91).

20. Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 96.

21. God's revelation comes only through the spoken word received by faith never through sight, which must remain subservient to the oral, spoken invisible message. "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). "We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen . . . By faith we understand . . . Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11).

“The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written; ‘The righteous live by faith’” (Romans 1:17). “Set your mind on things above [the invisible Christ, “the way, the truth and the life”], not on the things that are on earth [the visible, material, tangible, concrete reality of the present world].” “Fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2). The aural, auditory sense or put simply the ear is the organ of perception and faith never the eyes. Sight brings only doubt; despite popular opinion seeing is not believing, but unbelief. The desire to see the truth is rooted in doubt and unbelief; “Unless I see . . .” doubting Thomas said, “. . . I will not believe” (John 20:25). “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20:29). “Sight played an enormous role in the Fall and caused all of humanity and language to swing to its side. Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the Bible so often relates sight to sin. Sight is seen as the source of sin, and the eye becomes the link between reality and the flesh. The eye is seen as the focusing lens of the body (but only of the body). The Bible speaks of the lust of the eye and of the eye as the source and means of coveting. Now we know that covetousness is the crux of the whole affair, since sin always depends on it. “You shall not covet” (Ex. 20: 17) is the last of the commandments because it summarizes everything—all the other sins” (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 100, 101). Because Eve looked upon the fruit, she lusted after wisdom, the knowledge of good and evil, a possession she desired but did not work for or earn that did not belong to her. “Eve coveted equality with God . . . She coveted autonomy of decision” (Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 101). Lust is born from sight of the material possession. The Tenth Commandment lists a prohibition of desire on what does not belong to us but is rightfully our neighbor’s: his wife, house, domesticated animals and servants, all must first be seen before desired. Today we call these possessions status symbols, spouse, house, cars, money, etc., etc., all the objects of consumer desire that dominate our visual horizon

through advertising, commercials and the all-pervasive world of image, which fills us with materialistic greed.

22. Technological convergence brings TV, computer, cell phone, video game (telecommunications) together as one medium. Professor of Philosophy Andy Clark notes that the cell phone is the gateway to the cyborg condition: "The cell phone is, indeed, a prime, if entry-level cyborg technology" (Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 27). The cell phone has evolved from a clumsy mobile phone into a sleek microcomputer that puts the full resources of the internet at the fingertips of the user.

The computer medium heralds the absolute closing of the human mind and cultural diversity by subverting all ends to its means it creates the condition necessary for total domination of the human spirit. All total systems subvert ends to means in their revolutionary beginning, such as the Napoleonic empire, fascism and communism. "By any means necessary," or "for the good of the cause" becomes the motto of the radical on the road to totalitarian paradise (Serfdom). The computer coopts all nontechnical areas; in the form of "technical aid and support" subverting their ends by overbearing means. As the absolute single point of convergence for all humanity the computer fixes its own organizational categories on every person, discipline (field) or organization that uses it. The passage of admission to digital utopia is technical conformity (surrender). All nontech people and fields must soon learn the ways of the computer, if they expect to survive in the new universal cyber regime (the technological order). Liberal Arts, for instance no longer exists as a separate track or discipline in a dialectical counter balance to Science. Beholden to the computer for success it has sold its spiritual birth right as moral conscience through cultural critic or prophet to the rational establishment. By way of apt analogy, in the past when churches received State support through

official recognition as the established religion they became in effect the court prophets, chaplain's to the king. They "sold out" to the powers that be, forfeiting their divisive voice. Dissent is never allowed in any total system by definition, otherwise it would not be total. Those who profit from the system are not in a position to disagree with its direction without mortal endangerment. The old maxim "never bite the hand that feeds you" was rigorously applied by the official religions in the past. Likewise, rarely is a critical voice heard today through the prodigious production of liberal arts in media, except for science fiction film. The old dichotomy of art and technology embodied in the Intellectual versus the City model has resolved itself in the computer. Chilton Williamson, Jr. noted the subtle reeducation the older generation of writers must endure in order to practice their craft using the computer. "Writing ought to be, technically speaking, among the simplest and natural of human actions. The computer makes it one of the most complex and unnatural ones. It is nothing less than a crime against humanity, and against art, that a writer should be required to learn how to master a machine of any kind whatsoever in order to write a single sentence. But no writer today can succeed in his craft if he does not learn to become a more or less skillful machine operator first." ("Digital Enthusiasm" in *Chronicles* [June 2014, 38.6], 33). The end or goal of writing (to be read by others) has been subverted by means of the computer (Subversion: to corrupt an alien system for different ends from within, for example; primitive Christianity was subverted by the political forces of the later Roman Empire, creating Christendom). Computer subversion of humanity has been repeated simultaneously with writing since the digital revolution in the 1990's.

By giving children at the earliest age possible a computer to play with and master, turning work into play, the technological oligarchy has guaranteed that they will grow to become computer technicians in some degree and has

successfully circumvented the nasty reeducation process necessary to all revolutions in the past. As the product of the digital revolution the Millennial generation has inherited the onerous responsibility of being the first generation raised on the computer as their defining characteristic. They are the first non-national generation, identifiable by digital acuity, video game addiction and the cell phone, rather than by race, gender or creed. The world that they create will ultimately prove their humanity or not.

One machine that can do everything controls everyone, even now as I write an unsolicited advertisement appears on my computer screen telling me that "Technical support is designed to monitor your system for issues." Positively Orwellian! No greater insidious subtlety to seduce the human spirit than the emerging global technological order has appeared since the Tower of Babel!

All total systems are inherently corrupt and eventually self-destruct.

23. Philosopher Michael Foucault builds on Jeremy Bentham's purposed panoptic system theory by arguing that Bentham's proposed universal prison surveillance system that kept prisoners under constant watch has been extended to contemporary society through media saturation. Law Professor Jerry Rosen argues that through social media society has entered a condition he describes as "Omniopticon" where we are all watching each other (*The Naked Crowd*); Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 152; Reg Whitaker *The End of Privacy: How Total Surveillance Is Becoming a Reality* (New York: New Press, 1999).

24. Hyperreal communities, churches, schools, dating sites do not allow for individual charisma, personal persona, flamboyancy, speech impediments, warts, blemishes, ugliness, beauty, intelligence, everything thing that makes an individual unique disappears behind the brilliance of a

cartoon reality.

The modern socialization process once reserved for family, church and community in traditional society has been usurped by media and the State. Socialization is the rather sensitive and all important process through which values are imprinted on youth. Socialization is everything! Society receives its understanding of right and wrong, good and evil in a word normalcy through socialization. In the mission of the church socialization is equal to evangelism. If the church successfully evangelizes a society, converting everyone to the Christian faith, it must then pass those values to the next generation, if it fails to do so it must then start the whole evangelization process over. Regrettably, the American church is learning this lesson the hard way, after surrendering the socialization process of Christian youth to media, and public schools. The most media saturated and technologically adapt generation in human history is rapidly becoming the most nihilistic since late antiquity.

Media transmits collective values directly to the social body by passing the individual consciousness. Mass media transmits its own values of consumption and materialism that traditional family, church and community as social agents cannot compete with according to social critic Herbert Marcuse. Media transmits the values of "efficiency, dream, and romance." "With this education, the family can no longer compete." The father's authority is the first traditional value to fall. (Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry to Freud* (New York: Vintage 1955, 88).

25. John L. Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 19.

26. The only reason people give as to why they use media technology is because of its convenience, it is easier to send an email or text than write a letter and use a postage stamp.

However, ease of use and convenience shows lack of understanding as well as accountability. "I use it because it is easy" is hardly a thought-out moral defense for one's action! And here is where the trap lies for all of us. The history of technology demonstrates that convenient and pervasive use over time slowly turns into necessity. What was once done because it was so easy to do, eventually must be done. TV, computer and most recently the cell phone, these technologies never appeared as necessities but convenience, but now they are irresistible necessities. Convenience turns into necessity because it was so easy to send a text, or email, we have forgotten how to communicate in any other way, or refuse to relearn those old ways. Convenience dulls the spirit and numbs the mind, producing stupidity and apathy by removing all other practices from our intellectual horizon. Beware of anything thing that looks so easy, it is nothing more than a hook to necessity. The old saying, "If it sounds too good to be true it probably is," applies to technology as well. "Whatever appears to make your life easier right now in the long run may make it more difficult." Convenience turns into habit, habit turns into need, need turns into addiction.

27. The friendships forged in traditional institutions create the social support network for an individual throughout his professional career. As an online professor I did not know how to write a letter of recommendation for a student I have never met in person. Education has become so dominated by technical learning, all students in essence are studying to be engineers in their field whether teachers, medical practitioners, social workers etc.; they are taught efficient methods as administrators or managers of large groups of people.

28. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962).

29. Quoted in Locke, *The De-Voicing of Society*, 43.

30. Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, 122. "Even more, it

[the camera] keeps me from proceeding to cultural assimilation, because these two steps can be taken only in a state of availability and lack of preoccupation with other matters – a state of “being there.” (Ibid).

31. In line with Baudrillard thesis on the orders of simulacra, popular cell phone use, namely texting, demonstrates regressive effects of the latter stage of simulacra: metastasis or reversal of effects. It is quite common to see people texting and even preferring texting to any other mode of communication, especially phone calling, when it is obviously easier to call and talk than it is to text, time wise and in terms of context and amount of content necessary for successful conversation, yet texting is preferred because of its impersonal nature; people prefer the harder task of texting because it is impersonal, however, impersonal communication is less effective to the point of communication.

32. *Radio Times* (January 2016). Hawking said bluntly, “I think the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race.” Quoted in “Rise of the Machines” in the *Dallas Morning News* Sunday, February 14, 2016, 1P. Recognizing and controlling the dangers of progress is a call for limits and boundaries to technological acceleration possible only through negation.

33. The fear of living without the necessity that controls us reveals the modern condition of technological determinism. In confronting determinism we must appeal to “the individual’s sense of responsibility . . . the first act of freedom, is to become aware of the necessity” (Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxiii).

Necessity (whatever we fear we cannot live without) is always a limitation placed on human nature, such as the basic biological needs to eat and sleep. Necessity limits freedom and therefore power and ability. Death is also a necessity,

without which new life and growth cannot take place. However, death is the last enemy, which is defeated finally in the resurrection of the saints (1 Corinthians 15:50-58). To believe as Transhumanists do that death can be overcome through technological enhancement can only result in abomination. Professor of Computer Science Matthew Dickerson prophetically asks, what if the Transhuman “transformation is based on something that is not true? What will we be transformed into?” (*The Mind and the Machine: What it Means to be Human and Why it Matters*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), xiv.

34. A campaign to “JUST SAY NO!” to further technological advance that threatens human existence, such as artificial intelligence, must be a collective effort for the entire human race, but begins with our own personal individual choices in limiting technological use, i.e. TV, computer, cell phone, and automobiles, and set boundaries to consumption on all consumer products. Resist the digitalization of traditional life through technological transfer of community to the online medium. Despite the convenience of a total online education it is unconscionable and detrimental if online students never encounter a real college classroom, talk face to face with a professor and argue in group discussion with peers. Likewise, the church cannot remain the Body of Christ by shunting its responsibilities to parishioners, new members and seekers by declaring online and televised services equal to a live one. “Do not forsake the assembly of yourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25) prohibits a total digitalization of Christian worship and community. Christ said, “Where two or three have gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The bodily presence necessary for community conveyed in these passages must not be allegorized by techno-gnostics who equate physical isolation in front of an electric screen to be “just as good” as being there.

35. We are enslaved to what we fear we cannot live without

whether it be money, sex or technology. The rich young ruler did not follow Christ because he could not imagine life without his wealth, the security, comfort and power it bestowed was greater than the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24). The disciples were in shock at Jesus’ utter intolerance to devotion to anything other than God: “You cannot serve God and money [technology, power]” (Matthew 6:24). Knowing their own attachment to wealth, they despaired, “Who then can be saved?” (Mark 10:26). It appears impossible to give up what we fear we cannot live without. “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” (Matthew 6:25); the perennial anxiety and pursuit of the faithless and fearful enslaved to material (bodily) necessity; “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing [enhancement]?” (Matthew 6:25). “For after all these things the Gentiles [unregenerate] seek” (Matthew 6:32). “But Lord Jesus, we cannot live without cell phones and computers, any more than we can live without money! Get real, be reasonable—Lord you are asking the impossible of mortal sinners.” And Jesus agrees, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27).

36. Louis Armstrong – *What A Wonderful World* Lyrics | MetroLyrics

37. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, xxxi.

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# 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?"<sup>{1}</sup> 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 Fathers. 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."[\[2\]](#) 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.”<sup>{3}</sup> 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.”<sup>{4}</sup>

## **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*.<sup>{6}</sup> 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."<sup>{7}</sup>

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.<sup>{8}</sup> 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."<sup>{9}</sup> 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.[{13}](#) 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.[{14}](#) 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.”[{15}](#) 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.”[{16}](#)

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.”[{17}](#) 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

1. Erwin W. Lutzer, *Is God On America's Side* (Moody Publishers, 2008), 75.
2. David L. Holmes, *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers* (Oxford, 2006), 39.
3. Ibid., 47.
4. Ibid., 39.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. [books.google.com/books?id=IHMAAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA1#PPA1,M1](http://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.<sup>{2}</sup> 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!"<sup>{3}</sup>

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.* [\[4\]](#)

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.[{5}](#) 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).[{6}](#)

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.[{7}](#) 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."[{8}](#) 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.”[{9}](#)

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.”[{10}](#)

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.[{11}](#)

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":

*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.*[{15}](#)

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

1. *City of Angels*, DVD, directed by Brad Silberling (Warner Home Video, 1998).
2. Rick Wade, “Confident Belief,” Probe Ministries, 2001, [www.probe.org/confident-belief/](http://www.probe.org/confident-belief/).
3. Roger Nicole, “The Biblical Concept of Truth,” in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 287.
4. Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: A History and Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 165-66.

5. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed, s.v., "true."
6. John V. Dahms, "The Nature of Truth," *JETS* 28/4 (December, 1985), 455-465. This is parallel to Carnell's triad of ontological truth, propositional truth, and truth as personal rectitude. See Edward John Carnell, *Christian Commitment: An Apologetic* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), 14-17.
7. Nicole, 288. I am indebted to Nicole's and Thiselton's (cf. note 8 below) studies for much of what follows.
8. Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); s.v. "Truth" by A. C. Thiselton, III.877, quoting Alfred Jepsen, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, I:313.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 5, *God Who Stands and Stays, Part One* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 336.
13. Jean Baudrillard, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: 2000), 169.
14. See Groothuis, 170.
15. Dorothy Sayers, *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1969), 4; quoted in Groothuis, 170.
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.

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## 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.”*

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*“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.’”<sup>[3]</sup> 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.”<sup>[4]</sup> 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, fatefully 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'être*. 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) entreating anyone travelling to Greece to take it there, [\[30\]](#) which may ironically imply that the barbarians had something to teach the world's greatest philosophers. Likelier, Arnom, who put himself under the tutelage of the Fox, meant to dedicate the Queen's life saga to a greater civilization. Is this a symbolic merging and maturing of the two schools of thought and faith? A reference to Arnom as "priest of Aphrodite," likely indicates his fuller "Greekification." Whether this change was for ill, good or neutral is hard to say. Perhaps the former priest of the crude barbarian goddess Ungit was effectively sending a message, as if to preach: "To those in Greece, supreme land of learning and reason, place of the gods of the philosophers, we commend you this account of a Being beyond description who revealed our Queen's aching fallenness, journey into redemption, and glorified revelation as a goddess in her own right." This writer's weak grasp of Greek mythology and theology notwithstanding, it seems clear Lewis offers much resolution of reason and religion, of the contemplative and the Enjoyed, however incomplete it must naturally be.

[1] C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, (San Diego and New York: A Harvest Book / Harcourt, 1956), 302-303.

[2] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, (San Diego and New York: A Harvest Book / Harcourt, 1960), 117.

[3] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 8.

[5] *Ibid.*, 10.

[6] *Ibid.*, 14.

[7] *Ibid.*, 31

[8] *Ibid.*, 22.

[9] *Ibid.*, 17-18.

[10] *Ibid.*, 15,54.

[11] *Ibid.*, 14.

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

[13] *Ibid.*, 293-294.

[14] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940), 14-15.

[15] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 301.

[16] *Ibid.*, 33.

[17] *Ibid.*, 49.

[18] *Ibid.*, 268.

[19] Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 13.

[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.

[28] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 2 (“Affection”).

[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.

[30] Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 308-309.

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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.”[\[1\]](#) 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.'" [\[2\]](#)

Richard Dawkins, in his book *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." [\[3\]](#) 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?[{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.[{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.

## 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 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 *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 led 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.<sup>{12}</sup> 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."<sup>{13}</sup> 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

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 23-4.

2. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004), 72, quoted in Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 113.

3. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 198.

4. Antony Flew, *There is a God* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 91.

5. Ibid., 89. For more on this, see Gene Herr, “[Case for a Creator](#),” [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).

6. Dr. Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (Free Press, 2006), 3.

7. Gregory Benford, “Leaping the Abyss: Stephen Hawking on

Black Holes, Unified Field Theory and Marilyn Monroe," *Reason* 4.02 (April 2002): 29 quoted in Flew, *There is a God*, 97.

8. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 51.

9. *Ibid.*, 46-50.

10. See Patrick Zukeran, "[The Lives of Muhammad and Jesus](#)," at [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).

11. Amy Orr-Ewing, *Is Believing in God Irrational?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 208.

12. Alister McGrath and Joanna McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 60.

13. See Patrick Zukeran, "[The Origin of Man's Religions](#)," [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).

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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 “ascendency” 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!

[www.probe.org/machinehead-from-1984-to-the-brave-new-world-order-and-beyond/](http://www.probe.org/machinehead-from-1984-to-the-brave-new-world-order-and-beyond/)

# 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.

[www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/](http://www.probe.org/law-and-grace-combating-the-american-heresy-of-pelagianism/)

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/](http://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![\[1\]](#) 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.”[{2}](#)

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 programming, 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.”[{3}](#)

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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?”<sup>{6}</sup> 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

1. George Orwell, 1984 [{New York: HBJ, Inc., 1949}](#), 17)
2. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: The Modern Library, 1932), 285.
3. Ibid, 1.
4. Lawrence J. Terlizze, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 104-105).
5. H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (New York: Bantam, 1982 [1895]).
6. T.S. Eliot quoted in Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991, 5).

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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*.[\[1\]](#) 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[\[2\]](#) 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,[{3}](#) 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[{4}](#) 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<sup>{5}</sup> 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<sup>{6}</sup> 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<sup>{7}</sup> 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,<sup>{8}</sup> 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<sup>[9]</sup> 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<sup>{10}</sup> 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<sup>{11}</sup> 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<sup>{12}</sup> 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<sup>{13}</sup> 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

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## **Crimping Consciences: Texas City Railroads Pro-Gay Ordinance**

*Byron Barlowe blogs about the his city's Anti-Discrimination ordinance intended to give full recognition to the LGBT community at the expense of those who disagree.*

### **New Anti-Discrimination Policy Approved**

According to the [Dallas Morning News Plano Blog](#), "In a split vote Monday, the Plano City Council passed the controversial Equal Rights Policy [ERP] over the objections of many residents in the standing-room-only crowd.

The amendment to the city's 1989 anti-discrimination policy extends protections from housing, employment and public accommodation discrimination to include sexual orientation, gender identity and other categories" like veterans. While no one objected to the inclusion of veterans, an overwhelming number of surprised and very lately aware (as in, the day of) citizens voiced strong opposition. These objections, while

noted, seemed to make little to no difference to the city council and certainly to Mayor Harry LaRosiliere, who was so eager to vote for the statute that he went out of order during proceedings.

As a Plano resident who publicly urged the council to vote “No” on the measure, I offer some reflections on the issue—both local and larger—from a biblically informed worldview.

## **Good Intentions: Trying to Legislate Values *Directly***

Rather than seeking to legislate merely out of a set of values—an unavoidable reality—the Plano City Council clearly tried to impose a set of values directly onto the public by adopting this more expansive anti-discrimination ordinance. Such legislative overreach has become part and parcel of an increasingly politically correct polity known as the United States of America. Plano is now more PC. While this kind of ordinance is not only inadvisable because it cannot hope to work well, it also steps beyond the scope of a proper role of government.

IT CANNOT WORK BECAUSE . . .

We often hear the phrase “You can’t legislate morality.” Well, yes and no. While the very nature of human law at its root is a delineation of and codification of right vis a vis wrong—that is, strictures or incentives administered by the state as a morally informed code of conduct—it is also true that government cannot successfully impose morality, per se, onto the consciences of their citizens.

Yet, that is precisely what such ordinances as Plano’s ERP seeks to do. Plano’s “out” regarding the problem of conscientious objection? City Attorney Paige Mims assures us that if anyone outside of the many exempted statuses has a moral or religious objection, they can go through a waiver

process. This is, on its face, an undue imposition on businesspeople who don't fall under exempted categories like education, non-profit or religious. Recent legal precedent (see Hobby Lobby case) makes clear that religious businesses do not somehow lay down their rights of conscience when they go into business.

#### ROLE OF GOVERNMENT. . .

When government entities try to arbitrate motives, for example hate crimes laws that purport to regulate actions based on the attitudinal intent of the actor, it steps into a sphere where it does not, indeed it cannot, belong. In other words, it takes on a godlike sovereignty to righteously discern between this and that intention. Can't be done. Not righteously. Not fairly.

People—including city legal departments and judges—are fallible humans who lack the innate ability to administer justice based primarily or solely on someone's internal motivation. "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out" (Proverbs 20:5). Drawing out the "purposes" of a man's or woman's heart is certainly not a governmental role. But this is what it takes to know motives, a role only God claims full access to, and a role traditionally reserved for clergy, other spiritual advisers and psychologists.

Here is a pithy bunch of [biblical worldview teaching on the role of government](#).

Biblically, the proper role of government is founded in limits primarily written in Romans 13. As I understand it, a biblical worldview on government's role is limited to: fighting wars, passing and enforcing laws concerning public human interactions and that's about it. Anything else falls under the jurisdiction of religious and social institutions. Government: stay out!

**I'm not arguing for such a state of affairs as an absolute in the real world**, but as a plumb line to measure when government has stepped over its proper boundaries. In the case of Plano's ERP government has overstepped.

## **Progressivism on Parade**

The subtext of public deliberations on Plano's ERP was plainly a progressive agenda. Why else would a city seek to get "ahead of the curve" on a social issue such as gender bias or sexual identity discrimination or whatever the euphemism is today? (Refer above to the value of limited role of government, which was expressed repeatedly to the council by citizens of Plano.) The council, challenged that there are no known cases of such discrimination, seemed to shrug dismissively and invoke the need to "get ahead of" the issue.

"The issue of equality is a basic human rights issue and the choice for some to focus on a person's sexuality is conflating the issue," said the Mayor. Conflating what with what? Either the mayor misunderstands the term "conflating" (making things the same) or he's basically accusing objectors of the very thing that has been foisted upon them—namely, making one's sexual choices (not their true sexuality) the determiner of human rights. This is like watching someone start a fight over a piece of land and then accusing the one attacked of starting that same fight over that very piece of land!

Questioning the need for the statute was otherwise met with a not-so-veiled sense of accusation, an implication of inherent bias on the part of the objectors, despite an overall congenial atmosphere. So, if I question the veracity of the claim to need such a policy or ask for reasonable cause, I am automatically anti-gay? That's patently false and unfair. Yet that was the sense of things in a politically correct undercurrent that is the zeitgeist of our day.

## Worldview War

This is the serious game begun back in the 1970s by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen who spelled out the propaganda project of the gay lobby in a book titled [\*After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear & Hatred of Gays in the 90s\*](#). Now that their jamming (name-calling, guilt by association and other tactics) have worked so well, only an implicit inference need be made at such meetings as Monday night's. It has a chilling—no—a virtual shutdown effect.

Yet, many citizens displayed aplomb when speaking on the Constitution and related matters. Businesspeople appealed to the unfairness of having to seek redress through a voucher system. One person well said in response: “The Constitution is my waiver.” First Amendment (or any other) rights do not require special permission. It's government's role merely to ensure them, which Plano may think it's doing by elevating ever more special interests to protected status. That is an upside-down approach that's illegitimate no matter how much case law exists or how many other cities and companies enact similar policies.

## The “We’re Just Following” Fallacy

An admittedly very arguable point I'd like to add: Mayor LaRosiliere and City Attorney Mims claimed that other major cities in Texas have such statutes on the books. Hence we are not, as implicated, “out front” taking legal risks, but rather are following others' lead. This seems disingenuous.

Are we “out in front” of the issue or are we, as strongly emphasized by the Mayor, simply one in a fairly long line of municipalities trying to codify fair treatment to people of all lifestyles and segments? One could make the case that Plano is in the vanguard overall but not first in implementation. However, that is unsatisfactory to many. You can't ultimately have it both ways: either you're progressive

on social issues (which does not truly reflect Plano well) or you're just falling in line with current legal trends.

## **The “Gay Gene” at the Bottom of the Debate**

One thing is sure: *increased expansion of rights and privileges to previously unaddressed parties is the trend in our culture—and lots of it has to do with sexuality in a newly politicized way.* But we thought government was supposed to get out of our bedrooms?

Any claim to that distinction has been lost with the adoption of the near-universal belief in what amounts to a “[gay gene](#)”—that a person inherently possesses a sexual identity that may indeed be homosexual or of other varieties. This, over and against a mere proclivity or attraction to the same sex, which leaves room for choice, which is an ethical issue. Remove choice regarding homosexuality, you remove any basis of objection. Remove objection, you can run roughshod over any cultural restraints on the free and damaging expression of sexuality outside the bounds of its Inventor, God. Remove those restrictions, celebrate the lifestyle, then codify and impugn those who disagree, and the After the Ball agenda is a complete success.

Monday night's meeting was an incremental victory toward this end, whether or not players on the city council or either side of the issue realized it. Regarding objectors' motives, it's one thing to care for individuals whose sexual identity is in question or those who act out a gay lifestyle and it's another kind of thing entirely to exercise one's rights to oppose codification of these choices and lifestyles. I and many of my friends there that night were doing one while we practice the other in private situations, too.

There is no cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy here—one can do both public square advocacy of conservative values and also

outreach to individuals who struggle in a certain area of sin—namely other-than-heterosexual-wed sex. True Christlike love does not affirm that which the Bible condemns, but shows grace nonetheless.

## **There is a Precedent for Unintended Consequences and Abuse**

Plano's ERP sets up the same oppression of religious objectors that has been seen already across the U.S. with cake bakers, wedding venue owners and others who—for reasons of conscience—refuse to do business with certain parties in select situations like gays getting married. Yes, exemptions were written into Plano's ordinance, but does anyone seriously believe these will stand up under judicial scrutiny in this day and age? The erosion of rights continues—and saying so, again, is not to be confused with [intolerance](#).

This brand of identity politics is rooted in the cultural adoption of the doctrine of a gay gene ("God or nature made me this way!"), which is at a worldview level, where most objectors to the statute were coming from. We object to the underlying presupposition that homosexuality is not utterly tied up with choice, which is so fundamental to opposition to the gay rights issue. (I almost come off as a throwback rube for even bringing it up in today's enlightened culture—which furthers my point!)

## **The Condescension that Falsely Pits Feelings vs. Facts**

Monday night's proceedings—at least from the point of view of the city council—were saturated with what has been called the Sacred / Secular Split. On this view, there are basically two levels of discourse: an area of public life informed largely by science but also by enlightened social values (invariably liberal / progressive / non-traditional ones) balanced

unevenly by a lesser valued, private world of emotional / psychological / religious sentiments.

The former—where real knowledge resides—should supposedly be the domain of public policy. The latter—again, a private set of often closely held feelings and values that should have no sway in the public arena yet the existence of which are somewhat guarded by government and other institutions—are to be tolerated as inevitable but will hopefully catch up with social contracts like those being forged by the gay lobby and societal institutions across the waterfront. The notion is: “You have a right to your private opinion. Just don’t bring it into the public square.”

This attitude, this taken-for-granted starting place was most evident in closing remarks made by several city council members—all of whom happened to vote for the policy. One council member waxed eloquent on his world travels, noting that the most advanced societies he’d run across made it a point never to discriminate. (I don’t know where he’s been, but perhaps his hotel’s staff might beg to differ—just guessing.)

More poignantly, he and another council member who said that her Christian faith informed her “yes” vote, was only one more who joined a chorus of comments like:

“There were lots of strong feelings on the topic of discussion tonight” and

“This is a very emotional issue for many. . . .”

The plain inference was that objections were raised out of the private, sacred area of life, laden with “emotion” and “feelings” while effective debate occurred on the level of law, fact and agreed-upon societal norms (at least the evolving kind that our “City of Excellence” wants to be known for).

Pronouncements by a clergy woman (Disciples of Christ) who serves as an officer of a Plano Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender association, the mayor and at least one more gay advocate that the passage of the ERP was just “the right thing to do” obviously paints the vast majority of citizens as those who want to do the wrong thing. According to Mayor LaRosiliere, “Providing equal rights to everyone is the right thing to do.” Rights to what? Rights in displacement of whose rights? The task in a pluralistic society is to find that fairest middle ground—and that failed Monday night.

Apparently bigotry, at least ignorance, was the only thing standing in the way of Plano’s ERP. Thank you for the condescension. Which leads to my final point: the race card was deftly played by none other than Mayor LaRosiliere where it has no place. And the Mayor did precisely what he accused others of of doing, that is . . .

## . . . **Conflating Race & Sexual Lifestyle**

Plano’s Mayor ended deliberations (or nearly did) with [a speech](#) on the equivalency of historical human rights movements to the current push for special privileges for sexual identities and lifestyles. His well-written story arc was centered on the question, “Why are we doing this now?” In a series of juxtaposed historical references, he posed the question he deemed was being needlessly asked about Plano’s Equal Rights Protection ordinance: **Why pass this now if there is no case on record of any discrimination?** In the case of the infamous Dredd-Scott Supreme Court decision that ruled blacks were 3/5 of a person one might ask, he said, “Why are we doing this now?”

“If we spoke in 1919,” LaRosiliere continued, “to allow women to vote, the question would be, ‘Why are you oppressing me and making me subject to this now.’” He went on to paint discrimination against the Irish in early 19th Century New York and segregation in the South in the 20th Century as

morally equivalent instances comparable to the current situation—ostensibly oppression of gay, lesbian and transgender citizens.

Very cleverly devised rhetorical device, that. But it **presupposes a moral equivalency that a black man sitting beside me rejected outright.** This gentleman from Nigeria was so confused by the proceedings and the Mayor's speech capping them off that he was convinced the entire issue at hand was racism! When I asked him this question, he unequivocally answered "No!": "Do you think that homosexual identity is the same kind of thing as you being black or being from Nigeria?"

"No!"

And rightly, **my new African friend—who is a Christian—was bothered by the conflation of the two and the use of such rhetoric to elevate a class of people based on their sinful behavior and identity to it as the basis to extend so-called human rights. We all have the right to fair treatment as humans made in God's image. We do not have a right to socially engineer law to force the compromise of conscience that is being carried out by Plano's new ordinance.**

As I pleaded with the council not to allow, we will surely read about this case going to court, being found unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful and costing this taxpayer and all others unnecessarily.

Ideas, worldviews, do indeed have consequences.