

Changing World Views

By Joe Greig

Wikipedia defines a World View as “the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing natural philosophy; fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, values, emotions, and ethics.” Or, in a more modest manner, “the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it.” Thus, world views have serious implications for a society’s understanding of reality; a world view influences what one recognizes or fails to notice in the world, how one views the “other” and gives rise to social and political ideologies for dealing with what or whom is considered “the other.” Linguist George Lakoff, whose work on “frames,” largely in the context of politics, argues that language, both its terms and structures are “framed” in a specific context identified with a specific world view. It is from within the frames that meaning and argumentation are created and function.

The idea that world views cannot be separated from the language used to talk about the world is somewhat disconcerting. Language does not so much express a truth about something already known, rather it creates the unknown so that the known may be discovered. Thus, the claim is often made that language creates reality. Not only does language provide a basic grammar and structure for the categorization and expression of experience, but provides the structures of popularly perceived “givens” such as time, space, and causation.

Differences of opinion about causation, for example, are reflected philosophically in the questions regarding free will or determinism. Differences of opinion resulting in the descriptive and functional ways people express natural phenomena exist, not because reality is there staring us in the face, but because they are mental constructs from a vast reservoir of impressions. These constructs go beyond descriptions of the natural world. They are also inclusive of “values,” including methodologies, within the construct integrating social and political categories.

World views also involve religious perspectives and the creative power of religious language. The result is similar to any other world view in providing a framework of beliefs for interpreting the world and providing basic values for interacting with it. Specific religions provide the specific structures of ideas of time, such as a beginning and end, eternal cycles, or timelessness, and corresponding

spacial and causal relations that transcend naturalistic explanations. More mythically based religious world views may be to a great extent dependent on non-rational responses to data and interpretations than to rational considerations or scientific descriptions of the world. Such a religious world view is supported by a basic commitment to values present in sacred stories, parables, and other literary genre; whether from a different perspective they are considered true or false, real or fictional. The values, being inseparable from the literary and linguistic forms containing them, are to be “believed” as a unity, and are often considered certain or infallible, thus unchangeable units of reality. Furthermore, a kind of logical theory is possible (theology), by working from a presupposition of logical consistency. This logical theory can work within either a confined system (religious tradition and sacred text), or an open system involving all that is known by other systems of knowledge.

Because language is so integral to collective understanding within a world view, one language may be difficult to translate into another. This makes creative and corrective comparisons among world views challenging. This situation does not necessarily mean that there is “world view and linguistic relativity,” and that no mutual understanding can take place among groups with different views and languages. Even in very different languages and world perceptions, some degree of calibration is possible. Nevertheless, a world view determines the kinds of questions asked about the world and the kinds of answers expected in return.

World views can and do change. In the case of interacting societies, cultures, and world views expressed linguistically, both language and the understanding of the world are modified by constant interchange. Thus, some degree of “world view fragmentation” occurs across cultural contacts involving the collision of different systems of knowledge which contribute to formation of new world views and modifications in knowledge systems. This process is not a smooth or easy one. For example, over time we have witnessed how social and political ideologies have produced different views of the world. The concept of “manifest destiny” was responsible for creating the American landscape in terms of “property” and classifying the indigenous peoples as subhuman “savages” with few or no rights to land or deserving of human rights. More recently, we encounter creative concepts like ecology and conservation, versus natural resource exploitation and utilization.

Like the power of manifest destiny, political and economic ideologies cannot be separated from these other perspectives. Nor can religious beliefs impacting the value of conservation of natural resources for the present and the future be exempted from beliefs about the end of the world.. Viewing resistance movements as “terrorist” or “freedom fighters” is another conspicuous example of how value systems and language mold views of reality, thus world views. We may not have experienced a “War of the Worlds,” but we are constantly involved in wars of “world views;” and

the fact that we are involved in an ideological and verbal war rather than a peaceful transition is testimony to the power of values and morality that are endemic in every world view.

Presently, in conservative political and religious movements there is concern with how science and philosophical systems impact the perceptions, presuppositions, and values, of a world view formed by a “literal” reading of the Bible. Some of the materials understood literally are classified by literary experts as myths and sagas.. Because there is no easy way of separating the values taught by the myth from the “surface content” of the myth there is a tendency among conservatives to reject analytical knowledge systems because they destroy the “literal” understanding of the surface content; for instance, classifying a text as myth rather than history. But where science and philosophy are lacking or suppressed, either geographically or according to specific population distributions, the language of myth and saga prevail in providing explanations of phenomena and the rationale for conservative religious values. What is often rejected, or not understood by many conservatives is that social and cultural values expressed mythologically, or based on folk lore are not necessarily wrong. In specific societies they may function well, even though in contact with other world views some of the values may seem to weaken or fail. Such a situation suggests that values are relative only to a specific culture. But there is no necessity in the claim that a value formed within one world view is therefore incompatible with a value in another considered for some reason superior, or the claim that there is no value or world view better than another.

The idea of the relativity of world views, thus the difficulty of claiming one universal world view, arises out of scientific and philosophical analysis. But because of the tentative nature of the scientific process and the philosophical underpinnings of theories of knowledge, world views cannot be completely objectified as something outside our mental constructs and psychological orientation. If we are dissatisfied with a post-modern position on the “relativism of world views” where one is considered as good as another, we seem to be left with an approach where we suspend judgment on the exclusive validity of any world view. This does not mean denying that there may be universal truths, but that one’s present task is not affirming what they are; rather the task is “world view analysis.” World view analysis is not merely a comparison or an analysis of existing world views, but participates in analyzing the function of language employed in expressing world views. Such comparative analysis results not only in the process of “fracturing of world views,” but in finding compatible elements among colliding systems so that constructive and integrative dialogue may take place. But the fracturing of world views may be traumatic and passionate because of its threats to well-established value systems and personas with inflexible psychological make-ups which are embedded in them.

According to scientific studies of the way the brain works when it is confronted by different value systems, the circuitry of the brain does not respond immediately to logical argumentation or new evidence and make a change to a world view. A brain state has been formed over time containing the component of a particular world view. To effect a change in this brain state the brain must essentially undergo “rewiring.” Logic, along with what can be referred to as evidence, must work within the claims of more than one system or world view for progressive change to occur. The difficulty for change to occur is because the value system of world views is in our psychological makeup which over time has been imprinted in our brains. Changes in brain states often take as long as the operational mechanisms took to form the previous brain state. Perhaps the changing psychological component is not complete even long after a rational decision for change has been concluded.

According to Lakoff, as one “frame” or value system is favorably entertained, its power of conviction is strengthened, while an opposing value system is weakened. This would indicate that in cases where a world view is changed, it is changed by the erosion of one world view being gradually infiltrated or overcome by moral and informational elements of another world view which offers more workable explanations both at the level of phenomena and values. In the process of communication, language undergoes modification, functioning to create new realities. New discoveries are made from the creative function of new language and the abandoning of the old. Thus, a new world view arises out of the resolution of a collision of values and informational systems with their subsequent ordering or reordering.

To illustrate such a change in a world view, I will relate a personal story. Up until my late teens, the time when the frontal lobe of the brain is developing so that decision making becomes an increasingly important part of living, I was quite content to believe what the godfearing adults in my life had taught me, to live within a world view that for me had not achieved comprehensive definition or set boundaries in my life. Then I fell in love. There is nothing unique about falling in love; nature has bequeathed passion in one form or another to every species. It is a way for the cycle of life to continue. Nobody objected to me falling in love; it was with whom I had fallen in love that was the problem. I fell in love with Stella Ramirez. If that last name does not mean anything to you then you are either too young or your memory has been dulled by the abrasives of time.

A minister, who had talked to another minister, who claimed to have been instrumental in bringing Stella into the church, quickly pointed out to my parents that Stella was a “Mexican,” a nice girl, but nevertheless a Mexican, no different, despite her college education, than any other Mexican. Although, she also had Spanish and Irish heritage on her mother’s side, only the descriptor “Mexican” was used. The use

of the word “Mexican” was part of a linguistic structure embodying a pejorative connotation, not used purely descriptively. It was used within a “frame,” to *use a concept from the work of George Lakoff. It was filled with prejudicial content. My parents were advised that they would have to nip this relationship in the bud; marrying a Mexican would ruin their son’s life and ministry. Upon completing the ministerial course, they warned, I would be stuck in the “Mexican work” down in the Southwest, and I would never get out. I had too much promise for them to let that happen.

The movement to break us up grew quickly. Another minister, a conference president, contacted my parents issuing a warning about what was happening to their beloved son. In fact, if I married Stella, I would “never” get a call. One of these concerned men even inspired messengers from afar to come to me and point out the physical differences between us. I was white, she was kind of olive complexioned, but exposed to the sun she would turn much darker because she was a Mexican. Even the darkness of her eyes held characteristics, unrecognizable to me, but which once pointed out were alien indicators of difference. And our children, they would not be white, but mixed, a stigma they would have to bear the rest of their lives. This certainly was not God’s will. In a moment I was confronted by the belief that I had betrayed both my parents and the white race; no, I had destroyed them. In a way, I was guilty of murder. And before I even had any children I was already abusing those bearing the name “Greig” by passing on to them a mixed racial heritage. This latter event did not happen; we had no children, so in a way, according to this way of thinking, I killed my father twice.

The frontal lobe of my brain developed considerably that school year. Merely falling in love was only a half step to understanding what love demands of lovers. Love, if it is to go beyond the foreplay of breeding, demands that we think clearly, act ethically, and responsibly. Without making the move to ethics a man can love his fiancée or wife conjugally, but subordinate her personal will and freedom to his own. He can be perfectly at ease with this kind of a relationship because he, perhaps both, accept it as an unquestionable aspect (value) of their world view.

I never gave further thought to the charge that I was guilty of murdering the white race until I read that when Charles Darwin concluded that humans had evolved from earlier non-human ancestors, thus were not specially created in the image of God, he felt like he had committed murder. Now, I don’t want to be misunderstood. Today, I stand enlightened to the folly of the racially motivated counsel I received. But, then I was still a teenager. It was difficult living above the fray. It was impossible for me to just ignore the “men of God” who were offering me their brand of salvation. I was involved in a battle of world views, and I did not yet have sufficient experience and knowledge to know how to take sides. I was part of a white race, a predominantly white culture. These adults, especially the ministers, the men of experience, got to me;

in a sense, I had to choose Stella or God. In addition, they put pressure on my parents to work along with them. They attempted to destroy the innocence of my bliss by referring to what seemed to them a higher divinely ordained standard to which I owed allegiance, but which I had lost sight of. That standard was not something I was unfamiliar with. It had been a weak, but present aspect of the world view which I inherited from my culture. But I was in love with a particular person, and I did not have the conceptual or linguistic structure of her place in the world to prevent falling in love with her. I believed providence had brought us together; now at the same time I was being admonished to repent of that love. I was being thrown into an ethical dilemma. Falling in love suddenly was not enough, I had to fall out of love and keep the “white faith,” or rescue the passion of love by appealing to another standard that would keep the flame burning, bring light to the darkness. Belief in providence was thrown into question. I had been taught to believe in providence, but now was told our romantic relationship was not providence but a delusion.

Through it all the clarity, integrity, and tenacity of Stella’s love remained constant. The threat of separation from the lover set the anchor deep in what I valued most. I had two perspectives in my mind, two different ways of viewing the beloved. When love is being attacked, its reciprocating nature provides constancy and strength. But though love is shared, it also has to be tested mutually; and in the testing naivete is lost, like a questionable world view confronting another, like a naive belief in providence. Whatever conditions brought Stella and me together, we had to assume we were now in control of it. Our love would be tested by the inclusive attributes of our individual characters. Testing involves a certain amount of stress for what is being tested; feelings would be hurt, reborn, and redirected. The meaning of passionate love would be changed by being informed by reason and a rational form of ethics. But a moral value is not something anchored in reason alone, but in living experience. My brain was at work with the data of both reason and experience, weakening one world view and strengthening another. In a sense, my religion and relationship to God was being redefined along with my views of race, authority, and ministry. I was no longer so subject to the will of others, which they considered to be the will of God. Nor was I surrendered to emotion alone. I was beginning to think for myself, chart my own destiny, participate through word and action in creating my own version of the world.

Fortunately, the President of the Central Union, Theodore Carcich, somehow heard the gossip and acted immediately. Perhaps his children informed him; Stella and I knew both of them and considered them our friends. President Carcich called both Stella and me to come to his home, separately; his wife joined him in the counseling. In the end we were advised to ignore the criticisms hurled at us by our racist detractors. We seemed “meant for each other,” Mrs. Carcich said. Sydney Allen and Mervin Maxwell, both religion teachers, also conveyed a similar message to us.

I'm thankful that when my parents finally met Stella, the terrifying images of what she could do to their son vanished, and they saw her for what she was: fully human, a devout, talented Christian woman, an honor student, having both Chemistry and English majors, and as a pre-med student already accepted into medical school; a young woman who was above the racial priorities that motivated the religious agenda of her detractors. Living by faith demands that the blinders come off, that reality which informs the world in its variety of splendors be recognized as master over the false creations of prejudice.

At the time, I doubt that I knew much about world views or how they affect our lives. I certainly had not read anything by Lakoff or other scholars of world views. But without being aware of it, I had challenged a world view by challenging a value system within it. It might seem strange to think of this incident as a challenge to a comprehensive world view, but world views are complex mental and psychological systems. They do not have absolute borders; they are constructs, thus subject to irregular changes without any particular mapping or established rhythm.

The change in my world view was a bit different than the change in Darwin's world view. Darwin lived within a world view that accepted the evolution of other species, but for some time he accepted within that world view that humans were specially created in the image of God. Then the force of the evidence changed the content, thus the parameters of his world view. This change occurred over time. Darwin had two world views in his mind. Entertaining the one supported by the data weakened the other until he rejected it. Darwin had to devalue his value of humanity as a special creation. They too were the result of evolution. Darwin's and my change of perspective represent different but related ways the ungovernable diversity of reality, the coercive power of data and values, informs all of existence and necessitates a change of views and attitudes. My love for Stella had confronted a powerful, but unworthy value. A racist religious interpretation of physical data complete with linguistic content and structure had to be condemned and abandoned. I had unknowingly opened a door to a new world view, or at least important aspects of it, and once having walked through it would never return.

We often hear of an Adventist world view which is based on the Bible and the Bible alone, *sola scriptura*, although the writings of E.G. White also must be taken into consideration. But there are some identifiable features of the way normative Adventism perceives the world based on the authority of inspired writings. In addition to elevating authoritative biblical teachings above other sources of knowledge, an Adventist world view identifies the "Other," that is those who are not Adventists. Strangely enough, this concept also extends to the place of women in the church, even though a woman functioned as the Church's prophet. Institutionally, authority over women remains patriarchal, and women have a diminished role in the church. This

diminished value of women remains today as a component of the Church's world view.

Because of the comprehensiveness of an SDA world view, a full discussion of the interconnection of values within that world view will not be attempted. For present purposes our attention will be directed to the difficulty of integrating important scientific components into an Adventist world view based on the authority of the Bible. The first feature of an SDA world view is acceptance of supernatural causation; God can and does intervene in the affairs of the natural world. Difficulties with the causal nexus of naturalism are ignored, or criticized as being inadequate or incomplete to understand divine causality in the natural world.

The second component is a view of time having a beginning and end. This structure after the creation of the world (Genesis 1), and the "Fall," provides the final stage (The Apocalypse), for the theme of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. But the controversy also involves human beings and beings on other "unfallen" worlds looking on and witnessing the outcome which justifies God's actions and his law. At the end of time, in an apocalyptic moment involving the Second Coming of Christ, Satan is defeated, God's law and governing of the world are vindicated, the world comes to a catastrophic end, is melted down, and a new heaven and earth are created by divine action for the redeemed. In this structure of time, the end, which brings to a halt life lived under the consequences of the Fall, subordinates life lived in the "here and now" to final salvation and life in the "there and then." The subsequent value of moral discrimination for the present is thereby depreciated by expectations predicated on the idea of a redeemed life in the future.

Filling out the details of human involvement in the Great Controversy, God has a "true" church, identified by its restoration of biblical truth, a faithful Remnant of the controversy which is preserved from a spiritual and physical attack by the beast of the Apocalypse, identified as the Papacy. The Papacy is an instrument of Satan for the destruction of the truth, or God's law (The Ten Commandments), most specifically the fourth commandment identifying the seventh day as the Sabbath. This makes Sunday a false Sabbath. The Sabbath-Sunday controversy highlights the question of authority. "Sunday keeping" encompasses the Papacy's claim to have authority to change biblical teaching. The restoration of Sabbath keeping establishes biblical authority over human authority. The scriptures are the infallible unchangeable word of God. Sunday keeping identifies those who are following the apostate authority of the Papacy; therefore Sunday keeping Protestants along with Catholics become the "other," and referred to as "apostate Protestants."

Although this scenario has changed in some sectors of the Adventist Church, due to a desire to become less sectarian and more mainstream Evangelical, it remains

strong in popular conservative spheres of the church. The language of exclusion continues to create the reality many Adventists recognize in the world and society, including a value system that elevates the authority of biblical teaching over science, and identifies the “other” over against the true people of God.

The logical consistency of the Adventist view of authority extends to the creation account of Genesis 1 which is memorialized in the seventh day Sabbath. The Genesis account, if backed by the authority of the sacred text, cannot be challenged by human theories, thus evolution with its long time periods cannot be accepted as an account of origins, nor can the scientific method, if its application results in conclusions which conflict with the literal reading of the authoritative text. Attempts to defend the biblical account by incorporating scientific language into it to make it compatible with science results in pseudo-science, and exposes a value system tolerant of lax moral discrimination. Also, the uncomfortable position of defenders of biblical authority against evolutionary science results in a subtle “suspicion” of scientific methodology because the scientific account of origins not only undermines the authority of a literal reading of Genesis 1, but undermines the “value” of humanity being created in the image of God. Because the Sabbath commandment memorializes creation, allowing a scientific view of origins not only contradicts Genesis, but countermines the witness of the Sabbath to Creation. This situation threatens to bring down one of the identifying pillars of Adventist faith, and with it an entire theological structure, its language, and values.

So, it is clear why there is such resistance to evolutionary science. However, reality has its ways of making changes in all world views; and this extends to the contributions of science to a world view as well as to those of religion. If a scientific theory or a religious belief is inadequate or wrong, it will be falsified in the face of reality. In science this is part of the value structure of the scientific process. In some ideologies or religions where the certainty of a claim is defended as unassailable, challenges by competing ideologies may lead to changes by gradual weakening of a view until it becomes unimportant in the evolved views of a society. In the case of science and the assessment of empirical evidence, the amassing of evidence and the general acceptance of that evidence by society over time, strengthens science and weakens non scientific approaches. This is not to say that a change of world view may happen more quickly, and with psychologically traumatic effects.

In the case of a religious claim operating within a dualistic construct of both mythic and scientific understanding, the belief may be supported almost indefinitely by moral argumentation, even if it ignores the implications of a scientific assessment. The immediacy of the Second Coming may be taken as an example. The repeated failure of the “soon” coming of Christ has been met with explanatory arguments since early Christian times. In Adventism, after time predictions failed, the doctrine was not

considered falsified, but was given new life and meaning by reinterpreting scripture, and later, placing blame for the failure on the church membership. They had not perfected their characters sufficiently for Christ to come, or they had not loved Christ sufficiently for him to honor that relationship with his return. This explanation is used repeatedly to explain the delay, and it works for convincing the minds of a philosophically and scientifically ill-informed audience. But it has a moral shortcoming. The church members must assume a heavy burden of guilt for the delay, and eventually people will throw it off for the duplicity in the reasoning. The moral onus now is placed on God. If love is the condition of the return, then given what love is and does, it is God who has failed the relationship. If love is the defining characteristic of God, it should trump any demand for being good enough, or loved enough to be honored by the second coming. To be saved at the cross only to be emotionally enslaved by expectations in a seemingly endless stream of time is confounding. In a world where people have some sense of moral discrimination, this explanation for the delay not only confuses human life in time, but weakens moral purpose. At stake here is nothing less than the character of God. One is faced with the choice of abandoning a fickle God, examining the doctrine by moral reasoning, or escaping all rational approaches and moving into mystical spirituality, isolating oneself from the world and all the problems involving the human intellect.

The recognition of a weak, moral inclusive value system shakes the whole system, as certainly as an inadequacy in a scientific model makes it necessary to take another approach. This is especially true in a religion where one makes claims and predictions from an infallible authority. With authority brought into question, room is opened up for consideration of other explanatory systems. In the modern age, science with its supporting philosophical bases is one of the most competent explanatory systems for phenomena and for predictions. The value of this approach to understanding the world comes with a host of other compatible values which we ignore at great risk. This is not a claim that there is a comprehensive scientific world view which excludes a religious one. Humans are also emotional beings, and values taught by narratives and parables must tie in with this fact rather than remaining only at a rational level. For values to be fully functional for a human being, they must be integrated with feeling as well as being formulations of rational consent.

A purely scientific world view would most certainly risk being a false one. Scientific discoveries have played a major role in modifying our world views, but this is not to say that science is the key that unlocks every aspect of reality. Science, thus far, has mostly limited itself to descriptions of phenomena, it is empirical and deliberately reductionistic. But scientists have to go beyond glaring phenomena and evidence of causal actions to propose “explanatory theories” which help explain relationships among phenomena and why what is being examined came to be what it

is. Yet these explanations are not allowed to contravene the evidence and known natural laws. There is a search for a mechanism to explain what has, or is happening. This explanation is sometimes a long time in coming, but this is not a problem for science. It is merely an incompleteness or weakness of the theory or model. It merely remains an unknown, thus subject to theoretical speculation within the scientifically possible. Scientists are not practicing metaphysicians.

However, changes in the perceptions of science can lead to challenges throughout the system. Some theoretical scientists are questioning the traditional framework of science. Their goal is to describe the “totality of reality,” provide a grand unification theory of physics, and this involves asking deeper questions which will give answers to the issues which science up to now ” has been unable to answer. I am speaking of the invention of string theory and postulating the existence of multiple universes. The new approach gives much weight to the explanatory power of an idea and the adequacy of a theory itself, rather than depending on verifiable data and predictions which may never be forthcoming due to vast spacio-temporal conditions necessary for verification. I will not comment further except to say that while it seems to minimize human moral activity in this universe, it is also an illustration of the dynamic nature of science.

But in the context of a world informed by science, at the present time, Adventism, within the discussion on origins, stands badly balanced on one foot. That foot is planted in established dogma. The church teeters because the supports it grasps to remain standing are being pulled away; and everyone who studies science and observes its successes knows it. Putting the other foot down to restore balance is the equivalent of adjusting to a view of theology and reality informed by science, but also new views of moral theory and other philosophical categories aligned with reason. We will have to think of ourselves differently, learn how to talk differently, talk about what we once believed, but now are enlightened to see it a different way. While the world will go on as if nothing is happening in Adventism, there is a real danger for the religious believer and the collective church. The danger is irrelevance, humiliation and ultimately damage to our psychic nature. It can be the equivalent of a psychological bludgeoning, and recognition of this will take much effort on the part of the enlightened to refashion an unsustainable world view into one capable of imparting life and hope to the faithful. Such refashioning will take a combined effort of people of faith and science, those with religious and spiritual appreciation who can be guides on flights of religious imagination characterized by excitement and challenge as it probes the meaning of our humanity, of God and reality, and the role of faith in directing the journey.