

Introduction:

This lesson is rich in ideas and concepts which maybe relatively unfamiliar to the first time participant. Dr. Tackett begins the lesson by asking if it is possible for Christians to be taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophy. The implication from 2 Colossians 2:8 is that Christians can be taken captive if not aware. The point of the lesson, therefore, is to introduce the philosophy of Naturalism and then to critique it because, today, Naturalism is at the bottom of most of the lies in our culture, and therefore, it is important for the Christian to have a basic understanding of what this philosophy means. The themes listed below will flesh out the significant items of the lesson. Towards the conclusion of the lesson, R.C. Sproul makes an unconventional statement that “a new mind always brings with it a new heart.” Dr. Tackett springboards off this statement and returns to the topic of transformation as the end (or point) of a worldview study, and this time refers to the notion of not conforming to the lies of the world by the renewing of your mind Romans 12:2.

Themes:**Naturalism vs Theism:**

The video skillfully uses segments from Carl Sagan’s Cosmos series (from the 70’s) to illustrate the philosophy of Naturalism. Sagan’s famous phrase, “The Cosmos is all there is, or ever was, or ever will be” is basically saying that matter is the final reality. There is nothing outside of the cosmos, all of reality is, in a sense, a closed box which is made up of essentially one substance – matter (this idea is called **Monism**, adapted from the term Mono – meaning ‘one’) . Naturalism has further implications. Knowledge can be gained only through the senses. If something can’t be weighed, measured, observed, etc., then we cannot possibly know about it. The scientific process, in other words, reigns supreme when it comes to the acquisition of knowledge. Naturalism assumes that the diversity which is observed in the world today is the result of evolutionary processes. From the variety of plant and animal life, to the development of economic and political systems (members of the societal order), all is ever-changing and in a constant struggle for survival and supremacy. Naturalism also undermines the notion of any objective, transcendent basis for ethics (or “oughtness”) . Essentially, this is due to the fact that there is no law giver (i.e. God) to provide the ethical basis from which to build any system of morality on. Additionally, the belief in the evolutionary nature of the universe reinforces the notion that all is temporary. Note: Dr. Tackett will bring this idea up in a subsequent lesson when discussing the idea of evil.

The Christian (or Theistic) view holds that matter is not the final reality, but rather God is the final reality. Additionally, creation is not a closed material box. The Cosmos is “open” to re-ordering by God through His interactions within creation. Additionally, creation is not of one single essence but of two. In addition to matter, there is the additional spiritual essence. Christians therefore are “dualistic” in their philosophy because of the understanding that there is both matter and spirit. Further implications

of a Theistic (or Biblical) worldview are profound. Besides the scientific process, Christian believe that knowledge about the universe can be gained from both the Bible and through the Holy Spirit. Again, the system of knowledge (or Epistemology) is not closed, but open. The Biblical worldview holds that in the beginning God created all that is from nothing. There are two points which are significant with this. First, there is a beginning to the existence of the universe – it is not eternal as the materialist must necessarily believe. Second, the dualistic nature of reality allows for the universe to be crafted with intent, with design, with information, and by a supremely intelligent and powerful designer (Genesis 1, John 1-3, etc.). The Christian believes that the cosmos is an ordered whole which has been created by a orderly, rational, and personal being which both transcends the creation and yet is active within it. The creation is therefore something that is imbued with intent, design, information, and purpose (a purposeful universe has great significance when it come to the study of the natural world or what we call science). Unlike the naturalist, the Christian does have a solid basis for ethics and morality. This basis is found in the unchanging character and nature of God as revealed through the Word (see “Ethics” below).

Assumptive Language:

Assumptive language is language which assumes that related presuppositions are true, when they in fact may not be. Carl Sagan’s famous line “The Cosmos is all there is, or ever was, or ever will be ” is a perfect example of this in that the phrase completely assumes the naturalist presupposition that matter is the final (and only) reality of cosmos. It completely discounts the notion of a transcendent God without directly saying so. Assumptive language is dangerous because it is designed to evade the critical thought processes of the unsuspecting recipient.

The Cosmic Cube:

The metaphor used to explain the naturalistic view of the cosmos and of life.

The naturalist/materialist must find all of the answers to life’s question by looking inside the “box” or the universe. Unfortunately, the answers to life’s big questions cannot be found by searching in the box. The box contains only particulars (see below) but not universals. Universals are found only in a source of Truth that is not of this world.

Universals and Particulars:

Particulars are the individual (or collections of) objects that we find in the world. “It’s the stuff we find in the box.” The universals are the ideas, notions, etc. which make sense out of the particulars and provide order and meaning.

For example, the family today is viewed largely as any collection of individuals who are “committed” to each other through some type of “love” relationship. As the Christian consensus regarding the definition of family fades, we see that cohabitation, homosexual lifestyles, and even polygamous lifestyles are now being de-stigmatized. How long will it be before polygamy is an excepted lifestyle? Can pedophilia and incestuous relationships be far off in the distance?

Without the universal principle which has been provided within God’s word, the meaning of marriage and family decay into a tangled web of illegitimate relationships and broken lives.

Ethics:

Ethics is the study of what “ought to be” and differs from “morality” which has to do with the mores or “habits of the heart” of the people in a society. Ethics, therefore, are the basic first principles of right and wrong which are a direct reflection of the character and nature God (or Truth).

When it comes to the issue of ethics the problem for the naturalist (or secularist) is identifying any consistent or meaningful basis for ethics and morality. The Christian does not have this problem, because of the universal principles revealed in scripture which are transcendent, consistent, and stable.

One way secularists attempt to solve the problem of not having a sufficient base for ethics is with Postmodernism.

Postmodernism is the notion that the only truth which exists is confined to a specific culture and a specific time. There is no over-arching transcendent truth, no grand meta-narrative which is valid at all times and in all societies. The only truth that exists is that which arrived at within a given society and within a given time.

How a society arrives at its “truth” is interesting. Peaceful, stable societies are able to determine truth through civil means of public opinion, persuasion, and political processes. In unstable societies, the peaceful, non-violent means will break down into nothing but a power struggle where “might makes right.” Those who are willing and able to use brutality will ultimately seize the day in a society that has no belief in a transcendent truth.

“Most people do not realize that the tenets of postmodernism have been tried before in a political system. Social constructivism, cultural determinism, the rejection of individual identity, the rejection of humanism, the denial of the transcendent, power reductionism, the rejection of reason, and the revolutionary critique of the existing order are tenets of not only postmodernism but of fascism.”

Postmodern Times, Gene Edward Veith, Jr. pg 164

Ethics is a supremely important topic for the Christian to fully comprehend.

Points to Watch For:

Dr. Tackett makes an important point regarding those who hold to the naturalist/materialist position (or adherents of the “Cosmic Cube”); they cannot possibly live by their professed beliefs. See if you can detect during the video how and where Carl Sagan and Dr. William Provine contradict their strict materialist philosophical beliefs. Dr. Tackett, however, also makes the point that many contemporary Christians have been unknowingly taken captive by the assumptive language of our day and have in the process, “conformed to this world.” Transformation, once again, is the closing thought of the video.