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Conversation with a Postmodernist : June 2014

by Freddy Davis

Many reading the following conversation will find this discussion quite disturbing. The reason it is disturbing is that the Postmodernist in this case is a pastor and chaplain. I have changed his name here out of respect for his privacy (I will call him William). Rest assured, though, the following interaction actually took place in June of 2014.

This discussion took place on LinkedIn, a social media forum which allows for group discussions. The original question that was put up for discussion was: What is the difference between Relative Truth and Absolute Truth; and does Relative Truth have or should have any place in Christianity?

There were actually many people who entered into this discussion. However, there were parts where the exchange was primarily between William and me. What I have done for this article is to extract only those particular exchanges.

By way of explanation, let me just make a couple of comments about how it came to be that a pastor could possibly have this kind of non-biblical belief system. As you are probably well aware, our nation was founded on the beliefs of Christian Theism. However, over the past century or so, naturalistic worldview beliefs have become increasingly prominent and now actually dominate most of the major institutions of our culture. These are beliefs which have substituted the Christian belief in God and its associated values with a belief that man is the end of all things. This naturalistic belief has come to dominate our entertainment industry, the political system, the news media and our educational institutions.

Unfortunately, many of the educational institutions which have been affected have been theological schools. In fact, the theological institutions which are primarily used by certain of the mainline protestant denominations in America no longer teach traditional biblical theology. Rather, they have substituted various liberal forms of theology which are based in naturalistic ideology rather than in Biblical Theism. Some of the liberal forms of theology include Neo-orthodoxy, Liberation Theology and, in more recent times, Postmodern Theology. William, in this discussion, holds to Postmodern Theology. Following is the discussion we held.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

I'll be in the minority here and say I'm not sure we can know whether a truth is absolute or not, so I'm certainly not going to claim to know it myself. All I can say is that there are things I am more or less certain of. Presumably only God can know absolute truth with certainty, and I am quite suspicious of absolute truth claims. So I would say that there is only relative truth. This doesn't mean we can't say anything or make claims; spacetime is relative but we can say lots of reliable things about it. But it remains relative, a matter of relationships. In answer to the question, I would provocatively say that absolute truth has no place in Christianity.

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Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

Douglas, you can attempt to make a claim like that, but whether you like it or not, you are asserting your own belief (that there is only relative truth) as an absolute truth. Your very claim is self contradictory.

On top of that, if there is no absolute truth, then there is no Christian faith. If you really believe what you have said, I have a difficult time understanding why you are serving as a pastor and why you even want to have anything to do with the Christian faith. The worldview foundation of the beliefs you have expressed are not Christian, but are from Naturalism. If you believe absolute truth has no place in Christianity, either you don't understand the concept of relative truth as you are expressing it and/or you don't understand the foundation of the Christian faith.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

@Freddy: For some reason, this fallacy always comes up with discussing relativism. Your statement is a category error. What you're saying makes no more sense than saying something like "Well, if the theory of relativity is true, then that's not a relative statement, so the theory of relativity is false." It is possible to make categorical statements about things that are understood only in relationship to each other. If not, then physics would be impossible. I don't know why this comes up so often, but I often see it as a "Gotcha!" kind of response to any relative statement about truth.

I'm also not making statements beyond my own experience (which I find to be a good practice most of

the time). I do not know anything to be absolutely true. (And no, that was not an absolute truth statement). I also think that absolute truth claims do one of two things: 1. completely halt meaningful discussion, or 2. come right before some kind of appeal to authority.

So I'm sticking with my original statement - I don't think Christianity benefits in any way from the claim that we have access to absolute truth. I think that Christianity benefits a great deal from the humility to say that we don't know things for certain, are limited fallible beings, and always have new things to learn.

Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

Douglas, you are free to stick to your original statement if you like, but that does not change the fact that your assertion is self contradictory. The explanation you have given does not hold up because you are making an explanation based on the presuppositions of one worldview and trying to apply them in another.

Your whole approach is based in a naturalistic worldview being the basis for truth. That assumes that anything which cannot be empirically verified is faith while only science can give us fact. That is simply not true. In fact, what you are implying as the basis for truth (based on naturalistic presuppositions) is itself simply a different faith system. Then, to illustrate your point, you have specifically pointed to the theory of relativity and juxtaposed it to experimental physics. That is exactly like making the claim that the theory of evolution is true because science has empirically proven it. It simply is not a true statement.

I will repeat what I said before. If there is no absolute truth, then there is no Christian faith. The worldview foundation of the beliefs you have expressed

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are not Christian, but are from Naturalism. If you believe absolute truth has no place in Christianity, either you don't understand the concept of relative truth as you are expressing it and/or you don't understand the foundation of the Christian faith.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

@Freddy: I think you have already gone into presuppositionalist apologetics territory, and we are no longer talking about the same thing. My experience thus far with PA is that it is impossible to have an actual conversation with someone employing it. No matter what I say, you will say something that is unrelated, but what you wanted to say anyway. Case in point: what does evolution have to do with this conversation? And where did I lodge a truth-claim with naturalism in anything I said? You are not replying to me in a meaningful way, you seem to just be reiterating a script you've memorized.

Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

Douglas, you have twice accused me of babbling out a script I have memorized. That kind of insult is really unwarranted regarding someone you don't even know.

To begin with, you have accused me of going into presuppositional apologetics territory as if speaking about presuppositions disqualifies what I have said. The fact is, there is nothing you (or anyone else) can ever utter which is not based on some set of presuppositions. So pretending that you are able to speak authoritative statements which are based on some kind of objective foundation is simply ludicrous. What you have dismissed is the presuppositions of historical Christianity and are asserting a different set of beliefs based on

some other set of presuppositions (which you have not yet admitted to, have not specifically identified, and which you certainly can't demonstrate to be true in any manner whatever it is).

I'm sorry you missed the connection I was making using the illustration regarding evolution. I was comparing the fact that what we know based on experimental science about the process of evolution and what the theory of evolution tries to assert are two different things. This is true in the same way that relativity theory and experimental physics are two different things. Your example simply did not illustrate what you were claiming for it.

You asked where you lodged a truth claim with Naturalism. Let me try again. You have and continue to assert that there is no such thing as absolute truth. As I read your arguments, EVERYTHING you are claiming is based on a set of presuppositions (yes I said it again) which assumes that everything is relative. What you have described over and over again without using the word is a postmodernist approach to understanding reality. Well, Postmodernism is one of the expressions of Naturalism. You can't argue using your own set of presuppositions then claim you are not using them because you have not identified them by name.

But to get at the bottom line, a Christian worldview understands that there is something beyond the material universe which is objectively real and can be objectively known (an absolute). The reason it can be known is because the revealer created human beings with the capacity to understand what he has revealed. Beyond that, he has revealed himself on a personal level and can be known by those who open their lives to him. Limiting the ability to know

God some form of natural function as you seem to be insisting will never get you to an understanding of or a relationship with the objectively real person who is God (and is the root of the absolute). And to overtly answer the last part of your question, we know because we have met him in a personal relationship.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

@Freddy: I promised I'd try to be much pithier, so here goes. And my intent wasn't to insult you, it's just that I have been presented with identical arguments, in an identical style, by presuppositional apologists, and have found them, in every instance, to be impossible to have a meaningful conversation with. I think that is also the case here.

1. Postmodernism is not an expression of Naturalism. And this is what I mean when I accuse you of using a script - you have moved the discussion to your flawed (straw man) understanding of Postmodernism so that you can use your pre-prepared arguments against Postmodernism, rather than deal with what I actually say. The fact that you misunderstand Postmodernism doesn't help.

2. Your assertion that historical Christianity is one worldview, or one set of presuppositions, does not comport with the evidence of history, or even of the evidence of scripture taken by itself.

3. Your claim that I am the one making objective truth claims is, on its face, ridiculous. That is the inverse of the claims I am making. You are saying that I am making objective truth claims, then criticizing me because I will not make objective truth claims.

4. Your view is indistinguishable, to me, from a delusion. You are saying you know there is absolute truth because you have a personal relationship with someone you feel revealed absolute truth to you. Do you see why that ends the discussion? Because if you felt you had received absolute truth from your toaster or your dog, you would feel exactly the same way and make the same argument. You're in effect saying, "I have secret knowledge because of a private relationship that you do not have." There is simply no way to have a rational conversation with that position.

5. Of course I have a worldview and suppositions (I doubt I would buy what you think a presupposition is or how it functions, but I do suppose things) - I have been pretty open about them, but you implied I was hiding them or something, so do you want a list? Here are some that might be germane to my position on truth, but remember, these suppositions are not taken a priori, but are rather rooted in evidence. You argue about worldview as if it is something unchanging, and presuppositions as if they do not change in response to new experiences and new evidence. That is not true of mine in either case - I have no idea whether that is true of yours. Anyway:

A. Human beings are flawed in perception, reasoning and understanding. That is, no matter what we are perceiving, reasoning about, or think we understand, there will be errors.

B. It is for all intents and purposes meaningless to refer to magical revelation as a source of knowledge, because:

- * knowledge that only one special person can have is indistinguishable from delusion

- * knowledge that cannot be communicated is of very little use

- * knowledge that only one special person can have and that cannot be communicated cannot be tested in any way for veracity

C. No truth (fact, experience, idea, etc.) exists that is not in relationship to some other truth. (This is the definition of "relative") Even mathematical axioms are still dependent on context and relationships to other axioms and to observed reality.

D. Even if there was an absolute truth, in the way this is usually meant by religious folks, there is no way that we could understand that truth absolutely, because A and B (above).

E. It is morally preferable, and intellectually more honest, to acknowledge A at all times in humility. "This is what I think, what do you think?" is in all cases preferable to "This is the absolute truth, and if you don't agree you are wrong."

Therefore, the option I choose is to understand truth as relative.

In any event, I don't have your magical access to private revelation, and since that is the source of your ideas, I have no point at which I can engage with you,

except to say that I am deeply skeptical of your claim to revelatory knowledge of absolute truth.

Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

William,

First let me clear up a couple of your misconceptions. If you will read my previous reply a little more carefully, you might notice that I did not say you were a Postmodernist, only that your argument used a Postmodernist approach.

Secondly, there may be a reason you keep running into identical arguments. It could be that the answers to your assertions lie in the arguments that are being made. That would be a good reason for you to keep hearing it. Beyond that, I could say the same thing about your arguments. I have interacted with numerous self declared Postmodernists, and even Atheists, who make the same kinds of arguments you make. So based on your reasoning, would that make you a person who is impossible to have a meaningful conversation with, as well? I have disputed your assertions but don't think I have done so in a way which puts you down. The conversation might be a little more civil if you would also use that approach. So, on to dealing with your comments.

1. Postmodernism is an expression of Naturalism. The basic underlying (worldview) beliefs of Postmodernism use naturalistic presuppositions as a base. Postmodernism denies absolute truth and maintains that there is no such thing as objective right and wrong - the very things you have asserted. The rationale for this approach, in Postmodern belief, is that there is no such thing as a supernatural reality. Now, you have not been very clear as to whether or not you believe in God or, if you do, what you actually believe about him, but the approach you have used in your argument very much has postmodern fingerprints on it.

2. You have made an assertion but have not given much hint about what you mean by this. Very difficult to respond because of that.

3. So, your claim that we cannot know absolute truth is not a truth claim? You don't seem to realize the contradictory nature of your own words. Just saying you are not making objective truth claims does not mean you are not actually doing it. If you are, indeed,

not making a truth claim, then why are you jumping all over me for not having the same belief as you?

4, I don't think I ever characterized my faith in God as a feeling. My claim is that God is an actual person who created human beings in his own image which makes us persons. As persons are objective realities and are able to objectively and propositionally interact with one another, the interaction believers have with God is actually real and can be known. Your allusion to the idea that only that which can be interacted with in a material manner can be real is very much a naturalistic presupposition which you have no way of demonstrating using the assumptions you are pushing on me. Additionally, knowledge of God is not secret. In fact, he has purposefully and actively revealed it to all of humanity. Are you really saying that the Bible is not a propositional revelation of God to man? All you have really done in your argument is dismiss any possibility which does not fit your presuppositions.

5. You say your beliefs are rooted in evidence, but you really don't mention what the evidence is. In your arguments you seem to be only allowing evidence which is empirical in nature. The problem is, your very assumption has no empirical basis. As for your presuppositions:

A. This is a statement about the flawed nature of human beings, not about the existence of absolute truth. The fact that we don't perfectly understand God's revelation does not in any way take away from the fact that absolute truth exists and that it is possible for us to apprehend that truth sufficiently even though not fully.

B. You are the one who has used the word magical and that is a mischaracterization of the nature of revelation. The revelation God has given in Scripture is not special knowledge to only one special person, but what he has given to mankind. It is also knowledge that has been communicated propositionally. Beyond that, it can be tested. It is just that based on your presuppositions you have dismissed the kind of evidence that is able to show it to be true - and have done it a priori (you have no objective basis whatsoever for making your assertion about this).

C. That fact, experience, idea, etc., exists in relationship to other truth does not dismiss the concept of absolute truth. No one is suggesting that if there is one element of truth it excludes or is independent of the rest of the truth that exists. I don't see how this

point really has much relationship to anything in this discussion.

D. Your reasoning here relates to the flawed nature of human beings, not to the existence of absolute truth, because my answers A and B.

E. Morally preferable? Says who? You have totally dismissed the possibility of absolute truth which is the very basis for morality. All you leave for yourself is the possibility for relative truth in the sense that you have to make it up yourself. So, you are only expressing your personal moral preference without any reason for anyone else to prefer your approach (again, your entire argument is based on naturalistic worldview presuppositions, not on Christian beliefs).

What I don't get is why you even want to be a pastor/chaplain or any kind of Christian worker. Your entire approach to understanding reality is not even based on a Christian worldview, and the goals of your ministry seem to have nothing to do with the purpose of God in the world as he has revealed in Scripture.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

Freddy, I don't think I'll continue here. We're making no headway in understanding each other.

In answer to your last question, there is no singular "Christian worldview." Yours, like mine, is highly specific to our context and conditioned by same. There has never been a singular "Christian worldview" as far as scripture and the historical record show. So I want to be a pastor (and am) because of a bunch of things that you don't believe are o [William simply stopped typing this sentence. See next post as to why.]

But, you've made the unsupported argument that I cannot possibly present empirical evidence that empirical evidence can be trusted. There's just no way to have a conversation with 'empirical evidence doesn't matter'.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

I was going to go further, but that comment contained exactly 666 characters. But I'll save you fur-

ther time, Freddy: to you, I have no doubt that I don't count as Christian at all. I disagree with you on almost everything you've said, and this is far beyond the scope of a comment thread already.

Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

I'm sorry, William, but your reply, as with your previous one, simply doesn't reflect what I actually said. I never said empirical evidence doesn't matter and I never said anything about you not being able to present empirical evidence that empirical evidence can't be trusted. In fact, I haven't even discussed the philosophical basis for interpreting empirical evidence in this string at all.

Actually, I fully believe empirical evidence can be trusted. I believe that God created the material universe in a way that is based on natural laws which can be explored using empirical methodology. The problem with your argument is that you have never presented empirical evidence for anything you say you believe. All you have done is assert particular beliefs based on, well, your belief that what you are saying is true. The reason we are making no headway is not because I am saying things which cannot be discussed (as you keep saying over and over again), but because you continue to assert a non-biblical point of view with nothing to back up what you are saying.

I'm not fully sure I understand what you mean with your assertion that there is no singular "Christian worldview." What we do have is the teachings of the Bible which represent an authoritative revelation from God. Those teachings present a view of reality which are truth. There are, certainly, elements of those teachings where various people have differing interpretations. That said, there is a core which all biblical Christians will affirm and which represent a line which cannot be crossed and one still be considered a Christian. Specifically that relates to its teaching about God, man and salvation. You have been quite coy regarding those things, choosing, instead, to make assertions in other areas which you have not backed up. Many of the things you have said seem to be crossing that line as you have alluded (since you have still not been willing to specifically clarify your theological base) to beliefs which simply do not come from the Bible.

You came in here intentionally making controversial statements which, by your own admission (in your very first post), you knew most would not agree with. And it is certainly your privilege to do that. However, it is certainly unreasonable to expect that when you do you will not be challenged when you are not able to back up what you are saying.

William
Pastor, Chaplain

I agree, and that is part of what brings me to the position of valuing relative truth. Caught up in this is that I am a postmodernist, though not in Freddy's idiosyncratic sense - rather, a postmodernist in the historical sense of the various movements and schools of thought that arose out of the collapse of authoritative meaning (sometimes called "governing metanarrative") at the end of the Enlightenment and in particular after the two great world wars. This was combined with the entrance of previously marginalized people into various academic discussions, and voila! We come to find that "the absolute truth" is in fact constructed, and it is constructed differently by different communities and in different contexts. The "absolute truth" until postmodernism came around (which is not one single movement) existed without the input of marginalized people at all. Christopher Columbus was history, no one cared about the Arawaks. The US was founded by the Founding Fathers, who cares about what the women or slaves or the poor were up to at the time. Postmodernism, in my view and understanding, is simply the acceptance of the reality that there is no longer one grand narrative that accounts for everything.

Freddy Davis
State Minister at Capitol Commission

Thank you, William, for finally saying overtly what you have been alluding covertly to the entire time. Contrary to your assumption, I do have a pretty good grasp on Postmodernism which is why I pegged it early (in spite of your attempts to argue based on it without ever owning up to it). There are a couple of problems I have with Postmodernism as a philosophical construct.

The first one relates to what this entire discussion has been about. Your assertion that there is no such things as a grand metanarrative not only discounts the possibility of absolute truth in a general sense, but

basically says that the only truth that exists period is that which individuals construct in their own heads. If you even acknowledge the existence of God, he does not or cannot communicate propositionally with us - and even if he did the meaning of the communication would be what we make it to be, not what he thought he was communicating to us. In effect there is no personal God (which by the way is a foundational presupposition of Naturalism). In your construct, you have not only thrown out the metanarratives of the societal "oppressors" in favor of local narratives of oppressed groups, you have thrown out the metanarrative of the biblical revelation itself. When you do this you cannot even be a Christian in the biblical sense of the word because you don't believe the Bible is God's revelation of himself to man (or even that the concept of God revealing himself is a valid concept).

The second problem I have is what I have expressed before. You have asserted Postmodernism as a worldview construct but have given no evidence whatsoever that it reflects reality. The only evidence that you have even put forth is that you believe it because you believe it. You argue for it but there is no reason for your argument. You make up for yourself what you think is true and important which only applies to you. Where does that come from? What makes it true?

Contrary to what you have asserted, absolute truth is not the construct of powerful human beings who have used a made up metanarrative to oppress the powerless. Rather it is the actual structure of reality - portions of it that God himself has revealed to mankind so that we can know how to enter into a personal relationship with him.

Honestly, you get to believe what you want, but until you can give some kind of actual evidence that what you are saying is true, nothing you are saying has any meaning at all. And what you have already said has, literally, no relationship to the Christian faith.

William
Pastor, Chaplain

Yeah, Freddy, I never "covertly" did anything. You certainly claim a lot of expertise as to what is in my head - and that is an issue I have with your approach in general, that it is rooted in you telling me what I think and believe, as if I'm not aware and I need your help to understand my own thoughts. I've also read through your understanding of the various worldviews

you believe exist, and I don't think we agree on much of anything.

We also disagree on what "the Christian faith" is. Nothing you've said has much (if any) relation to the Christian faith in my view. The Christian faith is not a worldview, and it is not singular, and it has not always been the same throughout history. I don't think you understand the bible as a text, and you make claims for the bible that the bible does not make for itself. As for evidence that truth is constructed - you don't see what you believe to be true as constructed, so it is hard to give evidence for it. If you think the sky is orange because you think the bible says the sky is orange and the bible cannot be wrong because you say the bible cannot be wrong, then we'll remain stuck. You don't see anything suspicious in the fact that what you think is objectively true happens to be the majority opinion in the culture into which you were born? And that what other people think is objectively true is almost always the majority opinion in the culture into which they were born?

In addition, in a pluralistic world, the burden of proof is on the person positing a meta-narrative. My evidence is that there are lots of narratives, all but one of which disagree with yours. You have the task of proving yours is the only right one.

I am a postmodernist simply because I have a basic respect for people who disagree with me about what is true. I assume they are not misguided, or stupid, or sinful, or being sneaky, or whatever. I assume they have some understanding of truth, and I have some understanding of truth, and I clearly see how what I think is true is constructed and dependent on my context (things like the accident of where I was born). So I think there is the option of claiming a grand meta-narrative, or not. In your case, you claim your own very specific American conservative evangelical Christianity as the grand meta-narrative. I don't think your view of the bible even applies to Roman Catholics or Orthodox Christians, not to mention the Episcopalians and Methodists down the street, and I don't think you represent historical Christianity back farther than maybe the turn of the 19th century, and you certainly do not represent the majority of Christians on earth today.

Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

Wow, Douglas, do you even realize what you have done? You are dismissing the very idea of metanar-

atives using Postmodernism as a metanarrative. I am saying, because of that, your attempt to avoid the necessity of providing your own "burden of proof" is not valid. If you are going to claim that Postmodernism really does represent the way reality is structured, you need to provide some evidence that it is true rather than merely making an assertion. The fact that there are lots of possible metanarratives is no evidence at all that the postmodernist approach reflects reality.

Do you not realize that in dismissing a Theistic approach to understanding reality you are doing the very thing you assert is wrong? If all knowledge really is subjective (subject to the interpretation of the individual as Postmodernism requires), your very assertion that you have a correct way of interpreting reality as opposed to mine is a total contradiction. Either you don't believe what you are saying or you don't understand the implications. And I find it interesting that you assert that you are a Postmodernist "simply because I have a basic respect for people who disagree with me about what is true." I guess that applies to everyone except those who don't agree with your Postmodernist point of view.

Actually, as opposed to your claim, I have not tried to tell you what you believe, and I don't understand why you would frame my points in that way. You believe what you believe. All I did was to make plain some of the things you implied but did not say overtly until I called on you to do so, then I explained the implications of your postmodernist beliefs (really more for the benefit of the others reading this discussion than for you). Your protest in that regard is simply off base.

And as for my approach to worldview, all I have done with that on my website is explain the various worldview possibilities (and BTW, since you don't agree with my approach, I would be very interested in how you would do it differently). In spite of the fact that you said you have read my approach, you apparently did not understand it. I have never claimed Christianity is a worldview. I talk about Christianity as a belief system which is one expression of a theistic worldview.

As for the reason you have given for why you are a postmodernist, do you seriously think that no other belief system is able to have a basic respect for people? Christian Theism has the utmost respect for people. We believe God created humanity in his own image. And when man fell God went to all the trouble to provide a way to have the sin problem taken care

of. Biblical Christians have the highest regard for all humanity.

What else? You keep saying we don't agree on what the "Christian faith" is. Well, I'm sure we don't but that is another thing you keep saying without ever explaining directly what you mean. You obviously don't believe in the message of historic Christianity, so what exactly do you believe about the content and message of the Christian faith?

Let's see, one more thing - the difference between my view of the Bible and that of other Christian faith groups. I have already once mentioned this peripherally, but let me see if I can close the circle for you. There certainly are a lot of differences between Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and others. But if you will look carefully, you will see that there is a common core which all biblical Christians embrace - what they believe about God, man and salvation. God is the deity described in the Bible, man is created in the image of God but fallen and in need of salvation, and salvation was accomplished by Christ's sacrificial death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. That is historical Christianity. It appears to me that you are the one attempting to dismiss that message and interpret the Bible using your own personal (and dare I say post 19th century) preferences.

William

Pastor, Chaplain

Freddy, I despair of getting through, but here goes.

The burden of proof is on you, because you are claiming absolute truth, to which you have access, which contradicts what the vast majority of other human beings would report as their beliefs and experience. At bare minimum, in your world, five and a half billion people are wrong about truth. In my world, you and I and other people have a partial understanding of truth that is constructed and interrelated.

Postmodernism predicts a world that is very much the world we see - lots and lots of narratives, the majority of which make sense of the world for the people living within them. Efforts to unite everyone under a single narrative will invariably fail, as they have, even when supported by various kinds of imperialism. You are saying no, there is only one narrative, and it is my narrative. There is no evidence for this that I can see, so the burden of proof is on you. My evidence exists

if you walk out your door and ask the first person you meet what they think is true and why.

And yes, I think that any absolute truth claim contains within it the implication that everyone else's truth claims are sneaky, misinformed, self-deceiving, ignorant, or certainly in some way lacking. If billions of people are wrong about reality, the burden is, again, on you.

I also am baffled as to why you say that I am using empirical evidence, as if that was a criticism. I take it as a compliment. You are right - empirical evidence is the only evidence outside your mind or my mind. It is the only evidence you can show me, or I can show you. I totally use it.

My reading of your website (Marketfaith) is that there are five worldviews you present - and I would say that I agree with much of your understanding of naturalism, little of your understanding of what you call animism, almost none of what you call "Far Eastern Thought", much of what you call theism, and some of what you call Christianity. I just think it is a very difficult claim to defend, that there are five worldviews, or that there are even any small number of distinct worldviews.

My approach would be to admit that worldviews are not vast, unitary realities, and that while a particular person has a worldview, you really can't talk reasonably about a "Far East" worldview, etc. There is no such identifiable thing. A peasant in North Korea and an industrialist in Indonesia do not share a worldview. With these particular, surface views of the worldviews you think are incorrect, of course they're easy to critique. They're straw men.

I took your claims about Christianity to be more far-reaching than the bare minimum you cited (and you should update your website if Christianity is not a worldview, because it is one of the five worldviews you present in your worldview worksheet, though yes, you present it as a sort of sub-set of theism. You have also mentioned the Christian worldview above). If all you were saying is that there are three or four things that almost all Christians can agree on historically, I have no problem with that claim at all. But if you claim that Christianity is a singular worldview, or go beyond those three or four basics, you've lost me. If you are not making any claims about Christianity other than the four things you listed, then I apologize. I thought you were making claims about a monolithic Christian

view of reality, and empiricism, and experience, and the nature of truth, epistemology, etc.

You claim to have the highest regard for humanity, but somehow you find that the overwhelming majority of the humans who have ever lived are wrong about reality. That is a huge claim to make, and I await your evidence for it. My claim is that the overwhelming majority of humans who have ever lived had an incomplete understanding of truth, and that none of them had or have a complete understanding of truth, and that for all of them truth was constructed either consciously or (mostly) not.

(Continued from last post)

And, for the last time, you are making a category error. The claim that there is not one single governing metanarrative is not a governing metanarrative - that is a common but false criticism of postmodernism made by people who assume there is a governing metanarrative. It's the same way that saying there is no god is not a theology, and anarchism is not a political party. If I see no blue marbles, and I say "There are no blue marbles," you can't reasonably say "so you do see blue marbles after all - you see a number of blue marbles equal to zero! Can't you see what you're doing? You're self-refuting. Silly post-modernist." That is simply not a legitimate criticism. I see no blue marbles.

My claim is that the world we see around us is the world we see around us, and we all account for it in different ways (which in some ways overlap for most people), and that people like you cannot convince everyone you have absolute truth because we all have relative truth. If you knew absolute truth, don't you think it would be apparent to anyone? You could just point to it, and we'd all be convinced (excepting a few people due to mental illness, or something similar, or maybe an ulterior motive).

What is your claim for why it is that so many people do not share your understanding of absolute truth? It would be really helpful if you said what was absolutely true. I don't actually even know if you are going to say something like "mathematical axioms" or "repeatable observations of the natural world" or "Platonic ideals."

And, heck, while we're at it, what do you absolutely know to be absolutely true? If you've said, I missed it.

Lastly, I'll say this one more time to see if it comes across. I AM NOT SAYING I HAVE AN ABSOLUTE-

LY CORRECT VIEW OF REALITY. I am telling you what my thoughts, beliefs and experiences are, and I am saying, from the outset, again and again, that I do not have access to absolute truth. I think you keep hearing me making a claim to absolute truth because you believe one has to exist in there somewhere. No, really. I think truth is relative, and constructed, relational, incompletely understood - all the things I've been saying over and over again.

Freddy Davis

State Minister at Capitol Commission

First, I want to apologize to everyone that my reply is as long as it is. Because of the gravity of William arguments, I truly believe they need to be answered as fully as possible, so I have chosen to go ahead and do it.

William, you continue to insist that a postmodernist approach is not a claim to absolute truth, yet you also continue to dismiss my approach. If what you are claiming is true (even though making a truth claim is itself a contradiction for a postmodernist) then how can you say my experience of truth is wrong? Didn't you say, "I think that any absolute truth claim contains within it the implication that everyone else's truth claims are sneaky, misinformed, self-deceiving, ignorant, or certainly in some way lacking." Why can your absolute truth claim be right and mine not? You can't have it both ways.

In some ways it is still difficult to address some of your issues. I am fully aware that is partially because you are trying to be consistent with your answers - which is a problem for postmodernism. But I thought since you have theological training you would at least understand the evangelical Christian point of view. We actually do believe that both material and transcendent reality exist and are both objectively real. Spiritual reality exists beyond our natural understanding, and matters related to eternity must be revealed by the God who exists there if we are to know anything about it (which he has done). It is possible for us to know things about it truthfully without knowing it absolutely. That does not change the absolute nature of its (or God's) existence. By the same token, the material universe exists objectively and operates by natural laws which God himself put in place. He can interact with the material universe without messing up the natural laws because he is its creator. Hope this helps you understand a little better about the beliefs you are kicking against. And how do we know it is

true? Because part of God's revelation is personal. When a person invites Christ into his or her life, we enter into an objectively real personal relationship with him. Your seeming insistence that this be empirically provable simply does not reflect the reality that does exist. And insisting that God empirically demonstrate this is completely outside of the Christian faith.

And in spite of your continual insistence that the burden of proof is on me, you do have a burden of proof that you must fulfill. You must somehow demonstrate that there is no such thing as a grand metanarrative that God has revealed to mankind. And where do you get the idea that I don't think local narratives exist? Your idea that the existence of personal narratives eliminates the possibility of a grand metanarrative is simply not true. I don't disagree that it is possible for all people to have a partial understanding of truth. In fact, the Bible affirms that. But a partial understanding of truth is not salvific truth. The Bible also affirms that the number of people who will ultimately find the "narrow path" is few. The fact that this particular teaching of the Bible offends you does not change the fact that this is an absolutely true biblical teaching. The fact that you do not like the biblical teaching that many people will not choose Christ is not a valid reason for dismissing what the Bible teaches. So, again, what justification do you have for dismissing the very concept of absolute truth other than you simply don't like/believe the metanarrative revealed in the Bible? Something is not true just because you claim it.

(Continued)

You seem to have missed my point about the use of empirical evidence. I was not being critical of the use of it. In fact, I think it is important, as well. My point is that you are basing your arguments on a worldview system which requires empirical verification for EVERYTHING – including your justification for using a postmodern approach for understanding reality. So, where is the science to back it up? Just making assertions does not make something true.

You still don't seem to understand the concept of worldview as I have expressed it, thus your criticism of my approach is completely invalid. You are the one who has built a straw man to characterize my approach then tried to knock it down. People don't typically identify their beliefs based on worldview categories. In fact, for most people, the worldview presuppositions which underlie their beliefs are completely unconscious. What people consciously identi-

fy with are the belief systems which sit on top of their worldview assumptions. Your critique is simply invalid.

(BTW, the reason I use the term "Christian worldview" is out of convenience. Most people who read my articles are not conversant in the more philosophical nuances of what is being dealt with so I have chosen to simplify it by using as little technical terminology as I can manage. I indeed do begin with the assumption that Christian theism is the truth about reality and have used the survey tool as a way to compare all beliefs to the truth. Your criticism of that does not invalidate what I have done. And that fact that you don't like the way I have characterized the worldview beliefs is also not a valid criticism. Many different people approach this topic in different ways. Because of that, I have defined my terms so people can understand what I am talking about. The fact that you would like to use a different method of categorization does not in any way invalidate the way I have done it. When you write your work on worldview, you can organize it the way you prefer.)

Now, back to the topic at hand. Your criticism of my method continues with your critique of my expression about the Christian faith. I laid out the basics in those simple ways, but obviously the implications of each of them do get expressed in "a monolithic Christian view of reality, and empiricism, and experience, and the nature of truth, epistemology, etc." The God of the Bible has revealed himself and his ways specifically, and that revelation is absolute truth. Reality does exist in a particular way and not in any other way. When I talk about the biblical understanding of God, it means specific things and is not subject to relativistic interpretations. Same for the biblical teaching about man and salvation. It all means what God meant it to mean when he revealed it, not what "it means to me as I read it." It means something to me personally as I apply the truth principles to my life, but the principles themselves are absolute. (I am still waiting to hear why you think it is legitimate to relativize the principles.)

(Continued)

Now, regarding your assertion that I am making a category error by my argument. In fact, it is you who are making a category error. When you compare marbles to a metanarrative discussion (tangible to intangible) there are things which simply do not line up. You are essentially saying your postmodernist belief is a tangible element that can be dealt with empirically while my Christian theistic approach is a faith statement that has no backing. It is simply a false

comparison. For instance, you can say all you want that belief in "no god is not a theology." But it is. The "no God" expresses only one side of the argument while pretending that the other side does not exist. However, if there is no God then everything must still be accounted for by some means (presumably natural laws). So, the Atheist must still account for the existence of the universe and everything in it based on the positive belief that science is able to show it. Otherwise, the belief in "no God" is just another belief system (which it actually is). And every belief system has a theology. The theology of Atheism is the positive affirmation that there is no God. You may see no blue marbles, but you do see "something." And it is that "something" that you are trying to deny exists. Postmodernism is not a "nothing." It is a belief system which is governed by a set of propositions. (Propositions, by the way, that cannot be governed by your postmodernist approach because they are fixed.)

Finally, you have still ignored the main question that gets at your side of the question in this post. What do you believe about who God is and how do you know that your belief is true?

Conclusion

At this point the conversation ended. William apparently decided he no longer wanted to be a part of the discussion. In fact, he went back into the forum and went so far as to actually delete all of his posts. Perhaps he finally became aware that none of his Postmodern beliefs could hold up to critical scrutiny.

The reason this discussion is important for you is that, undoubtedly, you know people who attend churches whose pastors teach this kind of theology, or perhaps attend one yourself. In order not to become confused and to be able to share a witness in these situations, you need to be aware of the arguments people make and the worldview beliefs these arguments are founded upon. People who believe this kind of theology are functional Atheists and separated from God. It is my hope and prayer that reading this discussion provides you with tools which will help you in your own spiritual growth and your Christian witness.

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