

Higher Education as a Context for “Religion and Science”

with Thomas Aechtner, “Galileo Still Goes to Jail: Conflict Model Persistence within Introductory Anthropology Materials”; and Garrett Kenney, “Why Religion Matters and the Purposes of Higher Education: A Dialogue with Huston Smith.”

WHY RELIGION MATTERS AND THE PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A DIALOGUE WITH HUSTON SMITH

by *Garrett Kenney*

Abstract. This article examines Huston Smith’s critique of and remedy for modernity from the perspective of a college professor who adopted “Why Religion Matters” (2001) as required reading for undergraduates. Smith’s heartfelt plea to consider, if not embrace, the common wisdom of traditional religious worldviews deserves a hearing. But Smith’s approach is also in need of qualification, supplementation, and critique. This article, ironically, finds the needed qualification, supplementation, and critique in Huston Smith’s much earlier publication, *The Purposes of Higher Education* (1955). This article provides the dialogue.

Keywords: atheism; education; Huston Smith; religion; science; theism

Huston Smith (b. 1919) is one of America’s most prolific and seasoned religion scholars. His initial notoriety came with the 1958 publication of *The Religions of Man* (revised as *The World’s Religions*, Smith 1991), a popular textbook for comparative religion courses that sold over two million copies. His distinguished publishing and teaching career was celebrated in a five-part Public Broadcasting Special, *The Wisdom and Faith of Huston Smith*, hosted by Bill Moyers in 1996. Although several of Smith’s landmark books will be commented upon in this article, only two will be in focus, his earliest success, *The Purposes of Higher Education* (1955), and his latest, *Why Religion Matters* (2001). Soon after *Why Religion Matters* was published, *Zygon* invited responses by several scholars. Ian Barbour (2001) challenged Smith’s

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zealous support of Intelligent Design. Gregory Peterson (2001) complained that Smith misrepresented the scientific community, overstating its role in the decline of religion and the contemporary loss of a sense of the transcendent. Ursula Goodenough (2001) concluded that, in spite of Smith's efforts, "the science-and-religion dialogue, alas, will not be moved forward" (Goodenough 2001, 206).

This article, while acknowledging and appreciating prior critiques, revisits the themes of *Why Religion Matters* suggesting a way forward in light of Smith's earlier, much earlier, *The Purposes of Higher Education* (1955). The article is presented in two parts. Part One reviews the central thesis of *Why Religion Matters*, its structure, its chief metaphor, the tunnel of modernity, and a brief survey of its four "flagship books" (Appleyard 1992; Carter 1993; Marsden 1994; Larsen 1997). Part Two, then, reflects back upon *Why Religion Matters* in light of insights derived from *The Purposes of Higher Education*. These insights emerge from a discussion of six tensions in worldview education (absolutism vs. relativism; objectivity vs. commitment; freedom vs. authority; egoism vs. altruism; the individual vs. the state; the sacred vs. the secular) and four aims in liberal education (knowledge; abilities; appreciations; motivations). The article concludes with modest suggestions regarding forward progress in the science-and-religion dialogue.

PART ONE: WHY RELIGION MATTERS

Why Religion Matters (2001) documents the erosion of religion's influence in higher education, science, the media, and our legal systems, what Smith metaphorically refers to as the floor, ceiling, and walls of modernity's tunnel. According to Smith, "most professionals in philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence, neurobiology, and cognitive science accept some version of materialism because they believe that is the only philosophy consistent with our contemporary scientific worldview" (Smith 2001, 49). *Why Religion Matters* is about an adequate worldview, one's understanding of the "big picture," and how that understanding shapes individuals and societies, for better and for worse. Our present crisis, declared over a decade ago in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, consists of a "loss of faith in transcendence, in a reality that encompasses and surpasses our quotidian affairs" (cited three times by Smith 2001, 41, 194, 217). This loss, according to Smith, is the result of the ascendancy of naturalistic, materialistic, reductionistic, and scientific worldviews, inappropriately and illegitimately claiming the findings of science and the insights of postmodernity as allies. *Why Religion Matters* provides not only critique, but remedy. Smith provides "features of the religious landscape that are invariant" and "a map that can orient us, wherever the future may bring" (Smith, 2001, 5).

Why Religion Matters is written in two parts, "Modernity's Tunnel" (Chapters 1–7) and "Light at the Tunnel's End" (Chapters 8–16). The key

chapter in Part Two is Chapter 14, “The Big Picture.” This chapter provides a sketch of the common features of “The Big Picture,” those “features of the religious landscape that are invariant” (Smith 2001, 5), and functions as Smith’s remedy to scientism. Since Smith’s argument has been subjected to criticism, I feel obliged to note Smith’s admissions that *Why Religion Matters* may be judged as an “oversimplification” (Smith 2001, 2) of the problem and that this book was not written for the literary elite, but is “as plebian as I can render its not always simple argument” (Smith 2001, 46).

The chief metaphor of *Why Religion Matters* is the tunnel of modernity. This tunnel has been forged by scientism, the floor supporting the two walls (higher education and the law) and the roof (the media). Smith notes that science and scientism are often confused, if not equated. Among the many interesting/humorous anecdotes that Smith offers is one about an unnamed professor of science from the University of Minnesota who, after hearing one of Smith’s lectures, commented: “but there’s one thing about scientism that you still don’t see, Huston, science *is* scientism” (Smith 2001, 69; italics original). But Smith carefully distinguishes science from scientism, suggesting that scientism adds two corollaries to science: “first, that the scientific method is, if not the *only* reliable method of getting at truth, then at least the most reliable method; and second, that the things science deals with—material entities—are the *most* fundamental things that exist” (Smith, 2001, 60; italics original).

Smith complains in his Introduction: “When, with the inauguration of the scientific worldview, human beings started considering themselves the bearers of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, meaning began to ebb and the stature of humanity to diminish. The world lost is human dimension and we began to lose control of it” (2001, 1).

An echo of the Tower of Babel incident from Genesis 11 comes to my mind.

Smith senses a similar echo in the voice of Syracuse sociologist Manfred Stanley:

It is by now a Sunday-supplement commonplace that the . . . modernization of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation. . . . At its most fundamental level, the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernization forces upon us a world, that, although baptized as real by science, is denuded of all humanly recognizable qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfillment, salvation and damnation. It is not, of course being claimed that such matters are not part of the existential realities of human life. It is rather, that the scientific worldview makes it illegitimate to speak of them as being ‘objectively’ part of the world, forcing us instead to define such evaluation and such emotional experience as “merely subjective” projections of people’s inner lives. (Cited in Smith 2001, 7, 8)

In response to this echo Smith insists “that if the human spirit is to fare better than it recently has it must shake off the tunnel vision of modernity,” and regain “the importance of the religious dimension of human life, in individuals, societies, and in civilizations” (Smith 2001, xiv).

An ominous note is heard in the voice of eminent microbiologist Jacques Monod:

No society before ours was ever rent by contradictions so agonizing. In both primitive and classical cultures the animistic tradition saw knowledge and values as stemming from the same source. For the first time in history a civilization is trying to shape itself while clinging desperately to the animistic tradition to justify its values, and at the same time abandoning it as a source of knowledge. . . . Just as an initial choice in the biological evolution of a species can be binding upon its entire future, so the choice of scientific practice, an unconscious choice in the beginning, has launched the evolution of culture on a one-way path: onto a track which nineteenth-century scientism saw leading upward to an empyrean noon hour for mankind, whereas what we see opening before us today is an abyss of darkness. (Cited in Smith 2001, 17)

Smith rejects any attempt to “sweeten this sour apple” (2001, 38). He calls attention to Ursula Goodenough’s thought in *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (1998). Goodenough confesses that for her nature has “no Creator, no superordinate meaning, no purpose other than life’s continuance,” nevertheless she testifies to feelings of “awe and reverence” (cited in Smith 2001, 38). Smith quips: “but how much comfort can we draw from that fact when the awe nature awakens in human beings is, like all emotions, no more than a post-it note, so to speak, affixed to a nature that is unaware of being thus bedecked” (2001, 38).

A sentiment similar to that of Goodenough is found in Owen Flanagan’s *The Problem of the Soul* (2002). Professor of Philosophy at Duke University, Flanagan writes about the “conflict between two grand images of who we are: the humanistic and the scientific” (2002, ix). He carefully, clearly, and passionately weaves his way through current philosophical and scientific perspectives on the complex issues of consciousness, mind/body dualism, free-will and determinism, the existence of God and the problem of evil, and the alleged ontological status of the “self.”

Flanagan’s approach, while similar to Goodenough, differs from other recommended texts. Among these are Barbour (1997); Brown, Murphy, and Maloney (1998); Gregersen, Drees, and Gorman (2000); Hayes and Ferguson (2007); Larsen (2000); Murphy and Ellis (1996); Polkinghorne (1994, 1998); Smith (1976); Southgate et al. (1999); and Ward (2002). These texts all argue that a reconciliation of theistic faith and current scientific understandings of nature are not only possible and plausible, but recommended. Not so with Owen Flanagan. Here is how Flanagan concludes *The Problem of the Soul*:

We are now near the end of our long journey . . . the defender of the scientific image who wants to make peace with the manifest image can make ample room for ethics, for reflective inquiry into living well and living morally. . . . This quest suits the human animal well. . . . It is the most we can aim for given the kind of creature we are, and happily it is enough. If you think this is not so, if you want more, if you wish that your life had prospects for transcendent meaning, for more than the personal satisfaction and contentment you can achieve while you are alive, and more than what you will have contributed to the world after you die, then you are still in the grip of illusions. Trust me, you can't get more. But what you can get, if you live well, is enough. Don't be greedy. Enough is enough. (2002, 319)

Flanagan's assertion is reminiscent of Freud's similar assertion at the end of *The Future of an Illusion* ([1927]1961) nearly a century ago: "Our science is not illusion, but an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere" (56).

So, what is at stake here? And, what is this debate all about? Returning to *Why Religion Matters*, Smith states: "the fundamental issue is about facts, period. The entire panoply of facts as gestalted by worldviews. . . it is about the standing of values in the objective world, the world that is there whether human beings exist or not" (2001, 27). Or, to put the matter in question form: "Are values as deeply ingrained in that world as are its natural laws, or are they added to it as epiphenomenal gloss when life enters the picture?" (Smith 2001, 27).

In order to help convey what is at stake, Smith solicits the testament of popular English poet David Gascoyne: "The underlying theme that remained constant in almost everything I have written is the intolerable nature of human reality when devoid of all spiritual, metaphysical dimension" (cited in Smith 2001, 41).

Several metaphors help visualize the inherent flaws of scientism. First, to think that science can speak to the question of metaphysics is "like thinking that people floating through space in a huge balloon could use the same flashlight that illumines its interior to see where the balloon is located in space" (Smith 2001, 42). Second, "Hopes and fears, pleasures and pains, successes and disappointments—the sum total of the lives that we experience directly—are for science epiphenomenal only, the foam on the beer, which requires beer (matter) to exist but not vice versa" (Smith 2001, 50). Third, "Imagine yourself in a bungalow in North India. You are standing before a picture window that commands a breathtaking view of the Himalayan Mountains. What modernity has done, in effect, is to lower the shade of that window to within two inches of its sill. With our eyes angled downward, all that we can now see of the outdoors is the ground on which the bungalow stands. In this analogy, the ground represents the material world—and to give credit where credit is due, science has shown that world to be awesome beyond belief. Still, it is not Mount Everest" (Smith 2001, 193).

Fourth, and finally, my favorite, based on Raphael's masterpiece and taken from *The Purposes of Higher Education* (1955) rather than *Why Religion Matters* (2001):

Let us suppose the hallway [of Raphael's 'School of Athens'] to be inhabited by a colony of flies, to whom the picture is a familiar object. They have crossed and recrossed it many times. They are intimate with the irregularities of its surface. They are aware of some of its variety of colors, and possibly also of the odor of pigments that have been used. Obviously they know something of the picture, but how much? They know it from a fly's standpoint. But why it is there, or why these colors take these particular patterns, they do not know. The Greek history and Renaissance thought of which the picture speaks—Plato's philosophy and Raphael's dream—of these they must remain forever ignorant. The limitation is not in the picture, but in themselves. We stand in similar relation to the fullness of reality. When it seems flat and ordinary it is because our senses and concepts snatch only at the fringes of its unfathomable secrets. (Smith 1955, 184)

The problem is this: philosophical materialism does not logically and necessarily follow from methodological materialism. Materialism is a worldview, a metaphysical interpretation of reality that must compete with any other potentially persuasive worldview. No single worldview has a monopoly on science. And, any given worldview is subject to evaluation.

Keith Ward, in his *God, Chance, and Necessity* (1996) provides a comparative evaluation of materialism and theism utilizing the criteria of economy, elegance, and comprehensiveness. Ward awards a draw to theism and materialism on the matters of economy and elegance. Both worldviews evoke a simple and singular principle for why things are the way they are. One posits the will of a divine being, the other the laws of physics. Both worldviews are elegant. One provides explanation for ultimate origins and destiny, the other accounts for ongoing process. But Ward awards theism the prize on comprehensiveness. He evaluates materialism as "ignoring completely all those features of personal conscious experience and purpose with which we are in fact most familiar" (Ward 1996, 101–02).

Another important area of controversy between mystic and materialist concerns the "gaps" between what we "know scientifically" and "what we conjecture ultimately is" (e.g., matter and/or Spirit). Gaps are good. They are good for scientific research as they generate hypotheses to be tested. They are good for theology as they recommend a place for a Creator, Sustainer, or Intelligent Designer. Will science continue to eliminate gaps that were formerly thought to secure the hypothesis of Intelligent Design? Probably. Will science eventually eliminate each and every gap so that we arrive at a Theory of Everything? Perhaps not. Much remains to be seen and constitutes a journey and a dilemma shared by mystic and materialist alike.

One's worldview depends upon presuppositions rather than proof. Certainly, whether mystic or materialist, one is advised to construct a worldview that is congruent with the findings of science. But science does not decide the issue. We do. You do. I do. People who live lives do. Any decision for theism, atheism, or agnosticism is informed, yes, advisedly, from the best of science, but also reflects the complex interactions of: upbringing; social location; professional associations; life experiences; intuitions; dispositions; psychological motivations; and favorable and/or unfavorable exposures to the best and/or worst that life has to offer. In short, one exercises faith. Everyone. This is the common ground that we all share. And, although the stakes are high and the matters of debate are real and serious, those who differ can still respect each other, debate each other with civility, and continue to work together for a better world. Theists, atheists, and agnostics all share the same planet, belong to the same species, and similarly struggle to embody that elusive commodity we call virtue. More on this later. But for now, we reenter the tunnel.

With the floor of modernity's tunnel sufficiently illustrated it remains to provide descriptions of the walls and the ceiling. These descriptions are followed by a synopsis of Huston Smith's remedy. And then we will move on to consider how the insights of *The Purposes of Higher Education* provide guidance in the presentation, discussion, and understanding of these matters.

Each chapter on a given aspect of modernity's tunnel recognizes a flagship book that has signaled its path. For the chapter on the floor of scientism Smith selected Bryan Appleyard's *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man* (1992). For the chapter on the wall of higher education Smith selected George Marsden's *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (1994). Marsden's thesis is that what was once an institution devoted to the fundamental superiority of the traditional worldview is now an institution dominated by scientific research and a curriculum always connected to the larger, market-driven, capitalistic society. Smith recalls those features of early American universities that are largely absent today. Included in his litany are: the training of clergy; compulsory chapel; required Sunday worship; frequent campus revival; affordability; small class size; manageable bits of knowledge; a clear sense of an overriding meaning, purpose, and truth in relation to the various meanings, purposes, and truths of individual departments. But his chief lament is the current pull of a naturalistic metaphysic on the social sciences, psychology, the humanities, philosophy, and religious studies. Smith deems the assumptions of a naturalistic metaphysic to contradict every one of the great traditional religions and philosophies of mankind. But he saves his severest remarks for religious studies.

Twentieth-century theologians did not hold their ground and insist that their theology was rooted in fact, objective knowledge, the way things are.

Rather, they adopted strategies of isolation and accommodation. Rather than correct the problem of the split between facts and values they illustrated the disparity between them. As Smith puts it: “Not being grounded in the reality that is generally recognized to be potentially *knowable*, the object of faith, ethics, and art stands in constant danger of becoming epiphenomenal and only derivatively real” (2001, 100; italics original).

The flagship book for the chapter on the roof of the tunnel (the media) is Edward J. Larsen’s *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (1997). Smith concentrates on the Scopes Trial, the movie *Inherit the Wind*, and ongoing battles over Darwinism because he judges media distortions regarding these as the most graphic index he knows of the way the media handle religion in our time. He concludes this chapter by sharing Peter Jennings’s comments years ago to Harvard Divinity School students: “We must stop treating religion as if it were like building model airplanes, just another hobby, not really a fit activity for intelligent adults. The sooner we do, the sooner we will have a greater grasp of our nation” (Smith 2001, 120).

In a later but related chapter (Chapter 10, “Discerning the Signs of the Times”), Smith recounts how he challenged the National Association of Biology Teachers’ (NABT) official definition of evolution: “Evolution is an *unsupervised, impersonal* natural process of temporal descent with genetic modifications that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments” (cited from Smith 2001, 163; italics not original to the NABT definition). At a 1997 meeting at the Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York Smith challenged the NABT’s definition with this question: “Had biologists discovered any *facts*. . . that prove that the process is ‘unsupervised’ and ‘impersonal’?” (Smith 2001, 163, italics original). Initially, Smith’s question was dismissed but later it was reconsidered and eventually resulted in the removal of those two words. Smith, however, was not content to drop the matter here. He made a second request suggesting: “Darwinism should be taught, and efforts to fill in the gaps in the theory should continue. But claims to the effect that Darwinism is so much on top of the story that it is unreasonable to think that other causes (some of which might not be empirical) could have played a part—that proscription should be dropped” (Smith 2001, 165). Smith has yet to hear back regarding his second proposal. Reason: methodological reductionism often dead-ends in philosophical reductionism.

The flagship book for the chapter on the remaining wall (the law) is Stephen Carter’s *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (1993). Carter’s book serves Smith’s purposes well and includes commentary on an Oregon State Supreme Court Case in which Huston Smith became involved. According to Carter, courts have been “transforming the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment. . . from a guardian of religious liberty into a guarantor of public secularism”

(cited in Smith 2001, 129). Smith underlines this assertion by continuing his focus upon the debate over evolution. Smith states, “Reduced to simplest terms, courts rightly assume that theism is a religious position, while wrongly assuming that atheism is not. . . . If God is omitted from accounts of human origins, students will take that absence as implying that God has no place in the picture” (2001, 132). Smith is concerned to protect a national policy of neutrality but believes that the courts, like higher education and the media, have succumbed to the ascendancy of a naturalistic worldview. Naturalism is the norm, the sanctioned view for public policy whereas theism is religious and needs to be marginalized to the private sector.

My review of the gist of the argument of *Why Religion Matters* is now complete. Huston Smith sees contemporary culture in a dark tunnel. Higher education, the law, and the media are so inundated by scientism that the human spirit, if it is to prosper in the millennium to come, must return to the wisdom of traditional religious remedies.

We are now in a position to consider Smith’s remedy. This, for the most part, is found in Chapter 14, “The Big Picture.” In essence, this chapter states that what science cannot give us, religion can. Smith identifies and discusses the following (all conceived in terms of what is ultimate): orientation; meaning; purpose; value; quality; a happy ending; a sense of belonging; and, most importantly, an object of devotion, worthy of absolute commitment, sacrifice, and adoration.

These are the goods which religion delivers. For Smith, and others who find their needs met by religion, a worldview superior to that offered by materialistic science is evident. As Smith states, “. . .the traditional worldview is transparently intelligible. The scientific worldview is not. Final causes being categorically excluded from it, it necessarily dead ends in questions that have no answers” (2001, 233).

Smith is not advocating any particular religion. Rather, he is advocating the hierarchical view of reality common to “over seventy thousand estimated societies” (Smith 2001, 213). These traditional societies divide reality into two spheres, this world and the Other world, with the latter being more real. The Other world divides further into the knowable and the unknowable, with the latter being more real. In Buddhism this reality is termed *shunyata* or *nirvana*. In Hinduism, *nirguna Brahman*. In Chinese religion, the unspeakable *Tao*. In Christianity, this reality is called the Godhead. In Islam, *hawiyah ghalb izzah*, or unmanifested sovereign power. And, so on in various other religions. Although the terminology differs from culture to culture, the distinction remains the same. That which is most real is “hidden” but nevertheless accessible.

Smith includes an assessment of the human person. In traditional religions the self is divided into two parts, the empirical and the transcendental, the latter being more real. As demonstrated above on scientism,

this presents an opposite view. Modern science views the human person as a physical reality having the emergent property of consciousness due to a sophisticated brain and nervous system. The physical is deemed as real, the emergent property of consciousness, less so. The debate in our contemporary culture revolves around this issue.

PART TWO: THE PURPOSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As a college professor interested in presenting both sides of this debate, fostering civility, and identifying common ground, I turned to Smith's earlier book, *The Purposes of Higher Education* for guidance. The relevance of *The Purposes of Higher Education* to the concerns of *Why Religion Matters* is eloquently expressed in its preface:

What will emerge if you take proponents of pragmatism, scientism, religion, naturalism, idealism, transcendentalism, near-positivism, together with generous sprinklings of eclecticism and uncrystallized intuitions: shut them together in a living room for a series of evenings with their convictions tempered by nothing but a will to understand one another and a common concern for the future of education, and ask them to come out with a statement on the aims of education which all can commend? (Smith 1955, xvii)

Such a statement is what one finds in the pages of *The Purposes of Higher Education*. This text is divided into two parts: (1) The resolution of tensions; and, (2) general aims. The selective overview presented here focuses upon the application of its wisdom/insights to the concerns of *Why Religion Matters*.

Part I provides "resolutions" to six classic tensions faced by educators who are attempting to negotiate worldview differences. The tensions discussed are: absolutism versus relativism; objectivity versus commitment; freedom versus authority; egoism versus altruism; the individual versus the state; and sacred versus secular. Part II focuses upon the aims of liberal education: knowledge, abilities, appreciations, and motivations. My review highlights those features that I found most helpful in my attempt to respond to the challenges of *Why Religion Matters*.

I begin with Part II, "The Aims of Liberal Education." The knowledge that Smith suggests higher education aims at covers four major areas of relevant and essential information. Students should be instructed in the natural sciences. They should have some sense of physics, chemistry, and biology in order to understand the natural world of which they are a part. Smith wisely points out that

In all this the student should acquire a feeling for science as a fallible, developing, self-correcting discipline in which theories are not automatically thrown up by facts but extracted from them by creative hypothesis. Students should see that not all the sciences look at the world in the same way, and

that insofar as science does have a unified point of view it is not exclusive of others—common sense, aesthetic, and the like. If these aims can be achieved, instruction in the sciences, while still contrasted with the humanities in name, will be no less humanizing in result. (1955, 155)

This insight is valuable in its implicit refutation of scientism, suggesting the merit of alternative epistemologies.

Students should be instructed in sociology and history in order to learn what works for the common good. In the discussion here Smith also stresses the importance of geography, economics, political science, anthropology, and philosophy. Students should be instructed in their cultural history. Here Smith includes literature, art, drama, music, and religion. The final and fourth area Smith touches upon is knowledge of the processes that make for personal and group fulfillment. Here he stresses psychology, sociology, history, art, literature, philosophy, and religion. These subjects provide the student with a sense of orientation to life, with a sense of what one is living for. Without mandating a particular worldview, the student is brought to see that some worldview is necessary if life is going to work for personal or for group fulfillment. Although no one would argue about students needing to be equipped with this basic information, one might argue about which worldview students should be encouraged to adopt. *Why Religion Matters* argues for the superiority of the general traditional religious worldview. College educators must rise to the occasion of elucidating that argument while at the same time facilitating counter arguments.

The chapter on abilities begins with the necessary and requisite skills of reading, writing, and speaking, continues with a discussion of critical thinking and the skill of making value judgments, and concludes with a discussion of effective social interaction. What I found most valuable for the concerns of *Why Religion Matters* were Smith's comments on critical thinking and value judgments. Regarding critical thinking Smith states: "In prescribing critical thinking as an aim of liberal education, there is no thought that all the student's thinking should be of this sort" (1955, 164). Smith makes allowance for the value of "stream of consciousness, imagination, association, hunch, insight, allusion, and the like" (1955, 164). I interpret "the like" to include faith, revelation, and religious experience. Regarding value judgments, Smith rightly notes that "evaluation pervades human life" and that "evaluation implies a standard in terms of which judgments are made" (1955, 167). Smith suggests that students should be confronted with their own values, the values of the dominant culture, and those of others. Values are always related to consequences. The challenge of *Why Religion Matters* was/is to provide clarity regarding two clearly differing points of view, with attendant values and the consequences those values might have. What was/is missing in *Why Religion Matters* is a clear presentation of criteria by which to evaluate one's worldview.

The third main aim of a liberal education is appreciations. Smith stresses the importance of seeing things from another vantage point. Students need exposure to both mystics and materialists. I often include Aquinas alongside Darwin, or Calvin alongside Nietzsche. The point in developing appreciations that are strong, varied, and profound is to produce people who can extract at least a measure of value from views with which on the whole they disagree. Smith notes, “where understanding is genuine the alternative to admiration is usually compassion rather than contempt” (1955, 179). When two people disagree, tension between them may be dissipated by compassion and cooperation may present itself as an option. Smith envisions this by stressing the cultivation of awe and wonder. He states:

Curiosity arises from a blend of humility (a sense of not having all the answers) and vitality (sufficient surplus energy to continue the search). Wonder and awe, for their part, cannot be precisely defined short of metaphysics. To those who believe in suprasensible orders of being, they are glimpses into these higher realms. Naturalists, on the other hand, interpret them in psychological terms: they are states of consciousness involving feelings of high importance. But, however they are interpreted, wonder and awe stand opposed to apathy and the prosaic view of life and experience. (Smith 1955, 183)

Awe and wonder, then, constitute essential and common ground for mystic and materialist alike.

The final aim covered in Part I concerns motivations. Motivations differ from appreciations in that, in addition to *options*, they provide *incentives* for action. Smith identifies six specific motivations a liberal education should foster.

Students should be motivated to develop an adequate hierarchy of values. No one would dispute placing good over evil, better over worse, or obtaining a sense of history. Although values are usually developed and established in the home, a liberal education serves to “help clarify them, extend their scope, and review their validity” (Smith 1955, 191).

Students should be motivated to develop an affirmative, constructive orientation toward life. This assumes that life has significance, whether derived from human ingenuity alone, or intended by a higher power. Significance becomes common ground. The basis of one’s significance is the dispute. This clarification tends to foster mutual understanding between mystic and materialist.

Students should be motivated to develop an independent spirit. Hence, free expression must be allowed for those persuaded by either mystics or materialists. Both cannot be right, but both must be respectful. Instructors should show support for both, functioning as floor authorities rather than ceiling authorities (explained below).

Students should be motivated to assume social responsibility as participants in the world community. Although mystics and materialists draw from different wells, they nevertheless are partners in co-creating the world they live in and will leave to a later generation. This generates common concern, a common vision, and much needed hope. Orthodoxy, however, must yield to orthopraxy.

Students should be motivated to include the interests of others within their own. This facilitates a largeness of heart. It builds on the recognition of the need for freedom, freedom *of* worldviews, not freedom *from* worldviews. But this involves clarifying what is a worldview and what is not. This is precisely Smith's complaint in *Why Religion Matters*. Theism is treated legally and politically as a worldview, whereas materialism is often seen as the norm. Fairness requires that materialism also be acknowledged as one of several competing worldview options rather than as a norm.

Finally, students should be motivated to seek self-realization on the highest possible level. Mystics and materialists alike would not want to hold back those who are making progress. And, it must be pointed out, that individuals from both camps appear to prosper. Educators need to recognize the difference between providing students with the requisite knowledge, skills, appreciations, and motivations they need to construct a given worldview and making choices for them.

Part I navigates its way through six classic tensions and is equally as instructive as Part II. I begin with absolutism versus relativism. Absolutists seek to uphold objectivity and universality. Relativists seek to uphold subjectivity and sensitivity to particular circumstances. The strength of the former lies in objectivity; the strength of the latter lies in sensitivity to particular circumstances. Hence, Smith advocates a middle position that he calls "objective relativism." He states:

With relativism it acknowledges that there are no values that are unaffected by their contexts: given a relevant difference in situation, what is of value for that situation will also be different. But having granted this, objective relativism then goes on to agree with absolutism (1) that the question of what is good in any given situation is a question of objective fact to be determined by the character of the situation as a whole and never simply by personal preference or opinion, and (2) that contexts are sufficiently similar to warrant value generalizations concerning individuals, societies, and mankind as a whole. (Smith 1955, 28)

This resolution is extremely helpful in the mystic versus materialist debate. Since the debate is precisely over who has the correct facts about the nature of reality, educational policies and pedagogies that not only facilitate the debate but also emphasize value generalizations are preferred. Thus far I have identified freedom, respect, civility, significance, awe and wonder, human limitation, social responsibility, and a general hierarchy of

values. Would anyone object to clarity, openness to evidence, precision, honesty, the quickening of aspirations, or patience?

A second tension is found between objectivity and commitment. Must mystic or materialist sacrifice their beliefs on the altar of objectivity? Not according to Smith. He relieves this tension by suggesting, once again, a middle path. Recognizing that total objectivity eludes everyone, that no one has a God's eye view of things, and that all facts are interpreted through a process of selection and specialization, Smith endorses the notion of fallibilism. This he defines as "the vivid awareness of the mind's limitations, the high sense of the finitude of every human perspective" (Smith 1955, 47). He thus recommends "the open self as matrix for responsible commitment" (Smith 1955, 45). Smith elaborates:

There is, however, another level to this matter. It is perfectly true that to the extent that I have faith in a specific proposition I will be open-minded about it. But there is another kind of faith, faith of a different order which belongs not so much to the mind as to the total man. This faith does not reside in the cerebral cortex but in the total character structure of the personality. It does not attach itself to specific doctrines; instead it is a generalized orientation toward the world as a whole and all life. It is the basic quality of what we may call the open self. In science it takes the form of confidence that any particular hypothesis which falls will be superseded by a more adequate and inclusive one. In religion it takes the form of confidence that if any specific article of faith must go, this is to make room for a vaster and more creative insight. In both cases basic faith makes it possible for the individual to face without fear the prospect of permanent revolution on the level of his specific ideas. (1955, 45)

Smith's insight is captured succinctly in this ancient Chinese saying: "only the river bed that is low enough to absorb hundreds of small streams flowing into it can become a river of mighty waters" (Smith 1955, 44). Henry Emerson Fosdick challenges any potential fundamentalism of mystic or materialist with this thought: "the idea that any creed can be final is as incredible to me as that the interpretation of the physical universe should stop with Newton or Einstein. But while ideas of God can change and ought to—that does not mean that anything has happened to God" (cited in Smith 1955, 49). Nor do the ongoing interpretations of physical reality alter the nature of that reality. Thus, mystic and materialist alike must agree that "reality" and "notions of reality" remain distinct. Ideas are subject to two types of failure. They may be simply wrong, or merely incomplete. This is referred to as critical realism.

The third tension addressed is that between freedom and authority. Instructors enjoy only a temporary authority over students. Students are not lifelong subordinates. Instructors best function when they act, in Smith's terminology, as floor authorities rather than ceiling authorities. This metaphor suggests that teachers properly function as supports, those

who provide balance and ensure proper controls to the maturation of students. Ceiling authorities, on the other hand, limit student's perspectives, stifle questioning, and aim for conformity. If the adage "the truth will make you free" has any validity, then educators are obligated to facilitate the discovery of truth in order that students might truly be free. Smith's definition of freedom stunned me when I first read it and I quote it here as a means to complete my thought: "freedom is the spontaneous expression of an authentic self" (Smith 1955, 79). If an educator's goal is to produce spontaneous and authentic selves, then she must be committed to providing clear distinctions between competing worldviews, clarity regarding how they are to be properly evaluated, and the services of a floor rather than a ceiling authority.

My comments on tensions four (egoism versus altruism) and five (individual versus state) will be brief and treated together. Smith's central insight in these two chapters is in the recognition of interdependence. It's not about me and it's not about you. It's about us! Mutuality relieves the tension between egoism and altruism and individual and state. Flowers that survive do so because they are open to their environments. Rain, sun, wind, soil, and bees all work together in assisting the "open" flower to thrive in an interdependent reality. Mystics and materialists constitute extremes in today's interdependent social and political environment. Recognizing interdependence and practicing mutuality presents itself as wisdom for all considered.

The final tension and concluding section of this essay concerns the secular versus the sacred. The root meaning of secular is "worldly," that which has to do with the routine and ordinariness of this world. The root meaning of sacred refers to that which is "set apart" from the world. This distinction brings to mind Smith's remedy, the affirmation that reality divides into two spheres, this world and the Other world.

Yet, even many naturalists, although rejecting the notion of the Other, nevertheless allow for a notion of the sacred within, rather than from without. This presents two challenges: (1) the challenge of precisely defining that which distinguishes the secular from the sacred; and (2) the challenge of constructing a bridge that would facilitate dialogue between mystic and materialist.

Smith suggests that educators begin by moving the debate past name-calling. On the one hand, religionists equate secularism with humanism, paganism, nihilism, atheism, agnosticism, relativism, intellectualism, scientism, and unbelief. On the other hand, secularists equate religion with dogmatism, ecclesiasticism, obscurantism, credulity, conservatism, absolutism, immaturity, and superstition.

Smith, therefore, presents the following acute question: "For where is the line between confidence in science and scientism, between the determined use of intelligence and intellectualism, between taking nature seriously and

naturalism, between a becoming humbleness of mind and agnosticism, between hope for history and utopianism?" (1955, 141). He continues: "Where, again, is the precise difference between loyalty to an institution and ecclesiasticism, between dogma and dogmatism, between awareness of mystery and obscurantism, between receptiveness to values of the past and conservatism, between authentic faith and credulity?" (Smith 1955, 142). Name-calling appears much easier than laboring through these necessary distinctions. But such is the task that educators must take up even if only to admit that such precision eludes them.

This challenge is further refined with the awareness that precise distinctions between atheism and theism, or naturalism and supernaturalism, are complicated by the range of views within these positions. Theism allows for varieties of pantheism, panentheism, and deism. These views attempt to negotiate a number of problems (e.g., transcendence versus immanence; creation *ex nihilo* versus creation *ex deus*; differing responses to the problem of evil; and varying positions on the possibility of miracles). Atheism admits assertive or dogmatic atheism, agnostic atheism, semantic atheism, traditional atheism, mythological atheism, dialectical atheism, rejections of the god-state, rejections of the god-wealth, rejections of the god-self, and others.

Smith contributes this thought: "There always tends to be a religious quality to atheism, never more clearly revealed than in Socrates' reply to the charge when, standing trial for his life, he said to his accusers, 'But I do believe in God, only in a sense higher than you do'" (1955, 142).

Regarding distinctions between naturalism and supernaturalism, Smith adds: "Truth to tell, science's concept of the natural world is taking on every day more of the numinous, the weird, and the fantastic, which we had hitherto assumed was supernaturalism's monopoly" (1955, 143).

Ever more issues present themselves. Secularists and religionists must negotiate reason versus revelation, fatalism versus utopianism, and self-reliance versus grace. I offer these brief reflections. Revelation, properly understood, does not nullify reason, it augments it. Mystic and materialist, while agreeing to keep one foot on the bridge of reason, might freely debate the advantages of the positioning of the other foot. Both might agree to cooperate in constructing an aesthetically pleasing bridge, while one awaits its collapse and the other its reunion with the heavenly bridge maker. Verification belongs to the future.

Regarding self-reliance versus grace, Huston Smith is difficult to improve upon. He states:

Finally, we find it difficult to define secularism as evincing faith in man's own powers while religion relies on powers beyond the self. To be a self at all is to have some power; to be a finite self is to have limited power which must be supported and supplemented by forces from without. Man can do wonders, but without the help of nature's order, parent's nurture, and culture's

backing, his efforts falter and fail. Who, moreover, can say how far into the environment his unpayable indebtedness and the spread of his warranted gratitude extends? All we know for sure is that nothing must be done to undermine man's responsibility, initiative, and self-confidence, nor to undercut his awareness of the "everlasting arms," however defined, which continually support his life and provide him with strength and encouragement for the tasks of the day. (Smith 1995, 145)

Differences between mystic and materialist are deep, wide, and serious. Yet, the bridge of dialogue, constructed in this essay, is possible, plausible, and necessary. I end this essay with difficulty. There is so much more to say. My bias lies with Huston Smith, with his theistic and mystical affirmations and proclamations as presented in *Why Religion Matters*. But as a public educator I am obligated to observe guidelines that promote civility, strive for balance, and thoughtfully and carefully consider the perspective of the opposition. *The Purposes of Higher Education* is immensely instructive in achieving these ends.

In conclusion, I refer one more time to yet another instructive text by Huston Smith. In his *Condemned to Meaning* (1965), Smith analyzes the concept of meaning. Meaning is important to everyone, be they mystic, materialist, or whatever. Smith weaves his way through various distinctions: atomic versus global; intrinsic versus extrinsic; articulate versus inarticulate; and individual versus generic meaning. He poses this question: "What, insofar as it can be stated (rendered articulate), is the meaning of human life (global) considered in its own right (intrinsic) and as pertaining to all who live it (generic)?" (Smith 1965, 41).

Smith answers with five categories of meaning which we all exercise in order to structure billions of life-impressions that would otherwise remain random and pointless. These categories consist of: (1) trouble; (2) hope; (3) endeavor; (4) trust; and (5) mystery. The synopsis I present here intends to provide a fitting conclusion to the aims of this essay.

To live is to know trouble. Whether looking for trouble or not, it comes to one and all in various quantities and in various qualities. Call it sin, *dukkha*, *maya*, angst, or whatever you prefer, it is the human condition. But, thankfully, hope springs eternal and also presents itself in a variety of forms. As Smith puts it: "the human spirit rises like a spark from trouble's anvil, flying upward and outward toward *hope*" (1965, 48; italics original). Hope beckons and inspires endeavor. With a goal envisioned, work is energized and undertaken. This leads to trust. If trouble is certain, and hope and endeavor are trouble's remedy, then trust becomes a necessity. But trust in what, or in whom? Mystics and materialists point in different directions. But while they point they share the same space, stand on the same ground, and are nurtured by a common environment. This common environment, educational, political, natural, and social constitutes the mutual grounds of trust upon which both must depend. It is the depth and nature of these

grounds that is the object of debate. This, then, leaves all a mystery for share and care.

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