

Why Worldviews?

Our grandparents and parents lived in the modern age—the 20th century, the age of Science that Walt Disney referred to as the *Carousel of Progress*—the era of automobiles and telephones, radios and television.

Today we live in an even faster-moving, even more technological world.

And more than that, we live in a *post-modern* world, where there seems to be a concerted effort to *de-construct* what many people used to call the truth.

de-construct = "1. to examine (something, such as a work of literature) using the methods of deconstruction; 2. to take apart or examine in order to reveal the basis or composition, often with the intention of exposing biases, flaws, or inconsistencies; 3. to adapt or separate the elements of for use in an ironic or radically new way; 4. DESTROY, DEMOLISH." (*Mirriam-Webster*)

People know a lot today, but how can we tell truth from fiction? And can we process and analyze all the data we receive? Can we truly understand?

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Introduction

People—our relatives and neighbors, seem to disagree about so many things. And, often, they seem to have such strong opinions on subjects I have not thought about, or have not even heard about! How can I—or for that matter, how can anyone—know what to think, or *how* to think (accurately)?



The debacle that is the current situation in Syria

For example, I think of myself as being a certain height, a certain weight, and a certain age. But, *why? What is the **basis** of my ideas?*

basis = "the underlying support or foundation for an idea, argument, or process" (*Bing*)

I have always thought of myself as having been born on a certain date—the date my family always celebrated as my “birthday,” even before I was really old enough to think about it much. We always had a cake, and there usually were gifts. And my parents or older siblings were often there, laughing at amusing stories about other birthdays, years ago. Everyone acknowledged that date as my birthday—there seemed to be a solid **consensus**.

consensus = "a general agreement;" "agreement, harmony, concord, like-mindedness" (*Bing*)

A few years ago, our kids started looking into our family trees, and we discovered that my wife’s grandfather’s birth date is somewhat open to question. We’ve got all kinds of records—government-issued documents, but many of them disagree with each other. We’re not 100% sure when he was born! And to make matters worse, it appears that he actually changed his name somewhere along the way. All of this illustrates the thinking behind this study.

Chapter 1 - What is True? (Epistemology) and the Concept of Ultimate Truth

I have often been involved in the ketchup/mustard controversy that surrounds the eating of hot dogs at our house. You see, most of our five kids are in the ketchup camp, while my wife and I have always come down on the side of mustard (especially with onions or sauerkraut!) But really, what does it matter? What is the big deal? As my stepfather used to say, it's six of one, half a dozen of the other.



Hot Dogs

But think of other, more serious issues, like voting, or family or religious matters.

The stakes are higher, as are people's passions. And the ***consequences*** of our ideas, and our decisions are more serious.

consequence = "a result or effect of an action or condition,"
"importance or relevance." (Bing)

How do we know if we're right?

I suggest that it is—ultimately—a matter of ***authority***, and since each of us is responsible for our own decisions, we each get to decide who to give authority to. And we all do, every day, about all kinds of issues:

authority = "the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience;" "the power to influence others, especially because of one's commanding manner or one's recognized knowledge about something;" "official permission; sanction." (Bing)

Here are examples of examples of things or people whom we tend to grant authority:

- experts
- books/authors
- magazines/newspapers
- movies/TV
- news
- science/scientists
- doctors
- experience
- tradition
- parents
- pastors
- priests
- presidents
- rabbis
- teachers
- society
- consensus
- intuition
- revelation

The question that comes to mind is *why*? How do we know that our authorities are right? And isn't all knowing a matter of *belief* and *trust*?



ThinkingAccuratelyEducation.com
Created in Canva

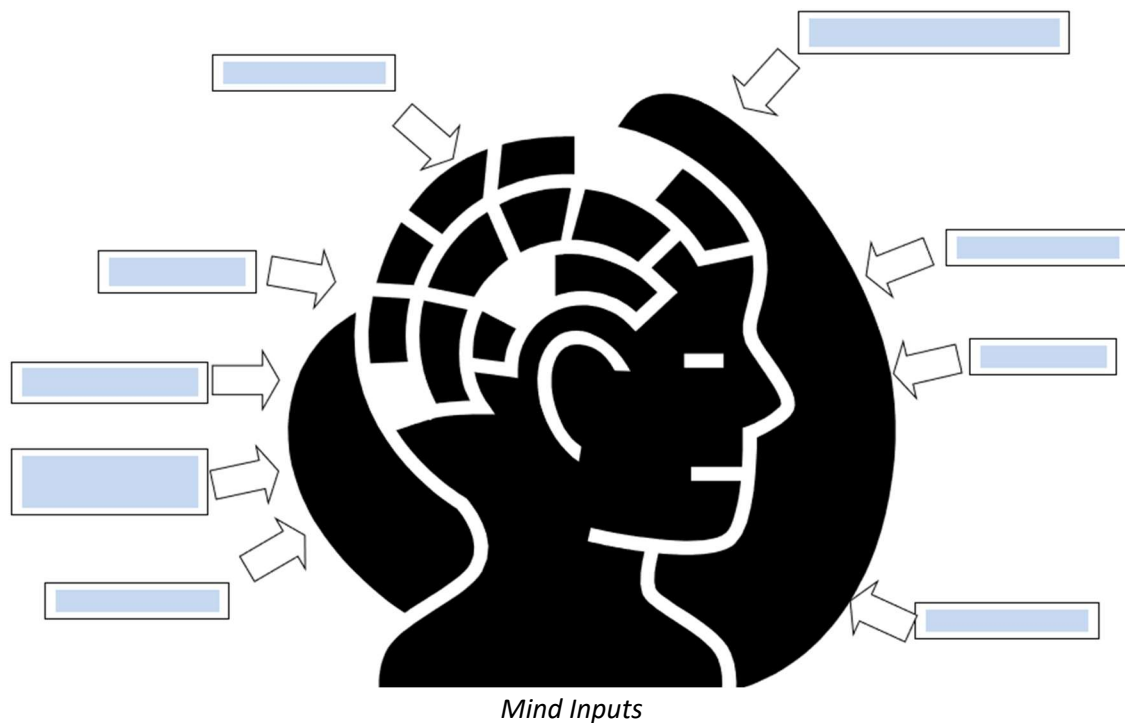
belief = "an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists;" "something one accepts as true or real; a firmly held opinion or conviction," "trust, faith, or confidence in someone or something."
(Bing)

trust = "firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something." (Bing)

What do you believe to be true? Why? What do you base your beliefs on?

Have you might have been granting a bit too much authority to someone who might—possibly—be a tiny bit less reliable that you first thought they were?

How reliable is the basis for your ideas? In this book, I am inviting you to embark on a journey with me as we think about these kinds of things together.



It is often said, “You are what you eat.” Someone once said, “We become what we think about.” And even a Roman Emperor named Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus¹ once said, “Your mind will take the shape of what you frequently hold in thought...”²

Think for a moment of the human mind in terms of a computer system. There are inputs, a processor, and there are outputs; and “garbage in, garbage out” is a common expression.

¹ Britannica.com

² Dailystoic.com

Chapter 2 - What is Real? (Ontology)

Up to this point, we've been talking about knowing.

Another word for this is *epistemology*.

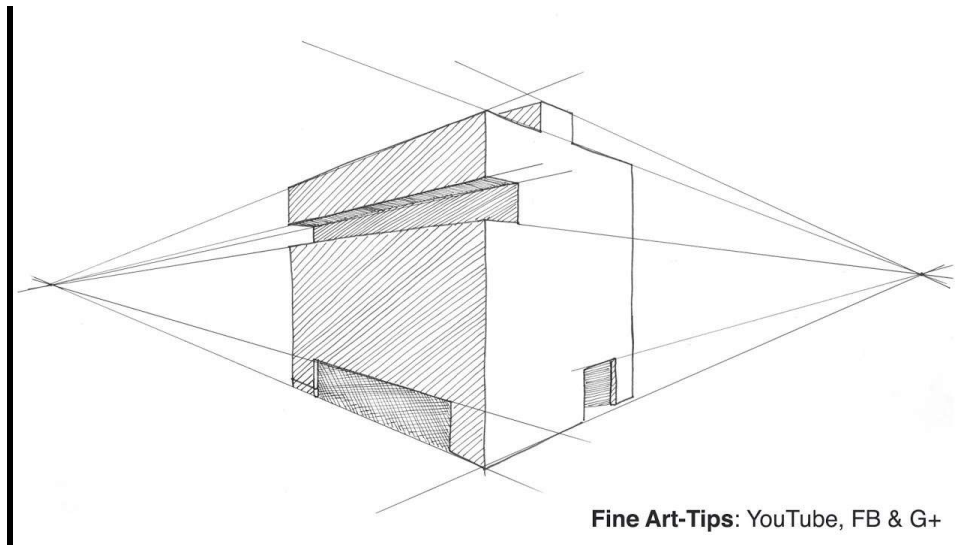
episteme = "knowledge" (Greek)

ology = "the study of" (such as biology, psychology, sociology, etc.)

Your *epistemological position* will lead to your *worldview*.

worldview = "a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world." (Bing)

Everyone has a worldview from which they view the world--and the universe--around them (a perspective).



Fine Art-Tips: YouTube, FB & G+

Perspective

What do you think your perspective—your epistemological position (your worldview) is? And where do you go for ultimate truth?

I suggest that this is the single biggest question you will ever have to answer--and you do!
Everyone has to answer it for themselves.



Big Questions

Want to know another question you're going to have to answer?

What is real?

Chapter 3 – Science

We have introduced a number of options regarding the source of ultimate truth, and we said that where one ends up is really a function of your choice—and your starting place or “jump-off” point.

For example (we said) if you believe that Science is the source of ultimate truth, then your view of Reality must be a form of **materialism** (everything that is “real” is composed of matter and energy) or **naturalism** (Nature is all that is real).

epistemology = “the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.” (*Bing*)

ontology = “the branch of metaphysics dealing with the nature of being.” (*Bing*)

materialism = “the doctrine that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications.” (*Bing*)

naturalism = “the...belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.” (*Bing*)

Your epistemological position is influenced by—and will necessarily determine—your ontological position.

To use an illustration, let’s say that you are planning a trip to Montauk Point, NY on the Long Island Railroad and you are starting from Jamaica, Queens. Not all of the lines lead to your desired destination. You can’t take the lines to Oyster Bay or Port Jefferson, or even the one to Greenport. You’ve got to take the line that goes out through Babylon.

Where do you want to end up? What do you think is the source of ultimate truth? What do you think is real? The two questions are connected, and how you answer them will determine how you answer our third question as well: *How did everything get here? Where did it come from? How did it start?*

Science is a wonderful thing. It has produced so many wonderful technological breakthroughs and achieved so much. We have to keep that in mind.

Yet there are limits to what Science can do for us. It can look at the *Mona Lisa*, and can tell us what material was used for its background. It can tell us the composition of the paint the artist used, and maybe even count the brush-strokes, but it cannot tell us if it is beautiful. It can tell us what happens physically to a soldier in battle, but it cannot explain it cannot explain honor or duty or courage or cowardice.

And some of Science's heroes, like Charles Darwin, or Charles Lyell, must have used something other than the *scientific method*, because someone using it could not *know* what happened in the past. He or she can only look at evidence in the present and *presume* that it could be interpreted in a certain, definite way.

scientific method = "a method of procedure that has characterized natural science since the 17th century, consisting in systematic observation, measurement, and experiment, and the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses." (Bing)

It may be possible to reproduce an outcome—such as a substance with specific relative proportions of particular radioactive isotopes—but it cannot be possible to observe how any original, naturally-occurring sample of a similar substance might have arrived in that particular configuration in at some point in the past.

know = "be aware of through observation, inquiry, or information; be absolutely certain or sure about something." (Bing)

presume = "suppose that something is the case on the basis of probability; take for granted that something exists or is the case." (Bing)

Chapter 4 - Rationalism and Empiricism

Let's say that you think that human reason is a good place to start (kind of like Spock on Star Trek). Then everything you choose to accept as real must be reasonable.

Did you know that Thomas Jefferson (the author of *The Declaration of Independence*) believed that way about the Bible? He took a razor blade and cut out anything that had to do with the miraculous (Moses parting the Red Sea; Jesus' virgin birth, etc.) He could not fit miracles into his worldview. His *epistemological* and *ontological* perspectives did not include them as part of what he saw as real.

This is called **rationalism**.

Another point of view is called **empiricism**.

One source tells us³ that empiricism is "the view that all concepts originate in experience, that all concepts are about or applicable to things that can be experienced, or that all rationally acceptable beliefs or **propositions** are justifiable or knowable only through experience."

proposition = "a statement or assertion that expresses a judgment or opinion" (*Bing*)

And to clarify, another source says⁴:

"The dispute between rationalism and empiricism concerns the extent to which we are dependent upon sense experience in our effort to gain knowledge. Rationalists claim that there are significant ways in which our concepts and knowledge are gained independently of sense experience. Empiricists claim that sense experience is the ultimate source of all our concepts and knowledge."

While this distinction could be developed more fully, for our purposes it must be recognized that neither rationalism or empiricism can—because of the limitations of both human reason and human experience—answer our questions.

rationalism = "a belief or theory that opinions and actions should be based on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response." (*Bing*)

empiricism = "the theory that all knowledge is derived from sense-experience. Stimulated by the rise of experimental science, it developed in the 17th and 18th centuries, expounded in particular by John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume." (*Bing*)

³ Britannica.com

⁴ Plato.stanford.edu

Chapter 5 – Where Did Everything Come From?

We have been *postulating* that one's epistemological position would lead to a related ontological position. (What is true → What is real.)

postulate = "suggest or assume the existence, fact, or truth of (something) as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or belief."

Another way of saying this is to say that what is true is a *factor* of what is real.

factor = "a circumstance, fact, or influence that contributes to a result or outcome."

Which brings us to our third question in this thought journey. Once you've decided what is real, you might wonder where it all came from.

So, *what is real?*

Some of us adhere to a form of *monism*.

monism = "a theory or doctrine that denies the existence of a distinction or duality in some sphere, such as that between matter and mind, or God and the world." (*Bing*)

That can apply both to the materialists, as well as to the Eastern mystics (e.g., *The Matrix* or *Dr. Strange*), who consider matter to be only an illusion (remember the quote, "There is no spoon"?).

And others of us ascribe to *dualism* or a form of *pluralism*.

dualism = "the quality or condition of being dual; duality." (*Bing*)

pluralism = "a condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc., coexist." (*Bing*)

People who accept the existence of the supernatural or spiritual (i.e., demons, witches, angels, miracles, God) as an unseen reality, in addition to the physical universe, are considered to be dualists.

People who accept concepts such as a "multiverse" or parallel universes or alternate realities can be considered pluralists.⁵

What do you believe to be true? Why? And what do you think is real? What is your reasoning, your evidence? Can you explain? Eventually, you're going to have to answer the question, *Where did it all come from?*

⁵ Space.com

Chapter 6 – Tradition

To summarize our thinking thus far, we could say:

epistemology-->ontology-->cosmology

cosmology = “a matter of philosophical and scientific knowledge that studies the material structure and the laws governing the universe conceived as an ordered set. ... In particular, the doctrine that deals with the origin of the universe...” (Researchgate)

Looking toward tradition as a source of ultimate truth can be a tricky business, as one first has to ask how far one wants to go back. For example, in the United States, do we want to look at American ideas from the country’s founding, or the twentieth century, or from our parent’s generation?

One constant, though, throughout American history has been the *Judeo-Christian tradition*.



Moses on frieze on the U.S. Supreme Court building

Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us, of course, it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion that all men are created equal.” --

President Dwight D. Eisenhower⁶

⁶ Eyclopedia.com

In general, what this means is an epistemological point-of-view that includes mostly what flows out from what Judaism and Christianity share as being true: A God, a heaven, angels, demons, and a devil and a hell. This implies an after-life, and a judgment (of “sin”), and this leads to a bundle of Irving Berlin/Bing Crosby/Gary Cooper/Jimmy Stewart/Frank Capra-esque “Judeo-Christian ethics”,⁷ centering on a common, every-day “*Going My Way*”/“*Meet John Doe*”/“*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*” (love thy neighbor as thyself) kind of decency.

The ontological position that goes along with this is that this is not all there is—and therefore, that the “American Dream” is less a desire to acquire material things, and more about:

"The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

-- James Truslow Adams (1931)⁸

And what we see today as the “traditional” cosmological position of this kind of worldview is that God made the earth and all that is in the heavens (by some means). However, this position is somewhat tenuous, in that a fairly good-sized portion of its adherents supports what it considers “good science.”

This serves to point out the problem with tradition as a source of “Ultimate Truth”: It keeps changing.

In his 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*, Pope Pius XII made plain his fervent hope that evolution would prove to be a passing scientific fad, and addressed those persons who ‘imprudently and indiscreetly’ held that evolution... ‘explains the origin of all things.’ The Pope stated:

“The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it enquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God..”

And in a 1996 a message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II revisited the question of evolution, hoping that “we will all be able to profit from the fruitfulness of a trustful dialogue between the Church and science.”

⁷ Hollywoodintoto.com

⁸ Thebalance.com

He went on to say:

“Today, almost half a century after publication of the encyclical, new knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favor of the theory.”

The pontiff probably intended for this to serve as an olive branch to the scientific community. Unfortunately, however, Richard Dawkins, the outspoken, polemical atheist, reacting to *blood in the water* (so-to-speak) wrote an essay called “You Can’t Have It Both Ways,” accusing Pope John Paul of “casuistical double-talk” and “obscurantism,” expressing mock curiosity as to when God jumped into the evolution picture. The pope, instead of building a bridge of understanding, merely gave ammunition to his tradition’s critics. What had survived for decades in the largely-favorable environment of the “modern age” has simply not weathered the challenges of the post-modern one.

The Judeo-Christian tradition, which once acted as a **bulwark**, here in America, against so many ideologies that had swept, seemingly like waves of locusts, across a worn and weary Europe, now seems more like a decrepit wooden fence that has seen too many winters.

bulwark = “a defensive wall.” (*Bing*)

Chapter 7 – Revelation

Having found nothing, thus far, that we can lean on as a source of ultimate truth, we are left, like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, in an undesirable predicament.

"How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?"

--The Sign of Four

This is reminiscent of a quotation from King George VI of the U.K., from a famous Christmas speech that he gave as a prelude to their involvement in the Second World War.

"And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.'

And he replied:

'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way...''⁹

And so, we are going to start taking a look at the world's religions and their "sacred" texts from the vantage point of epistemology. Is it possible—as Sherlock Holmes might say—that one of these religious texts might prove to be a source of ultimate truth?

⁹ Telegraph.co.uk

Chapter 8 – The Vedas (and Hinduism)

According to one website¹⁰, the oldest religion in the world is Hinduism. And the group of texts associated with it is called *the Vedas*. It seems that the Vedas were written sometime after the Aryans invaded the Indian subcontinent (c. 1500 BC). Based upon their older, oral traditions, the Vedas tell us that the Hindu religion involves the worship of many gods, which does not seem that unusual, but they also include rules for something called the *caste system*, through which the earlier (Indus Valley) peoples—now called the *Dravidians*¹¹—began to be considered to be “untouchables.”¹²

One interesting feature of Hinduism is the idea that God (Brahman) and the universe are one.¹³ He (it) is “eternal, conscious, irreducible, infinite, omnipresent.” The purpose of life for the Hindu is Moksha— “considered the most important meaning of life and (offering) such rewards as liberation from reincarnation, self-realization, *enlightenment*, or unity with God.”¹⁴

Terms that have come into the West from Hinduism include: *maya* – the idea that the physical world and all that is in it is an illusion, and that “the real nature or essence of this world is divinity alone.”¹⁵ Adherents (and proselytes) are encouraged to “see” real reality through “spiritual wisdom” obtained through *yoga*. They are also encouraged to achieve ethical standards through *dharma*, a kind of general moral law (but which also includes specific laws to be followed “according to one’s class, status, and station in life.”¹⁶)

But, how can we judge if the Vedas are a possible source of ultimate truth?

What will be our standards?

One website¹⁷ talks about epistemology and different kinds of knowledge. They talk about something called ***propositional knowledge***.

propositional knowledge (or declarative knowledge) = "knowledge that some proposition is either true or false." (*Bing*)

So how can we know if the propositions contained in a religious text are true or false? This is where it becomes valuable to think of epistemology, ontology, and cosmology in relationship with one another.

¹⁰ Theculturetrip.com

¹¹ Apworldhistory101.com

¹² Realhistoryww.com

¹³ Britannica.com

¹⁴ U.osu.edu

¹⁵ Uri.org

¹⁶ Britannica.com

¹⁷ lep.utm.edu

The Vedas, obviously, are written from the perspective that they are true. Assuming that they are, we therefore would have to accept their view of reality (that the physical world is only an illusion, as in Marvel Studios' *Dr. Strange* or Warner Bros.' *The Matrix*). We might also take another look at their understanding of **God**. One site says that "Brahman created gods and humans in such a way that they had to be dependent on each other. Gods had power but could not make food for themselves and humans did not have power but they could make their own food."¹⁸ ?

god = "1. the Being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness who is worshipped as creator and ruler of the universe; 2. a being or object believed to have more than natural attributes and powers and to require human worship..." (*Miriam-Webster*)

We are told that "Indra is the most popular and praised god in the Vedas. In the Rig Veda, more than half the hymns invoke 3 gods, with Indra being the one who has the maximum number of hymns (250 hymns). He is the lord of the heavens. He is the god of thunder and rain and a great warrior."¹⁹

¹⁸ Templepurohit.com

¹⁹ Templepurohit.com



Indra

We are told that “The Rigveda contains many other Indo-European elements, such as ritual sacrifices and the worship of male sky gods, including the old sky god Dyaus, whose name is cognate with those of Zeus of ancient Greece and Jupiter of Rome (‘Father Jove’). The Vedic heaven, the ‘world of the fathers,’ resembles the Germanic Valhalla and seems also to be an Indo-European inheritance.”²⁰

It seems safe to say that Hinduism’s *Vedas* are a lot like the Norse, Greek, and Roman systems that are considered to be only *mythology*.

mythology = 1. “a collection of myths, especially one belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition,” or 2. “a set of stories or beliefs about a particular person, institution, or situation, especially when exaggerated or fictitious.” (*Bing*)

²⁰ Britannica.com

But the Vedas assert the existence of a *world soul* or *cosmic soul* known as the *unmanifested Brahman*²¹. It is not an individual being. It is the life source. It is the eternal essence of the universe and the ultimate divine (*yet impersonal*) reality present in every particle, every molecule, every object, life, element and breath.²²

This belief is usually referred to as a form of *pantheism*.

pantheism = "a doctrine which identifies God with the universe, or regards the universe as a manifestation of God." (*Bing*)

Paul Harrison, known as the president of the World Pantheist Movement, says, "We should relate to the universe in the same way as believers in God relate to God. That is, with humility, awe, reverence, celebration and the search for deeper understanding."

That seems to be suggesting that we should inter-relate with our environment as one would inter-relate with an all-knowing, all-powerful God (*a Being*).

On the other hand, are told about the *manifest Brahman*, which can be known through the many gods and goddesses, such as Brahma (*not to be confused with Brahman*), Vishnu and Shiva.

"...Before the creation of the universe," Vedic cosmology says, "Lord Vishnu was sleeping in the ocean of all causes. His bed is a giant serpent with thousands of cobra-like hoods. ` (note that navel is symbolized as the root of creation!). Inside this lotus, Brahma is born... Each Brahma has a life span of 100 years... at the end of which even he ceases to exist, giving way to his successor- a new Brahma."²³

Interestingly, it is said that the Beatle, George Harrison, included a Vedic prayer amidst the background vocals of his famous hit song, *My Sweet Lord*.²⁴

*"Gururbrahmaa Guru visnuh, Gururdevo Mahesvarah
Gurussaakshaat Param Brahma
Tasmai Shri Gurave Namhah"*

("The teacher is Brahma, the teacher is Vishnu, the teacher is the Lord Mahesvarah. Verily the teacher is the supreme Brahman, to that respected teacher I bow down.")

²¹ Hinduwebsite.com

²² Ackland.org

²³ Speakingtree.in

²⁴ Beatlesbible.com

One source tells us that: “The song expresses an aesthetic quality characteristic of Vaishnava (one of the major forms of modern Hinduism) theology. That quality, technically known as *viraha bhakti* (a kind of Krishna-centered devotionism), is a soul-stirring love for God arising from the anguish of distance and separation. Such love in separation is a precursor of unfettered unity, for God responds and makes Himself known by His embrace.”²⁵

sincere = “(esp. of feelings, beliefs, opinions, or intentions) honest; not false or invented...” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Can sincerity, though, be a basis for a worldview? In researching this question, I ran across an article with a provocative title, “*When Your Life’s on the Line, Accuracy Is More Important Than Sincerity.*”²⁵

“When officers use their weapons in the field,” the article says, “It’s in response to a life-threatening challenge; their lives are on the line. Accuracy is critical. It’s not enough to shoot *at* the person who is trying to kill you; officers must be accurate enough to stop the assailant quickly and completely. There’s no room for error. It’s not enough to have *tried*; in that critical moment, the only thing that matters is accuracy.”

Though this topic seems far afield, it actually does reinforce our premise (made in chapter 1) that the more serious the consequences of our ideas, the more important it is that we make every effort to be accurate in our *thinking*.

thinking = “a way of reasoning; judgment...” (*thefreedictionary.com*)

In checking the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, one discovers that George Harrison’s views fit comfortably within what is called “*Neo-Hinduism*.”²⁶

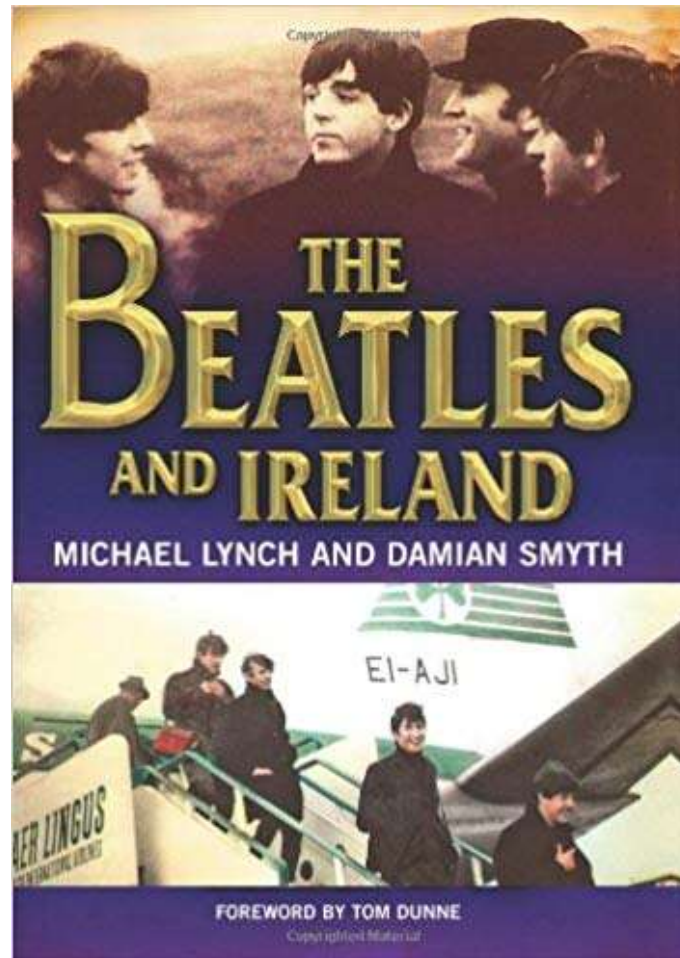
Ours is the universal religion. It is inclusive enough, it is broad enough to include all the ideals. All the ideals of religion that already exist in the world can be immediately included, and we can patiently wait for all the ideals that are to come in the future to be taken in the same fashion, embraced in the infinite arms of the religion of Vedānta. (Vivekānanda, vol. III p.251-2.)

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy concludes that “Hindu philosophers have taken varied views on many important issues in philosophy. Hindu philosophers, for instance, are not in agreement as to whether God is a person. They have not all agreed upon the nature and scope of the epistemic validity of the Vedas...” and so it goes.

²⁵ Coldcasechristianity.com

²⁶ lep.utm.edu

George Harrison's Hinduism has been described as exemplifying "cafeteria"-style, "consumerist religion,"²⁷ but what, I wondered, was the impetus for his journey away from Roman Catholicism and toward Hinduism? After all, he is thought of as, "the greatest promoter of Indian culture and Hinduism to the Western world during the 20th century."²⁸



One article quotes Damian Smyth, co-author of *The Beatles And Ireland*, as saying, "He was reared as a Catholic but became very disillusioned with organised religion. He couldn't really comprehend the business of 'this is how it is and don't question it'. And then when he discovered the eastern and Indian philosophies in the mid-sixties it was like a light bulb coming on."²⁹

Perhaps Harrison's own words, quoted in the movie, *Living in the Material World*, tell us best what we want to know:

²⁷ Ncronline.org

²⁸ lbtimes.com

²⁹ Independent.ie

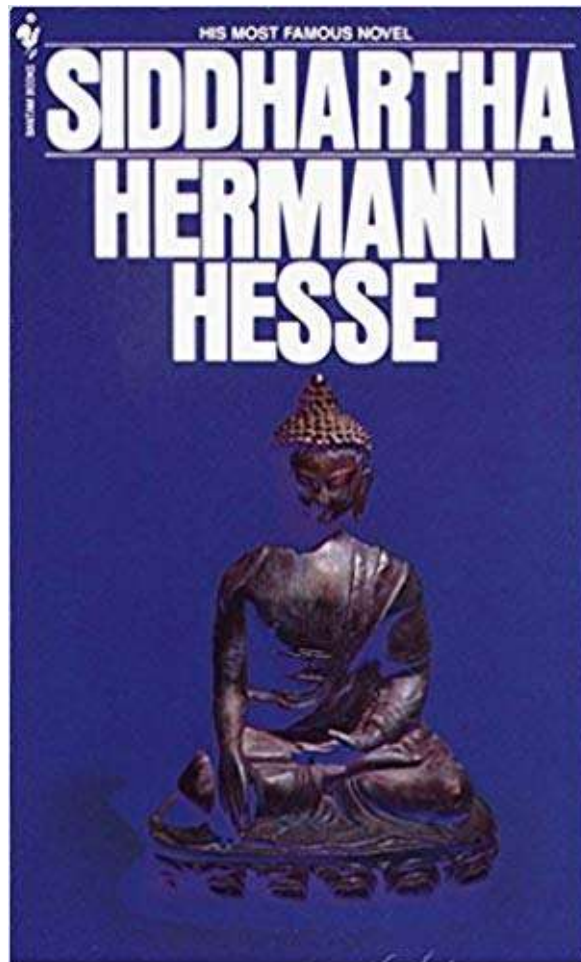
'Ravi (Shankar) and his brother gave me a lot of books by some wise men. One of the books which was by Swami Vivekananda said if there is a God, you must SEE him. And...if there is a soul, you must PERCEIVE it. Otherwise, it is better NOT to believe. It's better to be an outspoken atheist, than a hypocrite... And, after all my life...I been brought up...well, they had tried to raise me a Catholic. They had told you just believe what they're telling you and not have the direct experience. This for me; going to India and having somebody saying, 'no, you can't believe ANYTHING until you have direct perception of it.' And, I thought WOW, fantastic; at last...somebody who makes some sense...and I wanted to go deeper into that.'

*George Harrison*³⁰

We must—despite Mr. Harrison's own seemingly earnest quest for truth—still decide for *ourselves* if the epistemological, ontological, and cosmological propositions of the Vedas are true. To do anything less might be to merely follow a fellow-traveler (albeit an admittedly well-meaning one) down the path that he trod. It could be the right path, but it could also be the wrong path. What might the consequences of a wrong decision be?

³⁰ Blog.world-mysteries.com

Chapter 9 – The Buddhavacana and the Buddha



We go on from our study of Hinduism to consider the Hindu founder of—what he called the “middle way” between the various forms of Hinduism—Siddhartha Gautama, “the Buddha” (6th century BC). The stated purpose of Hinduism had been “to achieve *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*.”³¹

dharma = "(in Indian religion) the eternal and inherent nature of reality, regarded in Hinduism as a cosmic law underlying right behavior and social order." (Bing)

artha = "the pursuit of wealth or material advantage" (Britannica.com)

kama = "obtaining enjoyment from life"³²

moksha = "enlightenment"³³

³¹ U.osu.edu

³² U.osu.edu

³³ U.osu.edu

The Buddha renounced *artha* and *kama*. He focused on *dharma* and a revolutionary doctrine called *nirvana* ("quenching" or "blowing out"). Hinduism had taught that the soul is eternal, and that by passing through multiple lives, and reincarnations, and by way of *karma*, can eventually achieve *moksha*.

karma = "(in Hinduism and Buddhism) the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences."

But Gautama (Buddha) taught that many cycles of these multiple births and rebirths can be skipped by following the *noble eight-fold path*.

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH:

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood (no trading in animals for slaughter, dealing in weapons, dealing in slaves, dealing in poison or dealing in intoxicants.)
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness (putting aside greed and all distress)
8. Right concentration (pleasant abiding)

A good way of understanding the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism is by thinking of the Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe. One source says:

*"Gautama did for India what Luther and the Reformers did for Christendom."*³⁴

Buddha's teachings (contained in the *Buddhavacana* or "the word of the Buddha"³⁵) seem, though, more similar to a self-help program, kind of like Tony Robbins' *5 Steps to Take Control of Your Life Now*. But, from just a strictly epistemological point-of-view, the question is, *Are the buddhavacana's propositions true?* The universality of suffering lies at the core of Buddhist teaching. The nature of suffering, its cause, and the noble eightfold path toward its elimination constitute the main focus of Buddhist search for enlightenment.

Once again, we find the Buddha's quest, like George Harrison's, to be something we can sympathize with, and even to be laudable.

But are its propositions any more acceptable than Hinduism's?

³⁴ *The Journal of Sacred Literature*, C. Cox, 1865, p. 287

³⁵ Pariyatti.org

Buddhists, for example, don't acknowledge a supreme god or deity, which implies no after-life.

One site³⁶ responds to that this way: Nirvana is about "getting off the Ferris wheel of reincarnation..." *But what happens then?*

The site goes on to say: "Where Buddha departed most radically from Hinduism was in his doctrine of *anatta*, the notion that individuals do not possess eternal souls. Instead of eternal souls, individuals consist (only) of a bundle of habits, memories, sensations, desires, and so forth, which together *delude* one into thinking that he or she consists of a stable, lasting self."

Buddhist teaching is—first and foremost--about escaping suffering in this life, so it does not concern itself with the next. That's its ontological point of view. And its cosmology? We are told about the *Thirty One Planes of Existence* through which beings are born and reborn. And we are told that:

"The material universe consists of an infinity of world systems scattered through boundless space, each coming in to existence and passing away through beginningless and endless time "

-- Rev. Tri Ratna Priya Karuna³⁷

But what about a first cause?

Buddhism answers this way:

"One of the basic tenets of Buddhism is the concept of interdependence which says that all things exist only in relationship to others, and that nothing can have an independent and autonomous existence. The world is a vast flow of events that are linked together and participate in one another. Thus there can be no First Cause, and no creation ex nihilo of the universe, as in the Big Bang theory."³⁸

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, though, includes *The Cosmological Argument* which says:

³⁶ Near-death.com

³⁷ Urbandharma.org

³⁸ Ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

“...Philosophers infer deductively, inductively, or abductively by inference to the best explanation that a first or sustaining cause, a necessary being, an unmoved mover, or a personal being (God) exists that caused and/or sustains the universe.”³⁹

So—despite its popularity among celebrities as Angelina Jolie, Orlando Bloom, Keanu Reeves, Leonard Cohen, Tina Turner, Steve Jobs, and Tiger Woods—and even considering Gautama’s well-intentioned sincerity, it seems that we have to look further than the buddhavacana to find the source of ultimate truth.

³⁹ Plato.stanford.edu

Chapter 10 - The Tao Te Ching: Laozi's lessons in self-awareness

Self-awareness is an admirable quality, but does Taoism provide a worldview from which to look out on (and make sense of) the universe?

Let's look at Taoism's epistemological position.

One website tells us that the Tao is "the reality *beyond* human perception, a reality that Taoists strongly associate with the natural world."⁴⁰ Another begins with the admonition, "Don't concentrate on the meaning of Tao..."⁴¹ A Cambridge Press article (with a wink and a nod) quotes Aristotle:

"The more you know, the less you know; the less you know, the more you really know."

--Aristotle

The author goes on to say, "If we know our own True Self...then we shall know all things..."

Another article explains Taoist philosophy from a very practical point-of-view.⁴²

From an ethical point of view it is considered correct not to interfere with the spontaneity (of other beings, or Nature itself) or alter it by any means, expressed by 'wu wei' (chin. 無爲 / 无为, wúwéi or also in Chinese: 爲無爲 / 为无为, wéi wúwéi, non-action as in abstention of any action opposing nature).

This—though—brings to mind Apollo 13 (and the "battle" waged by Nasa engineers against the prospect of losing the craft (and the astronauts inside) to a "*spontaneous*" catastrophe. One also might of the recent shooting at a 250-member church in Texas where a security guard ended a would-be mass-murder by taking out the shooter.

This website goes on to say, "Taoist philosophy recognizes that the Universe already works harmoniously according to its own ways..." But anyone who has lived through the devastation that a tornado can bring, or who witnesses a bloody fight (often "to-the-death") between two animals might beg to differ with this proposition.

All of this sounds attractive, but probably only works in the real world for *sages* like Chirrut Îmwe.

⁴⁰ Philosophyterms.com

⁴¹ Personaltao.com

⁴² Nationsonline.org



*Star Wars*⁴³

sage = "From a Taoist viewpoint, this term refers to one whose actions are in complete harmony with his surroundings - both the immediate environment and the universe as a whole." (JadeDragon.com)

So, let's go on to take a look at the ontology and cosmology of the Tao Te Ching.

One paper says:

"The basis of the Taoist worldview is one unified pulsating cosmos and all its manifestations. Taoist thinkers interpret existence as a continuous process. They consider complementary forces to be the source of movement. The world creates itself out of its own potential existence."

--Tatiana Danilova

*National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine*⁴⁴

"The world creates itself out of its own potential existence"?

And another site⁴⁵ says:

⁴³ Twitter.com

⁴⁴ Researchgate.net

⁴⁵ Learnreligions.com

1. *"In the beginning, there was an endless void... The Tao is a universal energy, from which all things emanate.*
2. *From this vast cosmic universe, from Tao, the One emerges.*
3. *As the One manifests in the world, it divides into two: the Yin and the Yang, complementary conditions of action (Yang) and inaction (Yin)...*
4. *From this dance of Yin and Yang emerges the five elements: wood, fire, metal, water, and earth....*
5. *From the five constituent elements come the 'ten-thousand things,' representing all of manifest existence, all of the objects, inhabitants, and phenomena of the world that we experience..."*

What causes the One to emerge?

One website⁴⁶ offers an intriguing perspective:

"Just as the love of music had to exist before the organization for (a) dance could be founded, the Tao also had to exist before the universe could be created. This remains true even if one subscribes to the theist notion that asserts a Supreme Being as the creator.

Christians would say that God created the universe out of His divine love or divine will. In order for that to work, divine love or will had to be present before the act of creation. It simply cannot be the other way around."

Let's look, then, at the Tao, itself:

*"The things which from of old have got the One (the Tao) are -- Heaven which by it
is bright and pure;
Earth rendered thereby firm and sure;
Spirits with powers by it supplied;
Valleys kept full throughout their void
All creatures which through it do live
Princes and kings who from it get
The model which to all they give.*

⁴⁶ Taoism.net

All these are the results of the One (Tao).

*If heaven were not thus pure, it soon would rend;
If earth were not thus sure, 'twould break and bend;
Without these powers, the spirits soon would fail;
If not so filled, the drought would parch each vale;
Without that life, creatures would pass away;
Princes and kings, without that moral sway,
However grand and high, would all decay.*

Thus it is that dignity finds its (firm) root in its (previous) meanness, and what is lofty finds its stability in the lowness (from which it rises). Hence princes and kings call themselves 'Orphans,' 'Men of small virtue,' and as 'Carriages without a nave.' Is not this an acknowledgment that in their considering themselves mean they see the foundation of their dignity? So it is that in the enumeration of the different parts of a carriage we do not come on what makes it answer the ends of a carriage. They do not wish to show themselves elegant-looking as jade, but (prefer) to be coarse-looking as an (ordinary) stone."⁴⁷

There is something appealing about the Tao...an inherent wisdom, a system of ethics. But, can a system of ethics—and true wisdom—be disconnected from its **philosophical** underpinnings? In other words, if you cannot believe its epistemological, ontological, and cosmological propositions, don't its ethical propositions become mere suggestions?

philosophical = "relating or devoted to the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence" (Bing)

If it's propositions cannot be accepted as true, can't we say we choose not grant it **moral authority** over our lives?

moral authority = "trustworthiness to make decisions that are right and good" (Mirriam-Webster)

For example, we might choose to omit chapter 3:

⁴⁷ Sacred-texts.com

Not to value and employ men of superior ability is the way to keep the people from rivalry among themselves; not to prize articles which are difficult to procure is the way to keep them from becoming thieves; not to show them what is likely to excite their desires is the way to keep their minds from disorder.

Therefore the sage, in the exercise of his government, empties their minds, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, and strengthens their bones.

He constantly (tries to) keep them without knowledge and without desire, and where there are those who have knowledge, to keep them from presuming to act (on it). When there is this abstinence from action, good order is universal.

So, how do we reconcile what seems to be some wisdom imbedded within Taoism with the apparent lack of believability of its propositions?

“Laozi doesn’t invent the conception of ‘Tao.’ More than two thousand years before Laozi’s Tao Teh Ching, ‘Tao’ appeared in I Ching (Yi Jing), the Book of Changes.”

--Xuan Weng, in “BRIDGING CULTURES IN A THIRD SPACE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEACHING CHINESE IN AMERICAN CHINESE SCHOOLS”⁴⁸

Further study reveals this:

“The Book of Changes — I Ching in Chinese — is unquestionably one of the most important books in the world’s literature.”⁴⁹

--Richard Wilhelm

⁴⁸ Pdfs.semanticscholar.org (Dissertation before Professor Francine Hultgren, UMD, 2010)

⁴⁹ lging.com

Wilhelm also says, “Its origin goes back to mythical antiquity,” and Britannica.com confirms that it goes at least back to the *Zhou Dynasty* and the 12th century B.C.⁵⁰

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And in *Teaching the I Ching (Book of Changes)*, Geoffrey Redmond and Tze-ki Hon tell us:

*“Centered on yin and yang (and represented through the straight and broken lines in hexagrams), the Yijing is one of the main sources of Chinese cosmology.”*⁵²

So, maybe our answers lie—not in the *Tao Te Ching*—but in the *I Ching*.

In his preface to his 1882 translation of the *I Ching*, James Legge discloses how he “(got) hold of a clue that would guide (him) to a knowledge of the mysterious classic... if we take away (the) explanations and commentaries attributed to king Wăn, the duke of Kâu, and Confucius (as other translators have) we take away the whole Yî (another name for the I Ching)... (They) have been misled somehow about the contents of the Yî; and unless they can overthrow all the traditions and beliefs about them, whether Chinese or foreign, their undertaking is more hopeless than the task laid on the children of Israel by Pharaoh, that they should make bricks without straw... I have spoken of the Chinese terms Tî and Shang Tî, and shown how I felt it necessary to continue to render them by our word *God*, as I had done in all my translations of the Chinese classics since 1861 (although) my doing so gave offence to some of the missionaries in China and others... Since then the matter has rested, and I introduce it again here in this preface, because... I have, as before, wherever it does occur, translated it by *God*. Those who object to that term say that Shang Tî might be rendered by 'Supreme Ruler' or 'Supreme Emperor,' or by 'Ruler (or Emperor) on high;' but when I examined the question, more than thirty years ago, with all possible interest and all the resources at my command, I came to the conclusions that Tî, on its first employment by the Chinese fathers, was intended to express the same concept which our fathers expressed by *God*, and that such has been its highest and proper application ever since. There would be little if any difference in the meaning conveyed to readers by 'Supreme Ruler' and 'God;' but when I render Tî by *God* and Shang Tî by the *Supreme God*, or, for the sake of brevity, simply by *God*, I am translating, and not giving a private interpretation of my own. I do it not in the interests of controversy, but as the simple expression of what to me is truth; and I am glad to know that a great majority of the Protestant missionaries in China use Tî and Shang Tî as the nearest analogue for *God*.

⁵⁰ Britannica.com

⁵² Oxfordindex.oup.com

上帝

shàngdì

Chapter 11 - The Torah and the Jews

In *The Chosen* by Chaim Potok, one of the characters (a *Hassidic* rabbi) says about his son:

*“Reuven, I did not want my Daniel to become like my brother, may he rest in peace. Better I should have had no son at all than to have a brilliant son who had no soul. I looked at my Daniel when he was four years old, and I said to myself, How will I teach this mind what it is to have a soul? How will I teach this mind to understand pain? How will I teach it to want to take on another person’s suffering? How will I do this and not lose my son, my precious son whom I love as I love the Master of the Universe Himself? How will I do this and not cause my son, God forbid, to abandon the Master of the Universe and His Commandments? How could I teach my son the way I was taught by my father and not drive him away from Torah? Because this is America, Reuven. This is not Europe. It is an open world here. Here there are libraries and books and schools. Here there are great universities that do not concern themselves with how many Jewish students they have. I did not want to drive my son away from God, but I did not want him to grow up a mind without a soul. I knew already when he was a boy that I could not prevent his mind from going to the world for knowledge. I knew in my heart that it might prevent him from taking my place. But I had to prevent it from driving him away completely from the Master of the Universe. And I had to make certain his soul would be the soul of a **tzaddik** no matter what he did with his life.”*

tzaddik = “a righteous and saintly person by Jewish religious standards” (Mirriam-Webster)

One Jewish website tells us: “The lifestyle of the religious Jew is based on certain underlying theological assumptions about God and His role in history. Clearly, the belief that He is *the Creator and Sustainer* of the universe...”⁵³

These are cosmological propositions that we can choose either to believe or disbelieve, but they are at least easily understandable.

It goes on: (The concept that God) revealed His Law to Israel at Mt. Sinai...has profound practical implications for the Jew and for all humanity. That man is **accountable** to God for his deeds and that he is expected to realize a spiritual purpose in his life transform him from a highly developed animal into a **transcendental** being.”

accountable = “required or expected to justify actions or decisions; responsible.” (Bing)

transcendental = “relating to a spiritual or nonphysical realm” (Bing)

These are ontological and ethical propositions. Here we have what we said that the Tao Te Ching lacked, ethics (and morals) tied to clear, coherent cosmological and ontological propositions we can evaluate.

Another website goes further: “Jews believe that there is a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship,” (and) “they believe that God continues to work in the world, affecting everything that people do.”⁵⁴

The Jewish relationship with God, according to this source, “is a **covenant** relationship. In exchange for the many good deeds that God has done and continues to do for the Jewish People...

- The Jews keep God's laws
- The Jews seek to bring *holiness* into every aspect of their lives.”

covenant = “an agreement” in law, “a contract drawn up by deed” (Bing)

Is this meant to convey the idea that God has a special arrangement with the Jewish people (as opposed to non-Jews, or Gentiles)?

*“This idea is a recurring theme in Jewish liturgy and is expressed in many passages of Scripture.”*⁵⁵

⁵³ Jewsforjudaism.org

⁵⁴ BBC.co.uk

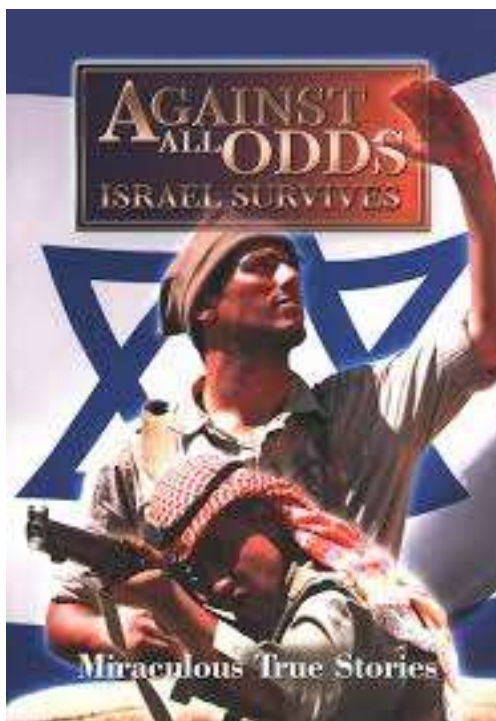
⁵⁵ Britannica.com

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* calls this the *Torah* (the first five books of the *Hebrew Bible*.)⁵⁶

In one of it's books, the Torah us that God's covenant with the Jews includes *blessings* and *curses*.⁵⁷ And additionally, we are told several times about *miracles* that God performs for them.⁵⁸

miracle = "a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency." (Bing)

This view is supported by a TV show by *Questar Studios*, currently on Amazon Prime, called "Against All Odds – Israel Survives."



Evaluating the Epistemological, Ontological, and Cosmological propositions of the Torah, we start at an article by Dr. Jaco Gericke, Associate Research Professor of Theology and Philosophy at North-West University, South Africa, and an author at *Center for Hebraic Thought*, who writes:

⁵⁶ Britannica.com

⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 28:1-69

⁵⁸ Exodus 7-12; 14; 15-17

*"The Hebrew Bible is not an essay in epistemology, yet its discourse does contain **assumptions** about the nature of knowledge, belief, truth, interpretation, understanding and cognitive processes."*⁵⁹

assumption = "a point of view that is taken for granted without the need for evidence, or even discussion of the issue." (Univ. of Bradford)

"Historically, of course, Judaism presented itself as a possessor of the truth revealed to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai and preserved for posterity in torat emet, the Torah of truth."

--2018 Symposium on "Judaism in an Age of Truthiness"

Hebrew Union College

אלו ואילו דברי אלהים חיים

Eilu v'eilu divrei elohim chayim

"These and these are the words of the Living God" (*Talmud Eruvim 13b*)

That proposition—that the Hebrew Bible is a collection of the "words" of a living God—is assumed, and is for us to believe or not.

Why should we believe it? We might (for the miracles sake), and we can look also further, at the Torah and ontology.

"In rejecting pantheism Judaism embraced the distinction between the creator god and the created world. This reveals itself in the normal biblical language about heaven and earth: heaven is created by the one creator in order to be the location of himself and his entourage, whereas earth is where humans live."

--N.T. Wright

*The New Testament and the People of God*⁶⁰

So, the Hebrew Bible proposes a **dualistic** ontology.

dualism = "the division of something conceptually into two opposed or contrasted aspects, or the state of being so divided." (*Bing*)

⁵⁹ "IS THERE PHILOSOPHY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE? SOME RECENT AFFIRMATIVE PERSPECTIVES?" (Yoramhazony.org)

⁶⁰ Girardianlectionary.net

The Hebrew Bible speaks of angels and demons.⁶¹ The Hebrew Bible describes an unseen place (a nether-world), similar to the ancient Greek Tartarus or Hades.⁶² And there seems to be some suggestion of an afterlife in the Hebrew Scriptures.⁶³ But this idea seems to have been discarded by modern Jews. However, one idea promulgated by the Book of Daniel (for one) is that of a *Maschiach* (or "Messiah").⁶⁴

Mashiach = "literally means 'the anointed one,' and refers to the ancient practice of anointing kings with oil when they took the throne. The mashiach is the one who will be anointed as king in the End of Days." (*Coexisting in a Religious World of Divide: A Journey of Faith in Christianity and Judaism*)⁶⁵

Yet, it seems that many Jews no longer believe in the coming of a Messiah.

"(There is in Jewish thought an) 'assertion . . . that side by side with a written code there exists a living tradition with power to interpret the written code, to add to it, and even at times to modify it or ignore it as might be needful in a changed circumstance, and to do this authoritatively...'"

*English rabbinical scholar Herbert Danby*⁶⁶

"An organization called the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies has a website called *IJS (Israel & Judaism Studies)*, which says that there are "three major variants or streams of Judaism... Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Reform (often called 'Liberal' or 'Progressive'..."⁶⁷

It goes on: "The Orthodox view is that the Biblical law may be developed and interpreted only by processes of reasoning which maintain respect for its Divine origin... (Conservative Judaism's) study of the holy texts," it continues, "is embedded in the belief that Judaism is constantly evolving to meet the contemporary needs of the Jewish people." And it also says: "A new element entered the Jewish world in the early nineteenth century, a movement which is variously described as Progressive, Reform or Liberal Judaism...(which) originated with the emancipation of the Jews of the various German states...(who) sought full acceptance in the German cultural milieu to which they had finally been admitted. Many were influenced by the philosophy of the eighteenth century Enlightenment... By the late 19th Century, the 'Science of

⁶¹ Psalm 91:1; 103:20; 148:2; Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17

⁶² Job 14:3

⁶³ Psalm 16:10

⁶⁴ Daniel 9:24-27

⁶⁵ Elisheva Irma Diaz, 2019, West Bow Press

⁶⁶ *Paul: His Life and Teaching*, John McRay, 2007, Bake Books

⁶⁷ IJS.org.au

Judaism' (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) by Julius Wellhausen⁶⁸ reflected the developing understanding of evolution, history and biblical scholarship"

We end our study of Judaism, with it's cosmology. The Hebrew Bible says:

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"

--Genesis 1:1

The problem, though, is that many Jews no longer believe it.

An illustration of this is contained in a white paper called, *Judaism and Cosmology*:

"My Judaism-and-science thinking is mainly on the implications for us Jews of the new picture of the universe that modern cosmology is giving us. I'm a theoretical physicist. In the early part of my career, my research helped to create what is now called the Standard Model of particle physics. After that, cosmology became my main research interest. The Cold Dark Matter theory that I developed with my colleagues starting in the early 1980s has now become the standard theory of the composition and structure of the universe. Since the early 1990s evidence has been accumulating of the success of this theory, which has led to our first scientific understanding of the evolution of the universe starting just fractions of a second after the Big Bang. Thus we cosmologists are beginning to be able to answer God's challenge in Job: 'Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?' We are now able, in our scientific imaginations, to see in considerable detail how the universe and the earth were created. Our growing ability to understand the history of the universe in turn encouraged my wife Nancy Ellen Abrams and me to think about the possible larger cultural and religious implications... The new cosmology explains for the first time the evolution of the material content and structure of the universe, including the origin of galaxies and planetary systems. Especially for us Jews, whose greatest religious text begins with two creation stories and whose liturgy routinely praises God as the creator of the universe, a new picture of the origin and structure of the universe must have religious implications. In addressing this question... Nancy and I have emphasized the surprising ways that human beings (and any other intelligent creatures that may inhabit our universe) are central or special from a cosmic perspective... We also live at a pivotal time for

⁶⁸ Britannica.com

humanity, the end of the brief period of exponential expansion in our numbers and in our technological impacts on the earth. The new cosmology thus gives us humans a new perspective on how we fit into the universe.”

-- Joel Primack

Judaism and Science Organizational Meeting, 2008⁶⁹

Chapter 12 - The Bible and Christianity

As we turn toward our analysis of Christianity, we must first recognize that it was founded by Jews (similarly to the founding of Buddhism by Hindus), and begin with the Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians call the *Old Testament*).

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; forasmuch as they broke My covenant, although I was a lord over them, saith the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...”

Jeremiah 31:31-33

A paper titled, *What is Knowledge? Biblical/Hebraic Epistemology*, says this:

“Epistemology is one’s view or theory of knowledge, and as a discipline, it seeks to respond to the following kinds of questions. What is the nature, or what are the features of knowledge? What can we know? Are there things we cannot know? What are the sources of knowledge? How is knowledge justified? What are the limits in attempting to justify knowledge? And so on... In accordance with the biblical view of humanity as a differentiated totality rather than as a being composed of body and soul, knowledge is an activity in which the whole person—

⁶⁹ Physics.ucsc.edu

intellect, emotion, will—participates. The heart and all its faculties as the defining element of a person are central to the knowing process as a totality.”

-- Dr. Davey Naugle

*Summer Institute in Christian Scholarship*⁷⁰

That seems to be right in line with Judaism’s emphasis on the *tzaddick* (see previous chapter).

It will be our **working theory** that Judaism is the base—the “foundation” upon which the “house” of Christianity is built.

working theory = "A working theory is a theory in the works/in the making: a theory that's being tested." (*UsingEnglish.com*)

With that in mind, we will compare Old and New Testament ontologies.

1. “(Judaism) proclaims that there is only one God, whose name is Yahweh, and He is the creator and ruler of the universe. He revealed His law, the Torah, to the Jewish people (who were known as Hebrews at that time) and He chose them to be a light for all humanity.
2. “A very important concept in Judaism is that of the Messiah. Originally the Jews believed that God would send a powerful messenger (the Messiah) who would deliver Israel from her oppressors and usher in a reign of peace and prosperity. Today many Jews no longer hold to a personal messiah, but hope for a messianic age of justice and truth. For the Jews the coming of the Messiah or the messianic age still lies in the future.
3. “Christians also accept the (Hebrew Scriptures, though they call them the ‘Old Testament’) and all its teachings as inspired.
4. “Among the basic truths accepted by both faiths are the perfect creation of the world out of nothing by an infinite God, the entrance of sin into this world via the temptation of another transcendent being called Satan, the judgement of God on sin, and the necessity of atonement for sin.
5. “In Judaism this atonement is accomplished through sacrifices, prayer, righteous acts, and God’s mercy.
6. “Christianity has received from Judaism its basic understanding of God, his covenant relationship with His people, and assembling together for worship. There is a divine plan

⁷⁰ Dbu.edu

for history and it is moving toward a wonderful goal when Yahweh will be the King not only of the Jews but of all the earth. Separation from the corrupting influences of the pagan world is important, but Judaism is not a religion that focuses on a spiritual world somewhere down the road. Its focus is on this present world, where life is meant to be rich and full.”⁷¹

Using the same analogy, we would say that the Hebrew house might be thought of as being one story, while the Christian house might be thought of being a second-story addition to the house, although, in reality, that is an over-simplification. New Testament ontology is different in several distinct ways. To begin with, Christians not only believe that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah (“Christos” or “**Christ**” in Greek) of Judaism. They believe that He is God Himself.⁷²

Christ = anointed; (e.g., the 'Messiah')

The famous British author and theologian C.S. Lewis once wrote:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about (Jesus): ‘I’m ready to accept (Him) as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”⁷³

Another thing that Christians believe, is that Jesus Christ, after being crucified by the Romans, was resurrected—that is raised from the dead—and that He is no longer dead but alive, where He sits on a throne in heaven, at the right hand of God.⁷⁴ So, from an ontological point of view, heaven is like a throne room, where God sits as a King, and Jesus sits in a favored place (God’s “right-hand man”).

⁷¹ Biblica.com

⁷² John 5:18

⁷³ *Mere Christianity*

⁷⁴ Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:20-23

This idea is actually corroborated throughout both the Old and New Testaments in several places:

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple."

--Isaiah 6:1

*"I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated...A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him."*

--Daniel 7:9-10

"At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne."

-- Revelation 4:2

Like Judaism, Christianity believes there is a God. But the New Testament tells us that Jesus, too, is God.⁷⁵ This is part of what Christians call the Trinity.

trinity = "In Christian doctrine, the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons in one Godhead." (*Britannica.com*)

In the New Testament, we are told:

"Everything was created by Him (meaning Christ), in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible..."

Colossians 1:16

We are also told:

"In the beginning was the Word (again referring to Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning (God's right-hand man?). All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created..."

John 1:1-3

⁷⁵ John 1:1

So, as difficult as any of this may be to believe, these are the New Testament's propositions.

"Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse..."

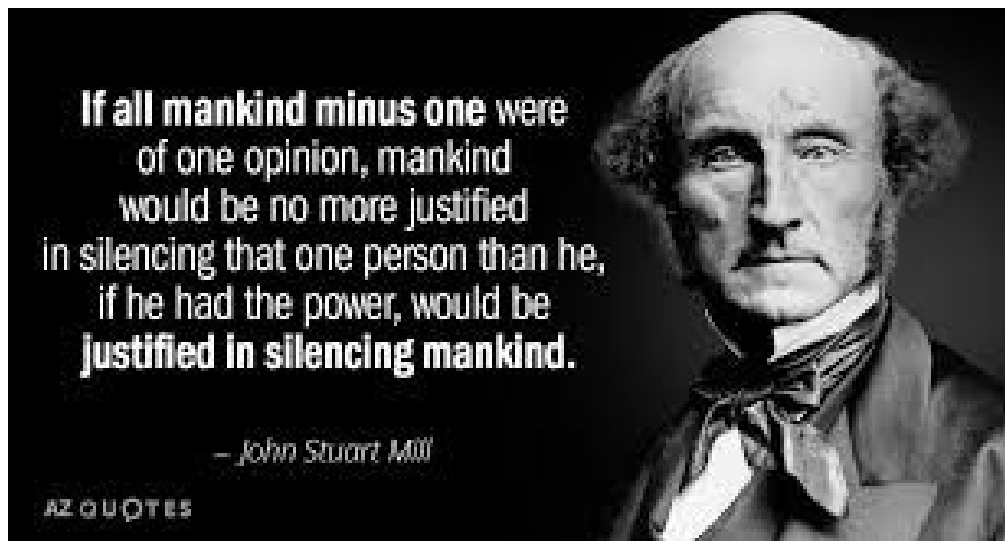
--C.S. Lewis



Another man—John Stuart Mill (a *critic* of Christianity, whom the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* says: “profoundly influenced the shape of nineteenth century British thought and political discourse... whose substantial corpus of works includes texts in logic, epistemology, economics, social and political philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, religion, and current affairs”), said this about Jesus Christ:

“But about the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight....in the very first rank of men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life.”

--John Stuart Mill



So belief in Jesus Christ as the Jewish Messiah may be considered the linchpin of Christianity's epistemological and ontological system of propositions.

What about cosmology?

Here we turn to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, specifically their site called *Cosmology and Theology*. There they raise an interesting idea:

“According to traditional Christian theism, creation ex nihilo is miraculous—something which the laws of nature cannot explain. But then why should a theist expect to be able to derive creation ex nihilo from the laws of nature? Compare with other supposed miracles, e.g., within Christianity the claim that Jesus changed

*water into wine. Do Christian theists claim that chemistry should predict that water can transform into wine?"*⁷⁶

The idea is that Jesus created the wine with the appearance and properties of real wine, to such an extent that:

"When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.'"

-- John 2:9-10

So, the "master of the feast" (*Maitre d*) tastes the wine and (presumably based on the skills and experience that had qualified him for that position) thinks of it as 'the good wine'.

The implications of this are vast.

Is that suggesting a possibility that Charles Lyell (the principal advocate of the theory of uniformitarianism⁷⁷) might have looked at the striated layers of the geologic column, and (mistakenly?) assumed that it was laid down through natural processes over millions of years? And may that also imply that Charles Darwin (the naturalist whose theories became the foundation of modern evolutionary studies) may have been mistaken, when in the Galapagos, he first postulated the idea that animals and humans shared a common ancestry. And may that not imply that the Belgian priest named Georges Lemaître might also have made an error when he first suggested the big bang theory in the 1920s?

So, we are left with a number of propositions that we may either believe or not.

Charles Spurgeon, Victorian England's best-known Baptist minister⁷⁸ once said:

"There is no room for indifference where the gospel is concerned — it is either the most astounding of impostures, or the most amazing of revelations; no man can safely remain undecided about it, it is too weighty, too solemn to be snuffed at as a matter of no concern. Foes and friends alike confess that the mystery of godliness is great: it is no rippling rill of dogma, but a broad ocean of thought, no molehill of

⁷⁶ John 2:1-11

⁷⁷ NPS.gov

⁷⁸ Victorianweb.org

discovery, but an Alp of revelation, no single beam of light but a sun shining at its strength."

--Charles H. Spurgeon

"The Great Mystery of Godliness"

Dec 22, 1867

imposture = "an instance of pretending to be someone else in order to deceive others." (Bing)

What did he mean by, "the mystery of godliness"? He goes on to tell us:

"(It is) the union of the divine and human in the Lord Jesus..."

Paul (the apostle) said as much when he wrote:

*"God chose to make known...the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*⁷⁹

Chuck Smith, "the evangelical pastor whose outreach to hippies in the 1960s helped transform worship styles in American Christianity and fueled the rise of the Calvary Chapel movement,"⁸⁰ once said:

"God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for my sins, to provide forgiveness for my sins. And then...He did something else, He rose from the dead. And then He said, 'Now, I will come and dwell in you and by My dwelling in you, I will give to you the power to walk this path. You don't have it in yourself; you can't do it in yourself, but I will dwell in you, and I will live in you, empowering you to do it.' ...That basically is the chief difference between Christianity and the other religions of the world. With Christianity, the power is imparted by the indwelling of Jesus Christ. It isn't just pointing to the path and saying, 'That's the way you should walk.' But it is coming in and giving you the capacity and the power to do it."

As we said earlier, Christianity submits a number of propositions, which it expects us to believe, and then it submits the life of Jesus of Nazareth as evidence of their veracity.

⁷⁹ Colossians 1:27

⁸⁰ Christianitytoday.com

So, what about the veracity of its ontological statements?

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.*⁸¹

What kind of creature?

This, perhaps, brings to mind Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch*:

*"This superior man would not be a product of long evolution; rather, he would emerge when any man with superior potential completely masters himself and strikes off conventional Christian 'herd morality' to create his own values, which are completely rooted in life on this earth. ...His goal was a 'Caesar with Christ's soul...'"*⁸²

That does not sound like what Spurgeon (or Chuck Smith or Paul the Apostle) had in mind. There is, though, a good example of what they seem to be suggesting—someone like Steve Rogers in the *Marvel Studios* movie, *Captain America: The First Avenger*.



In one scene, *Dr. Erskine* says this to the would-be hero:

"This is why you were chosen. Because the strong man who has known power all his life, may lose respect for that power, but a weak man knows the value of strength, and knows... compassion."

⁸¹ 2nd Corinthians 5:17

⁸² Britannica.com

This is very similar to the New Testament view of this new (*next-level-in-human evolution*) creature:

“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”⁸³

It seems that Spurgeon was on the right tack when he said that this was:

“One of the most extraordinary doctrines that was ever declared in human hearing...”

Though the New Testament does not seem to be saying that Christians are “super-soldiers,” what it does seem to be saying is that the smallest of us (when united with the Spirit of Christ) can do far greater deeds than we ever could do on our own.

In it, Jesus is quoted as saying:

“I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John (the baptist). Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”⁸⁴

And later, Paul also writes:

“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”⁸⁵

What that implies, then, is that a timid young girl can stand up before a crowd and perform her viola recital successfully (and then go on to spend much of her life on various stages), or the fearful old man—when told by his physical therapist that his full recovery from a stroke could only come if he overcame his fear of walking on his own legs—somehow can summon the courage to stand and take those first steps to a full life.

⁸³ 1st Corinthians 1:27-29

⁸⁴ Luke 7:28

⁸⁵ Philippians 4:13

Christianity seems to be professing to be *filled* (on a normal and continuing basis) with *miracles* that come when *foolish* and *weak* and *timid* and *lowly* Christians rise up to do good, noble, and even great things.

And this seems to have been true throughout history.

One article says, “Former professor of sociology Dr. Alvin Schmidt notes Elwood Cubberly’s observation that the biblical teachings of Jesus Christ challenged ‘almost everything for which the Roman world had stood...’” It goes on to say, “Dr. James Kennedy writes, ‘Life was expendable prior to Christianity’s influence... In (the days of the Romans) abortion was rampant. Abandonment was commonplace: It was common for infirm babies or unwanted little ones to be taken out into the forest or the mountainside, to be consumed by wild animals or to starve... They often abandoned female babies because women were considered inferior...’”⁸⁶

Contrast this to the New Testament assertion:

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*⁸⁷

A website talks about Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, “He was a Roman citizen of Britain (known as Patricius) who was captured by pirates at the age of sixteen and sold into slavery in Ireland. He escaped back to Britain, became ordained as a bishop, and returned to the land of his captivity as a missionary in c. 432/433 (A.D.). He is credited with expanding literacy in Ireland through the monastic orders he established, revising and codifying the Brehon Laws, and converting the country to Christianity.”

Another source describes how in the European Renaissance, “Christianity brought caring communities with indiscriminate personalized care for the ill and aged. This ultimately led to the creation of hospitals as we know them today. Monastic institutions appeared which often had hospitals, and provided a degree of medical scholarship.”⁸⁸

A book tells about “a solitary monk who shook the world” (Martin Luther, who stood alone against the greatest powers of the European High Middle Ages—the Catholic Church, and the Holy Roman Emperor).⁸⁹

Additionally: “Though the impulses for transformation of the social order according to the spirit of the Christian ethic came more strongly from the Free churches, state and territorial churches

⁸⁶ Tomorrowsworld.org

⁸⁷ Galatians 3:28

⁸⁸ Medievalists.net

⁸⁹ *Shakespeare: His Times and Contemporaries*, Part 1, George Markham Tweddell, 1861

made positive contributions in improving the status quo. In 17th- and 18th-century Germany, Lutheran clergy, such as August Francke (1663–1727), were active in establishing poorhouses, orphanages, schools, and hospitals.”⁹⁰

We are also told about William Wilberforce, whose “abolitionism was derived in part from evangelical Christianity, to which he was converted in 1784–85. His spiritual adviser became John Newton, a former slave trader who had repented and who had been the pastor at Wilberforce’s church when he was a child. In 1787 Wilberforce helped to found...the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade—the latter more commonly called the Anti-Slavery Society.”⁹¹

And we are told that, “Anglican clerics (and, especially, John Wesley and the Methodists)...began a Christian social movement during the Industrial Revolution that brought Christian influence to the conditions of life and work in industry...(and that) in 1848, the year of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* and a wave of revolutions across Europe (English Christians) were concerned with social issues, prison reform, and care of the mentally ill.”⁹²

And lastly, we quote from David McCullough’s wonderful book, 1776:

“(George Washington) was not a brilliant strategist or tactician (like Napoleon)... At several crucial moments he had shown marked indecisiveness. He had made serious mistakes in judgment...(but) he never gave up... (And) for those who had been with Washington and who know what a close call it was at the beginning—how often circumstance, storms, contrary winds, the oddities or strengths of individual character had made the difference—the outcome (of the America War for Independence) seemed little short of a miracle.”



"The Prayer at Valley Forge"

⁹⁰ Britannica.com

⁹¹ Britannica.com

⁹² Britannica

"The most sublime picture in American history is of George Washington on his knees in the snow at Valley Forge. That image personifies a people who know that it is not enough to depend on our own courage and goodness; we must also seek help from God, our Father and Preserver."⁹³

--Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States of America

Conclusion

The methodology used in this study has been intended so as to give us a firm foundation for further studies of history, government, and world events.

The argument being made here is that neither popular, *prevailing* opinions (*zeitgeist*), tradition, experience, human reason, nor even academia, expert testimony, or Science itself have proven to be a sufficient base for *understanding* our world.

understanding= "the power of comprehending" (*Mirriam-Webster*)

zeitgeist = "the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time." (*Bing*)

It is important, however, to recognize that we are not advocating a rejection of any of these. Instead, we are accepting the value of all of these, when brought under what we have accepted as the authority of Jesus Christ, as documented in the Bible.

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me."
Matthew 28:18*

*"And to Him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve Him;
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,*

⁹³ *George Washington's Sacred Fire*, Peter Lillback, 2006, Providence Forum Press

*and His kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.”
Daniel 7:14*

We are inviting you to follow along as we attempt to take a long, contemplative look at the world from this particular *worldview*.

On his website, David Quine, the creator of the fine *Worldviews of the Western World* curriculum, quotes 20th century evangelist and a pastor, Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer.

Dr. Schaeffer is known for his “compelling book,”⁹⁴ *He Is There and He Is Not Silent: Does It Make Sense to Believe in God?* In it, he wrote:

“Philosophy and religion deal with the same basic questions...though they give different answers and use different terms. The basic questions... are the questions of being (that is, what exists) of man and his dilemma (that is, morals), and of epistemology (that is, how man knows). Philosophy deals with these points, but so does religion, including evangelical, orthodox Christianity.”⁹⁵

Our book should be considered to be somewhat of a ***manifesto***.

manifesto = “a public declaration of policy and aims” (Bing)

Everything we do at *Thinking Accurately Education* (our policy) is going to be aimed at finding what Dr. Schaeffer used to call, “*True Truth*.” We will consider the prevailing opinions of our culture, our traditions, our experience, our reason; and we will evaluate what the academics, experts, or Science itself have to say, but we will compare it to what the Bible says, and we will attempt to come to understand when there are conflicts.

For example, there is an odd little book that details “some astonishing points of correspondence between certain characters in the Chinese language and elements of the Genesis account of man’s early beginnings.”⁹⁶ That is the kind of question we will consider.

As we are wont to quote:

“How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?”

--Sherlock Holmes, “The Sign of Four”

⁹⁴ Amazon.com

⁹⁵ *He Is There and He Is Not Silent: Does It Make Sense to Believe in God?* Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, 1972, Crossway Books

⁹⁶ *The Discovery of Genesis*, C.H. Kang and Ethel R. Nelson, 1979, Concordia Publishing House