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BOOK REVIEW

Glenn S. Sunshine. *Why You Think the Way You Do*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 240 pp. Pbk. US\$14.99; CDN\$19.99.

The stated purpose of this book is to explain “the development of Western civilization from the perspective of the changes in worldview from the Roman Empire to the early years of the twenty-first century” (16), and in this, the book is largely successful. Despite the amount of history that must be plumbed, the work is clearly organized and generally concise. Sunshine’s thesis is that the history of Western worldviews is inextricably linked to the development of the Christian faith, and a departure from the “biblical worldview” around the thirteenth century has had a profound, and ultimately negative, effect on Western culture, resulting in much of the cultural confusion found in postmodernism and deconstructionism. In the end, the author concludes that the decline of the Roman Empire is being repeated all over again with the decline of Western culture in general. He offers no prescription to correct this, he merely documents it.

The back cover says the book is “an accessible and eminently readable survey” of the way Christianity has transformed Western culture since the paganism of the Roman Empire. Most chapters contain concise and effective background material useful for introducing new eras, cultural developments, and personalities in Western history. Philosophical terms that would be unfamiliar to beginning undergraduates (e.g., “nihilism” or “methodological naturalism”) are given brief definitions. Minimal notes are provided at the back of the book, with suggestions for further reading. The intended audience appears to be early undergraduate students or the educated layperson. Because of the positive emphasis on the Protestant Reformation and the con-

servative political stances in the final chapters, it is safe to assume that the author is Evangelical and politically conservative.

The author establishes a working definition of worldview early in the book as: “the framework you use to interpret the world and your place in it” (13). Specialists might find this definition lacking; nonetheless, the target audience and the bulk of the historical material to be covered dictate frequent oversimplification throughout.

Readers will notice a fast-paced narrative through chapters 1 to 8, which survey the changes in popular worldview from ancient Rome through the Enlightenment and the revolutionary seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The language here is dispassionate, perhaps what one would expect from a history professor in class. Their central theme is that a worldview is composed of a concept of what is real (metaphysics) and an idea of what we know and how we can know it (epistemology).

One of the main values of the book is the author’s ability to take complicated philosophical topics and summarize them in easily digestible examples. For example, as an illustration of the difference between Platonic “idealism” and Aristotelian “realism,” Sunshine asks, if the mass of photosynthetic accessories in their seemingly infinite varieties can be represented by the universal word “leaf,” how does this relate to “all the particulars, i.e., the individual leaves” (25)? This type of question is extremely useful for opening up the undergraduate mind to the complexities of some philosophical topics.

Also useful is how the author connects the dots across the development of worldviews in Western culture. Along the way, much in Western history is laid bare. For example, the difference between the Judeo-Christian and the Neo-Platonist views of God and of death account for the pagan reluctance to come to the aid of Roman plague victims, and the Christians’ willingness to render aid and die along with them. Many of the “legends” of Western history are dispelled, including a thorough explication of why the “Dark Ages” were not really intellectually “dark.” The section on “Medieval worldviews” explains much in historical theology, a history of continental philosophy, and the history spanning the ninth to fifteenth centuries generally. A particularly

helpful feature is a thorough “worldview summary” at the end of selected chapters. The author’s biases are discernible in this section, in particular in a section proudly explaining why Christianity is responsible for the beginning of capitalism (75–77).

Beginning in the ninth chapter, the author enters a more passionate polemic decrying a decline in Western culture resulting from the divorce of Enlightenment thought and the biblical worldview. The author’s biases become more evident in this section. He immediately focuses upon Darwinism in the section on “science and worldview” (164), saying that Darwin’s evolutionary theory is not science because it cannot “be validated through the scientific method” (166). The author considers the theory more an article of faith than a scientific position. He asks, “What would it take to falsify Darwinism? If you cannot think of or imagine anything that would, it is an article of faith and not a scientific theory” (169). Perhaps the author is unfamiliar with the relevant scholarship in the field of evolutionary biology. Statements like this amount to the little more than argument from personal incredulity. Ironically, this is the type of argument of which Christians have accused the New Atheists. There actually are kinds of evidence which, if found, could falsify the theory; interested readers are encouraged to consult Jerry Coyne’s excellent *Why Evolution is True*. Evolutionary theory is not the only topic caricatured. The author seems to see belief in global warming as a purely religious view linked to the eco-friendly Gaia hypothesis, a spurious connection that suggests pure bias.

All that said, the strengths of the book outweigh the weaknesses. The book is written in the spirit and genre of Francis Schaeffer’s *How Should We Then Live* and Alister McGrath’s *The Twilight of Atheism*. It is an effective and concise treatment of a broad range of history and Christianity’s role in shaping Western worldviews. Overall, the book is an accessible introduction to a particular theory of Western worldviews and their development. If one is seeking a brief and concise overview of this topic, this book is recommended.

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