

“Clashing Civilizations, Culture Wars, and the Academy:
The Illuminating Role of ‘Worldview’”

Human history has been characterized perennially by intense disagreements over fundamental matters of consequence. Ardent differences about how people ought to think and act in regard to life-determining issues are a chief trait of the human condition. Our age is certainly no exception.

The noted Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington¹ in his much-debated article and book on “The Clash of Civilizations” argued that world politics was entering a new phase after the end of the Cold War, and that tensions between civilizations as the highest cultural groupings of people — especially the West, the Islamic world, and the Confucian East — would dominate the global scene.² That there is more than a grain of truth in Huntington’s proposal seems self-evident today.

Current conflicts, however, are not relegated to the global scale by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, Huntington’s own former student James Kurth responded critically to his teacher’s thesis with an article titled “The Real Clash” in the journal *The National Interest*.³ In this essay, Kurth argued that the clash that is coming, or that is in fact already present, is not so much *extramural* among the world’s great civilizations as it *intramural* within the civilization of the

¹ Huntington is the Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor at Harvard University where he is also the director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies and the chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. He was the director of security planning for the National Security Council in the Carter administration, the founder and co-editor of the journal *Foreign Policy*, and the president of the American Political Science Association.

² Samuel P. Huntington, “Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993). See also his book *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, A Touchstone Book, 1996).

³ James Kurth, “The Real Clash,” *The National Interest* 3 (Fall 1994), pp. 3-15. That Kurth so responded to Huntington is mentioned in and taken from Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis*, foreword John J. Dilulio, Jr., with a new afterword by the author (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2001), p. 3.

West, particularly between the adherents of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the advocates of diversified secular outlooks. Books with titles like *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* by James Davison Hunter, *Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* by Thomas Sowell, and *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion and Morality in Crisis* by Robert P. George seem to confirm Kurth's hypothesis.⁴ An internal cultural conflict of monumental significance is perhaps the defining trait of the West at this crucial moment in history. These conflicts are over such issues as drug laws, tax policies, military operations, military spending, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, physician assisted suicide, heterosexuality, homosexuality, same-sex marriage, family relations, no fault divorce, church/state relations, pornography, stem cell research, human cloning and so on.

A real cultural clash, then, within the West? Indeed! A clash of civilizations on a global scale? Most certainly, as September 11 and other radical Islamic terrorist attacks around the world indicate clearly. The choice of perspectives is not either Huntington with his "clash of civilizations" thesis, or Kurth with his "real clash" in the West proposal. Rather both are real — indeed, very real.

But what is their ultimate source? Why the continuous *agon* between civilizations, cultures, nations, cities, communities, families, and individuals? Since human beings cannot function without a governing frame of reference, more and more people are beginning to realize that the conflicts we are experiencing today at every level are actually conflicts between underlying worldviews.⁵ This certainly includes the clashes among scholars in the various disciplines at the university. Thus, what I want to propose is that the notion of worldview, in German, *Weltanschauung*, can help elucidate the character of

⁴ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Thomas Sowell, *Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2001).

⁵ James H. Olthius, "On Worldviews," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, ed. Paul Marshall, et. al., Christian Studies Today (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1989), p. 26.

these global and local controversies, including the conditions in the academy today. Worldviews, I propose, are the silent, yet motive forces that shape the conflicted dynamics of human life. Let's begin, therefore, by taking a brief look at the history of this term.

The Word-History of *Weltanschauung*

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant coined the term *Weltanschauung* or worldview in his book *Critique of Judgment*, published in 1790. For Kant, the word, which appeared only one time in his extensive writings, meant something like an intuition of the world given through sense perception. The word was of minor significance to Kant. Yet his Copernican Revolution in philosophy, with its emphasis on the knowing and willing self as the cognitive and moral center of the world, created the conceptual space for the notion of worldview to flourish.

And flourish it did in German idealism and romanticism, especially through thinkers like Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Goethe and others. By the early part of the nineteenth century, its definition as a basic outlook on life had become more or less fixed, and it soon became a popular companion word used along side philosophy. It was a virtually indispensable term in many disciplines, and in the vocabulary of educated Germans.

As the nineteenth century progressed, writers in other European languages adopted *Weltanschauung* as either a loan or copy word. It wasn't long before it made its way across the English channel and the Atlantic Ocean, taking up residence in the Anglo-American context, and that within about 70 years of its coinage.

Furthermore, various Dutch, Scottish, and American theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and James Orr, and eventually Carl F. H. Henry and Francis Schaeffer picked up on this common concept as a way of explaining Christianity as a comprehensive, holistic philosophy of life. Each made use of it in their writings, frequently using the expressions "Christian and/or biblical world and life view." Ever since, worldview has had a rather distinguished career in the Church. This is the case not only among Protestants, but also in Orthodox and Catholic

circles, and among those of various theological persuasions, both liberal and conservative.

Thus in the last two-hundred or so years since its inception, *Weltanschauung* or worldview has become a central conception in Western intellectual and ecclesiastical discourse. As a term that keenly expressed the aspiration to apprehend the nature of the universe, it struck a vital chord of human interest. *Weltanschauung* was apparently “an idea whose time had come.”⁶

But what exactly does this term mean? How should worldview be defined?

Definitions of Worldview

If we scour the philosophic history of worldview, we find that it was used in a variety of ways among leading thinkers. For example, G. W. F. Hegel understood defined it as different and recurrent views of life, forms of consciousness, and world outlooks. Søren Kierkegaard, who preferred the term lifeview, understood it to express a particular understanding of the meaning of life and its purpose. Wilhelm Dilthey spoke about worldviews as explications of the enigmas of life, answers to the questions that comprise the riddle of the universe. Friedrich Nietzsche said that worldviews were nothing but reifications, fictive ways of seeing and knowing things from a particular perspective. Edmund Husserl argued that a worldview was a value system, an acquired wisdom, an infused consciousness, leading to an ideal humanity. Martin Heidegger said that worldviews were interpretations of natural things, a view or sense of life that shapes human affairs. For Ludwig Wittgenstein, it was a fusion of a form of life and a language game that he preferred to call a world picture. For postmodernists, they are, a la Nietzsche, reified metanarratives that need to be deconstructed.

⁶ Albert M. Wolters, “‘Weltanschauung’ in the History of Ideas: Preliminary Notes,” unpublished manuscript, no date, p. 4.

Several Christian thinkers have offered their take on this concept as well. James Orr, for example, defined a worldview as the whole manner of conceiving of the world and humanity's place in it, the widest possible view which the mind can take of things. G. K. Chesterton very simply called a worldview a conception of the universe. Abraham Kuyper referred to a worldview as a life-system, rooted in a fundamental principle from which was derived a whole complex of ruling ideas and conceptions about reality. Francis Schaeffer suggested that it was a perspective on life, a whole system of thought that answers the questions presented by the reality of existence. James Sire has stated that a worldview is a set of presuppositions held consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently, about the basic make up of reality.

In my own book, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, I have argued that a worldview is a vision of life rooted in and expressed through the human heart. Given the biblical teaching about the heart as the core of the person and the seat of the intellect, affections, will, and spirituality, it seems to me that life proceeds "cardioptically," out of a vision of the heart. The heart of the matter of worldview, I suggest, is that worldview is a matter of the human heart with its deeply embedded ideas, sensibilities, choices, and objects of worship.⁷

Now the overwhelming personal and public power of such a reasonably well-organized *Weltanschauung* is hard to exaggerate. For indeed a worldview is the presuppositional basis of life — the premises from which arguments are made, the source from which talk flows, the foundation upon which action is based. From it emerge the issues of life, to borrow a line from the book of Proverbs. A worldview, as is often said, makes a world of difference.

A World[view] of Difference

As an example of worldview influence, consider the stories of two well-known, wheelchair-bound quadriplegics who hold opposing positions on the issue of stem cell research.

⁷ All of these definitions of worldview can be found in David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), passim.

At the age of 17, a young girl named Joni Eareckson, now Joni Eareckson Tada, jumped into shallow water in Chesapeake Bay during a boating excursion, and broke her neck. Since that time has been confined to a wheel chair, unable to use her hands or feet, requiring daily assistance to bathe, dress, and take care of the daily routines of life.

In May 1995, Hollywood actor Christopher Reeve, a.k.a. Superman, was thrown headfirst from a horse in a riding accident, and suffered a broken neck. Ever since, he has been paralyzed from the shoulders down, confined to a wheelchair, and dependent upon a ventilator for nearly every breath he takes.

Joni Eareckson Tada and Christopher Reeve find themselves in very similar situations. But they have two very different positions about the therapeutic use of various bio-technologies like stem cell research that could be used to cure various diseases and maladies, including spinal cord injuries like they both have suffered.

Tada, however, opposes such research, stating "If we violate a human embryo today, tomorrow we will become callous about the fetus, then the infant, and then people with physical defects...let's influence society with reasoned judgment, strength of character, and a commitment to improve our culture, not diminish it."⁸ Reeve, on the other hand, supports such measures, arguing "We must pursue research on embryonic stem cells. With the life expectancy of average Americans heading as high as 75 to 80 years, it is our responsibility to do everything possible to protect the quality of life of the present and future generations. A critical factor will be what we do with human embryonic stem cells. ... no obstacle should stand in the way of responsible investigation of their possibilities."⁹

⁸ "A Short Philosophical Hop, Skip, and Jump: The Threat of Embryonic Research," BreakPoint with Charles Colson, February 27, 2003. Accessed 9/23/03 at http://www.pfm.org/Content/ContentGroups/BreakPoint/BreakPoint_Commentaries/20031/February_2003/èA_Short_Philosophical_Hop_Skip_and_Jumpí.htm

⁹ Christopher Reeve, "Use the Body's "Repair Kit," *TIME Magazine* 155 (May 1, 2000). Available online: <http://www.fortunecity.com/lavender/greatsleep/1023/editorial-timemag-050100.html> (Accessed September 25, 2003).

Why do they have and promote such widely different outlooks on these matters? I would submit that the reason is because of the basic differences in their underlying worldviews. Reeve is a secularist; Tada a Christian theist. Their deepest convictions about the nature of reality itself generate these diverse ethical opinions, illustrating quite vividly the difference that worldviews make in approaching not only bioethical matters, but every area and issue in human life.

This just seems to be the way life is. More importantly, this just seems to be the way people are. That is, human nature is such that people cannot help but have a *Weltanschauung* as a guide to life, however inchoate or concrete it might be. This necessity of a fundamental framework of principles and values, which seems as basic as food and sex,¹⁰ is certainly supported by a biblical anthropology. It also accords rather well with other accounts of human nature that share no necessary sympathy with the Christian tradition.

Human Nature and Worldview

I believe that the Scriptures teach that human beings are inescapably religious beings. On biblical grounds, it is not hard to fathom why people possess this essential religious disposition and are naturally inclined toward orienting their lives around some ultimate concern. They are the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 26-27), and even after their defacement due to sin, they still seem to carry about in their consciousness the memory of their essential religious constitution. This is probably the basis for John Calvin's argument that God has not only imparted an "awareness of divinity" (*Divinitatis sensum*) but also implanted the "seed of religion" (*semen religionis*) in the human heart.¹¹ Or as Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann has said, "*Homo sapiens*," "*homo faber*," . . . yes, but, first of all "*homo adorans*."¹² What he means by this

¹⁰ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 4.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 43-44 (§1. 3. 1).

¹² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1963), 15.

is that people are thinkers and makers to be sure, but before they are these things or anything else, they are primarily worshippers whose essential nature is to adore. In fact, they then do all of their thinking and all of their making in the light of what they adore and worship.

Thus, there are no truly *non*-religious or *un*-believing people, personal protestations to the contrary notwithstanding. The human heart, given its divine design, abhors a vacuum just as nature does. Its emptiness must be filled, its longings satisfied, its questions answered, its restlessness calmed. It is in a constant search for some semblance of truth, goodness, beauty, completion and contentment.

The question, therefore, is not whether someone is religious or a believer, but rather how and in what? In theologian Langdon Gilkey's words,

Whether he wishes it or not, man as a free creature must pattern his life according to some chosen ultimate end, must center his life on some chosen ultimate loyalty, and must commit his security to some trusted power. Man is thus essentially, not accidentally, religious, because his basic structure, as dependent and yet free, inevitably roots his life in something ultimate.¹³

How this fundamental religious instinct is directed is the most important fact about a man or a woman individually, and collectively about a culture. The options at the end of the day are only twofold: either the human heart will worship God or an idol, the Creator or some aspect of the creation, *and will cultivate a perspective on life, that is, a worldview, that flows out of the power and illumination of either commitment*. The god of one's heart determines the light and direction of one's life. As Henry Zylstra puts it, "No man is religiously neutral in his knowledge of and his appropriation of reality."¹⁴ Worldviews, on this account, are function of what one worships.

¹³ Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth*, Christian Faith Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 193.

¹⁴ Henry Zylstra, *Testament of Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), pp. 145-46.

Now an interesting book from Oxford University Press that appeared in January of this year (2003) is supportive of this understanding of human nature, though not from a religious point of view. Titled *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*, author Christian Smith suggests that human beings have a peculiar set of capacities and proclivities that distinguishes them significantly from other animals on this planet. Despite the vast differences in humanity between cultures and across history, no matter how differently people narrate their lives and histories, there remains an underlying structure of human personhood that helps to order human culture, history, and narration. Smith thus argues that humans are animals with an inescapable moral and spiritual dimension. They cannot avoid a fundamental moral orientation in life. Similarly, humans cannot escape living by one or another sacred narrative. Along the way, Smith severely critiques naturalistic theories of humanity, asserting that they badly misunderstand the character of the human animal. By contrast, this work argues that all people are at bottom believers whose lives, actions, and institutions are constituted, motivated, and governed by narrative traditions and moral orders on which they inescapably depend.¹⁵

From these theological and sociological insights, then, we may infer that adopting an overriding perspective on life is an inescapable property of human beings as worshipping, moral, believing creatures. The differences in the content of these essentially sacred outlooks are what ultimately account for the bloody clashes of civilizations and the fierce culture wars that have characterized human history from time immemorial up to our own day.

Knowledge is Perspectival

There is, therefore, no view from nowhere! All things are known from somewhere!¹⁶ Everyone sees things aslant. Knowledge is always perspectival.

¹⁵ This description of the contents of this book were taken from the publishers notes online at: <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/booksearch/isbnInquiry.asp?userid=65AW4KBL0H&sourceid=00393694018763635809&bfdate=09%2D25%2D2003+14%3A46%3A39&isbn=0195162021&itm=1> (Accessed September 25, 2003).

¹⁶ Notwithstanding the view of Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

An image from C. S. Lewis may be helpful here. As he says in his brief but masterful essay “Meditation in a Tool Shed,” it is one thing to stand in the dark and look *at* a beam of bright sunlight that breaks into the darkness from a crack in the roof. It is another thing entirely to stand *in* the beam of light and see the darkness and other things by it. As he puts it, “Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.”¹⁷ In the tool shed, one can never know about the darkness except from the vantage point of the light. Contrariwise, one can never know about the light except from the vantage point of the darkness. As Lewis points out, “. . . you can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another.”¹⁸ What we perceive is always from the inside of one experience or another. There is no neutral ground. As Lewis says elsewhere, “For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing; it also depends on what sort of person you are.”¹⁹ This tool shed metaphor, I think, is an apt description of the non-negotiable role of a worldview perspective as an inside experience from which all things are viewed and understood.

Lewis’s reflections about the influence of inside experiences are, in fact, quite similar to a central postmodern observation about the human condition, and to the assertions of contemporary philosophers of science.

Many postmodern thinkers, after all, are claiming that all discourse — whether academic or popular — is culturally situated and conditioned by a variety of influential factors, especially one’s sex, race, and class. There are, in other words, no immaculate perceptions.

Corroboratively, the world-class chemist turned philosopher of science Michael Polanyi in his Gifford Lectures published as the book *Personal Knowledge* has assessed the modern ideal of objective, scientific detachment. In

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 212.

¹⁸ Lewis, “Meditations,” 215.

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Macmillan, Collier Books, 1955, 1970), p. 125.

his estimation, this critical epistemic model “falsifies our whole outlook far beyond the domain of science.”²⁰ Instead, all people see the world from a vantage point that resides at the core of their beings. To quote him directly, “For, as human beings, we must inevitably see the universe from a center lying within ourselves and speak about it in terms of a human language shaped by the exigencies of human intercourse. Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity.”²¹ For Polanyi, all knowledge was personal knowledge, and that fact must not be forgotten for the sake of science, and as a component of a truly human life.

Under Polanyi’s influence, Thomas Kuhn in his bombshell of a book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,²² argued that positivist science was oblivious to its own true character in its ahistorical orientation and in the negation of its inescapable psycho-social dimensions. Generating what one commentator called a “Weltanschauung Revolution,”²³ Kuhn highlighted how the natural scientific enterprise transpires in the context and under the dominion of a regnant paradigm which determines just about everything: the choice of research projects, the relevance of data, the content of observations, the acceptance of solutions, as well as the values, standards, and methods of science itself. This newly humanized and historicized version of the philosophy of science is not as neat and clean as the old “spockian” version (a la “Star Trek”), but it is truer to the way scientists as human beings with substantive outlooks on life really are, and how they do their science.

These post-modern, post-critical, and post-positivist notions, then, put three more nails in the coffin containing Rene Descartes’ original quest to obtain

²⁰ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1962), p. vii.

²¹ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 3.

²² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d. enlarged ed., vol. 2, no. 2, *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

²³ Edwin Hung, *The Nature of Science: Problems and Perspectives* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1997), pp 340, 355, 368, 370.

spotless, unaffected, value-free knowledge about the world. The idea that the mind exists as a distinct entity from the body has, of course, profoundly influenced Western culture since Descartes proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am." The goal of this formula, at least in part, became the rallying cry of the Enlightenment: keep the intellect free from subjective pollutants so it could arrive at the truth of things unhindered. Cognitive impartiality was the goal.

Epistemic self-dispossession, however, is impossible. There appears to be no way *a la* Descartes to bracket the mind as the true self and thing which only thinks from the body in which it is grounded, with all of its attendant social, cultural, religious and moral meanings. Even physiologically, the brain/mind cannot operate properly apart from its roots in the biological organism. As neurologist Antonio Damasio has shown in his provocative 1994 book, *Descartes Error*,²⁴ the absence of emotion and feeling can break down rationality. In fact, both are essential to good thinking and decision making. In explaining how emotions and feelings contribute to reason and to adaptive social behavior, Damasio also offers a fresh perspective on what emotions and feelings actually are: a direct sensing of our own body states, a link between the body and its survival-oriented regulations, on the one hand, and consciousness, on the other. Human beings are, indeed, unified, coherent creatures of mind/brain and body. Reason does not and cannot operate in a vacuum. Thinking is always a function of the whole person.

Worldview and the University

What is the upshot of all this for the university? When it comes to clashes among scholars in the various disciplines and to the conflicts over various issues in the culture wars, the fact is, academic neutrality is a myth. Some kind of antecedently embraced faith is always integrated with scholarship, teaching, and learning. The notion of worldview, buttressed by these insights from theology, sociology, postmodernism, philosophy of science, and neurophysiology — helps explain why.

Now I want to be perfectly clear. I am not suggesting that there is no such thing as an objective reality with its own integrity and attendant truth. Or that attaining to such truth is impossible. No, that is not it at all. I heartily believe in truth and in the possibility of knowing it.

What I am saying, however, is that all scientific and scholarly pursuits, despite their alleged objectivity, are affected in significant ways by the scientists' and scholars' underlying worldviews. When it comes to entering the kingdom of knowledge, there is a "particularity of cognitive access."²⁵ Everyone crosses the threshold into the cognitive domain through a specific gate. There is no other alternative available to the human race, scholars included.

In light of this I would like to make two or three final points. The first is this. Since no professor is purely objective, for the sake of truth in advertising, he or she ought to be willing to disclose the particulars of his or her worldview orientation from which he or she is teaching and/or writing. Such a bold confession prompts healthy introspection on the part of each professor and significantly enhances self-knowledge and self-understanding. It also provides impressionable students with an analytic tool to know the deeper source from which the professor's thought is derived in order to make appropriate assessments. In this vein, consider this apt suggestion from theologian William Hordern.

...the cult of objectivity in education can be dangerous. When a teacher prides himself upon objectivity, he hides from himself and others [his students/readers] the frame of reference within which he approaches the facts and by which he selects the facts that seem to be significant. As a result, he gives his findings an aura of finality that they do not deserve. The danger is that the student will accept his teacher's prejudices because they seem to him to be the result of rational thought. This is why I believe that the most truly objective teaching can occur only where the professor honestly confesses the frame of reference to which he is committed. Having done this, he should try to present as sympathetically as possible

²⁴ Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994).

²⁵ I got this phrase from a lecture I heard by Nicholas Wolterstorff at Wheaton College, 1996.

all opposing positions. But because his students know his frame of reference, they can guard against the inevitable bias that will appear.²⁶

As a specific example, notice how Jesuit scholar Xavier Léon-Dufour lays out his worldview cards on the table as he introduces himself in a book on the eucharist.

Readers would be naïve were they to believe that I, as a scientific worker, could eliminate all presuppositions in my reading of the Bible. They would be no less naïve were they to imagine that the scriptures can be read purely in the light of “common sense.” All human beings are conditioned by their environment, their previous history, and their temperament. I myself am a man and not a woman, a monotheist and not a Buddhist, a Christian and not a Jew, a Catholic and not a Protestant, a priest and not a lay person, a Jesuit and not a Dominican. Need I add more?²⁷

Everyone one of these factors, he is claiming, influences his scholarship. His biography, at the heart of which is his worldview, is academically influential. Unfortunately, however, this kind of forthright self-disclosure is a rare commodity in the university today, but is certainly a mark of honesty and maturity, traits that are needed in our pluralistic setting.

Second, in addition to the metaphysical and methodological naturalism that is the dominant worldview in the academy today, there ought to be room for scholarship and teaching that is informed by responsible religious perspectives as well, particularly a Christian *Weltanschauung*.

If codified, naturalism as a worldview or underlying set of working assumptions would consist of these essentials: (1) That the physical cosmos is all there is; God does not exist. (2) That the universe operates uniformly according to natural law in a closed system. (3) That human beings have evolved from the lower primates and that mind and personality are functions of the

²⁶ William Hordern, *The Case for New Reformation Theology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959).

²⁷ Xavier Léon-Dufour, S. J., *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 3-4. For another example of an author who lays out his “point of view” to help orient readers to his agenda, see George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 7.

biological organism. (4) That death is the extinction of the person. (5) That ethics are established exclusively by human beings and are relative. (6) That history is a linear, but purposeless process with an uncertain future. (7) That science is the omniscient epistemology, and its technological offspring are the hope of the survival of the race.²⁸

While some thinkers like John Searle and Quentin Smith assert that naturalism is the only viable worldview alternative for the academy and are campaigning for its political hegemony on campus,²⁹ others like sociologist Robert Bellah are arguing that there must be a recovery of the language of Christianity, not only for the sake of a genuine pluralism, but also for the revitalization of public life that is lost in a wilderness of decaying traditions.³⁰

Now a classic Christian worldview affirms the following distinctives (1) That the infinite, personal Trinitarian God exists and He is the maker of heaven and earth. (2) That the created universe exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system. (3) That human beings are created as God's image, possessing unique faculties, dignity, and worth. (4) That human beings have divinely designed epistemic capacities capable of knowing God and the world with the assistance of natural and special revelation. (5) That sin, which ultimately accounts for the tumultuous human condition, has been atoned by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who reconciles believers to God and renews their humanity through faith. (6) That there is a transcendent moral order to the universe rooted in God's character which holds the human race accountable. (7) That the larger story of history revolves around the themes of creation, fall, and redemption, leading to the final fulfillment of God's purposes on earth.

²⁸ This list roughly follows James W. Sire's discussion of naturalism in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd ed (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), chp. 4. Also, aspects of the following description of Christian Theism comes from the same source, chp. 2.

²⁹ John Searle, *The Rediscovery of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 90-91. Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism," *Philo* 4.

³⁰ Robert Bellah, *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*. Quoted in the Faculty Ministry vision statement of the C. S. Lewis Foundation online at: Available online at: <http://www.cslewis.org/programs/facultyforum/index.html> (Accessed September 27, 2003).

Without dictating uniform perspectives on various issues or hardening into an ideology, this kind of Christian vision consecrates and dignifies intellectual life, investing it with a gravity and significance that is often lost today. It is inherently holistic, since truth itself, rooted in God, is one. Its intrinsic unity critiques contemporary proclivities toward fragmentation and reductionism, and offers a fresh perspective on the coherence of life. Its moral vision rooted in the fixed character of God affords a solid foundation for needed, robust, moral judgments which are often precluded by secularist epistemologies. Its doctrines of creation and incarnation affirm the value of the natural world and the dignity of the human body, thwarting either their exploitation or deification, and affirming the deeper sacramental meaning of both. Its embrace of the divine realm and a spiritual order of existence, along with a doctrine of sin, prevents the human race from unduly exalting itself, and places needed restraints on human scientific, technological, and economic empires.³¹

Obviously, then, naturalism and Christian theism as alternative worldviews are going to make a great difference in how professors pursue their academic tasks. In neither a purely *naked public square* where secularism reigns, nor a *sacred public square* where religious perspectives dominate, but in a *civic public square* of authentic pluralism, there ought to be room for both points of view.

As the leaders of the California-based C. S. Lewis Foundation, inspired by the life and legacy of the noted Oxford and Cambridge professor of medieval and renaissance literature, point out (and I borrow generously from their ideas and language here for the following discussion and agenda), the Christian faith at one time constituted the over-arching paradigm that shaped the intellectual and aesthetic work of countless scholars and artists. The momentum it generated contributed vitally, not only to the formation of the culture at large, but also to the development of the modern university itself. In contrast, all traces of this once vibrant intellectual and imaginative tradition have virtually disappeared from the

³¹ Wilfred M. McClay, "Filling the Hollow Core: Religious Faith and the Postmodern University," in *The New Religious Humanists: A Reader*, ed. and intro. Gregory Wolfe (New York: The Free Press, 1997), p. 235.

academic landscape within the last hundred years or so. Christianity's perspective on thought and life now finds few defenders, let alone dynamic proponents, within the ranks of today's teaching and research faculty. This has important consequences for society at large:

- The university is denied meaningful access to one of the primary intellectual traditions that contributed substantially to its own development.
- The selective definition of "pluralism" currently in vogue tends to promote the expression of all but religiously informed points of view ("ABC" = "Anything But Christianity"), thus compromising the university's claim to serve as a genuine marketplace of ideas.
- The all too easy equation of religion with "indoctrination" and secularism with "education" evidences a marked double standard.
- Under this status quo, students are denied access to an education that adequately prepares them to function effectively within a highly diverse society of substantial religious constituencies.

A very different intellectual ethos governing the mainstream of contemporary higher education - one that affords faculty and students alike the liberty to articulate and defend positions grounded in divergent world views, including those based upon religious premises — ought to be cultivated. Indeed, what would the university be like if it were characterized by open access to both secular and religious forms of thought in its curricular as well as its extra-curricular life? Such a university would:

- Demonstrate a more authentic commitment to academic freedom by actively encouraging the expression of divergent points of view, affording no philosophy - whether secular or faith-based - privileged protection from the rigors of scholarly critique.
- Foster greater dialogue and understanding between disparate worldviews, thereby fulfilling its stated mission to function more truly as a free marketplace of ideas.
- Move beyond the prevailing utilitarian, information-driven, and career-oriented vision of higher education in favor of a perspective that takes seriously the challenge of nurturing an appetite for

wisdom and the search for principles relevant to a truly human life.³²

This, it seems to me, is an agenda worth working towards assiduously.

Conclusion

Now let me conclude. Amidst the clashing of civilizations, the culture wars, and the current intellectual conditions on university campuses, the concept of worldview plays an illuminating role. Beginning with Immanuel Kant, the term has enjoyed a distinguished history, having been used widely in intellectual and ecclesiastic circles. Though it sustains a variety of definitions and nuances, at the end of the day, it conveys a person's deepest conceptions and convictions about the basic make up of reality and the nature of life itself. Worldviews, as Joni Eareckson Tada and Christopher Reeve illustrate, make a world of difference in just about every department of human existence. They also seem to be an inescapable component of human nature as disciplines from theology to neuroscience illustrate. Academically speaking, worldviews demonstrate that knowledge is always perspectival, and that some kind of worldview faith is always going to lie at the foundation of scholarship, teaching, and learning. True intellectual objectivity, therefore, is mythical. Thus in the interests of genuine pluralism and academic freedom, and in light of what a Christian *Weltanschauung* has contributed historically and can offer to the academy today, room ought to be made in addition to naturalism for theistically informed points of view on the university campus which can thereby serve as a template for the rest of society as neither a naked or sacred, but as a genuinely civic public square.

Thank you very much.

³² Taken almost verbatim from the vision statement of the Faculty Ministry of the C. S. Lewis Foundation. Available online at: <http://www.cslewis.org/programs/facultyforum/index.html> (Accessed September 27, 2003).