

Worldviews Foundations - Unit 318



Week 5 –Why we think the way we do? What of the First Century?

Why do we think the way we do?

Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

Descartes argued that belief depends on an exercise of the will. This view of belief stood at the heart of Perkins's system.

Descartes, influenced by Perkin's way of reaching a conclusion about a person's salvation, arrived at a dichotomy between mind and body that leads to a dichotomy between the physical world and the spiritual world.

Descartes used Perkins method to arrive at what has become the most foundational change in thought, *Cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. For Descartes this was the only truth that he was absolutely sure was true.

Now, beginning with himself, humanity tried to understand the cosmos. Before this it was man, beginning with God, trying to understand the cosmos.

By the end of the eighteenth century, William Perkins's model of reducing issues to two alternatives had become the dominant way of thinking in the English-speaking world.

In the natural world observed by scientific investigation, scientists were faced by the two alternatives that their worldview allowed them:

- (1) phenomena occurred by the direct action of God, or
- (2) phenomena occurred as the result of the laws of nature.

For Example:

Immanuel Kant:

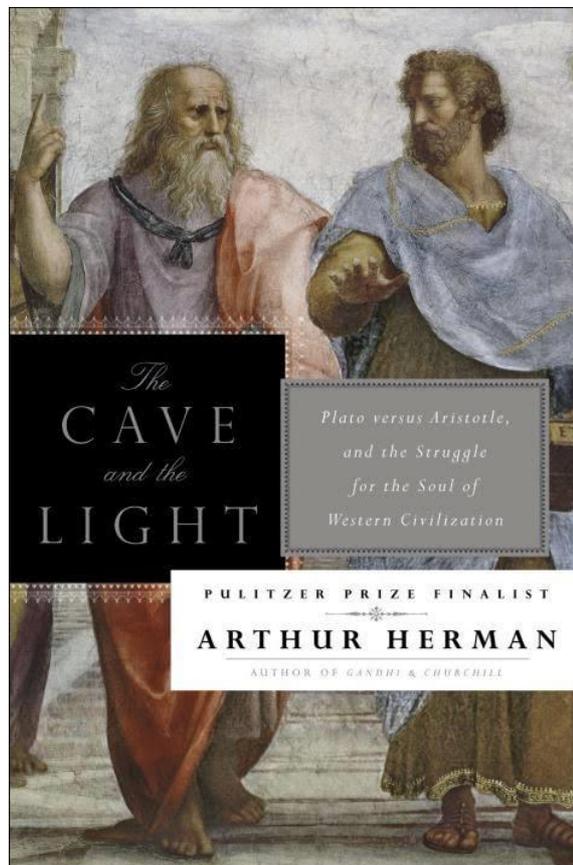
because we can only *know* that which is in the *phenomenal* realm, knowledge of God—who exists in the *noumenal* realm—is beyond human capacity.

Charles Darwin:

When Darwin came to realize that organisms change over time, he was placed in the jaws of the Perkins's dilemma.

1. God either created all species unchangeable by fiat or
2. God had nothing to do with the development of life at all.

This was just the beginning of the so called war between science and religion.



This is the natural consequence of the “God of the Gaps” framework that began with Occam’s Razor in the 1400s.

The Rise of Modernity:

Modernity is a paradigm shift in human thinking and human relations that ushered in the advent of modern science, technology, nation-states, money economy, capitalism, and industrialism in the Western societies. This shift in human thinking and relations produced unprecedented socio-economic-political conditions that have drastically restructured our lives.

Modernity sits on the foundations of the thinkers we have been looking at and their ideas;

- There are only two different answers to the one question
- The only foundation for thinking that is acceptable is the foundation of “I think therefore I am”
 - Empiricism becomes the foundation for all knowledge, no revelation is allowed
 - If we cannot find scientific evidence for god then god does not exist as there is nothing that exists except that we can demonstrate evidence for it
- Humanity then, becomes the starting point for all ideas and values
- We must reject the imposition of values and beliefs that have been imposed upon society by outside mechanisms, for example the Church, and rely on our own rationality to determine what is right and wrong

The Theme of Modernity:

Through reason and science humanity can progress to a better world and discover true knowledge.

Influencers of Modernity:

Charles Darwin 1809 – 1882

“Great minds shape the thinking of successive historical periods. Luther and Calvin inspired the Reformation; Locke, Leibniz, Voltaire and Rousseau, the Enlightenment. Modern thought is most dependent on the influence of Charles Darwin”¹

“Darwin is seen as giving the world a comprehension of itself so unlike the view held in the past that, in a sense he

¹ Ernst Mayr, “Darwin’s influence on Modern Thought” *Scientific America* November 24, 2009
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/darwins-influence-on-modern-thought/>

restarted history. Darwin's influence continues to be pervasive today..."²

What have been Darwin's influences on Modernity?

While we could spend significant time discussing the scientific evidence for or against Darwin's idea of natural selection and evolution, the most important things to note are perhaps what doors his ideas opened.

1. It gave opportunity for those looking, as part of the development of modernity, to get out from under imposed Dogmas, here read the Church. Darwin presented, in the new scientific way a plausible theory for the development of all life, including humanity. For many this allowed a 'no God' option.
2. Evolution became a part of mainstream thinking outside of biology and therefore lead, in popular thinking to the idea that things of the past were, by definition, weaker or less sophisticated than things of the future. The endless progression upwards towards a better future.
3. Social structures are engineered and controlled by impersonal forces and if governments can tap into these forces they can control the types of societies that develop. Therefore the solution to most societal problems is education and Money.
4. Man is nothing more than an evolved ape.

Karl Marx 1818-1883

A social and economic philosopher born in Germany of Jewish parents.

Marx published his most influential book in 1867, *Das Kapital*, 'on Capital'. In it he detailed the scientific laws which would lead inevitably to a better society because of the equitable sharing of wealth.

What have been Marx's influences on Modernity?

- The violent establishment of communist nations around the world, with the most influential being communist Russia or the USSR.
- The scientific evidence for the need for social concern by governments

² Dave Breese, *7 Men Who Rule the World from the Grave* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1990), 25.

- A willingness to critic and question the capitalistic system which came to dominate western culture.
- The idea of economic determinism – the future is determined by the way in which society engages its economy.

Julius Wellhausen 1844-1918

Called the ‘Father of Higher Criticism’, Wellhausen developed a way of bringing the ‘scientific method’ to the study and understanding of the Bible.

Wellhausen’s ideas were at the forefront of what became known as ‘Liberal Theology’. When these ideas entered the American Christian world they were strongly opposed by what became known as ‘Fundamentalism’.

What have been Wellhausen’s influences on Modernity?

- The breakdown of belief in the supernatural quality of the Bible and the exchange of revelation for rational knowledge
- Application of evolutionary development to the idea of god
- The opposing development of Christian Fundamentalism and to a degree right-wing American political ideas
- Within the faith, the movement to a more historical reading of scripture

Albert Einstein 1879-1955

Born in Germany and studied at the University of Zurich where he obtained his doctorate. Described as a ‘theoretical physicist’ he is best remembered for his Theory of General and Special Relativity.

What have been Einstein’s influences on Modernity?

- The beginning of the nuclear age
- The rise of relativism – a popular misunderstanding of the theory of relativity
- The rise of pragmatism – if all truth and value and morality is relative then the way to decide on what to do is to ask, what has the best effect? Do whatever gets you the desired result.

Sigmund Freud 1856-1939

Described as the father of psychoanalysis.

Freud proposed that human minds were divided into;

- the id – the dark unknown remembrances of the person from their life so far

- the ego – the way in which the id interacts with the world, the person's personality
- the superego – something like a conscience.

However the driving force of all of these divisions was the libido – the sexual urge. For Freud the libido is the universal motivator of all things.

What have been Freud's influences on Modernity?

- An individual is merely a collection of responses, appropriate or in appropriate, to the interplay of the id, ego superego and the individuals' libido.
- Therefore because of the first part an individual is determined by their past to a future.
- The rise of the 'libido is everything' society. The sexualisation of all things.

John Maynard Keynes 1883–1946

The most influential economist of the post WWI era Keynes preached that the major responsibility of government was to create full employment even if it meant borrowing money and amassing debt to do so.

What have been Keynes' influences on Modernity?

- Governments being in debt is OK
- People being in debt is OK
- The rise of the 1st world holding the developing world in the chains of debt

From Modernity to Post Modernity:

The failure of the Modernity ideal, **Through reason and science humanity can progress to a better world and discover true knowledge**, as seen in the rise of wars, the rise of wealth inequity, the increase in eco-disasters among other things, have led to the move from Modernity to Post Modernity.

Post-moderns are suspicious of those who make universal truth claims.

Postmodernity, as a worldview, refuses to allow any single defining source for truth and reality. The new emphasis is on difference, plurality and selective forms of tolerance.

The Roman and Jewish Worldviews of the First Century

Acknowledging that we all live out our worldview, consistently or inconsistently, consciously or unconsciously, then we need to recognise that the Biblical writers also wrote out of the worldview in which they lived. But understanding their worldview as much as possible then we can have a better understanding of Scripture.

The Roman Story:

- A small city state which grew into an empire
- No emperor until Julius Caesar
- Civil war with peace through winning by Augustus
- Belief in justice and freedom through military
- Augustus rewrote the story with himself as the 'messiah'
- Julius Caesar is deified
- Augustus is the 'son of god' who has brought peace to the world, the King of Peace

Symbols:

- Coins
- Statues
- Monuments

Praxis:

- Rome's justice system – crucifixion
- Building of roads and colonies established
- Military conquest
- Social stratification
- Honour and shame – places at dinner, Corinthians, slaves at the bottom who are property

Religions:

- Totally interwoven with ordinary life
- Worship of the emperors
- All people needed to be involved in the worship of the gods
- Lots of different views existed about the gods

The Jewish Story:

- The story revolves around Family and Land
- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 tribes
- The most important part of the story was the Exodus – Yahweh rescues his family from slavery
- Prophets and Kings
- Exile into Babylon
- What will happen now?
- Return from Babylon and the 2nd Temple Period

- The end of the story is told in a range of different ways;
 - The High Priest in the temple
 - The Essenes
 - The Pharisees – the keeping of the law
- The storytelling festivals
- A story in search of an ending.....

Matthew 2:1-18

Matthew 2:1-18 gives a description of the visit of the Magi to Herod and, eventually, their visit to the infant, Jesus. What we would ask in this section of the Bible are questions like this:

- Who are the actors in the story?
- What are the story/symbol/praxis/questions of each of the actors in the story?
- How do these worldviews provide clarity in understanding the biblical narrative?
- What do we see of the Roman Empire narrative? The Jewish Narrative? The 'in-Christ people' narrative?