

# The Purpose-Driven Cosmos

## an Essay on the Power of Purpose

### A. Two Worldviews: Biblical & Perennial

Books have appeared recently on the theme of a "purpose-driven life" or "purpose-driven church". It is hard to think of a life which is not purpose-driven and yet worth living. We humans are inherently purposeful beings. To feel lacking in this is likely to lead to depression, anxiety, apathy, or worse.

We shall explore here the purpose-driven *cosmos* or *worldview*, and how that differs from any worldview not purpose-driven. Whether the universe turns out to have a purpose will influence how, or perhaps even whether, one can live a purpose-driven life.

The matter is simplified by the fact that there are fundamentally two worldviews between which to choose, one of which turns out to be purpose-driven, the other of which is not. That creates a continental divide, marking the line between two fundamentally conflicting mind-sets, cultures, and value-systems.

The two worldviews are the Biblical and the "Perennial" (secular/pagan) worldviews. Aldous Huxley wrote *The Perennial Philosophy* in the early 1900's, claiming that there was only one worldview, that all views of the cosmos are really different versions of the same fundamental pattern, just diverse paths leading up to the same mountain top. It is called "perennial" because it pops up everywhere.

Huxley thought the Biblical worldview to be just another of the many Perennial permutations. The Biblical view, however, is logically different, and cannot be subsumed under the Perennial tent. To make that evident, we will compare "snapshots" of the two worldviews, and then compare them in terms of their moral, political, and scientific capacities.

### B. The Perennial Worldview

#### B-1. The Great Mother

Huxley was almost correct.

From the farthest reaches of early myths right up to modern secularism, there has been a common understanding of what the cosmos "looks like". Pagan mythologies universally see things originating from an unformed state of existence, a kind of cosmic soup.<sup>(1)</sup> We can imagine a cosmic kitchen blender into which we pour the totality of the universe, and then whip it into a slurry. We know that everything is there, but now we can see nothing at all -- no individual cows, horses, carrots, houses, or people -- no mountains, rivers, sky, not even an earth. The cosmos has been reduced, as it were, to pure potential. The original "stuff" of the cosmos was the pure potential from which all things emerged.

This original state of affairs is supposed to be discovered by the logical process of looking for the most simple, basic elements out of which to construct the more complex and complete world which we experience. An inexorable logic drives us down the ladder of existence from the most complex to the simplest as a way of understanding the world we experience. We want to find the original building blocks. Our cosmic blender broke things back down to those basic parts.

That logic drove the original Greek materialists, who imagined the simple elements to be earth, air, fire, and water. Out of these four, the whole rest of the cosmos had been formed. This kind of logic drives most modern thinking about cosmology.

But most early cosmology was not materialist in this sense. Early myths tell of a world alive with personal beings, the gods and goddesses. These divinities were the forces of nature with which humans had to deal. They were personal beings, not mechanical forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Described by Joseph Campbell in his *The Masks of God* volumes, and more popularly in his TV series, *The Power of Myth*, (also in book form). See also Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*. And Carl Sagan's *COSMOS* series, both in video and book format, for a secular (though slightly Hinduized) version of the Perennial view.

## 2.

The most primitive of these ancient mythologies focused on Mother Earth as the stable, enduring entity, that from which we all emerge and back to which we all go -- the Great Mother, *Magna Mater*. Her womb was that place of undifferentiated potential, from which all other things would come. The cycles of nature were the paradigm for understanding why things are the way they are. It was an inherently matriarchal system in which beings were spawned by the Great Mother, went through their life cycles, and then returned to her embrace. "Dust you are, and to dust you shall return..."

In many of the early "creation" stories, the first being to emerge from the womb of *Magna Mater* was a masculine entity. Gaia was the Greek version of *Magna Mater*, whose first offspring was Uranus. These first masculine offspring would generally become the male consorts of the Great Mother, who then bore further offspring.

### **B-2. From Mother-Dependency to Masculine Independency**

In the human race, phylogeny recapitulated ontogeny -- i.e., the journey of the human race into a more individuated sense of selfhood followed the same path as that of the small child emerging from its original dependency on mother.

The child is born, then begins to find its own identity separate from mother, going forth to seek its own course in life. This separation of the boys from mother was often promoted by the sometimes violent intrusion of the males of the clan in various "coming of age" ceremonies, designed to wean the child from dependency on mother over to participation in the tribal adult male life.

The very nurturing of the Great Mother guaranteed that her children would eventually "grow up", that they would mature, discover their own selfhood, and then desire independence from her. This passage is indicated by three interrelated events.

The *first* is occasioned by the dawning realization that "I am a someone!" The human race, so embedded in clan and cosmic nature cycles, began, slowly, to realize they did not have to "go with the flow". They could strike out for their own destiny and purpose.

Before one has a sense of independent personal identity, death is looked at quite differently. It is just part of that cosmic flow. Human sacrifice, e.g., of the king, to plant his body to fecundate Mother Earth, was "normal". Even the kings went along with it. But when one realizes that one *has* power, influence, and a personal identity, then one begins to want to keep it, to resist the lethal claims of the Great Mother.

The striving for personal immortality had begun.

The *second* event was a horrendous battle between the Great Mother and the rising masculine gods -- who had to establish their independence by force of arms. *Magna Mater* was not about to relinquish her hold if she could help it.

In Mesopotamian mythology, we see Marduk, the up-and-coming masculine god, fighting Tiamat, the Great Mother. Tiamat represents brute, overpowering cosmic force, whereas Marduk represents the rising consciousness of purpose and strategy. He slays Tiamat with his sword, cutting her in two. With the two halves he makes sky and earth -- the Mesopotamian "creation story". The Hellenic rendition of this battle is that between Zeus and Typhoeus. Horus fought the battle in Egyptian lore.

This masculine victory represents the successful emergence of the conscious over the unconscious, light over dark, independence from the gravitational pull back to the seductive safety of the womb, and calculated strategy over blind force.

The *third* event was the development of the sky-gods. In the early stages, the gods and goddesses were of the earth and sea. Earth was the locus of divinity. The advent of sky gods represented the yearning of man for freedom from Mother Earth. The "immortals", those who had sprung free from the Great Mother, were in the sky. The resurrected Eye of Horus becomes the sun traversing the sky.

The rising breed of heroes, i.e., the Great Individuals who asserted themselves over the circumstances of life, brought a more sophisticated social order. Though often seen as trouble-makers,

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these heroic types (as in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*) triumphed. In the midst of natural chaos, they imposed order. Cultural order, political order, moral order were not found, it was all imposed. Purposive order is not a natural given in the Perennial world.

Rather than continuing in the eternal cycles of nature, time took on a linear quality. Heroes began to define their own history, empires were built. Life took on a pyramidal structure, with the god-like "Great Individual" at the top of the power pyramid, ruling all beneath. Life became a power struggle not only against negative forces of nature, but against neighboring pyramids.

But, despite the heroism, boldness, and macho, there could never emerge a masculine figure who could stand on terms equal with the Great Mother. Any masculine figure emerging from the Great Mother would always be her offspring, her child, her dependent. So there could never be a *heiros gamos*, a cosmic sacred marriage, between masculine and feminine equals. There could be no Great Father to wed the Great Mother. The masculine and feminine aspects of life could never be in true balance, so the "battle of the sexes" would be an eternal fixture.

### **B-3. Dust You Are..., in a Closed System**

The cosmos was governed by two contradictory female deities: Chance and Fate. Chance was total free-wheeling luck, and fate was absolute determinism. Life was thus a constant struggle to get the divinities to be human-friendly. The forces of nature were only capriciously "on our side". So pagan sacrificial systems were designed to bribe the divinities.

But even the "immortals" were destined to die. Greek mythology tells of three female fates: one spun your thread of life, the second measured it, and the third cut it off. Once cut, it was set in stone. Nothing could change your life. After Zeus's thread was snipped, the fates predicted that one day a son of Zeus would kill him to usurp his place at the top, as Zeus had done to his father, Chronos, who had done the same to Uranus, the original father.

All the pyramids ever built were standing on Mother Earth, so there was no possibility of really escaping her gravitational death embrace. It was only a matter, by strategy and force, of putting off the evil day. So, time could take on a linear quality only provisionally and locally. The whole cosmos continued its way in cosmic cycles, and eventually drew back into those cycles the strongest and the shrewdest. The very pyramids themselves are eventually dissolved back again into the primordial soup from which they came.

The perennial cosmos is, in the literal, technical sense of the word, the perfect "closed system" -- i.e., a system absolutely isolated, from which there can be no emission of energy or information, and into which there can be no input of energy or information. Because the cosmos of the Great Mother was the totality of existence, there is nothing outside to enter in, and no place outside to which to go. And, there are no resources "out there" to which to appeal against the lethal power of *Magna Mater*, no personal salvation.

The Perennial cosmos is not purposive, it is not "going anywhere" other than in infinite eons of cosmic cycles. It has no beginning and no ending. It is not purpose-driven.

## **C. The Biblical Worldview**

### **C-1. A Hand and a Voice**

The Biblical worldview got a foothold in the midst of this depressing picture about 1900 B.C. when God told Abraham to migrate from Babylonia to Canaan. Thus was the beginning of the only alternative to the Perennial worldview.<sup>(2)</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> However...., there seems to evidence of a pre-historic and pre-Biblical awareness in almost all cultures of a pre-pagan era in which people worshipped a "high God". Societies all over the world record a "fall" from grace, an alienation from that high God, often with clear prophecies of a coming redemption, a people with a "Book" which would tell them of a Savior. Especially worth reading are *The Discovery of Genesis* by C. H. Kang & Ethel R. Nelson, and *Eternity in Their Hearts* by Don Richardson.

## 4.

Whereas, in the Perennial view, the source of all existence is the least personal and least individual of all things, in the Biblical view, the source was precisely the opposite -- the most individual, the most complete, the most personal of all things. The contrasting nature of the divinities is the fundamental distinction, the continental watershed, between the Biblical and Perennial views.

Two qualities make up the Biblical definition of 'God'. By the word, 'God', the Bible is referring to that being who is both *Creator* and *Sovereign* over all else. He is sovereign *because* He is creator. Being sovereign means being able to define the "reason for existence" of something. No being other than my creator can define my purpose for existence because, by definition, only my creator has given me my existence.

One can pictorially imagine God up in heaven with the circle of the cosmos down below. The Hand of God reaches down under the cosmos, holding it in existence. The Hand of God is the creative power of God, His ability to hold things in existence, to provide everything necessary for abundant life in the Garden of Eden. The Hand thus represents the life-giving, mothering side of God, the power of being.

But God also sovereignly speaks to His creation, for in it He has put persons made in His own image -- persons with a sense of purpose to whom, if we are willing, He can call, "Come, let us reason together..."<sup>(3)</sup> The law of God is the expression of His purpose for our lives. The cosmos is going somewhere, purpose-driven. The Voice of God thus represents sovereignty, the authoritative, fathering side of God.

In God, the masculine and feminine are absolutely and eternally wedded. The battle of the sexes never arises. That is the image of gender union we humans are meant to reflect under the law and grace of God.

### C-2. Two Trees

The difference of divine foundations between the Biblical and Perennial universes creates totally different conditions for life. In the closed-system Perennial view, there is no Hand of God holding me in existence, and there is no Voice of God giving me the reason why I am here. Life is always at risk, I am on my own, death is final, and it does not mean anything.

From the Biblical point of view, the Perennial world is precisely that world into which God told Adam he would fall and die, should he eat from the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil, rather than from the Tree of Life.

The tree was not forbidden to deny Adam and Eve moral knowledge. In Hebrew idiom, the tree stood for universal knowledge, God-like knowledge, omniscience. We would say, "Knowledge all the way from A to Z". The Hebrews put it, "...all the way from good to evil," -- i.e., universal knowledge. God was telling Adam, "You will crash if you try to be Me."

The forbidden tree was the tree of independence from God, the closed system, the place of isolation from the Hand and Voice of God, the Perennial world -- where one is the product of what looks suspiciously like a Black Hole. The system remains closed due only to ignorance and rebellion.

But, through the Tree of Life, God will yet lead Adam to all the abundance of the Kingdom of Heaven -- the community of the love of God and of fellow man.

### D. Morality

Philosophers have searched for the basis of moral order since the beginning of history. Both logical and empirical evidence tell us that our purpose for existence is the only solid and objective basis for moral order.

Where the Biblical worldview, the law and grace of God, are not the basis of society, moral order will never rise very high above self-centered pragmatism and power-struggle. Persons may *feel* morally

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 1:18

directed, but will be in conflict with each other over morality, and not be able to explain from where their sense of obligation comes.

Where a previously Biblical civilization has deteriorated, as in the West, moral order visibly decays because people know that if there is no God, as Ivan said in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "...everything is permitted." Or, more accurately, nothing is forbidden. So order is imposed (again) by the strong man -- by his own autonomous authority, not by a law to which both he and his people were subject.

By its very nature, the Biblical cosmos is purpose-driven, and that purpose is the bedrock of morality. Jesus was asked one day for the most important commandment. He replied with the two Great Commandments -- to love God and to love one's neighbor. "*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"<sup>(4)</sup> These two laws are the two highest in the whole cosmos. They define purpose for existence for the universe and everything in it. No law has authority which contradicts these two laws.

The Perennial view, on the other hand, has no cosmic purpose, and therefore no cosmic and objective moral order. Which is the same as no moral order at all. When God does not make right, might does.

### E. Politics

One of the two crown jewels of Western Civilization is the development of due process in civil law, most especially, the American democratic republic.

Everything civil government does, it does, as it were, at gun point. Laws are the stuff of politics, and laws are made to be enforced. Politics, rightly done, is about taming and rationalizing the use of coercive force.

It is claimed that we cannot legislate morality, whereas morality is precisely what we *should* be legislating. Submitting coercive force to moral order *is* the taming. Except in the cases of raw power struggle, every law is passed on the basis of someone's sense of right and wrong, someone's morality.

The American founding fathers understood that. Accordingly, they understood that the task of civil government was not to invent its own laws, but to administer the purpose for existence given already by our Creator. The Declaration of Independence notes that our rights and freedoms are unalienable only because they are given by God, not by civil government. Civil government is itself under the law (purpose) of God.

The advent of Hebrew religion was also the first advent of civil government under a specific and determinate law higher than itself. The scene of King David being reprimanded by Nathan, the prophet, could not have happened probably in any court in ancient times, because, in almost all cases, the king was, in effect, god.<sup>(5)</sup> There was no appeal beyond the king, no moral order by which to call him to account.

The ignorance (or arrogance) of the US Supreme Court has found in the Constitution a requirement to demote God from His sovereignty, erecting a "wall" between God and state. The Court thus made itself the arbiter of good and evil, life and death. When the cosmic purposes of the Creator are denied, we are left again to the purposes of governors who acknowledge no law higher than themselves. The law of God is our safeguard against tyranny.

### F. Science

The second crown jewel of Western Civilization is science.

A cosmos run by the blind forces of chance and fate is not a cosmos in which one will find orderly laws of nature, and is not consistent with the explanatory power of science. Only the Biblical story tells of a rational cosmos created by a purposeful God in which one can expect to find orderly laws. Although many cultures (China, Egypt, Rome, Greece) had technical knowledge, science never arose --

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:35 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 12

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because it took a millennium soaking in Biblical thought to break through to the then radical notion of empirical evidence tied to natural law. That is why those first in the scientific revolution, e.g., Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, said things such as, "*We are discovering God's laws after Him...*"

Although both Christians and non-believers are generally ignorant of the matter, Biblical respect for objective truth is the foundation for science. The undermining of the Western Biblical tradition, first by secularism, then by post-modernism, but most deeply by Christians who have lost their own Biblical way, is now resulting in the erosion of science in America. America is declining in world scientific leadership because other things (notably, feeling good) have become more important than objective truth.

### G. Reconsideration

So, Huxley was in error. The Biblical worldview stands logically independent of, and spiritually at war with, the Perennial view.

The first rule of spiritual warfare is the establishment of honest rules of dialogue, as in, "Come, let us reason together..." So, Biblical believers might suggest to the Perennial folks...

If stepping off the Hand of God into the Perennial world is the Fall described in Genesis 3;  
if that step leads to the total erosion of cosmic purpose and moral order, and thus to the  
severe handicapping of personal purpose and goal-setting;  
if we thus find ourselves devoid of both personal and public morality, and thus saddled with  
a civil government beyond which there is no appeal;  
if the pursuit of truth via science is itself undercut;  
if we are consigned to endless gender wars;  
and, if we thereby swap a chance at eternal life for certain death --  
one might be excused for thinking the purpose-driven cosmos of God worth  
reconsideration as the foundation for Western Civilization.

And, one might invite...

If the evidence shows these things to be true, would you be interested in reconsidering your position?

The power of purpose is nothing less than the power of living with our Creator and Sovereign in His purpose-driven cosmos.