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Making God Dance: Postmodern Theorizing and the Christian College

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By Mark S. McLeod

"...post this, post that. Everything is post these days, as if we're all just a footnote to something earlier that was real enough to have a name of its own."—Elaine Risley[1]

Just as every past age had its cultural and intellectual story to tell, so do we. It is the tale of a postmodern world where nothing is real, a fable where everything depends on nostalgia, a rumor in which everyone's beliefs are acceptable. Thus, evangelical Christians tend to think that postmodernism opposes the truth, and in particular, the absolute truth of the gospel. But it is far from clear that postmodernism is treacherous.

That we live in a postmodern world is evident in how academics work in their various disciplines. Even though evangelical scholars tend to disparage postmodernism, we ourselves are often caught up in postmodern thinking. In times past, the cultural and intellectual climate of the age molded Christian truth, so our being influenced by the spirit of the present age ought to be no surprise. Being thus shaped is not an evil, or at least it need not be if we become aware of what we are doing. Being postmodern need not entail that we give up on the objectivity of the gospel. It is time to take postmodernism seriously and allow its positive aspects to influence Christian higher education.

Postmodernism is rooted in a set of philosophical influences that run contrary to the philosophical position most evangelicals hold on the nature of theorizing. In order to understand postmodernism and its influence, one needs to understand these philosophical positions. My goals are thus to explain briefly the standard evangelical philosophy of theorizing as well as a corresponding postmodernist position, to illustrate with some examples how postmodernist

In this essay, Mark S. McLeod describes and advocates a postmodern model of theorizing which he calls "multi-world realism" as an alternative to "common sense realism" and the "correspondence theory of truth" which dominate, he maintains, both the Western philosophical tradition and current evangelical thinking. Objectivity is preserved and relativism avoided, he argues, by turning to "what is of interest to God, to that in which God delights or takes pleasure." He concludes by developing the implications of this view for the various aspects of Christian higher education, noting that a "Christian-Postmodern college would be an exciting place to work for the kingdom." Mr. McLeod, until recently a faculty member at Westmont College, teaches philosophy and humanities at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

assumptions work themselves out in two academic disciplines, to suggest a way for the Christian to embrace postmodernism without ceasing to be seriously Christian, and to illustrate a number of ways in which these changes in philosophical assumptions would influence the workings of the Christian college.

I. Evangelical Theorizing

The traditional philosophical position on theorizing most evangelicals hold maintains that truth is correspondence. It is what many, if not most, people think of as the common sense view. This view of truth is that our linguistic utterances, to be true, must "match" or "correspond to" an extra-mental world. There are, so to speak, two realms. First is the realm of thoughts, and in particular, propositional-style thoughts—thoughts that are descriptive or declarative in nature. Second is the realm of the nonmental world, the world "out there" that exists external to the human mind. The roots of this idea go as far back as Plato, and are as central to Western thought as any other belief or theory.

Part and parcel with this understanding of truth is the notion that our theories or, more broadly speaking, our worldviews[2] are true in just this sense, namely, that there is a mind-independent set of facts or data to which our theories, even the most general ones, match or correspond. Thus, what we do when we theorize is largely an epistemological project, that is, a project by which we come to discover the way the world is, to find the appropriate description of it, to match our thoughts and utterances to a world over which we have no say.

Underpinning both the correspondence theory of truth and the notion that our theories are either true or false is a certain metaphysical theory, the theory that there is a mind-independent world that exists no matter what we think about it, believe about it, want it to be, or conceive it to be. I'll refer to this view as Common Sense Realism, or Realism with a capital "R". According to Realism, there are tables and chairs, trees and rocks, and, in short, the whole perceivable world. Those of us who believe in persons, especially in persons understood primarily as entities with nonphysical souls, as well as those of us who believe in supernatural beings—God, angels, demons, and the like—will typically extend our Realism to those beings as well. These beings exist independent of our thinking about them just as do rocks, trees, tables, and chairs. Although not physical, they are just as real. Furthermore, Common Sense Realism asserts that there is only one such world, with only one true description. Thus we sometimes refer to Truth with a capital "T" or the absolute truth.

II. Our Postmodern World

The postmodern understanding of the world differs from the preceding position. A brief account of its roots and development can be helpful. The modern

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[1] Elaine Risley, a character in Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*, New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. 90.

[2] For ease of discussion, I am suppressing some important distinctions between the notions of theories, world views, conceptual schemes, and the like.

world is one in which philosophers say that if we think clearly enough and with sufficient diligence we can come to the truth. Rene Descartes, for instance, thinks that if he trusts only what he can clearly and distinctly perceive (with his mind's eye) then God will not let him go astray, at least not too far. Error is possible, however, since the will extends further than the intellect, and thus one can always go beyond what the evidence supports. Fundamentally, however, Descartes believes that clear thinking will guarantee that his beliefs are true; he wants, and believes he can have, absolute certainty about some things from which he can then infer other things about the world. Mathematical precision about one's own mental existence—*cogito ergo sum*—gives one a firm foundation for the existence and nature of the external world—the world of trees, chairs, other minds, and God.

Alas, Descartes's intellectual children are less sanguine about reaching the truth. David Hume, unlike Descartes, thinks clear thinking questions the value of clear thinking! He philosophizes about mathematics, on the one hand, and science on the other. Mathematics, although certain, is not about the real world; physics, although purportedly about the real world, is not only not certain but does not even rest on something we can show likely to be true. The foundations of physics are reducible to the psychological workings of the human mind.

The final central figure is Immanuel Kant. He responds to David Hume's radical skepticism about physics. For all we can tell, says Hume, there is no relationship of cause and effect that is necessary to the physical world. In order to rescue physics from the grip of Hume's skepticism, Kant responds with what he calls a "transcendental argument." For thinking to be possible at all, he says, there must be certain categories of thought that make experience—that is, sensuous experience—possible. These categories, such as cause and effect, number, and possibility and necessity, along with what he calls the "intuitions of space and time," are what make the experience of chairs, trees, tables, and elephants possible. But these categories and intuitions are, for Kant, internal to the workings of the human mind. This is Kant's "Copernican revolution." Rather than human thought conforming to a world that is independent of human thoughts, the so-called "world" really conforms to human thoughts. There is, in short, no mind-independent world to which we have access. So what Hume assumes is out there causing our experiences is, according to Kant, constituted by internal human thought structures.

It may sound as if Kant says that we have control over what we experience so that we can make up the world in whatever way we want. But clearly we individuals do not have such control over the world. Just as I see this desk in front of me, so would you were you here at the time of this writing. Nothing we can do will change that fact. But Kant does not think we can make up the world any way we want. There are, Kant says, two "worlds." The phenomenal world is the world that all of us experience and experience in more or less the same way—the world of rocks, trees, tables and chairs. We experience the same world because we are all rational creatures sharing exactly the same categories of thought. Thus

278   we all experience the desk-in-front-of-us. What we do not experience is the desk-in-itself. The latter is something from the noumenal world, the world of things-in-themselves, the world of what we might call "true essences." This is a world to which we do not have access through experience. So although humans do play an absolutely central role in shaping experience, we all play exactly the same role, for Kant, since rationality is everywhere the same.

    Kant thinks his theory returns physics to a position of strength, for Hume's skepticism rests on the assumption that our minds must be able to see or infer the existence of cause and effect. Upon Hume's realizing the impossibility of this perception or inference, he suggests that cause and effect is a psychological add-on, a mere unfounded assumption that we humans make to provide ourselves comfort. But Kant will have none of that; experience does not condition our thought but rather thought conditions our experience. If the cause and effect relation is a structure of the human mind, then we need not worry about whether we can perceive or infer its existence. The cause and effect relation, and other similar relations, are what make perception itself possible. In this sense, they are necessary; necessary for *thought* but not in the things *out there*. These relations are not in the physical world itself; they are part and parcel of the human mind. Physics, according to Kant, once again smells like a rose.

    What come out smelling less like a rose are religion, morality, art, and metaphysics. Kant believes that metaphysics, that branch of philosophy discussing the existence and nature of God, freewill, and "the true essences of things," cannot be done; or at least cannot be done on the grounds of pure reason. These are topics for practical reason; issues at best regulative for human life and beyond the firm foundation on which physics rests.

    After Kant comes the slow demise of Enlightenment thought, with its assumptions of identical values for all, a religion of reason that any clear thinking individual would come to believe, and the commitment to reason *qua* reason's capability of giving us universally acceptable truth. As Western thinkers realize that we have no need of the noumenal world, or at least no good reason to believe it exists, the basis for holding to a shared vision of the world (whether in theology, ethics, art, or physics) begins to collapse. Since rationality is a cultural artifact, we enter, in the twentieth century, the postmodern world, a world of skepticism, supposed irrationalism, and that bugaboo, relativism.

    The postmodern world is one in which we have only phenomena—what we experience—and no noumena. But further, it is a world in which the phenomena are relativized to our point of view, whether that is culturally or individually based. This relativism is present because we no longer think we can describe the way the world is, since there is no world-in-itself to describe. Thus we talk not of the human condition but of the postmodern condition; we talk not of truth but of what is interesting. Literary theorist Jacques Derrida says that texts have no meaning but that the meaning is in the margins of the printed page. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has his "will to power" talk—talk that means that we construct and will into influence our own worldview. Richard Rorty,

who once taught philosophy but gave it up to move to a humanities position, suggests that truth is what our peers will let us get away with. More recently, he believes that talk of truth is unimportant and that we should be more concerned with what provides us with solidarity rather than objectivity, where the basis of solidarity is what is interesting. Postmodernism is, in short, a reaction against the rationalism and scientism that dominated the Enlightenment and its legacy that we continue to live with in the twilight of the twentieth century.

In contrast to Common Sense Realism, a weak postmodern stance on truth suggests that if there is truth, it is not something to which we have access. A stronger position found among postmodernist theorists is that truth is relative to the broader theory one puts forth. Truth is not, then, correspondence to facts that exist independent of one's theory about them. Rather, facts and hence truth itself are shaped and influenced by the theories one holds. Not only is one's perception and understanding of reality formed by one's theoretical position; reality itself is so formed. Of course, the community of scholars among whom one works either supports or criticizes one's theory, and this is an important aspect of theorizing. But there is no way by which one can remove oneself from history and test one's theory for truth. Truth begins to sound relativistic on such a view, and this is more than merely an epistemological issue.

III. Postmodernism and the Disciplines

Some examples from various disciplines help to illustrate how postmodern thinking affects our work. The point here is not to convince anyone that postmodernism is the proper way to think of the world but rather to explore briefly how, as a matter of course, we have taken on postmodern assumptions. I'll give only two examples, but they could be multiplied, since postmodernist assumptions affect all the disciplines. The issue thus is pedagogical rather than argumentative.

Consider history. Most first-year college students think of history as "facts." But the contemporary historian tells us that "history takes place in the mind of the historian."[3] Yes, there are "facts"—the data with which the historian works—but "facts" are understood in the context of what the individual historian thinks, a context the historian constructs. Thus one has Christian views of history, but these views give us little to rely on except postmodern assumptions. For example, in a recent issue of the *Christian Scholar's Review*, historian Mark Noll claims that one goal of his essay on the possibility of knowledge about the past is to show that "a Christian perspective on knowledge can provide not only a, but the best foundation for restoring confidence in the human ability to know the past reliably." When it comes to fulfilling his goal, however, the best Noll can say is that although "Christian teaching offers a solution to the crisis of historical knowledge . . . [by providing] reasons for a chastened realism about our grasp of history" this is only a solution if Christianity itself is true. He continues: "But how, then, if we have acknowledged that Christianity does not support naively

[3] Rebecca L. M. McLeod, in conversation.

objectivist modes of demonstration, can we recommend Christianity as true? One answer is to assert that an apology for Christianity must begin where our knowledge of the past begins, with an understanding that is relative to our own perspectives."[4] These are, frankly, admissions that the canons of rationality are internal to a system of beliefs—in this case Christian beliefs—and one must ask even more forcefully why one should believe Christianity.

Perhaps all Noll is suggesting is that there is no theory-neutral starting point epistemically. Suppose we grant that for the moment. On those grounds alone, we have no reason to suppose that the Christian position is, in fact, "the best" foundation, nor even that it is better than others. Won't the Marxist historian tell us an equally rational story? And won't she take Marxism to be true? From that framework the result is, as one historian is fond of saying, "history where the names and dates have been changed to protect the historian, but the conclusions are always the same."[5] The problem is that all historians come to their work with framework assumptions that influence how they take the facts or, to state it more forcefully, enable them to "create" facts. Facts are theory conditioned and this understanding of history is, I suggest, not simply Kantian but the result of post-Kantian assumptions in which the noumenal world has been not only separated from the phenomenal world but is denied any purchase on our thinking whatsoever. Why then think there is a noumenal world? Why does the historian need it? To suggest that the issue is only an epistemic one is to make a distinction without a functional difference. The historian, even the Christian historian, works as if history has no noumenal framework.

Postmodernism is also central in theology. David Tracy, a theologian at the University of Chicago Divinity School, writes the following:

I have suggested the need for two criteria: "meaningfulness" as disclosive of our actual experience and meaning-as-internal-coherence as applicable to any cognitive claims. Even these two criteria combined will not suffice philosophically. In the case of cognitive claims, we want to know not only whether they are meaningful and coherent, but also whether they are "true." To respond to that last and most demanding question, one final set of philosophical criteria are demanded: criteria of "adequacy to experience."[6]

Read carefully how Tracy explains "adequacy to experience."

It [experience or language] is "true" when transcendental or metaphysical analysis shows its "adequacy to experience" by explicating how a particular concept (e.g., time, space, self, or God) functions as *a fundamental "belief" or "condition of possibility" of all our experience* [italics mine].[7]

One could hardly be more Kantian, except that Tracy has moved what Kant considered to be issues of practical reason (self and God) into the realm of pure

[4] Mark Noll, "Traditional Christianity and the Possibility of Historical Knowledge," *Christian Scholar's Review* vol. XIX, 4, pp. 394, 404, 405.

[5] Rebecca L. M. McLeod, in conversation.

[6] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*, Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1975, pp. 70, 71.

[7] Ibid., p. 71.

reason. This is an important move, however. Self and God are beyond what we can know by pure reason, according to Kant, and to move them into the "inner circle" is to change substantially Kant's position. Since it seems obvious enough to most people that the concept of God, at least, is not a "condition of possibility" of one's experience, and yet Tracy apparently thinks it is, it appears that there is little theory-neutral ground epistemically. Is this simply an epistemic issue? No, since Tracy is giving an account of "truth," not simply rationality or knowledge. At the very least he does not distinguish well between metaphysics and epistemology. While this alone does not make him a postmodernist, it calls attention to the fact that he has little reason not to be. Truth is embedded in a theory, a story, a way of seeing "the world" with which not everyone would agree or, perhaps, could agree.

IV. A Postmodernist Theory of "Truth"

One postmodern position on theorizing is what I call "Multi-world Realism."[8] On this view, "truth" is theory conditioned. This is a metaphysical claim that moves beyond simply holding that there are no theory-neutral epistemic starting points. The reason there are no theory-neutral starting points epistemically is that there is no theory-neutral truth. Of the competing positions on what the truth is in a given situation, none is better than the others from the standpoint of some objectively True (Truth with a capital "T") description. There are only different positions; there is no objectively True description. The Common Sense Realist is stuck on the notion of Truth understood as a single, objective story. Consider an alternative.

As the story goes, truth is such a small portion of what is valuable and interesting. Truth (lower case) is limited to language, and even there only to a relatively small portion of language, namely, declarative, descriptive sentences. What about the novel, or poetry? What of metaphor or, more broadly, symbol? What of the plastic arts? In these areas it is curious to talk about truth at all, but especially Truth. Instead there is what we can call "rightness of rendering."[9] The notion of rightness of rendering includes the notion of truth, but extends to others as well. Think of the novel. We have a rather curious saying about good novels; we say that they "ring true." While this sounds as if we are saying that the novel is (literally) true, in fact we are only applying the word "truth" metaphorically. What literally "rings true" is a bell. A bell rings true when its quality and tone are what was intended by the bell maker, but there is nothing for the bell's sound to correspond to "out there." And so when we say a novel

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[8] The "Multi-world Realist" name is one I attach to the theories of Nelson Goodman, on which work much of what I have to say in this section is based. See Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978, for fuller development of his position. There are other possibilities here but for the sake of space I've concentrated on Multi-world Realism. One might consider, as another alternative, Hilary Putnam's "internal realism." See his *The Many Faces of Realism*, LaSalle: Open Court, 1988.

[9] See Goodman.

rings true, we do not say that it *corresponds* to the mind-independent world, but rather that it *works* as it was intended to, or that it coheres together by creating a plausible world. Such worlds are, however, fictional.

What happens if we take fictional truth as a model (although not complete) for how truth works in nonfictional, theoretical settings? The result is that the declarative utterance is made true in the world in which it is made. This is so not because of a noumenal or extramental world to which the utterance matches but because what counts as true is decided largely by the theoretical framework. And literal truth will vary world to world. There may be contradictions within a given world, but there will be no contradictions across the worlds. There is, then, no need for a notion of objective Truth. Truth (lower case) can be explained internally, that is, only by reference to the hermeneutic circle in which the utterances are made. This explains why we have no epistemically neutral starting point.

Other kinds of worlds work similarly. The fictional utterance is made true by its fictional world, but the metaphorical expression is no different. It is true metaphorically, so to speak, in the world in which it is made. We know perfectly well what it means to say that a man is a cactus and we know that such an attribution has limits. But this is not *literally* true predication or attribution. It would not be a contradiction to say that a man is both a cactus and not a cactus, if one is talking across worlds. Nevertheless, the predication will apply to some men and not others, and rightly so. A man is a cactus only if he is prickly, that is, rude, hurtful, and self-protective. Of course, the metaphor's application is dependent upon circumstances, but that should be no surprise by now.

There are nonrepresentational notions of rightness as well. What does the abstract artist do when she paints? She creates, when she does it well, a right rendering of the abstract world. This is not to say that her painting represents some extra-painting reality, but its rightness might consist of rightness of design, or rightness of expression. A painter cannot just do anything on canvas. Paintings have limits created by the canvas, the oils or water colors, and so forth. But there are also limits of design; some "get at" what the artist wants, others do not.

There are many worlds, not just one. The worlds are worlds in which there are multiple layers of "rightness of rendering," worlds that are juxtaposed, overlapping, and created by fiction. The person I've been calling the Common Sense Realist falls short of telling the whole story because she thinks the story can be told simply in terms of Truth. In particular, the Common Sense Realist rejects the notion of more than one world understood as alternative descriptions true only internally, that is, by reference to the various theories. For the Multi-world Realist, there are many schemes, conceptual and otherwise, that create many worlds, and we live in more than one of these worlds at the same time. Not only is there no way to tell which world is the True world, but there is no reason, there being no noumenal world, for thinking that there is a single, True world description. Nevertheless, the Multi-world Realist does not believe in relativism where just anything goes (the concern with rightness of rendering is important here). But

neither does she believe in Common Sense Realism where only one thing will go (the many worlds talk is important here).

The Multi-world Realist says, in short, not only that there are conceptual schemes that influence the facts, but that there are other metaphysical concerns beside facts; "truth" is not the only important human construct. In other words, when we human beings theorize—about history, social relationships, the soul or what have you—we are making worlds. For the Multi-world Realist there is no noumenal world, and in its place there are multiple worlds created by human beings. Facts, truths, and values are made, not found.

Another way by which one can come to understand Multi-world Realism is to consider what the artist does. We tend to think about theories as human descriptions of the world and the way it works; Realism with a capital "R". Thus there are things "out there"—found objects or artifacts—that we try to describe with our theories and other utterances. But the artist is not a theorist, so one question to ask is what the artist makes. Art objects have an odd status from the point of view of Common Sense Realism. They are not exactly objects that we find in the world, nor are they simply artifacts. Neither are they theories. What are they?

The dichotomy between theories, conceptual schemes, and thought on the one hand, and the world, facts, and artifacts on the other, is what creates the puzzlement about artworks. It is not the artworks themselves. What the artist does when she creates a painting or sculpture is to create a new reality or, in Multi-world Realism's terms, a new world. She is not trying to copy or represent the world, or at least not all artists are; nor is she *simply* rearranging bits of pieces of the real world. She is, in fact, doing the same thing the rest of us do when we theorize about the so-called "real world." She is not copying it, or trying to correspond to it, but rather she is making a new world. It is precisely this that we do when we theorize, although in a different way.

Let me paraphrase briefly a contemporary theory of artworks[10] and then apply it to theories as a means of clarification. What happens when the artist takes an ordinary bed, bolts it to the floor of a museum, and paints a large stripe across it? What changes the ordinary bed into an artwork? It is not that the artist intends it to be a work of art, nor that something is expressed, nor that the work is in a museum. Rather it is that the artworld—the critics, the theorists, the museum-goers—"baptize" the work a work of art. For example, when cubism first came to be, the cubists were putting forth a potentially new reality. It was not a reality, however, until the artworld surrounded it, began to evaluate and explain it, and began to talk about its relationship to earlier schools of art. Then the cubist objects *became* works of art. They changed their ontological or metaphysical status, according to this view, from being mere paint

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[10] See Arthur Danto, "The Artistic Enfranchisement of Real Objects: The Artworld," in G. Dickie, R. Sclafani, and R. Roblin, eds., *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1990.

284   marks to works of art. They did not become real until there was a theoretical context for them. In other words, there is no essence to the work of art; artworks are contextually dependent realities.

How does this translate into the ontology or metaphysics of theories? As I said earlier, our theories are new realities as well. There is no dichotomy between the world "out there" and our theories; our theories are the world or, more exactly, the worlds. Art objects do not fall into the cracks between theories and the world; they are the nonlinguistic counterpart to theories. So theories are new worlds, or at least parts of new worlds where the other parts are the "facts" or "data." A theory becomes a new world when other theories and ideas surround it and "baptize" it a new world.

What then do we do when we theorize, according to this account? We do not try to discover the world, nor do we engage in an epistemic project. Rather, we make worlds; we are, as the artists have often been before us, creators of realities. So according to the Multi-world Realist, there are many worlds, some of which contain true and false predications; others, fictionally true and false predications; still others, metaphorically true and false predications; and yet still others, nonrepresentational expressions of reality, and so forth.

V. Making Multi-world Realism Christian

What does the Christian say of all this? Typically, the Christian, at least the orthodox Christian and in particular, the evangelical Christian, takes Common Sense Realism and its concomitant view of theories and truth to be necessary for Christianity. There is, as philosopher Hilary Putnam points out, something right about Common Sense Realism, namely, that of course there are tables and chairs, and that any philosophical theory that tells us otherwise is "more than slightly crazy."[11] It is natural for us to talk about the real world being out there, and Christians are no exception to this natural talk. But this is true not just for Christians but for all of us. What is especially important about Realism for Christians? There is, first of all, the exclusivistic claims of Christ who says "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." This kind of exclusivism seems to rule out any kind of relativism, and it is relativism that people fear when one begins to talk of different points of view or, more strongly, different worlds. Indeed, it is the fear that such talk will remove Christianity from its status as "the only true religion" that makes any kind of antirealism or idealism repugnant to orthodox Christians.

Evangelicals seem to have an extra burden to bear in regard to truth. We not only want to make truth claims that avoid relativism but we have a doctrine of Scripture that weighs down the wheel barrow. For us it is our almost exclusively *propositional* understanding of revelation that seems to force us into a correspondence theory of truth and its near neighbor, Common Sense Realism. Furthermore, our doctrine of revelation, and in particular our claims about

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[11] Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism*, p. 33.

the inerrancy of Scripture, are rooted in a certain philosophical vision of the world; namely, a modern vision that suggests that we can describe the world in language stripped of metaphor. What is behind this philosophical view, or embedded in it, is a desire for objectivity. We think that objectivity should be cashed out in terms of Truth construed as completely independent of our minds and their contents; what is True is True and nothing we can say, do, or think has any influence on it. And we think this because Jesus claims to be the Truth, and nothing we can say, do, or think about him changes him.

I propose for consideration that Common Sense Realism is fraught with problems and that we should turn to a modification of Multi-world Realism. Why would a Christian, and in particular an evangelical, want to reject Common Sense Realism? Let me highlight two difficulties.

First is what I take to be a certain kind of skepticism that comes with Common Sense Realism. We live in a world in which the supposedly universal categories that Western intellectuals once thought we all shared have collapsed. What I wish to suggest is that the skeptical strain in postmodernism can be traced right to the Common Sense picture of reality and its related understanding of Truth as correspondence. If one holds that there is a world completely mind-independent, one creates a gulf that has to be bridged. The road leading up to this gulf, the one running through the history of philosophy, is strewn with unsuccessful attempts at bridge building. One way to avoid the skepticism, and hence the need to build such bridges, is to avoid creating the gap in the first place. Hence, Common Sense Realism ought to be rejected.

My second reason for rejecting Common Sense Realism is the variety of replies one gets to this question: Just which world do we think is Real? The person on the street tells us that it is the earth on which she stands, along with the rocks, trees, tables, chairs, and the multitude of other medium-sized objects we can perceive. The scientist in the lab, or perhaps the philosopher in her study, tells us that that world is mere projection. The Real world is the world we cannot see, the world of neutrons, protons, quarks, and a myriad of other tiny bits and pieces. And not even the scientists can really agree. Do we live in a world in which light is waves, particles, or both? Do quarks really exist, physically? Or are they mathematical constructs, part of a grand mathematical map for getting around in the fictional subatomic world? Are they simple or do they have component parts? Now which is it? And how do we tell?

That we can even frame these questions points to the underlying, and strong, intuitions of Common Sense Realism. These intuitions notwithstanding, there are reasons to reject Common Sense Realism. Realism with a capital "R" is, as Putnam suggests, rather like the seducer in old-fashioned melodramas, always making promises to the innocent maiden, common sense. But as the innocent maiden should not trust the seducer, common sense should not trust Realism with a capital "R." We should look elsewhere, for the intuitions behind it do not tell the whole story. We should look to postmodern theories like Multi-world Realism.

Now the Multi-world Realist leaves something vital out of the account of the world, or, more properly speaking, the worlds. He or she must, it seems, ignore the intuition behind Common Sense Realism. This intuition might be put in Putnam's terms, namely, that there really are rocks, trees, pigs, and elephants. But this generates all kinds of confusion by its appeal to our everyday language of "the real" and "the true." To avoid this, let us speak in terms of objectivity. The intuition behind our tendency to accept Common Sense Realism is not its claims about reality or truth, but rather its attempt to secure objectivity. Thus, what is behind the Christian emphasis on Realism is the need for objectivity. But objectivity is not, I suggest, the same thing as so-called "objective Truth." Objectivity simply demands some nonarbitrary ground of things, not a third-person point of view from which truth can be judged.

For objectivity the Christian need not turn to a Common Sense Realist version of reality with its concomitant correspondence theory of Truth. Instead one need only turn to God, and in particular, to what is of interest to God, to that in which God delights or takes pleasure. The reason I focus on God's interests is that we should understand God as having neither beliefs nor theories. While he is able to listen to beliefs and theories, and understand them, he cannot be said to have beliefs that are true because he has no beliefs at all. In short, the objectivity that we Christians demand is found not in God's true beliefs, but in what he takes an interest in, that to which he pays special attention, that which causes him pleasure. What makes our theories objective is not some world external to our minds but rather that God takes delight in them, that they make God dance. Our theories can be wrong—note that I did not say false. They can be wrong if God does not approve of them, if God finds them uninteresting. Furthermore, there can be more than one theory that is right, since God can find more than one thing interesting. And beliefs can be true, but only within the theory or, more broadly speaking, worldview in which the belief is held. But what is true given the conditions of one theory or worldview may not be true in another. Of course one cannot say that they contradict one another across the worlds, for that assumes a third-person point of view, a noumenal world. That is precisely what is rejected on this account. None of this means that just anything will go, for God will not approve of just anything. Some theories do not make God dance.

Consider a brief illustration. Is the Calvinist or Arminian picture of the world true? This question, so far as it is a question about two theories, cannot be answered. But one can say that God might (and I suspect will) approve of *both* views. This may occur *not* because God shows them consistent (that would bring in a noumenal world again) but because he delights in both ways of our human dealings with the problem of foreordination. What kinds of things might God be displeased with? I suppose he will not delight in a theory that claims that God does not exist (and this I surmise on the basis of my evangelical theology, not some theory-independent position). But note that we will not know these things in this life; the objectivity I am suggesting has a strong eschatological component.

So *now* God allows all kinds of theories, but in the end he will only allow those in which he finds delight. In this life and for us, however, tolerance is mandatory.

VI. Postmodern Theorizing and the Christian College

I explore some of the implications for Christian higher education in this last section. These are neither in order of preference nor importance. The first several deal with curricular issues and the last with administrative concerns.

There is much talk on evangelical college campuses of the "Christian world-view." Such talk is very important; it is, in many ways, the distinctive of the evangelical college. From the Christian-Postmodern point of view, however, it is less than clear that the Christian worldview should be taken as monolithic. While it is true that the Christian worldview is a competitor against others, both religious and nonreligious, it is neither fair nor wise to ignore the "competitors" within our own camp. What is the Christian worldview? Is it the evangelical worldview or does it extend to Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Asian-Christian, or African-Christian points of view?[12] And what of the Reformed worldview or the Wesleyan worldview or the Southern-California-Bible-and-Community-Church worldview? We tend to speak as if the worldview we evangelicals (of whatever stripe) hold is the only Christian worldview. A recognition of the variety and richness of the many worlds we create by our theorizing and creative work should lead us to a more sympathetic reading of other Christian traditions. This in turn will help us to deal with the variety of nonreligious challenges to our faith.

Let's explore just a few of the implications of a broader understanding of worldviews. First, consider the student who becomes convinced that evangelicalism is based on faulty assumptions about Scripture and wonders whether Christianity is true. How should an instructor help such a student? Throwing yet another InterVarsity book to her is not likely to help. Why not have her read some of the great classics of Catholic spirituality or give her Pascal's advice to take holy water and mass? Why not encourage her to study liturgy or poetry as a means to moving toward a more mature faith? Or perhaps we should have her read some Barthian theology.

Second, why are we so worried about hiring Catholics for our faculties?[13] Wouldn't the diversity do us well? The concern is, of course, that our evangelical heritage might be eaten away by such moves, but there are other ways to protect our heritage. Why not look for Catholics who understand and are sympathetic to evangelicalism? Why not hire Catholics but limit the number of tenure-track positions to which we can appoint them? Or why not have visiting professorships which could be held by Catholics?[14]

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[12] Here, of course, one must look for differences among these points of view as well, both against one another and within a given tradition.

[13] The same is true for faculty of other Christian traditions as well, but there are far more American Catholics who could ably teach in evangelical colleges than American Orthodox, for example.

[14] It might do the evangelical colleges a great deal of good to have other nonevangelicals

One worry about worldviews and Christian Postmodernism concerns theology. A major part of our Christian worldviews comes from our theologies and it might be thought that, since God does not have theories (on the Christian-Postmodern view) we shouldn't have theories about him. But the Christian-Postmodern point of view does not imply that we cannot theorize about God. In fact, we can do theology pretty much the way it is done according to the traditions in which we find ourselves—Reformed, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Orthodox, and so forth. The big difference is that although we can do theology, different, and perhaps radically different, theologies can be right, according to Christian Multi-world Realism, since there will be different worlds created by the theorizing and we live in those different worlds. God can bless or curse them, as is his pleasure, but he has made us such that more than one version can be acceptable and quite livable. Theology is just theorizing and ought not be treated as a special, divinely inspired subject of inquiry, at least so far as Christian Multi-world Realism itself is concerned.[15]

Of course this raises the difficult issue of other non-Christian worldviews. Doesn't Christian Multi-world Realism not just allow for different Christian positions but different religious traditions as well? This is a complex matter; I'll respond only briefly. First, not just any view will go, according to the Christian Multi-world Realist. As noted above, one suspects that God will not, overall, be pleased with theories that imply that God does not exist. Second, surely there are many things in non-Christian thought over which God finds himself delighted. This is not to say that he finds everything so. Third, Christian Multi-world Realism is not a theory of salvation. It is a theory of theorizing. There is nothing in it that demands that God save everyone.

One particular area of theology where evangelicals are sensitive is the doctrine of Scripture. Note that there is nothing in Christian Multi-world Realism that entails that one cannot hold to a high view of Scripture, even one that attributes inerrancy to the original autographs. Such a doctrinal position is embedded in a theory, as are all others, and, from our evangelical point of view, it is one in which God delights. It is not, presumably, the only one in which he delights. The importance of inerrancy is not that it makes us Christian, but that it makes us evangelical Protestants of a particular stripe. What the theory does imply is that certain understandings of inerrancy are ruled out, for they depend too heavily on a positivist account of propositional truth that rules out world-making.

If theology, and theorizing more generally, are not so central as we typically treat them, then the role of the arts on Christian college campuses will become more important and less peripheral than they currently are. We have,

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(I mean "liberal" Christians) in visiting professorships, but this is probably a practical impossibility now. Hiring some orthodox Catholics is a good beginning.

[15] William Hasker pointed out to me that God might take special delight in our theologizing and hence theology might indeed have a special role for us. I admit this is correct, but my point in the text is that Christian Multi-world Realism doesn't itself suggest this. It only allows it.

in some evangelical schools, tended to disparage the arts. We have thought the arts mislead, lie, or seduce. We share this in common with Plato. But according to Multi-world Realism, the arts make new realities, just as theorizing does. The arts, and in particular the arts as practiced by Christians, do not need to represent the world; they do not need to communicate. That is the job of theorizing with its truth-rootedness. The notion of truth doesn't apply to the arts, or at least to the plastic arts. This is not to say there are no standards of rightness in the arts; there very well may be Christian standards of rightness in the arts. But here we are not talking about truth. We need not even be talking about right representation. There is plenty of good art that is abstract and nonrepresentational.

Literature, unlike the plastic arts, has as its main component language. As such, its role is perhaps more communicative. But literature is closer, in certain respects, to the plastic arts than to other, more discursive, theorizing. As such, Christian, and in particular evangelical, literature need not stick so closely to telling the gospel tale in predictable ways. Truly evangelical literature is virtually nonexistent. We borrow much of our literature from non-evangelicals such as C. S. Lewis. This need not be the case, and taking on Christian Multi-world Realism can help us change it. There are many reasons for this change. Beside the need for Christian creativity, there is the necessity for Christian voices to be heard in our larger society. We cannot influence the world if we speak to no one but ourselves. Christian literature that is "ghettoized" in stores with names like "The Scripture Stall" simply will not be read by the larger population. Where then is the witness; where then is the evangelical stance? Should we let the television ministers be the only representatives of evangelicalism?

If the arts are disparaged on some evangelical campuses, the sciences are raised to near-divine stature in American society at large. But, according to the Christian Multi-world Realist, the social and physical sciences are no less theoretical in the sense I've suggested than any of the humanities. The sciences are making reality just as the humanities are; they are no more, or less, objective than the humanities. The point of Christian Multi-world Realism for those in the sciences is to realize that the world viewed through our eyes, and even the world viewed through the eyes of a poet, are no less real than the world viewed through a microscope. There is, in short, nothing sacrosanct about the sciences or the so-called scientific method. Scientists have no special access to truth. They, too, are story-tellers. And the technologists, those cousins of the scientist—the doctors, the computer whizzes, the clinical psychologists, in short, the "applied" experts—are likewise in no better (or worse) shape than those in the humanities. We are all working toward constructing realities in such a way as to delight God.

A final reflection on curricular matters. A flagpole at Christian colleges, but perhaps especially central at the Christian College Consortium schools, is the mandate for the integration of faith and learning. One is to take one's faith as the touchstone for all one does, and one is to understand the various disciplines accordingly. It seems, however, that this notion of the integration of faith and learning has itself taken on certain Enlightenment or positivistic understandings

290   of the world. Faith is something other than learning; faith is something other than truth. But this still treats the sacred and the secular as two separate areas of life. No matter how much we say that the one who integrates her faith with her learning will not isolate the sacred from the secular, mere words to that effect will not win the day so long as she has to integrate two separate worlds.

On Christian Multi-world Realism, the notion of the integration of faith and learning should disintegrate. There is no world of faith that is separate from the worlds of science, history, or art. All worlds are human constructs and, under the hand of God, aim at pleasing him. To think that faith is some sort of an add-on harks back to positivism. There is nothing "out there" to integrate; our theories make the world integrated, at least when done well. The good Christian historian just is a good historian; the good Christian physicist just is a good physicist. In short, one's faith is one's learning.

Consider a Christian philosopher teaching in a "secular" university rather than a Christian college. It is not clear that one should be doing much different in the two settings. Why shouldn't one say the same things about theism at the state university that one says in the Christian college classroom? If one believes the arguments for God's existence are of little epistemic value, then one's students on the secular campus need to know that, as well as one's students at the Christian school. If one thinks religious experience takes us to truth about God, then why shouldn't one argue that in the secular university as well as in the Christian college? Can't one "integrate" one's faith and life in the secular setting as well as in the Christian setting? Of course, in the secular setting one may not be able to call attention explicitly to (what one hopes is) the biblical root of one's philosophy,[16] but one's theorizing won't change from one context to the other. A good education is a Christian education.[17]

There are, finally, several points I wish to make about changes in administration that should come about if the theory outlined here were taken seriously. The first thing to note is that Christian college administrators need to take faculty research seriously. There are two basic reasons for this. The first is that if we are, indeed, creating new realities in which God delights, we are not the only ones attempting to create new realities. If we are to have an influence in the world, if we are to shape it toward God's kingdom, then we must be on the cutting edge of scholarship and creative work. Second, if we are to teach students how to create, we are going to have to do the hard work of creation as faculty. This

[16] And this is largely for pragmatic reasons rather than theoretical ones, or at least it could be so argued.

[17] George Marsden suggests in "The Soul of the American University" (reprinted in *Faculty Dialogue*, Fall 1991) that postmodernism's stance (what he calls "post-1960s university pluralism") seems to allow for a Christian voice. In fact, he suggests that what Christians should urge is a broader pluralism that would include a Christian point of view. I've wondered when someone is going to test the separation of church and state interpretations by explicitly presenting and defending a Christian point of view in a secular university philosophy classroom. Why not, given pluralism?

means that administrators are going to have to find the money to reduce class loads and to fund research and creative work. To hide our lack of research behind the claim that we are "teaching colleges" is to cheat our students. One's research is an essential part of one's teaching. That is not to say that one has to be publishing one's work in the best journals or showing one's creative work in New York galleries (although these things certainly don't hurt the Christian mission), but one does have to be a working scholar, producing new realities and new ways of understanding those realities, in order to be a superior teacher. This will not happen until sufficient faculty are hired, and sufficient facilities are in place, for first-rate research to develop.

A second issue is that the administrators will have to hire the best-trained Christian minds in the country, even if some of them do not quite fit into the mold of the particular college. This is not to say that one shouldn't worry about "fit," but one shouldn't worry about it too much. And the administrators will need to explain these faculty to the constituency, and defend them if necessary, so that the faculty can be kept on. Christian colleges need to become places that foster real scholarship. They need to be producing excellent scholars and artists for the next generation. This will not happen on the Christian college campuses if administrators are not willing to hire, support, and keep the best Christian minds of the age.

A third and final comment for the administrative side of the evangelical college is that administrators will have to promote the Christian college differently. We are not just about the business of integrating faith and learning. We are about the business of influencing the world with ideas. We are not just about the business of giving good Bible training, but we are about the business of thinking biblically, no matter where this takes the student. We are not just about the business of keeping up our evangelical image for the constituency, but we are about the business of changing that image both for the constituency and for the larger world in which we find ourselves. Parents send their children, and students come, to evangelical schools to receive a Christian education. And well they should. But a Christian education is not tame. It is, on these Christian-Postmodern suggestions, ever new and challenging. Our public relations presentations need to include this. Students will not necessarily be safe at the Christian-Postmodern college, if "safe" means the same old evangelical story. But they will be secure in the objective arms of a God who made them creative agents, no matter where their Christian theorizing takes them.

VII. Conclusion

There is much more that needs to be said about Christian Multi-world Realism, both in its defense and in its implications for Christian higher education. A brief summary and final word will have to suffice. My thesis is that there is no noumenal, mind-independent world; there are, instead, many worlds that are created by human theorizing and creative work. Common Sense Realism ought to be rejected and replaced with Multi-world Realism. A number of important implications follow for Christian higher education. They are best summed up by

292   stating that Christian Multi-world Realism takes the biblical notion of humans as the image of God quite seriously. In particular, it takes the notion of our capability as creators to be central to the educational enterprise. We are involved in making things and theories for our delight as well as for God's. The central core of Christian education should thus be teaching the next generation how to be more creative in its theorizing, in its story telling, in its art, in its witnessing, and in its living.

And so to close, what are we to say of theorizing, truth, and Christian education in our postmodern world? While theories are important, since they make worlds, they cannot be said to be true. But they can be said, when they are right, to make God delighted. Our goal as human theorizers, then, is to make interesting worlds that give God pleasure. And when God takes pleasure, we can feel his pleasure. In short, our goal is to dance with God. May the Christian colleges do so.[18]