

Introduction to Christian Education – 2

Culture of Death?

Secularism and its Consequences for Family and Society

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Summary

This is the second of three papers introducing Christian education. This paper addresses the topic of the influence of secularism in education. In it I will describe what is happening in Britain, for that is the world of education that I know best. But much of it will also be familiar to teachers elsewhere in the world. The third session looks specifically at the influence of secular materialism on school curricula. This second session considers the larger context and addresses the influence of secular materialism (also known as secular humanism, and, sometimes, secular liberalism) on society at large. I present the evidence that indoctrination into secular materialism occurs on a massive scale, is demonstrably harmful, and demands urgent attention and action from everyone concerned for our future and that of our children.

Definition

By 'secularism' I mean *living as if God does not exist and as if faith is not relevant to everyday life*. The issue is not whether or not we think ('believe') God exists, but how we *live*. In a secular (or *secularist*) society, public life – including government, business, education and the media – operates without reference to God, religion, or faith. The underlying assumption is that it is possible to do so – that one can live without any particular ('sectarian' *sic*) religious or ideological commitments. It is assumed that universal human reason, or scientific reason in particular, can provide a sufficient basis for human life and one that is free from cultural, religious or philosophical commitments (which are regarded as irrational 'biases' or 'prejudices'!)

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1 Is Religion Dangerous?

1.1 It is commonly asserted today in the West that we may believe what we like in private, but in public life – including education – we must be ‘secular’. This is taken to mean that the public realm should be ‘neutral’ – free from any particular (‘sectarian’) philosophical, or religious commitments.

1.2 In fact, it is far worse than that. In the West we now have an aggressively anti-Christian group called the *New Atheists*. Fortuitously helped along by Islamic terrorism (e.g. New York in 2001, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005 – see Wikipedia 2012a), their books (e.g. Harris 2004, 2007, Dawkins 2006a, Dennett 2006, Hitchens, 2007) and TV programmes (e.g. Dawkins, 2006b, 2012) have changed the public perception of religion. At worst, religion is now regarded as evil and a major cause of violence and suffering throughout the world: it “fuels war, foments bigotry and abuses children.” (Dawkins 2006a: front cover flap; for a response see Ward, 2011) Religious believers are viewed as irrational, even deluded. More moderately, it is widely believed that a Christian faith commitment can undermine social cohesion and harmony and lead to harmful indoctrination in schools. Even at best, religious believers are widely viewed as weird and an embarrassment, especially to the young. Comparing, e.g., many church services, or mosque prayer times, with the portrayals of the universe in the latest science fiction movies, it can be all too easy to agree.

1.3 This is a truly astonishing situation. There is hardly any evidence at all that there is a danger from the Christian religion in the UK, or a risk of religious indoctrination in schools. In contrast, there is overwhelming evidence that indoctrination into secularism occurs on a massive scale in society and schools, that secularism is

demonstrably harmful, and that this situation demands urgent attention and action from everyone concerned for all our futures.

2 Is Secularism Harmless?

2.1 But aren't the new atheists rather extreme? After all the ordinary person who describes herself as 'secular' or 'non-religious' is not usually aggressive like the new atheists. If what is common to being 'secular' or 'non-religious' is simply living one's own life as if there is no God, then surely that harms no one. Does it matter?

2.2 Yet it is not as straightforward as it seems. Take the case of Eric. He was a young man, only 18 years old, who killed himself in 1999. In one of his notebooks he had written:

“There's no such thing as True Good or True evil, its all relative to the observer. its just all nature, chemistry, and math, deal with it.” (Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, 2006: 91, JC-001-026010, dated 12 June 1998)

2.3 We'll come back to Eric later. For the moment it is enough to note that the kind of secularism promoted by the New Atheists carries some disturbing implications. Whether the 'ordinary' secular person has thought about it or not, living as if there is no God raises some hard questions.

2.4 For example, is Eric right that there is ultimately no difference between good and evil? Is that distinction an opinion that has no grounding in anything out there in the external world? At the end of the day is what happens simply what happens?

2.5 If religious believers have some hard questions to answer, so do the secularists who dominate the public presentations of science – and so do all those who follow them unawares. The only difference is that whereas religious believers face these kinds of hard questions on a regular basis, secularists have hitherto been carefully shielded from such public interrogation.

3 Which Kind of Secularism?

3.1 In the first paper, *Which Story? Whose Story?*, we saw that we all live in a story; indeed that all human life is shaped by stories. Some stories are good; others are bad. Some can appear attractive, but actually be harmful.

3.2 So what is the particular secular story that dominates life and thought today? Having identified the dominant secular story we can consider its outworking in society and schools. Is it religion, or secularism that is better for us all? What *really* poses a danger to society and education today?

3.3 There are many secular worldviews, but in the Western world the dominant secular worldview is that of *Materialism*. We must keep in mind exactly what this means, because it is rarely made explicit in public life. We explained in the first paper that it consists of a close linking of the two meanings of that key word:

- *Materialism1* – physical nature is all there is;
- *Materialism2* – enjoying material possessions is all that matters.

3.4 So what follows if the worldview story of *materialism1* – nothing to nothing – is really true? What does it mean if *The Beatles* singer, John Lennon, was right, in his famous song *Imagine*, that above us is only sky (Lennon, 1971)?

3.5 Materialists have to hold that such things as consciousness, mind, intelligence, meaning, logic, design, value, and purpose are either illusory, or just unintended by-products of material processes. Either way they can play no causal role in the universe.

3.6 A famous poster about WW2 shows a German storm trooper amidst the ruins of a blitzkrieg, smiling and stroking a kitten that has leapt onto his motorbike (CSlacker, no date). The dissonance is shocking. We should be similarly shocked that many Christians and many atheists appear unable to recognise the situation they are in:

- many Christians appear unaware of the extent to which secular materialistic assumptions now shape people and society.
- many atheists find it very difficult to accept – to believe – what it would really mean to be in a godless world.

3.7 The most appropriate response to those who promote materialism is ‘Really?!’ Given its dominance, it is staggering to realise that materialism is unquestionably false – it is not a tenable position. Materialism is deficient as a philosophy – and as a basis for any and every science – because it cannot accommodate in its story many things (**3.5**) that have foundational significance for human life. It has to explain them away. Materialism may be widespread among secular scholars and scientists, but it flatly contradicts common sense experience and is self-refuting. If, for example, we are not free to weigh arguments and choose what is in accordance with evidence and logic, then there is neither science nor philosophy, nor any possibility of meaningful discussion about anything.

3.8 For some key references on the failure of materialism see, from an enormous literature, Barns, 2010, Glass 2012, Martin 2005, 2008; Moreland 2009; Nagel 2012, Plantinga 2000 (especially pages 227-240), 2011, Rea 2002, Robinson 2010, Ward 1996, 2008 and Wilson 2007.

3.9 Cogent as the arguments are, in practice they are overruled by the general perception that modern science has shown materialism to be true. We are constantly told that there is such overwhelming evidence for Darwinism (= the *materialistic* theory of evolution) that it renders materialism obligatory for all clear thinking people. Only those blinded by religious fundamentalism could possibly doubt it.

3.10 Richard Dawkins famously wrote that,

“It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I’d rather not consider that)” (Dawkins, 2004)

An atheist philosopher, Thomas Nagel, who has written of his doubts about Darwinian naturalism, has to admit,

“I realize that such doubts will strike many people as outrageous, but that is because almost everyone in our secular culture has been browbeaten into regarding the reductive research program as sacrosanct, on the ground that anything else would not be science.” (Nagel, 2012: 7)

3.11 The support for Darwinism is not primarily because of evidence, or a coherent theory, but because of *worldview commitments*. Dawkins has admitted as much:

“An atheist before Darwin could have said, following Hume: “I have no explanation for complex biological design. All I know is that God isn't a good explanation, so we must wait and hope that somebody comes up with a better one.” I can't help feeling that such a position, though logically sound, would have left one feeling pretty unsatisfied, and that although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” (Dawkins 1986: 6)

The key role of Darwinism in the modern world is not as a scientific theory, but as the only available *materialist* theory of origins, “the only game in town” (Dawkins 2009: viii, 426).

3.12 But has Darwinism been shown to be true? What if the general perception is wrong?

We shall consider in another paper the overwhelming scientific evidence against the materialist worldview and its theory of origins. For now here is Nagel’s conclusion:

“The more details we learn about the chemical basis of life and the intricacy of the genetic code, the more unbelievable the standard historical account becomes ...as it is usually presented, the current orthodoxy about the cosmic order is the product of governing assumptions that are unsupported, and that it flies in the face of common sense.” (Nagel 2012: 5)

“... the prevailing doctrine – that the appearance of life from dead matter and its evolution through accidental mutation and natural selection to its present forms has involved nothing but the operation of physical law – cannot be regarded as unassailable. It is an assumption governing the scientific project rather than a well-confirmed scientific hypothesis.” (Nagel 2012: 11)

3.13 Secular materialism can appear attractive – neutral and liberating – but it is demonstrably harmful and potentially very harmful. We’ll review some of the evidence for that conclusion in **Part Three**. First, we will show in **Part Two** that in Britain today we effectively have State-sponsored materialism. Of course that claim may seem surprising, or even unbelievable. How can it be true in a country with

such a rich Christian heritage and a State church? Well, let us consider some of the evidence.

PART TWO: INDOCTRINATION TODAY

We'll start at the famous London Zoo, listen to some well-known celebrities, look at a classic novel and a modern film, attend to some atheist rhetoric, and finish with what happens in professional training today, with a particular focus on education.

4 London's Human Zoo

4.1 What's going on here? In August 2005 London Zoo had a special exhibit. Naked apart from well-placed paper fig leaves, eight people monkeyed around in a rocky open Bear Mountain enclosure. The sign read: "Warning: Humans in their Natural Environment". The aim was to show that humans are not special; just another kind of animal (BBC 2005; CBS 2009; Saunders 2005; ZSL London Zoo 2005) One of the participants, Chemist, Thomas Mahoney, said that, "A lot of people think humans are above other animals. When they see humans as animals here, it kind of reminds us that we're not that special." (CBS 2009).

4.2 The Zoo exhibit is one illustration of the public promotion of materialism and of how it is coming to shape the views of many ordinary people. But worldview ideas have consequences and materialist ideas are no exception (see Weikart, 2004, 2008, 2009). This debasing of our view of what it means to be human is not harmless.

5 Celebrity Culture

5.1 For many that debasing of humanity gives them permission to behave immorally and justify that behaviour accordingly. Listen to some famous celebrities:

5.2 American actress Scarlett Johansson in a 2006 interview with *Allure* magazine: "I do think on some basic level we are animals, and by instinct we kind of breed accordingly. But, as much as I believe that, I work really hard when I'm in a relationship to make it work in a monogamous way." (Womack & Hiscock, 2006)

5.3 British-American actress, model, and fashion designer, Sienna Miller in a 2006 interview for *Rolling Stone* magazine: "I don't know, monogamy is a weird thing to me. It's an overrated virtue, because, let's face it, we're all f***ing animals. ... The fact is no one is perfect." (Contact Music, 2006; Dhalwala & Silverman, 2006)

5.4 American actor Will Smith (& Jada Pinkett) "Our perspective is, you don't avoid what's natural. You're going to be attracted to people. In our marriage vows, we didn't say "forsaking all others". The vow that we made was that you will never hear that I did something after the fact. If it came down to it, then one can say to the other, 'Look, I need to have sex with somebody. I'm not going to if you don't approve of it – but please approve of it.'" (Simpson, 2005)

5.5 Again we see how materialist assumptions have taken over in society at large. We should already be pondering some hard questions? Is this a long overdue step towards increasing enlightenment and freedom? What are the consequences? Might there be unwelcome costs, even dangers?

6 Arthur Koestler – *Darkness at Noon*

6.1 *Darkness at Noon* is the most famous novel of the Hungarian-born British author, Arthur Koestler (1905-1983). First published in 1940, it tells the tale of Rubashov, an old guard Bolshevik who is first cast out and then imprisoned and tried for treason by the Soviet government he once helped to create. In one scene, an interrogator – Ivanov – cheerfully admits to Rubashov that all they were doing was experimenting with human life:

“Every year several million people are killed quite pointlessly by epidemics and other natural catastrophes. And we should shrink from sacrificing a few hundred thousand for the most promising experiment in history? Nature is generous in her senseless experiments on mankind. Why should mankind not have the right to experiment on itself?” (Koestler 2005:131)

6.2 It is a stark reminder that once God is removed from the picture there is no alternative to the conclusion that everything is permitted, even mass murder. Interestingly Koestler portrays Rubashov as struggling to express his revulsion, but he cannot find the words. He can't say that *it isn't right*, or that *it is evil*; in the world of atheistic materialism that vocabulary no longer exists.

7 *No Country for Old Men* (Coen and Coen, 2007)

7.1 This much acclaimed film, is characterized by nihilism and gratuitous violence, but it does provide another illustration of the moral problem facing the materialist. The Oscar-winning film attempts a realistic portrayal of the despair of the drug culture and follows the bloody exploits of a mass murderer.

7.2 At the end of the film the mass murderer, Anton [Chigurh], has achieved his goal of tracking down money from a drug payment and he then senselessly goes to assassinate Carla [Jean Moss], the wife of a person who got in his way. He has already murdered her husband and he wants to kill her just because he told the husband he would kill her. In this eerie scene Anton is sitting in her house flipping a coin. He is willing to kill even those who don't directly get in his way. When confronted with this kind of situation he flips a coin to decide if he should murder the individual. In this scene Carla asks him why he does this and he suggests it is because he is a “chance-built creature.” Here is the dialogue.

Carla: You don't have to do this.
Anton: [*smiles*] People always say the same thing.
Carla: What do they say?
Anton: They say, "You don't have to do this."
Carla: You don't.

Anton: Okay.
[He flips a coin and covers it with his hand]
Anton: This is the best I can do. Call it.
Carla: I knowed you was crazy when I saw you sitting there. I knowed exactly what was in store for me.
Anton: Call it.
Carla: No. I ain't gonna call it.
Anton: Call it.
Carla: The coin don't have no say. It's just you.
Anton: Well, I got here the same way the coin did.

7.3 This is certainly a good demonstration of how an individual can be influenced by the vacuous, ethics-extracting, survival of the fittest mentality to the point where he becomes a vicious bloodthirsty animal. Little wonder that one critic – Andrew Sarris in the *New York Observer* – described the film narrative as “an exercise in cosmic futility” (Sarris, 2007)

8 Lawrence Krauss – “You are all Stardust”

8.1 Lawrence M. Krauss, is a renowned atheist physicist. He is one of the prominent ‘new atheists’ who present most of the popular science programmes on our Western TV channels. Here is a typical statement:

“You are all stardust. You couldn’t be here if stars hadn’t exploded, because the elements – the carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, iron, all the things that matter for evolution – weren’t created at the beginning of time. They were created in the nuclear furnaces of stars, and the only way they could get into your body is if those stars were kind enough to explode. *So, forget Jesus. The stars died so that you could be here today.*” [Krauss, 2009, emphasis added]”

9 Harry Kroto – Religious people “don’t have the intellectual integrity to teach science”

9.1 Dr Michael Reiss is professor of science education at London University and from 2006-2008 he was seconded to the Royal Society as their part-time Education Director. He has a background in theoretical biology (PhD) and bioethics, but is also an ordained Anglican minister. He accepts Darwinian evolution, but has long argued that science teachers should engage respectfully with pupils who are creationists (see, e.g. Jones & Reiss 2007, Reiss 2008).

9.2 Reiss recommends that rather than dismissing creationism as a “misconception”, teachers should regard it as a cultural “worldview” and explain to pupils why it is not regarded as scientific. He maintains that it is more effective to engage with pupils’ ideas rather than to obstruct discussion with those who do not accept the scientific version of evolution. Most educationists would regard that as professional good practice and it was certainly consistent with the Royal Society’s policy on education.

9.3 However on 11th September 2008 Reiss gave a talk to the *British Association Festival of Science* in Liverpool (see Reiss 2008) which was misreported in some of the media as lending support to teaching creationism as a legitimate point of view (Wikipedia 2012b). Any degree of tolerance of creationism in schools was beyond the pale for the materialist scientists who dominate the Royal Society and Reiss was forced to resign from his Royal Society post (Crawley, 2009).

9.4 A leading member, Sir Harry Kroto (Nobel Prize in Chemistry 1996) wrote of Reiss that,

““The origin of the universe and living organisms” is a perfectly respectable question for the science lesson, ... as long as someone with intellectual integrity is there to answer it. ... Reiss ... was in the wrong job. He, together with all religious people – whether they like it or not, whether they accept it or not – fall at the first hurdle of the main requirement for honest scientific discussion because they accept unfound dogma [that there is a Creator] as having fundamental significance ...” (Kroto 2008)

9.5 This secular bigotry and intolerance was widely condemned (BBC 2008), but it illustrates that it is now religious believers who seek a level playing field. If believers are regularly required to answer hard questions about their religious faith, then materialists should also be required to answer the challenges that face their materialist faith.

10 Richard Dawkins *Let's All Stop Beating Basil's Car*

10.1 A famous UK comedy series was *Fawlty Towers*. In it the actor John Cleese plays brilliantly a disaster-prone hotel manager, Basil Fawlty. In one episode Basil's car breaks down and after ordering it to start several times without response, Basil takes a tree branch and starts beating the car! We laugh, but when Richard Dawkins refers to this episode, he is serious. This is how Dawkins puts the point himself:

“When a computer malfunctions, we do not punish it. We track down the problem and fix it, usually by replacing a damaged component, either in hardware or software. ... Why do we not react in the same way to a defective man: a murderer, say, or a rapist? ... Isn't the murderer or the rapist just a machine with a defective component? Or a defective upbringing? Defective education? Defective genes? ... doesn't a truly scientific, mechanistic view of the nervous system make nonsense of the very idea of responsibility, whether diminished or not? Any crime, however heinous, is in principle to be blamed on antecedent conditions acting through the accused's physiology, heredity and environment. Don't judicial hearings to decide questions of blame or diminished responsibility make as little sense for a faulty man as for a Fawlty car? Why is it that we humans find it almost impossible to accept such conclusions? Why do we vent such visceral hatred on child murderers, or on thuggish vandals, when we should simply regard them as faulty units that need fixing or replacing?” (Dawkins 2006c)

10.2 How does that final comment ('fixing or replacing') sound to you? Dawkins is being completely logical here – if materialism is true then ideas of design, purpose and responsibility are untenable. Moral language makes no sense in the materialist universe.

11 Eric Pianka – “We’re no better than bacteria”

11.1 Known as ‘Dr Doom’, Dr Pianka, a Professor of Zoology at the University of Texas, USA, is a committed, practising materialist. As a materialist, he believes that people have no more value than bacteria, or any other living organism. They are all equal in that they are all random, unplanned artefacts of the evolutionary process.

11.2 Dr Pianka was the 2006 Distinguished Texas Scientist. In his speech to the Texas Academy of Science on 3rd March 2006, *The Vanishing Book of Life on Earth*, he argued that there are too many people in the world and that we are having a very detrimental effect on the global ecology (Pianka 2006). He believes that the human population needs to be reduced by 90%. War and famine may do it, but are too slow; something like an *Ebola* plague (*Ebola* is a flesh-dissolving virus) would be ideal. He was not, of course, suggesting that anyone should go out and spread *Ebola* (though he was investigated by the FBI – Wikipedia 2012c), but the stark difference between Christian and materialist morality is clear. Worldviews matter.

11.3 Materialists like Professor Pianka reason that all organisms begin as cells; that cells are only complex chemistry; and that any particular chemical complex is essentially the same as any other. In other words, we have the materialist Darwinian assumption that humans have no special value.

11.4 This is the critical worldview assumption at work in debates over cloning, stem cells and animal-human hybrids. We can’t stop to explore those topics here, but any time those issues are discussed, make sure your worldview-sensing antennae are in action.

We’ll finish this brief survey in education.

12 “You must keep your religion out of your professional work”

12.1 Today’s secularist environment is most evident in the realm of professional training. People are trained to work in the professions as if there is no God. How this works is that throughout their training they will receive the explicit or implicit message that, in order to be professional and objective, they must not bring their religion, or personal religious values into their public, professional work.

12.2 The inculcated mindset is revealed in some recent research into the training of school teachers. Education researchers Lynn Revell and Rosemary Walters investigated the attitudes of Christian and atheist students training to teach RE in secondary schools in England (Revell & Walters 2010).

12.3 Professor Trevor Cooling summarised the research as follows:

In the case of those who identified themselves as Christians, a consensus emerged that they had to be careful not to let their own private beliefs influence the pupils; that was not considered objective. Essentially, they saw their beliefs as a problem to be managed. However in the case of those that were atheist or agnostic there was a contrasting consensus; these students thought that their beliefs enhanced their professionalism. In other words, their atheist beliefs contributed to their being objective RE teachers because they didn't have a *religious* belief. In their case they viewed their atheistic beliefs as an asset to be tapped. This was only a small scale project and as such one cannot generalize from it. Further research is necessary. But it does indicate the existence of a mindset within contemporary education which is influencing students.

(Cooling 2011:4; also Cooling 2010:18)

12.4 The researchers themselves concluded:

“A secular, atheist or agnostic belief position in the classroom should be recognised by all students as an identifiable belief position rather than as a neutral stance.” (Revell & Walters 2010: 4)

“Agnostic, atheist and radical/liberal faith positions have also to be acknowledged as potential hindrances to the educational process.” (*ibid*: 9)

12.5 Clearly we have another illustration of how secularist assumptions have been uncritically absorbed by a majority of people. But let us examine the situation in the teaching profession in more detail.

12.6 We have seen that the assumption that religious believers should not bring their religion, or personal religious values into their public, professional work has come to be seen as so obvious, so reasonable that it is virtually unquestioned. In fact it is very problematic. Indeed it is arguable that in a pluralist society it is actually discriminatory and very difficult to justify. [The following discussion is adapted from the Norwegian Christian educationalist, Signe Sandsmark, 2000: 87. See also Clouser, 2005, Cooling, 2010, and Copley, 2005]

12.7 Religious believers training to be school or college teachers will, explicitly or implicitly, receive something like the following message:

In order to be professional and neutral in your practice, you must not talk about God in a way that implies that God actually exists. You must not pray with students. You must not talk as if moral norms and commandments are objective or universal. You must not base your curriculum on the assumption that human beings are created for a purpose. You must not teach science as if the world is intelligently designed.

12.8 The problem with this is exposed if we ask a complementary question: “What, then, should agnostics and atheists try to do, and avoid doing, if they also are to be ‘neutral’, ‘objective’ and ‘professional’ and not impose their atheism or agnosticism on their students?”

12.9 The empirical answer is ‘Nothing’. In other words, the question reveals that our educational practice is already effectively atheistic (operating *as if there is no God*) – so hardly neutral. Non-religious pupils and teachers will feel perfectly at home in the secular classroom, whereas religious believers will not. Graham Haydon (a philosopher of education at London University’s Institute of Education) put it succinctly:

“... it is simply 'not done' to bring one's religion, or views based on it, into any public sphere. But a society in which this kind of secularism reigns, even though not enforced by law, is surely not one in which it can be said that all persons are equally respected; it means, effectively, that some people are being silenced on matters of central importance to them.” (Haydon 1994:70)

12.10 In effect Haydon is questioning whether we are really serious about celebrating a pluralist society. If, in order to be professional, religious teachers are to teach in a way that hides their real beliefs – to teach *as if their religious faith is not true, or, at least, not relevant to their public life*, to teach, in other words, *as if they are atheists or agnostics* – then shouldn’t atheist teachers do likewise? In order not to impose their atheism on pupils, maybe they should teach as if they were religious believers – as if they were, *e.g.*, Buddhists, Christians, Jews or Muslims!

12.11 What this clearly illustrates is that it is not possible for education to be neutral. Secularism has created an environment in which it is religious believers who are most at risk of facing disrespect and the rubbishing of their beliefs. Listen to education researchers William Kay and Leslie Francis:

“Today much of the world of adulthood is characterized by the secular rather than by the religious ... The socialization process is persistently and inevitably drawing young people into the ethos of that post-Christian world. In this sense, to be irreligious is to be normal.” (Kay & Francis 1996: 144)

12.12 The risk of indoctrination in schools and society today is not from religion, but from secularism (Carey & Carey, 2012, Copley 2005; *c.f.* Cooling 2010, Fraser 1999, Greenawalt, 2005, Newbigin, 1998, Nord 1995, Norman 2002, Sandsmark 2000, Sommerville 2006, Trigg 2012). In today’s environment it is hardly surprising that almost 100% of unbelieving parents successfully pass on their unbelief to their children, but barely 50% of religious parents succeed in passing on their religious faith (Crockett & Voas 2006, NatCen Social Research 2011, Voas 2005, Voas & Crockett 2005).

12.13 Lesslie Newbigin put it bluntly:

“Even in homes where the parents are committed Christians, it is hard, to the point of impossibility, for children to sustain belief in the meta-narrative of the Bible over against that understanding of the meta-narrative – the picture of the origins and development of nature, of human society as a whole – which is being offered to them at school. It is possible to maintain the telling of the biblical story in the privacy of home and church, but in so far as this story contradicts the meta-narrative of the schools, young people are placed in an

impossible situation. ... A belief which is permitted only to exist in a bunker may survive for a time, but it must finally be obliterated.” (Newbigin 1998: 158-159)

12.14 Terence Copley was Professor of Educational Studies (Religious Education) at the University of Oxford when he died from cancer in January 2011. Previously, he was Professor of Education at the University of Exeter from 1997-2007. He was the author of the ground-breaking book *Indoctrination, Education and God* (Copley, 2005). From the title, a Western reader expects a discussion of religious education, but, no, this is a discussion of the real indoctrination threat today – from secularism:

“... a secular indoctrination process is at work in British and European society, programming people against religious belief ... People in Britain are frequently negative, even hostile, towards institutional Christianity, while at the same time being less critical of ‘other religions’ (except perhaps Islam), even more uncritical towards alternative spiritualities and, finally, completely uncritical of secular values.” (Copley, 2005:vii)

12.15 Nor is this something that has been recognised only recently. Long ago, Sir Walter Moberly (1881-1974, Philosopher, Vice-Chancellor of Manchester University, Chairman of the University Grants Committee), put it even more trenchantly:

“If in your organization, your curriculum, and your communal customs and ways of life, you leave God out, you teach with tremendous force that, for most people and at most times, He does not count ... It is a fallacy to suppose that by omitting a subject you teach nothing about it. On the contrary you teach that it is to be omitted, and that it is therefore a matter of secondary importance. And you teach this not openly and explicitly, which would invite criticism; you simply take it for granted and thereby insinuate it silently, insidiously, and all but irresistibly. If indoctrination is bad, this sort of conditioning and preconscious habituation is surely worse ... if a planner of atheistic conviction and Machiavellian astuteness had been at work, he could hardly have wrought more cunningly.” (Moberly, 1949: 56)

"Our predicament then is this. Most students go through our universities without ever having been forced to exercise their minds on the issues which are really momentous. Under the guise of academic neutrality they are subtly conditioned to unthinking acquiescence in the social and political *status quo* and in a secularism on which they have never seriously reflected ... Fundamentally they are uneducated." (*ibid*: 70)

13 Conclusion to Part Two

13.1 There are many more examples that could be considered. These are more than sufficient to show that secular assumptions are universal and all-pervasive, particularly in education. Since those assumptions are almost never declared, or put forward for examination or critique, we have a paradigm case of *indoctrination*.

13.2 But does it matter? We still live in a free society and religious believers can reject and counter the secularist assumptions. That they have not done so, or

certainly not very effectively, is, perhaps, another illustration of the success of the secular indoctrination. But does it matter? We begun with the accusations of harm hurled against religion by the New Atheists. But what about secularism? Is there evidence that secular materialism is dangerous?

Part Three: Secular Materialism *is* Dangerous

We have already see hints that secular materialism might be more than just theory or fantasy. So what about the real world? Do these materialist assumptions cause (remove barriers to) real harm in society and education?

14 Genocide in South West Africa

14.1 Many people do not know that the first genocide of the 20th century occurred in German South-West Africa (present day Namibia) (Olusoga & Erichsen 2010, Wikipedia 2012d). On January 12, 1904, the Herero tribe under its leader Samuel Maharero rebelled against German colonial rule. They were aggrieved that a great deal of their tribal lands had been stolen by German settlers.

14.2 Strikingly the Herero soldiers obeyed the terms and conditions of the 1864 Geneva Convention (Wikipedia 2012e). German missionaries, women and children were not harmed. But in August of the same year the German General Lotha von Trotha (1848-1920) defeated the Herero army at the battle of Waterburg. Callously von Trotha drove the Hereros into the desert of Omahake where many of the Herero combatants died of thirst. The German soldiers were ordered to poison all the water-holes in the region.

14.3 General von Trotha issued an "annihilation order" that was later to become infamous.

"I, the Great General of the German troops, send this letter to the Herero ... The Herero people must leave the land. ... Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children; I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at. These are my words to the Herero people." (Olusoga & Erichsen 2010: 149-150)

14.4 The German army was instructed to take no prisoners and to do nothing for the remaining women and children. Many of them were either shot or abandoned in the desert. The Herero population, which in 1904 had numbered about 80,000 people, had been reduced to fewer than 20,000 one year later.

14.5 In a series of newspaper articles General von Trotha defended his brutal treatment of the Herero people by appealing to the Darwinian materialist worldview. He stated that this was a 'racial war' waged against a people 'in decline'. He asserted that in this struggle, the Darwinian law of the survival of the fittest proved to be a more realistic guide than international law. Further to this, the German Empire defended its military conduct on the world stage by arguing that the Herero could not

be protected under the terms of the Geneva Convention because they were not true humans, but *Unmenshen* "non-humans".

14.6 It goes without saying that the Geneva Conventions presuppose a Biblical view of a person. All people are created in the image of God and soldiers must respect this human dignity. Darwinian materialism radically rejects this religious mindset.

15 Columbine – “only science and math are true”

15.1 We mentioned Eric at the beginning of this paper (# 2.2, page 3 above). **Eric David Harris** (1981-1999) was one of the two boys (the other was Dylan Klebold) who shot 12 students and a teacher at Columbine High School, Colorado, USA on 20th April 1999. He wrote the following in his notebooks:

“just because your mommy and daddy told you blood and violence is bad, you think it’s a f—g law of nature? wrong, only science and math are true, everything, and I mean every f—g thing else is Man made.” (Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, 2006:88, JC-001-026007, dated 21 April 1998)

“There’s no such thing as True Good or True evil, its all relative to the observer. its just all nature, chemistry, and math, deal with it.” (Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, 2006: 91, JC-001-026010, dated 12 June 1998)

15.2 Eric was living out the materialist worldview. He understood its complete moral bankruptcy. If materialism is true then everything else that seems to matter is a fiction. It is a tooth fairy. We may wish to believe it (being good and kind) but in reality it is a fairy tale. Maybe ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are just names we give to whatever causes sensations of pain or pleasure? But whatever the materialist explanation, the logic is clear: if only maths and science are true then anything goes! This includes deliberate, random, cold-blooded murder.

15.3 Where – how – did Eric learn all this? No teacher or media commentator *deliberately* taught it to him. But they taught it nevertheless. Education and the media are never neutral. When you evict a Christian worldview and values, you are not left with neutrality. It is impossible to avoid importing another worldview and its values. What is happening, in education and the media, is that, whether by intention or unawares, a secular, materialist worldview and its values have come to dominate.

15.4 In their eleven years of compulsory schooling, some children amazingly fail to learn much maths or English. But most children will absorb the materialism of the so-called ‘implicit’ or ‘hidden’ curriculum. Many will then conclude that truth and morality are just some people’s subjective opinions that they can choose to accept or reject. Thankfully it would appear that Christian values still have some hold on most of them, so that only a very few will follow Eric Harris’ example. But if we blame people for absorbing that worldview and acting according to its values, should we not blame far more those who have actively promoted that worldview?

16 Jeffrey Dahmer – “No one to be accountable to”

16.1 Then there was **Jeffrey Dahmer** (1960-1994), an American serial killer who murdered and dismembered 17 young men and boys, in some cases eating parts of their body. This is what his father, Lionel reported in a 2004 interview with Larry King:

“He felt that he was up – up from the slime, as he put it. You know, molecules to amoebas to Larry type of a thing, evolution. That there was nothing, no direction by a god. No one to be accountable to. No one to answer to at all.” (CNN 2004)

16.2 And if you still think that cannibalism is something that happened only ‘way back then’ or ‘way over there’ then remember the ‘German cannibal’, **Armin Meiwes** (b. 1961), who, in Rotenburg in 2001, killed and ate a man he met through a website. A disturbing case of consensual cannibalism (BBC 2003).

17 Pekka-Eric Auvinen – “There is no higher authority than me”

17.1 In Finland we had two school massacres in the space of a year. On 7th November 2007, 18-year-old Pekka-Eric Auvinen killed eight people at Jokela High School (Wikipedia 2012f). On 23rd September 2008, 22-year-old Matti Saari killed ten people at Kauhajoki College in an apparent carbon copy action (Wikipedia 2012g). Both gunmen shot themselves and died in hospital.

17.2 On his internet blog, Auvinen appealed to Darwin and Nietzsche to justify his actions:

“humanity is overrated.”

“its time to put natural selection and survival of the fittest back on the tracks.”

“I, as a natural selector, will eliminate all who I see unfit, disgraces of human race and failures of natural selection.”

“I am the law, judge and executioner. There is no higher authority than me.” (Wikipedia 2012f)

18 Richard Dawkins – “We have the power to defy the selfish genes”

18.1 The almost universal response has been to condemn these tragedies as the cowardly work of single, sick, irrational individuals. But what if it is true that only physical nature exists? What if it is not possible to speak about purpose, goodness and wickedness? What if evil is an illusion? What if, at the end of the day, we are simply animals that are struggling to survive? What if Nature really is utterly indifferent to our concerns? Who is irrational then? Very plausibly these are people who not only absorbed the materialism in the curricula and the media, but actually believed it and acted accordingly. Surprisingly it is the new atheists who appear not to believe their own message.

18.2 Richard Dawkins' concluding words in the first edition (1976) of his *The Selfish Gene* were as follows:

“We have at least the mental equipment to foster our long-term selfish interests rather than merely our short-term selfish interests. We can see the long-term benefits of participating in a ‘conspiracy of doves’, and we can sit down together and discuss ways of making the conspiracy work. We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth and, if necessary, the selfish memes of our indoctrination. We can even discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism – something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world. We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We alone on earth can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.” (Dawkins 1989: 200-201)

18.3 This is an extraordinary claim. Here we have both the hard, scientific, determinist Richard Dawkins (“We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines”), and in tension with it, the soft, mystical, even magical Richard Dawkins who still believes in a tooth fairy (“we have the power to turn against our creators”).

18.4 On the basis of his materialism, how can Dawkins – on his own evaluation, just a complicated chemical machine – rebel against his materialistic conditioning? And even if he could, how ever could he know that he had been successful? Or even know that he was ‘rebellious’? And if materialism is the truth, then why should we rebel? Why should we care?

18.5 If Richard Dawkins is correct, then reason is illusory because chemical (robot) machines do not have the freedom to be rational. Rationality presupposes that we can choose between two sides of the argument. We must be free to choose the position that is supported logically (rationally!) by the evidence.

18.6 Physical determination may sometimes – by chance – coincide with the rational choice, but there is no necessary connection and no independent means of knowing beforehand. In a deterministic universe the freedom must be illusory, and the same will apply to rationality itself. We choose our conclusions because this ‘choice’ has been programmed by our selfish genes. We believe what we believe because that is how we are hard wired to respond by natural selection.

18.7 If that is so why should anyone believe anything we say? Given the new atheists’ worldview why should anyone listen to them? Try as they may, these materialists cannot bring themselves to face a truly godless world. What Dawkins is articulating is the legacy of Christianity: that humans are separate from the natural world, called to rule the world and choose their destiny. But he is doing so without the Christian warrant, and without the Christian realism that humans are incorrigibly flawed.

18.8 Surprisingly, the contradiction is thoroughly dissected by another secularist, John Gray (2002) (Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics). (See also Gray 2003.)

“Humanists turn to Darwin to support their shaky modern faith in progress; but there is no progress in the world he revealed. A truly naturalistic view of the world leaves no room for secular hope. ... Humanism is a secular religion thrown together from decaying scraps of Christian myth.” (Gray 2002: xii, 31)

18.9 To take another pertinent example, why do (materialist) atheists seek to disprove God’s existence by pointing to all the evil that exists, when their own materialism does not permit a belief in evil? While atheists may live morally upright lives, their atheism does not provide any basis for the justification of moral beliefs, or any reason to condemn immoral actions, however heinous.

CONCLUSION: What do we teach the children?

19.1 If we were to base education on the materialist worldview and remove all the remnants of Christian belief, then what would we teach the children? Will we be as honest about this to the public as was professor Richard Peters?

“Our basic predicament in life is to learn to live with its ultimate pointlessness. We are monotonously reminded that education must be for life, so obviously the most important dimension of education is that in which we learn to come to terms with the pointlessness of life.” (Peters 1973:1. Peters (1919-2011) was professor of the philosophy of education, Institute of Education, University of London)

19.2 And what do we say to those who conclude that, with no God or universal moral order out there, no one else’s moral constraints have any claim on *their* life and behaviour?

19.3 The trouble is that children will absorb the implicit worldview anyway, and a few – thankfully very few – will live and act as if it is true. But if the grip of secularism on our society continues to grow, and the influence of Christianity continues to weaken, then more can be expected to live *as if materialism is true*. The materialist religion is surely *very dangerous*.

19.4 But isn’t there a lesson for materialists here? If the materialist worldview story cannot ground the good, moral lives most of you really want to live, if the “present trends in the liberal democratic societies of the West are carrying us in a direction in which most decent human beings do not want to go.” (Newbigin 1998: 135), then shouldn’t you consider worldview stories that make real and liveable sense of the human condition? We shall see in another session that there are also good scientific reasons to question the materialist story (see also 3.7ff. in Part 1).

19.5 A final lesson for those of us who are Christians is that we must live and teach as if God exists and as if our Christian faith is relevant to the whole of our individual and communal life and to every aspect of our educational practice.

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