

Understanding the Times: *Not So Evident Truths*
May 28, Anno Domini 2010

INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

We have been talking about the importance of understanding the concept of worldviews. A worldview is a network of beliefs or foundational assumptions through which we look at the world and by which we live our lives.

We might think of a worldview as functioning something like a pair of glasses. And for this analogy to work you have to imagine that everyone is wearing a pair of glasses. Some people are wearing glasses with blue lenses. Some are wearing glasses with red lenses. Others are wearing glasses with yellow lenses. And still others are wearing glasses with spotted lenses. And as each person looks through his glasses, he sees the world differently. Each person's view of the world is colored by the glasses he wears, so he is not able to get a true picture of the world. They all see the same basic outline of things, but the color of the lenses filters out certain aspects of reality. And for the one who is wearing the glasses with spotted lenses, there are some things that are completely blocked off from view. He can't see them.

Those who wear glasses with clear lenses can see the world the way it really is. These are those who have a Christian worldview, who look at the world with Christian assumptions.

Or, to modify the analogy, we can think of everyone as needing glasses. Everyone has bad vision and needs corrective lenses—but they don't know it. They think they see things as they really are. They think reality really is blurry.

They don't know any better because they've never experienced anything different. They've never seen things before *as they really are*. Their eyesight is bad and they don't know it. This is how things are with those who don't have a Christian worldview. They have a false perception of reality, but they don't know it. But those who are wearing glasses with corrective lenses view the world as it really is. They see things clearly. The Bible serves as our corrective lens so that we can see the world around us as it really is.

We have seen that there are two main worldviews which are competing for attention in the public square today: Christianity and its chief rival in our country—the philosophy of materialism or naturalism, which says that nature is all there is. There is no supernatural realm. There is no spiritual world—no God, no soul, no spirit, just matter and energy—matter in motion—matter arranged in different combinations—accidental collocations of atoms—and everything can be explained in terms of natural laws working on matter.

Nowhere is the practical difference between these two worldviews seen more clearly than in the area of ethics—how we are to live in terms of deciding what's right and wrong; distinguishing between good and evil.

What we must understand is that Darwinism changed the way in which man was viewed, no longer as a creature made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore unique, but as merely an animal. He is the highest form of animal, to be sure, but he is an animal nonetheless. Man did not come down from above, from the hand of a Creator, but he arose from below, from the primordial slime.

This puts a completely different value upon man; and with the revaluation

of man necessarily comes the revaluation of all values. In fact, what follows is the complete subversion of the very notion of morality.

This would be tragic enough if it only impacted an individual's personal ethical choices. But we don't live as isolated persons. We live in a society of persons, and a society has an ethic just like an individual does. We have a corporate morality, a corporate ethic, which is codified in a nation's laws.

And this, perhaps, is where the destructive power of this philosophy is most clearly seen. One of the gravest dangers of Darwinism is that it undermines the notion of inherent human rights. And it does so because there is nothing, ultimately, which is really all that special about man. He has no objective worth, no inherent dignity. He's nothing more than "an accidental collocation of atoms" (Bertrand Russell).

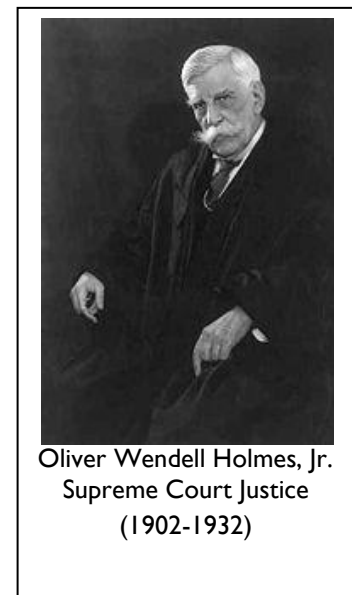
From what has been said it's clear that the Declaration of Independence, with the political philosophy it embodies could never have been written with Darwinian assumptions.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

These are the premises upon which the government of the United States was established. Without these premises a free society cannot hope to stand. The only possible basis for any concept of inherent human rights is the fact that all men equally have been created in the image of God and have been endowed by God with those rights. The alternative is that rights are given by the state.

In a materialist worldview, there are no overarching transcendent norms by which human behavior can be judged. There are no ultimate standards by which to evaluate behavior. If God does not exist then man is the highest of all beings. There is nothing above him. Man is the measure of all things. And the highest expression of the will of man is the state, the collection of men into a civil body politic, whose collective will is supreme.

This was summarized very well by Oliver Wendell Holmes, who served on the United States Supreme Court from 1902-1932. He said, “A law should be called good if it reflects the will of the dominant forces of the community.” And he made it clear that this was so even if the law should wreak havoc and destruction. “A law should be called good if it reflects the will of the dominant forces of the community, even if it will take us to hell.” And, “Wise or not, the proximate test of a good government is that the dominant power has its way.” He applied the same principle to international relations when he famously defined truth as “the majority vote of the nation that can lick all others.”¹ He also said, “[Law] corresponds at any given time with what is understood to be convenient. That involves continual change, and there can be no eternal order.”²



According to Holmes, then, rights come from the state, that is, from the civil government, provided that the civil government is an expression of the will of the people. Man has whatever rights the state is pleased to give. There could

¹ These statements are cited by Nancy Pearcey in *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), p. 245

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Wendell_Holmes

not be a starker contrast with the principles of the Founding Fathers. The Founding Fathers correctly understood human rights as coming from God. “All men are created equal [and] are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” They enumerate specifically: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. And then they say something very important: “To secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men...” Governments do not create the rights; they do not grant the rights; they do not confer the rights. The rights are an unalienable possession which each man has by virtue of being created in God’s image. Governments are instituted, not to grant the rights, but to protect them. “To secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men.”

I mention Holmes, because of the enormous impact he has had—and continues to have—on the court. “He is one of the most widely cited Supreme Court justices in history.”³ He did as much as any man to move the court away from its traditional Christian understanding of law. And he did so under the influence of Darwinist assumptions.

We would do well to understand that a judge’s philosophy of law is far more important than the particular decisions he renders. The same is true of a legislator. I want to know what he believes about the nature of law. Do the laws of man—*should* the laws of man—derive from some transcendent moral order or are laws mere human conventions?

This was one of the things I found to be very interesting years ago in the Senate confirmation hearings for Clarence Thomas. Clarence Thomas was nominated to the Supreme Court in 1991 by the first President Bush. You may remember that there was a tremendous hue and cry from the left because when

³ Ibid.

questioned, Thomas admitted that he thought there was some validity to the concept of “natural law.” He wasn’t talking about scientific laws—laws that govern the physical world, like the law of gravity, the laws of motion, the laws of thermodynamics, etc. He was talking about laws governing human behavior. He said that he entertained the possibility that natural law theory might be a valid approach to understanding law. The theory of natural law is the idea that moral law is set in nature and consequently is valid for all people at all times in all places.

There is a sense in which we as Christians accept the concept of natural law. God’s law revealed in the Bible concerning how we are to relate to one another is grounded in the nature and relations of moral beings. That is to say that God has given us laws that are appropriate and fitting given the way he has made us. He has given us laws which are suited to our natures and the relationships we have with one another. They work toward human happiness and well-being. Think what it would be like if no one ever broke God’s commandments. There would be no crime. Wars would cease. There would be no need for law enforcement or for standing armies. God’s law works for our good.

There is a sense in which we accept the idea of natural law, at least with the qualification that God is the creator of nature. We don’t think of natural law as existing independently of God, but as existing because God is the author of nature and he has written his law, as it were, into nature itself.

The theory of natural law was explained by William Blackstone, author of *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, published in four volumes from 1765-

1769. This was the definitive exposition of English law, and for several generations served as *the* textbook for men training for a legal career. Listen to how he defines natural law:

As man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should in all points conform to his Maker's will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature... This law of nature, being coeval with mankind and dictated by God Himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe in all countries, and at all times: no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this.



Sir William Blackstone
(1723-1780, author of
*Commentaries on the Laws of
England*)

Do you see here how Blackstone, *contrary to Oliver Wendell Holmes*, conceives of natural law as an objective and universal rule for moral behavior? Holmes said there is no eternal order. Times change, and so must laws. This was a very significant departure from Blackstone who expressed the Christian understanding of law which had been dominant in Western Europe since Constantine.

Blackstone goes on to explain that natural law can be discovered by reason:

[God] laid down certain immutable laws of human nature...and gave him also the faculty of reason to discover the purport of those laws... Such, among others, are these principles: that we should live honestly, should hurt nobody, and should render to everyone his due...

He speaks also of the effect of the fall upon our reason, how it has become

clouded and prejudiced, and as a result is slow to apprehend moral truth. And he adds:

This has given manifold occasion for the benign interposition of divine providence; which, in compassion to the frailty, the imperfection, and the blindness of human reason hath been pleased, at sundry times and in divers manners, to discover and enforce its laws by an immediate and direct revelation. The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures... The moral precepts of this law are indeed of the same original with those of the law of nature...

In other words, God is the author of both and so they are consistent with one another. And then he goes on to speak of the superiority of the Scriptural revelation because of its greater clarity. It is expressly revealed by God, whereas natural is discovered by reason.

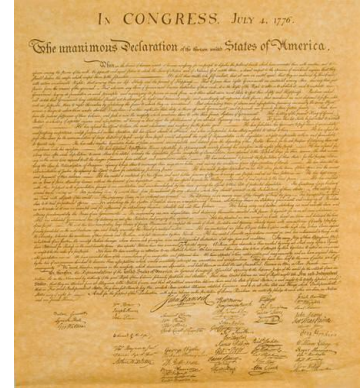
Undoubtedly the revealed law is of infinitely more authenticity than...the natural law... If one could be as certain of the latter as we are of the former, both would have an equal authority; but, till then, they can never be put in any competition together.

Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws; that is to say, no human laws should be suffered to contradict these.⁴

This was the standard view of things for the first 300 years of our nation's history. We see evidence of it in the Declaration of Independence.

⁴ Quotes of Blackstone are taken from *Commentaries on the Laws of England by Sir William Blackstone*, edited by William Carey Jones (Baton Rouge, LA: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 56-65

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the **Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.



We hold these truths to be **self-evident**, that **all men are created equal**, that they are **endowed by their Creator** with certain **unalienable Rights**, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men

We have witnessed a steady progression, or perhaps I would do better to say, we have witnessed a steady *regression* in our nation's history with respect to law. In the early days, in the colonial period and just after the War for Independence, there was no hesitation to appeal to the authority of Scripture in matters of legislation. The validity of biblical law and the propriety of applying it to matters of state were taken for granted. As we have seen, in our nation's charter there is an appeal to the laws of nature and of nature's God. This is the thing upon which our founders grounded their commitment to the idea of unalienable rights.

But in time things began to change. There was an increasing reluctance to appeal directly to God and to biblical law. Whereas our Founders appealed to the laws of nature and nature's God, it became commonplace simply to appeal to the laws of nature (independent of God). Even those who were not personally Christian, but tended toward Deism and even atheism, tended to

think that there was some universal moral law written in nature.

Even Darwin, though he was an atheist, tried to retain something of a Christian morality. When people questioned the moral implications of his theory, he tried to calm their fears by arguing that there was an evolutionary basis for an ethical system very close to what Christianity teaches. He argued that social instincts are stronger than selfish or hedonistic impulses, meaning that the biological urge to moral behavior is stronger than the urge to immoral behavior. In the *Descent of Man* he had said that the human moral sense had arisen through the combined activity of social instincts and rationality, and that these combined with natural selection had led quite naturally—with no divine intervention—to the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Thus there was no need to fear his theory because it confirmed one of the basic tenets of the Christian faith.⁵

And many thinkers in Queen Victoria's England were of the same opinion. They believed it was possible to get rid of God and still retain a morality that was for the most part consistent with Christianity. And they still believed it their duty to do so. They saw something like a Christian morality as being socially necessary. There could be no civilized society without it. "Indeed, so solicitous of morality were the Victorian agnostics that they were even willing to make concessions to religion in the interests of public morality."⁶ Religion was necessary as a basis for morality for the unenlightened masses.

Let me just say that this is a case of people not fully realizing the implications of their presuppositions. They were borrowing from a Christian

⁵ See Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 21

⁶ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*, p. 410

worldview. They lived in a culture that had been pervasively influenced by the Christian faith. Their moral sentiments had been formed in a Christian environment, even though they were not themselves personally Christians. The moral principles instilled in them by their Christian surroundings, they mistook for natural impulses. They failed to recognize how much their thinking on those subjects had been affected by the shared Christian worldview of their culture.

They wanted to dismiss the faith but retain the basic Christian moral outline. This was true of Darwin himself. Darwin was a first rate observer of the natural world. But he was not so good at seeing the moral and social implications of his theory.

This is typically how things go. Someone introduces a new philosophy and he works out some of the implications, but is able to see only so far. Those who come after him already have much of the work done for them and so they build on what he has done and extend the implications still further. And those who come after them extend the implications even more.

Darwin and his associates wanted to get rid of Christianity but retain its basic moral outlook. But others saw things more clearly. They understood that getting rid of Christianity gets rid of the basis for Christian morality. In fact, it gets rid of all morality.

No one saw this more clearly than the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. He was a thorough-going Darwinist and set about to construct an ethic that was consistent with a Darwinian view of the world. He blasted Christianity; there were few in his day who expressed such hatred of the Christian faith. But he also blasted other Darwinists for failing to see the moral

and social implications of their materialist philosophy. He said, "God is dead," and you don't realize it. You're still living like he was alive.

In light of the death of God, he advocated the revaluation of all values. The supreme virtue is the most basic human instinct, the will to power. The ideal for Nietzsche was the breeding, the willing of a Superman. And this is why he had a particular disdain for Christianity. Christianity teaches one to be self-less, to be humble and meek and to pity those who are weak and helpless. But listen to Nietzsche:

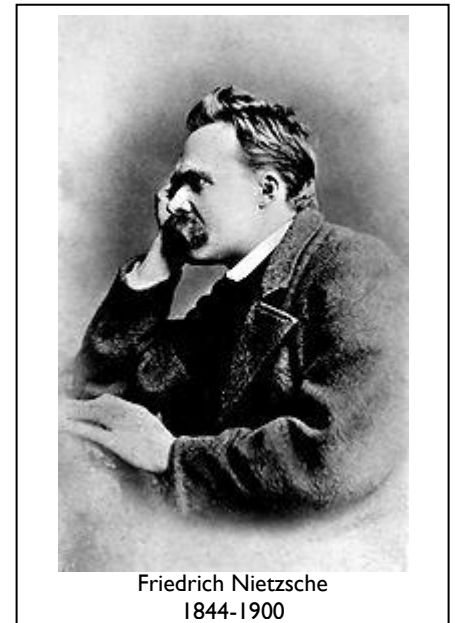
New ears for new music. New eyes for what is most distant. A new conscience for truths that have hitherto remained unheard....Reverence for self; love of self; absolute freedom of self.

The problem that I set here is not what shall replace mankind in the order of living creatures (--man is an end--): but what type of man must be *bred*, must be *willed*, as being the most valuable, the most worthy of life, the most secure guarantee of the future.

This more valuable type has appeared often enough in the past: but always as a happy accident, as an exception, never as deliberately *willed*. Very often it has been precisely the most feared; hitherto it has been almost *the* terror of terrors ;--and out of that terror the contrary type has been willed, cultivated and *attained*: the domestic animal, the herd animal, the sick brute-man--the Christian

Christianity is called the religion of *pity*.-- Pity stands in opposition to all the tonic passions that augment the energy of the feeling of aliveness: it is a depressant. A man loses power when he pities.

Pity thwarts the whole law of evolution, which is the law of natural



Friedrich Nietzsche
1844-1900

selection. It preserves whatever is ripe for destruction; it fights on the side of those disinherited and condemned by life; by maintaining life in so many of the botched of all kinds, it gives life itself a gloomy and dubious aspect. Mankind has ventured to call pity a virtue (--in every *superior* moral system it appears as a weakness--);

Nothing is more unhealthy, amid all our unhealthy modernism, than Christian pity.

It seems to me that Nietzsche was the most consistent thinker in taking Darwinist assumptions to their logical conclusions. The death of God means the death of meaning and the death of morality. The one great fact of reality is the struggle for existence, and in this struggle, only the strong survive.

There were a number of others who were saying similar things, just not as boldly and forcefully, nor with as much animus toward Christianity, as Nietzsche. In fact it was commonplace among Darwinists to speak of the need to subvert Christian morality in order to direct the further course of human evolution through eugenics: abortion, euthanasia, and forced sterilizations of the unfit, and selective breeding of the fit. It was argued that Christian compassion toward the weak undermines the whole upward thrust of human evolution by allowing the unfit to survive.

What happens when a culture embraces philosophical naturalism? What happens when evolution is the reigning paradigm? We have seen it many times in the 20th century.

Let us think of Germany. Darwinism took root in Germany far more quickly than it did anywhere else, even more so than Darwin's native England. In fact in one of his letters he expressed hope that since his theory had been so

widely received in Germany it would be widely received elsewhere in the world as well.

Within a generation every major institution in Germany was Darwinized. Hitler enthusiastically embraced Darwinism as well as the philosophy of Nietzsche, and upon coming to power he promoted one of Nietzsche's first disciples, Alfred Baumler, to professor of philosophy in Berlin. Hitler's famous book is entitled *Mein Kampf*, which means, "My Struggle." Reminiscent of "struggle for existence." He also presented himself as the Superman, reminiscent of Nietzsche.

Now I want to stress that my point is not to say that Darwinism inevitably leads to Nazism, but that apart from Darwinism Nazism could never have taken place. The reason is very simple: Darwinism can provide no guarantees for human values. Man has no inherent human rights. There is nothing that stands above the collective will of the state to judge its behavior to be wrong.

Darwinism not only proved to be justification for Nazism but also for communism. When Karl Marx, the founder of communism, also a German, read Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he wrote to a friend and enthusiastically declared it to be "a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history."⁷ Class struggle, of course, was the basis for communism. Marx proposed to dedicate his magnum opus, *Das Kapital*, to Darwin, though Darwin declined, saying it would cause grief to some members of his family to be associated with so atheistic a book.⁸

⁷ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Darwin and the Darwinian Revolution*, p. 421

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 383

Communism must, at its core, assume atheism and evolution. We must look upon Stalin's Russia and Mao's China (and everywhere else Communism has been dominant) as bearing the bitter fruit of Darwinism.

In these systems of thought, there are no cosmic guarantees of human values. Rights are the creation of the state. What's so bad about that? This: what the state gives the state may take away. The fact of the matter is, it is only the Christian worldview that has given freedom to any people, and it is only the Christian worldview that can preserve it.

We should also understand that it is not only the souls of individual men which are at stake, but the soul of civilization as well. Let us labor in the cause of the gospel through evangelism. And let us labor also to rebuild the ancient ruins and to raise up the foundations of many generations (Isa. 58:12).