



An overview of

Natural Rational Religion: A Reasonable Global Way of Life with Beliefs, Values and Meaning

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The Problem

Like many Atheists, I talk a lot about religion.

A Christian I spoke with, when I was a teenager, made this point:

She had something to believe in, that explained the world
and provided guidance on how to live a good life.

Whereas I, as an Atheist, had nothing but a *disbelief* in god(s).
What did I **believe** in?

Her question has stayed with me, for the rest of my life.

What we really need to know is not just what we believe in, but

What should we do? What do we value?

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The Quest

This is my attempt to answer questions about values and meaning,

- without having to invoke supernatural beings,
- and without being aggressively anti-religion,
- But rather trying to make some positive sense of it all.

This is very much a work in progress.

- So far only a few others are interested in these ideas.
- I'm looking for constructive feedback and help.
- More details are in the web site www.globalbeliefs.org.

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- 1.2 Metaphysics
- 1.3 Theology
- 1.4 Mind
- 1.5 Ethics
- 1.6 Ethics

2. Science

3. History

4. Religion

5. Culture

6. Personal

7. Political

8. Vision

9. Conclusion

To address these questions, this talk will cover:

First, in the Introduction

- How others have discussed values, meaning and purpose,
 - including how Courts have defined religion;
 - what we mean by “values” and “meaning”; and
 - what do we mean by “beliefs” and do they involve “faith”.
- How we need to take all domains of knowledge into account, so we specify which subject areas we need to consider.

Second, in Philosophy:

- How we find core values in various branches of Philosophy.

Third:

- Values in other knowledge domains and how it all fits together.

Finally:

- How this *Way* fits in with other approaches

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Mooted Sources of Value

Many people have spent lots of effort trying convince us to adopt some specific set of values.

- Philosophers have tried to deduce values from first principles;
- Scientists have tried to discover values in the evolution of altruism;
- Historians try to discern values in the progress of history, like Marx's dialectic, or American exceptionalism;
- Religions infer values from stories about the gods or gurus and their instructions;
- Cultures, rulers and elders try to impose values to preserve the status quo and their privileges;
- There is no consensus, and people despair. It's a mess.

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Alternative Perspectives (1)

Kant relied on a single **categorical imperative**:

- *Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, wish that it should become a universal law.*
- Kant thought this imperative was derived from reason, justified as an end in itself, which must always be obeyed.
- He believed all duties and obligations can be derived from it.
- Kant said there were also **hypothetical imperatives** which are rules that help us comply with the **categorical imperative**.

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Alternative Perspectives (2)

Wittgenstein:

- initially talked of language as pictures that can be linked to reality.
- He thought sentences about ethical or aesthetic matters had no associated “picture” and hence were meaningless:

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”

- To him then, we couldn’t even talk about values.

Hard core materialists and sceptics:

- seem to doubt that values exist.

Post modernists:

- decry any attempt at generating a universal truth, or values or a grand narrative, as a form of imperialist oppression.

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Alternative Perspectives (3)

Stephen Gould:

- in the 1990s, suggested that **Science** and **Religion** are **non-overlapping magisteria**.
- The domain of one is facts and theories to explain those facts.
- The other is about human purposes, meaning and value, that science can illuminate but never resolve.

New Atheists, such as Sam Harris (in *The Moral Landscape*):

- suggest that science *can* resolve questions of ethics and values.
- They *just assume* that goodness is real, citing evidence for the evolution of altruistic behaviour,
- Then they use a kind of utilitarianism – providing the greatest good to the greatest number – and say science can do the rest.

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Court Cases

- Australia's High Court, in the 1980s, accepted that Scientology was a religion and hence is entitled to tax exemptions.
- The Court determined that Religion typically: involves supernatural beliefs, and a code of conduct linked to those beliefs.
- This matches similar opinions of other Courts
 - especially in the USA (eg *Malnak v. Yogi*, *United States v. Seeger*, *Gillette v. United States*, *United States v. Kauten*).

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Values

What do we mean by “values”? How do we find “meaning”?

- Values are not *things* infusing the ether, like a herbal tea from the celestial tea pot.
- Value choices are based on beliefs about what the world is like.

Our choices reflect our values, and our values guide our choices.

- This is an **action based criteria**, focussed on our behaviour.
- Academic discussion about matters which have no impact on our lives, such as intrinsic virtue, may be worthwhile, but is not our focus.

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Meaning and Purpose

Meaning comes from seeing our life in a wider context.

- **For theists** this context is God(s), stories about creation, the prophets, and our relationship with the God(s).
- **For some other religions** the context includes stories about nirvana and enlightenment.

We find purpose when we adopt a role in a wider context.

How **can an Atheist** obtain valid values and find meaning in some similar context, with acceptable stories, without invoking the supernatural?

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Reasonable – Corrigible – Beliefs

The beliefs I'm talking about are ***corrigible – they can be corrected***:

- They are tentative, working hypotheses;
- not fixed, arbitrary, or dogmatic,
- not held on faith alone when we don't really know, but
- as far as possible directly based on, or consistent with, reason and the evidence.

Our beliefs can change as we gain more evidence and insight and refine our reasoning.

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Belief and Faith

When there is uncertain or conflicting evidence:

- *If it is possible*

we must accept our ignorance and not jump to conclusions.

- *But often that isn't possible:* some action is called for.

**Then we have to make a choice,
to act or not, as best we can.**

This is a **leap of faith**: simply making a choice
on the evidence we have to hand, hoping it will be OK.

This **faith is minimal**. The choice is forced on us.

It would be silly to make a leap of faith **despite** the available
evidence or when it's **not necessary**.

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A Comprehensive View.

We need to adopt a comprehensive view of everything we know.

We can break down most of our knowledge into seven domains:

- For our **Analysis**: we look at
 1. Philosophy,
 2. Science and
 3. History.
- For **Expression**: we look at
 4. Religion and
 5. Culture.
- For **Action**: we look at
 6. Personal Practice and
 7. Politics.

We pull all of this together in an 8th part: a **Global Vision**.

**We'll describe, briefly, how we use each of these domains to
help us find *values* and *meaning*, rather than specific beliefs.**

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Subject Selection

We select a subject for consideration if:

- *Knowing about that area helps us*
- *to discover reasonable values or personal guidelines*
- *or to find meaning and purpose,*

This is an ***action based criteria***,
focussing on the potential impact on our behaviour.

*What do we really want our children – and our leaders –
to know and understand?*

*What distinguishes this approach from traditional
religions, world views and philosophies?*

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9. Conclusion

**So let's start with a theoretical analysis.
We consider the philosophical branches of
epistemology, metaphysics, theology, mind, ethics
& aesthetics.**

We're doing this because it affects our behaviour!
In spite of the complexity, what do we value?

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1. Theoretical Analysis: Philosophy

Most people don't care a hoot about philosophy.

But everyone has "a philosophy" even if we can't spell it out,

- absorbed from our family, school and community,
- often based on 100 year old science, 1000s of years old religion, and the latest 10 minutes on social media.

Our philosophy is how we view the world,
our basic response to life.

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Philosophy (2)

- Our core choices aren't scientific or historical conclusions based solely on reason and the evidence. despite what some skeptics or rationalists might say.
- They are ***philosophical*** choices based on what we know and feel.
- We can't establish scientifically that:
the truth exists, the world is rational,
life is worth living, and hope for the future is valid.
But most of us believe these things.

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1.1 Epistemology

The big philosophical question is: What is Truth?

Whether we have “free will” is a fundamental dilemma.

On the one hand:

Everything that happens is either caused or chaotic!

- ❖ ● It might be that all our thoughts, beliefs and values are **caused** by the laws of nature; OR
- It might be that *God* knows and controls what we will decide even before we do ourselves.

Either way it would seem we don't have free will.

- ❖ Yet again, perhaps some things, including our beliefs and values, are not caused by anything!

Does that mean we have free will? **No!**

It only means that our beliefs and values are arbitrary – **chaotic**.

Some suspect quantum theory leaves room for free will, but our nervous systems are well above the level where quantum theory applies.

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Truth Dilemma (2)

So on the one hand:

Perhaps everything that happens is either caused or chaotic!

From which we would conclude we don't have free will

On the other hand:

We feel and act as though we do, and we can make real choices!

Some say that even though our brain physiology is deterministic, at some higher psychological level we can somehow freely choose between options.

Perhaps we can't solve this dilemma using reason and evidence. It is still disputed in

- Philosophy, as: free will versus determinism;
- Science, as: whether genes vs upbringing determine our destiny;
- History, as: is it due to inevitable trends & great “men”, vs random events;
- Religion, as: predestination or karma vs grace and divine justice;
- Art, as: is a work genuine creativity vs cultural influence or plagiarism;
- Politics, as: personal responsibility – the right vs welfare state - the left.

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Reason and Its Limits (1)

**So we are unsure about whether we can make real choices about what is true.
Can we use reason?**

Most of us think that using reason to guide our choices leads to better outcomes, but

- We can't use reason to justify using reason!
- We can't use reason to demonstrate that logical deductions apply in a given case! We have to use our knowledge of the real world.
- For example, why is the logic good in one case but not the other?
 - If Jane is taller than Jill and Jill is taller than Joan then Jane is taller than Joan.
 - If Jane is the mother of Jill and Jill is the mother of Joan why isn't Jane the mother of Joan? (She's her grandmother!)
- Some truths are known but can't be justified using reason!
Gödel showed there are truths we cannot prove in certain mathematical systems.

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Reason and Its Limits (2)

Ultimately rational decisions are not rationally justifiable.

We are being rational if finding new evidence might change our minds.

- When we are being completely rational,
we make lists of reasons for and against a particular decision,
then we make up our minds.
- Someone can always ask, 'but why did you decide that way?'
- If we can state the reason then it must be added to one of the lists,
and we can decide again.
- It's an infinite loop, or an arbitrary end point.
- The ultimate decision is to some extent beyond mere reason.

**All our choices involve such a leap of faith,
even if we use reason to minimise the size of the leap.**

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Truth and Revelation

Given that **reason is limited**, some people conclude we can only find the **truth through revelation**.

- But such people **arbitrarily choose** which revelation, and which rules to follow, and that is not a solution.
- If we can justify preferring one set of revelations over another, we don't need revelation to know what is right and good.
- If a sacred text tells of extraordinary miracles, why believe in these and not those of other traditions?
- Even if some miracles did occur, how do we know the rest of the text is right and good?

- We can't just choose arbitrarily, on faith alone.

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What we Value

But still, in daily life, we have to choose one way or the other.

- Perhaps we do make this choice "freely";
- perhaps it is arbitrary;
- perhaps it is caused by our genes or upbringing.

We don't have to resolve the free will/determinism issue.

In some real sense, we make choices, however they are defined.

- And our choices reflect our values.

- **Ultimately we all effectively choose to believe in the *Truth*: that *it is valid to seek the truth*.** This fundamental choice reflects a *core* value, even if it is obvious or done unconsciously.
- We are also forced to value ***Diversity***, because a reasonable person could make difference choices.

There is some mystery about this; we learn to *embrace* the mystery. We don't *value* mystery as something to strive for.

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1.2 Metaphysics

The second biggest question is: What is real?

Appearances based on perceptions are only indirectly related to reality.

- Is there some **permanent *thing*** behind the ever-changing appearances. Or is everything **impermanent**, and reality is only ever changing **events**.
- Some people say the ultimate reality is **incomprehensible and unknowable**, but somehow this *thing*, with no content, provides meaning and purpose!! How could this be persuasive?
- Progress in science continues to strengthen the case for materialism:
 - that all phenomena, including mental events and consciousness, are identical with material interactions, and
 - it is unreasonable to believe in a separate mental world of ideas.
- Science tells us the universe is a collection of myriads of **events**, as force carrying particles, called gauge bosons and gravitons, carry quanta of energy between matter particles.

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Partitioning reality with language

We construct our perception of reality and partition reality with language.

- We all interpret reality in terms of space and time, and we impose causality on it.
- Our brains partition our experiences into *things* and *events*.
- We attribute personalities to *things* that apparently move by themselves.
- We use language to identify, think about, and talk about these *things* and *events*.
- **Different languages and cultures partition the world differently**, into different concepts.
- Sociologists confirm that we construct our world out of generally ill-informed cultural norms.
- 3000 years ago the Hindu Vedas said this classification, in language & culture, is delusional.
- The Buddha later told us that even our own selves are not really real. But ...
we still think of ourselves and other minds as separate entities in our complex reality.

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Spiritual Reality

- Mind altering drugs and various physical or mental exercises can alter our perceptions, emotions and feelings, emphasising that our normal perception is limited.
- Some experiences can't be adequately described in words: like tastes and smells, and music.
- Many normal people have wordless so-called 'spiritual' experiences. These don't involve disembodied minds, but can affect our emotions and feelings and affect the life choices we make.
- Strange events like these, that we experience, are open to investigation by science. They are still part of the natural universe.
- Even so, we are still awed by the majesty, complexity and beauty of the universe. We can revel in these mind-blowing, natural wonders.

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What we Value

- Science still doesn't tell us what the ultimate nature of reality is.
 - Scientific theories are temporary and cover only limited areas.
 - We feel each new theory is closer to the truth, but we can't be certain.
 - Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and quantum theory imply that there are limits to what we can ever know.
 - Science still has a long way to go to explain lots of things.

But **we value this idea of a shared, natural, public reality.**

Despite its uncertainty, cultural differences, social constructs and subjectivity, it is the basis for all our communications.

And this analysis causes us to extend the meaning of valuing ***diversity***, because reasonable people can partition the world differently.

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1.3 Theology

The next big question is: Does God exist? As Atheists, we say **No!**

The reasons for believing in some sort of God(s) vary according to what sort of being God is supposed to be.

- We can't believe in a God that is all good, all powerful and all wise, because there is too much suffering, that is unrelated to *the evil that humans do*.
- Given the huge potential impact on our lives, the burden of proof for another kind of god is on the believer. Like the celestial tea pot, on the other side of Saturn, we don't have to disprove the existence of something that's undetectable.
- Is *God the creator*? Some simply **assume**:
 - that the universe must have *started* at some time,
 - that every event has a cause,
 - that this rule applies even before the universe existed,
 - and that God is that first cause.

These are four separate, baseless assumptions.

No-one explains who created God. **No religion explains existence itself.**

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Other kinds of God

- Is *God the sustainer, revealer and miracle worker*?
 - Perhaps God keeps the universe going, behind the laws of nature, the Big Bang and evolution. God intervenes occasionally to send gurus or prophets, to hand down revelations, answer prayers and perform miracles.
 - As science learns more there is less need to invoke God to explain natural events, and there will be fewer 'miracles'.
- Is there a *God that sensitive or good people experience*?
 - We can explain goodness, mystery, our sense of connection and wonder, and our need for values, meaning and purpose without invoking this God.
- Can we say "*God is Love*", immanent, somehow 'within' the universe?
 - This god can't answer our prayers, and doesn't makes us feel better.
 - We can work out guidelines for behaviour without this idea.

These kinds of God add nothing to our understanding.

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What we Value

Even if there is no god or supernatural beings, we (mostly) still **choose to continue the struggle to live.**

We can explain this:

- There are evolutionary explanations for these drives.
- Even a difficult life can have its good moments.
- Human nature has its *humane* side.

We choose to value **life** rather than death: we choose *this life*, this *natural life*, rather than a non-existent, *supernatural* afterlife.

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1.4 Mind

What is the nature of mind? How long does it exist?

- Hinduism talks of *Ātman*, our true self, identical to the transcendental self, Brahman.
- Buddhism says the idea that there is a core self is an illusion. *Anātman* refers to this “non-self”.
- Many believe in reincarnation, that after death we are reborn into another life, perhaps in an infinite cycle, broken only if we gain the right mental state: nirvana or enlightenment.
- Christianity and Islam say we are born with sinful or weak bodies, and souls which survive death, in eternal bliss or eternal anguish.
- These religions don’t explain how souls are created, or consider life before (the first) birth.

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Consciousness

Many people make a big deal out how our consciousness seems to be uniquely different from the rest of the material world.

Consciousness is not always the single ongoing, unitary experience that philosophers and religionists fantasise about.

- We think of an integrated personality as the ideal.
- But some people have multiple personalities or many voices in their heads.
- Sometimes conscious fades in and out.
- Animals have varying degrees of consciousness.

The Buddha was on track. Our notion of “self” is really an illusion.

- There is nothing uniquely “me” that lasts from birth to death, and
- nothing that existed before birth or lasts beyond death.

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Afterlife

The evidence shows there is no consciousness or mind without a working brain.

- There is no life after death, no ghosts or spirits, no reincarnation, no karma.
- When we die, we rot.

Some people find the prospect of total personal annihilation frightening.

But we live on only through our descendants, in our works, and in the memories of others.

We can still be content.

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What we Value

- Concluding that mental processes are “natural” gives us some hope that we can devise effective interventions to improve people’s behaviour, rather than just yelling at them, appealing to some intangible “free will”.
- It is liberating to realize that there is no hell, no eternal damnation, no exclusion from god and no divine retribution in this earthly life.
- Even though our minds are just our brains working, we can still have occasional life changing, wordless, ‘spiritual’ experiences.

Again, we value this potentially comprehensible natural **life** as opposed to incomprehensible, supernatural mind.

We value **life** and **love** even more because they are ephemeral.

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1.5 Ethics

In ethics, we face a few questions: Why be good? What is goodness?

We know that ethics don’t come from God.

- Some say we should be good because God will punish us or it makes bad karma if we don’t. But ...

behaving out of fear is not genuine goodness: it’s being practical.

- Some say being good is acting according to God’s wishes, because God is good and doesn’t lead us astray. But ...

it’s circular to say God is good when good is simply doing what God says.

- If we know God is good it’s because we already understand goodness, **before** we know god.
- So we know that many rules, from God, the Bible or Qu’ran, in fact are bad.

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Ethics without God

Can we find ethics without god?

- Some believe we make moral decisions independently of the laws of nature, invoking some kind of ‘transcendental’ free will.
But they have no rational explanation of how this happens: it seems arbitrary.
- Science and history tell us what *did* or *does* happen, but can’t tell us what we *should* do.

But ethics in most of us is in fact driven by the feelings of compassion and altruistic behaviour we acquired as humans evolved.

However, we can’t just rely on evolution, which many use to justify selfishness or that ‘might is right’ or that the strong should win.

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Limits of Evolved Altruism

- ❖ Most of us need some prodding to be good:
ie, we are **weak**;
- ❖ Some people apparently don’t feel much compassion at all:
ie, they are **mean**;
- ❖ Some clever people get their ethics from their enlightened self-interest, and that’s almost enough, but many people aren’t clever:
ie they are **foolish**.

So we need to manage those of us, and ourselves, when we are **weak, mean or foolish**,

We know people behave differently when there are legal & cultural rewards & punishments.

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Three Ethical Choices for Core Values (1)

- **We choose to assign *responsibility*** to a person committing an action, including ourselves, when there is a potential for social or personal intervention to be effective.
 - If a proposed intervention is ineffective, it is not ***compassionate*** to punish people for actions they can't control.
If someone effectively has no choice they can't be held responsible.
 - We are also uncertain of the ***truth***: so we must be slow to judge.
These are the bases of ***mercy***.

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Ethical Choices for Core Values (2)

- **We choose as a core value *love*,**
using the word to have the same meaning as ***compassion***:
to do what we can to reduce others' suffering,
which includes the suffering of animals.
 - We can debate whether this is best phrased as
 - promoting happiness or fulfillment, or
 - helping to satisfy others' preferences, or
 - perhaps other variations of utilitarianism.
- **We also choose as a core value *equality*:**
to accept that there are no reasonable grounds to believe
that one person *innately* deserves more chances, a better
life, or help than another.

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1.6 Aesthetics

What is beauty? Is anything intrinsically beautiful? Or is it just personal taste?

- ❖ Some say that a materialistic universe can't be beautiful without God. But this is another circular argument.
 - ❖ If beauty only came from God we would simply be reflecting God's taste, not ours.
 - ❖ How could we know if God has good taste, if we have none of our own?
- ❖ Some consider beauty to be in some other way 'transcendent' – above normal mortal humans, but that is too vague and unhelpful.
- ❖ Some say the beauty of the universe is a reason to believe in God.
 - ❖ But as actors in this universal play we can't make independent judgments,
 - ❖ just as a dancer can't see their own dance.
- ❖ Some consider beauty as a cultural artifact or a social construct:
 - ❖ each culture ends up passing on local ideas of what is beautiful,
 - ❖ so there is nothing universal or transcendental about it.

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The Science of Beauty

Most of the beauty we see is in our natural environment
but we also find it in artificial works made by humans.

Science can provide some insight into the origins of our sense of beauty and its impact on us.

- Singing, music and dance may have arisen in humans (as it has in birds and some monkeys) as a pre-linguistic form of communication.
 - This is why it is often wordless or mystical.
- Narratives (in oral stories, plays, poems, novels, comics, movies, TV serials) began with the development of language.

We all unconsciously interpret both daily and life critical events
in terms of narratives.

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Value Choices

- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,
just as goodness comes from within.
It's the choices we make!
- Many of us find ways to experience the mysteries of life,
by seeking out contact with the world's natural wonders,
or participating in "cultural" experiences,
like music, dancing, movies, art exhibitions and so on!

We make daily choices that are more than simply utilitarian,
reflecting that we value *beauty*.

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Core Values from Philosophy

The core values we obtain from our philosophy are:

***Truth, Diversity, Reality, Life,
Love, Beauty, Equality*** and ***Responsibility***.

As we discuss later, our final core value is ***Hope***.

- We expect most people listening could live with these values
 - except for some psychopaths and fanatics,
 - even if they'd use different language to express or justify them.
- All our behavioural guidelines are based on these *core* values.

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Core Values are Orthogonal

- These **nine core values** are *orthogonal* and **coherent**. That is
 - They don't overlap.
 - Choosing one doesn't imply another.
 - They fit together.We need to choose *all* of them.
- Trying to find one or two **all encompassing** values,
 - Like Kant's single categorical imperative,
 - Or Pope Francis's twin Truth and Compassion,
- **fails**
because it leaves out **many other core choices**
which **reflect other core values**.

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That's our *theoretical* analysis.
Now let's look at our *practical* analysis,
in science and history, covering:
- what we consider,
- what we learn,
- what we value, and
- what we feel.

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2. Practical Analysis: Science

What aspects of science do we need to consider?

- Despite what some New Atheists say, science is not the only source of knowledge.
- Some seem to *define* knowledge as what science can tell us, rather like the early Wittgenstein, but that's circular logic.
- We can't conduct scientific tests to prove or disprove our philosophical conclusions.
- But science does have globally accepted methods to assess what theories and facts are currently most likely to be true.
- Despite this, there is a lot of bogus science, which we need to be aware of, but that is not our focus here.

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What we Learn

Science tells us:

- How the universe and the fundamental forces evolved after the big bang;
- How the elements, the stars and planets were created;
- How life began and evolved into the diversity we see now;
- How suffering began in primitive nervous systems, and how it can be minimised;
- How sexuality, sexism, ageism and xenophobia developed, in many species;
- How humans became as we are: conscious, cooperative, caring and competitive.

Science provides better explanations, for more aspects of the world, than other world views. Still, these explanations will be revised as scientists learn more. Then they will be replaced by even better ones!

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What we Value

Science tells us what *is* not what *ought* to be,
what *does* happen, not what *should* happen.

But science can clarify many aspects of our core choices. It tells us that:

- Although some prejudices can be explained in evolutionary terms feeling that someone is inferior *simply because of* their age, sex, gender preference, class, caste, religion or race, is not based on clear distinctions in reality. They are social constructs learned in childhood, prejudices: judgements without thought. This reinforces our *core* value of **equality**.
- People's behaviour is becoming more and more understandable, and criminologists are learning more about how to control crime, reinforcing our core value of **responsibility**, *as we have defined it*.

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Derived Values

The scientific method is based on *core* values that we rephrase or combine. These can be called **derived** values. For instance:

- *honesty*, a commitment to tell the truth,
 - isn't a **core** value because it's **derived** from:
 - our belief that it is valid to seek the *Truth*,
 - there is an ultimate *Reality* to be honest about,
 - and on *Love* and *Equality*, because lying is hurtful and unfair.
- Other **derived** values inherent in the scientific method are:
 - *transparency, uncertainty, tolerance, respect and reason*.

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Effecting or Instrumental Values

Science and history help us to work out the best choices, which are ***instrumental***, to put into ***effect*** our ***core*** values. For example:

- Science helps with helping drug addicts:
 - using harm minimisation,
 - rather than harsh and ineffective punishments.

We revise such ***effecting*** values as new evidence comes to light.

- These are similar to Kant's ***hypothetical*** imperatives, guides to achieve his ***categorical*** imperative.
- Many Atheists confuse these ***effecting*** or ***instrumental*** values from science with ***core*** values from philosophy.

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What we Feel

What is the ***emotional impact*** these conclusions can have?

Science helps to explain why we are as we are, and why we behave as we do. It makes us feel normal.

Science is the basis for our universal narrative, of our origins and our destination, and helps us to find our place within it.

Science also provides good strategies to act according to our core values, and these strategies will only be replaced by better ones as we learn more.

Science is not just hard, cold facts.

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3. Practical Analysis: History

What aspects of history do we need to consider?

We all have a limited knowledge of history, usually focused on

- key events recalled by our national, religious or ethnic group, and
- Local, recent events, mostly in our lifetimes.

Most of us, not just racial supremacists and religious fanatics, obtain most of our identity from this inadequate understanding of history.

To overcome our parochialism, we have to learn more long term, global history.

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What we Learn

History tells us:

- How humans spread to all the continents;
- How local geography influenced agriculture and civilisations developed at different rates;
- How many civilisations have collapsed due to environmental factors and resistance to change in the social elites;
- How technology, business and government, spread and grew into modern nations and corporations;
- What we can do to minimise their harm;
- How colonialism devastated most of the world;
- How violence and cruelty have decreased over the centuries;
- How human rights have slowly progressed.

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What we Value

History focuses on what *has* happened, or might happen next, not what *should* happen.

History, as a study, is like science, based on the same **core** values and similar **derived** values.

But overall,

history tells us that there are grounds for **hope**, that personal and political action is valid.

Hope is a core value, based on our global experience, rather than a theoretical philosophical analysis.

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History's Effecting Values

- We can use our **core** values to identify the better societies, such as those that promote eg 'widespread personal fulfilment'.
- History investigates the strategies which produce such societies.
- Even though historical lessons are far less certain than those from science, these guidelines can be **effecting** values, such as:
 - *productivity,*
 - *prosperity,*
 - *rule of law,*
 - *human rights,*
 - *freedom and*
 - *democracy.*

These help us to achieve a good society.

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Ancillary Values

History shows:

- It takes ***courage, strength*** and ***self-discipline*** to follow our chosen path in our personal lives; and
- Political action needs ***loyalty, duty, honour*** and ***commitment***.

These we call ***ancillary values***. They aren't *core* values because

- they are also used for evil purposes ,
such as Nazism and terrorist attacks;
- they are useful guides only when in support of *justifiable core* values, rather than supporting our clan, team, state or race.

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What we Feel

Our understanding of history has a huge effect on how we feel:

Long term global history helps us to free ourselves from our limited personal histories, to escape from identity politics, seek more universal values, and become more aware global citizens.

History's current stories add to our universal narrative, helping us to find our place within it, providing explanations of the origin of modern society, states and governments, and how we should react, and these explanations will only be replaced by better ones.

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**So far, we have covered our
theoretical and practical
analyses, in philosophy,
science and history.**

**Now we turn briefly to the
means of expression,
in religion and culture.**

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3. Expression: Religion

What aspects of religion do we need to consider?

All major religions have their hypocrites and socialites,
innocents, and sophisticates ,
oppressors, saints and liberators,
fundamentalists, traditionalists and liberals,
warmongers and evangelists.

They all need to move on to a more sophisticated understanding of religion.
We do too.

For many people, religion is mostly about accepting a set of beliefs.

For others, religion is more about rituals and practices or behavioural guidelines.

Religion is humanity's attempt to find meaning and purpose, appealing to
our connectedness and innate caring. It's about our "ultimate concerns",
what we care about most, guiding how we live.

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The Structure of Religion

There are major differences between and within religions, but they have a common structure:

- an explanation of our origins, a paradise lost, suffering, and why we are in need of help;
 - rules or guidelines for behaviour, to reduce suffering or gain redemption;
 - sources of inspiration, exemplary models, as prophets or teachers;
- and these form a grand narrative, in which people find values, meaning and purpose.

This structure is found in indigenous and modern cultures, in the East and the West.

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What we Value

How we choose to interpret sacred texts, literally, or as allegories, or as fairy tales, generally **reflects** our **pre-existing values**.

Religion is not the *source* of value but provides examples of how to we express, talk about, or refer to, values, in rituals, but mostly in narratives, eg:

- Hindu epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*,
- Christian parables such as *The Good Samaritan*, and
- Muslim hadith – brief stories of Mohammed's actions or sayings.

Religions provide models of community engagement and service that we, as non-believers, can use and improve upon.

Some ways to express values historically arose in religious contexts. Eg:

- *derived* values: in laudable ideas such as *struggle and service*;
- *effecting* values: in *narratives* – stories, parables, hadiths, etc.

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What we Feel

Wisdom can be found in selected religious stories regardless of whether they are historically true or scientifically valid.

We must calmly acknowledge and **take from each religion whatever wisdom it offers and discard the rest.**

The best of religion adds richness and depth to our universal narrative and our part in it, and improving our understanding of religion enables us to be better, more tolerant people.

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5. Expression: Art, Media and Culture

What do we need to consider about art, media and culture?

We are all affected by the culture(s) we grow up in, and live in.

- It is pervasive and often unnoticed.
- We have to consider culture in its historical context, become aware of our own cultural biases, and revel in the *diversity* available to us now.

Culture, media and the arts don't just entertain us and help us to simply enjoy the world.

- They provide information, help us to communicate ideas, explore our identities, and provide insight into ourselves, often through narratives – books, plays, movies and so on.

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What we Value

Like religion, culture, media and the arts don't actually provide *core* values, but they explore ways to *express* our values, and their stories strongly influence what we value.

Although art provides insights, models to emulate, and warnings of what to avoid, we still have to *choose* our path!

Just as in religion, we interpret art, and our interpretation influences our values.

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For the media especially we need both legal and informal media guidelines or controls to promote such values as:

Authenticity: which is a ***derived*** value, a sincere attempt to responsibly convey the truth; and

Balance: which is an ***effecting*** value, presenting alternative views and contextual information, weighted according to relevance and the evidence.

But we all need to be better media consumers.

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What we Feel

Culture, media and the arts connect us to the world.

**Art and culture, distributed via different media,
give us a huge variety of ways to embellish the universal narrative
and provide insights into our role within it,
filling out and colouring our personal narratives,
the multiple stories in which we find our meaning and purpose.**

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**We have covered our theoretical
and practical analysis, in
philosophy, science and history,**

**and our means of expression,
in religion and culture.**

**Now we turn to
personal and political action.**

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6. Action: Personal Practice

What do we need to consider in our personal lives?

- The most critical part of life is
- the behavioural choices we make
 - on a moment by moment basis,
 - based on our beliefs about the world.
- These choices reflect our values.

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Core Personal Values

Our **core** values come from our philosophy, reflecting the **hard choices** we make as we try to resolve inescapable dilemmas:

Truth, Diversity, Reality, Life, Love, Beauty, Responsibility, Equality & Hope.

These are choices, **not**

- *imposed* on us by reason or the weight of the evidence.

But they are:

- **consistent with** our understanding of **reality**, our insights and global beliefs, from science, history, religion and culture.

We can't "undo" knowing that we choose our values.

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Other Personal Values

We have found other ways to express our *core* values, and subsidiary values that support *core* values in the other knowledge domains.

- Science: **Derived** values, restatements or combinations of *core* values:
eg Honesty, Transparency, Tolerance & Fairness;
Effecting values, secondary guides to implement *core* & *derived* values:
eg Respect, Reason, Learning, Prosperity, Freedom & Democracy.
- History: **Ancillary** values, tertiary guides to help us keep to our chosen path:
eg Courage, Strength, Self-discipline, Persistence,
laudable only when they support *core, derived* or *effecting* values.
- Religion: **Effecting** value of *Narrative, Struggle and Service.*
- Culture: **Derived** values such as *Authenticity* and *Balance.*

We adopt these values in our Personal and Political lives.

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What we Learn

- Our analysis of global beliefs and values in all knowledge domains,
 - gives us a basis for developing rational, evidence based guidelines for our
 - psychological integrity, physical health, friendships, sexual relationships, family life, work, and 'spiritual' selves.
 - such as resilience, minimising harm, consenting relationships, evidence based parenting, business ethics, and Atheist Spirituality – non-supernatural wordless epiphanies (as per Andre Compte-Sponville, Alain de Botton, Sam Harris & Dick Gross).
- We expect these to be reasonable guidelines:
 - that most people in this room could accept,
- These guidelines will sometimes be prescriptive,
 - but, unsurprisingly, we often must balance one value against another;
 - and sometimes we must address each situation case by case.

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What we Feel

We may initially feel overwhelmed by such complex arguments. But ...

- **We can feel confident that our personal actions are justified and valid** because they are based on sound analyses, as consistent as possible with reason and the evidence, and life affirming value choices.
- **We see ourselves playing our part in the universal narrative, becoming more aware of and more connected to the world, as we look after ourselves and our loved ones and our communities, through the many roles we adopt:**

as children, friends, lovers, spouses, parents, volunteers, teammates, workers, managers, professionals, citizens, public servants, political leaders;

and the multiple identities we have:

based eg on age, gender, ethnicity, race, caste, class, sexual preference, religion or nationality.

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7. Action: Politics

What do we need to consider in our political lives?

- Many people are disenchanted with politics, but we *can hope*: over the decades there is evidence of progress in human rights.
- Politics occurs in every group of humans: families, work places, community groups and so on.

Our political struggle is:

- to persuade opponents where their reasoning or evidence is flawed;
- Or to reduce the uncertainties in our differences, through learning, debate, research, or trial and error;
- Or perhaps to update our flawed beliefs.

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What we Learn

Our analysis of global beliefs and values in all knowledge domains,

- gives us a basis for developing rational, evidence based guidelines for business and economics, democracy and government , the environment, civil society and education;

such as:

- Centrally controlled economies don't work, but we need to manage markets;
- Totalitarianism is bad, but we need better ways to conduct our democracies;
- Regional sovereignty is good, but we need global environmental management;
- We need to promote civil society, and education in all knowledge domains.

These are reasonable guidelines that we expect most people can accept.

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What we Value

Our political decisions are based on

- our *core* philosophical values and
- the *derived, effecting* and *ancillary* values
- we adopt from science, history, religion, culture & personal practice.

Some issues are complex, but many differences are due to ignorance.

Sometimes we agree on the facts but choose different values.

Education is a key to resolving many political differences.

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What we Feel

These principles and guidelines for political action help to define our role within the universal narrative and to provide our purpose in life.

This analysis provides us with the confidence to join the struggle for justice, human rights, and to humbly, but assertively defend liberal democracy.

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9. Conclusion

We have covered

- **our theoretical analysis, in Philosophy;**
- **our practical analysis, in Science and History;**
- **our means of expression, in Religion and Culture;**
- **how this guides our behaviour, in Personal and Political action.**

Now we bring it all together.

Finally we consider:

- ***what we know, what we don't know,***
- ***what we value, and what we feel.***

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8. A Vision of a Reasonable Global Way

These beliefs and values are corrigible:

- They can all be updated in the light of new evidence, insights and reasoning.
- They are not perfect forever.
- But despite this uncertainty they provide a coherent, comprehensive story.

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What we Know

What are the known knowns? What do we know we know?

- On global, national and personal levels, most of the issues we face have known solutions *which address the uncertainties*, but we lack the political and personal will to do what we know we can and should.
- Politicians seem to be unaware of, or ignore, the crises and the solutions.
- Most of what is known by religious scholars is not known by their followers, including the historical facts of the traditions and texts and the breadth of religious interpretations.
- Much of what we think we know, and much of what our leaders know, actually reflects our own narrow-minded, distorted ignorance.
- These “known knowns” are not well known at all.

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What we Don't Know

We accept that some mysteries can't be resolved.

We can only embrace them.

- No science, religion or philosophy resolves the mystery of existence itself or answers the ultimate question: "why?"
 - Religions don't explain where the world, or its creator god comes from.
 - Religions don't explain why we should follow their rules or their god, other than bribes or threats, or servile adulation.
 - Some scientists use strange ideas of nothing to explain how we got something from nothing: they don't really explain existence itself.

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What we Don't Know (2)

- We can accept our wordless sense of reverence, wonder and awe, of nature's majesty and our insignificance, our longing for connectedness and, in some at least, 'spiritual' experiences.
- We accept a degree of faith is involved in choosing the values we espouse.
 - But ours is a minimalist faith, as much as possible consistent with reason and the evidence. We make leaps of faith only when we have to.
- Many leaders in science, religion and philosophy don't adequately face up to the dilemma of *chaos or causality*,
 - whereas in our philosophy we simply accept that our *core* choices, reflect our *core* values,
regardless of whether our choices are made freely, caused or arbitrary.

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What we Feel

How does all this make us feel?

- Science helps to explain **why we are as we are**, and is the basis for our **universal narrative**, helping us to find our place in the world.
- *Long term global* history adds to the **universal narrative**, freeing us from our limited personal perspectives, to escape from identity politics.
- Science and history's explanations are good now. They will only get better as we learn more.
- The **best** of religion and culture add richness and depth to the **universal narrative**, through multiple stories, in which we find insights into ourselves and the world.
- In our personal and political lives, this **universal narrative** gives us the **confidence** that our actions can be justified; that it is valid to join the struggle, to live, and pursue truth and justice.
- **We can find meaning and purpose in this wide context.**

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What we Feel (2)

This vision of how everything fits together is more **intellectually** and **emotionally satisfying** than any alternative. Despite the uncertainty:

- It forms a consistent, coherent, comprehensive whole;
- It provides a sound, philosophical, scientific, and historically valid view of the world;
- It provides humane guidelines on how to behave well and be good global citizens;
- It allows for rituals, 'spirituality', and public expressions reinforcing our commitment;
- It's not parochial: it's open to anyone, and respectful of other religious backgrounds;
- It provides a path for followers of traditional religions to grow in a positive way;
- It is life affirming, reducing the fear of death and give us hope for the future;
- It provides contentment otherwise unobtainable to an informed, reasonable, global citizen;
- It gives us meaning and purpose that is more satisfying than unreasonable faiths.

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What we feel (3)

It's our modern mythology, the quintessential truth, the Big Picture, the universal narrative:

- what is the case, how we can talk about it, and what we can do about it;
- how we see reality, feel about it and react in a coherent way.

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Secular Rituals

How we react is often via common, natural, **secular rituals**, which are part of our daily personal and political lives.

Rituals

- generate and reflect how we feel about and react to the world;
- provide connections to ourselves, friends family, and community;
- reinforce our role in the universal narrative; and help us to construct a meaningful life.
- On a personal level **secular rituals** include:
 - Regular celebrations, like birthdays and anniversaries;
 - Achievements in academia, sport and community service;
 - Milestones such as marriage, coming of age and death;
 - Activities of daily living, like brushing teeth, eating together & exercise;
 - Communing with nature, like bushwalking, surfing or gardening.

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Secular Rituals (2)

- On a community or political level **secular rituals** include:
 - annual celebrations: such as New Year, and various national days;
 - the rituals of business, democracy, the law, the military, sport and entertainment;
 - but mostly our routine acts of consideration and politeness as we deal with other people.

These rituals are consistent with our universal narrative.

We can claim all these beneficial secular rituals as reflections of this *Way*.

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**We have explained the vision that integrates
all domains of knowledge.**

What conclusions can we come to?

**How does this compare to the other
approaches mentioned earlier?**

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Alternatives: Gould's Magisteria

We can sympathize, partly, with **Gould's non-overlapping magisteria**.

- The domain of facts is our analysis of science and history, of *things*, what is and what will or might happen, the more static aspects of our understanding.
- The domain of meaning and value, covers the choices we make in philosophy, personal and political action, and our global vision: *events*, not *things*.
- But it is misleading to think of the domain of value choices as another static world where religion resides. There is no other world.

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Alternative Perspectives: Kant's Reason

Compared to **Kant's single categorical imperative**:

- Our core values are not derived from reason, as Kant hoped,
- but we use reason to clarify the real choices available to us.
- We need "**more than mere reason**". The **more** is choice.
- There are also many core choices we have to make, about *truth, diversity, life, love* and so on, not a single rule.

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Alternative Perspectives: Wittgenstein

We have resolved our problem with the **early Wittgenstein**, that we must be silent on values.

- He thought language constructed pictures of reality, a world of *things*.
- He couldn't draw pictures of values and purpose because they aren't *things*, they are choices.
- But we see them as active choices, as *events*.
- And despite Wittgenstein's early conclusion, **we must not be silent.**

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Alternatives: Post Modernists (1)

We can agree with the **post-modernists** that:

- Many of our ideas are social constructs that we must examine more carefully;
- We can at best strive for the truth about reality, and must allow for diversity;
- Imposing narratives on complex events is prone to oversimplification & error.
- The universal narrative that we are proposing is also social construct, despite our claim to be objective.

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Alternatives: Post Modernists (2)

But we confront **post-modernism** directly.

- Our grand narrative may be, is, a social construct but it is based on the global scientific consensus and long term global history, not parochial, short term, western imperialism.
- Our values such as **truth**, *diversity*, **love** and equality, mean we oppose **ignorant**, *closed*, **cruel** and oppressive societies.
- Our global values reflect explicit informed choices made in many cultures, not just “the West”;
- **Because in real life we have to act, despite social constructs, the uncertainties & our ignorance.**
- The valueless paralysis of post-modernism is part of the problem, not the solution.

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Alternatives: Atheists, Sceptics and Materialists

Atheists, sceptics and materialists dispute the value of religion generally because it is unscientific, involves unnatural entities and is morally bad.

Their criticisms are usually based on literalist interpretations, which many theists have abandoned, and the “bad” bits of the sacred texts, which many theists simply ignore.

(Interestingly, the narratives sceptics like are frequently science fantasy.)

Our approach is:

- as consistent with the science as possible;
- materialistic, while still allowing for mystery and moral tales;
- justifiable and corrigible;
- free of gods and spirits, but morally good;
- the basis of constructive discussion with liberal religionists.

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Alternatives: Utilitarianism

Some New Atheists (such as Peter Singer) promote **Preference Utilitarianism** as the 'good'.

But I suggest this is not enough:

- It is based on *Equality* and perhaps *Love*, and preference utilitarianism allows for our *Diversity* of preferences.
- But utilitarianism ignores, or just assumes, values such as *Truth, Reality, Life, Beauty, Responsibility* and *Hope*.

So utilitarianism to me is a **derived** or **effecting** principle, a very useful guide, especially in politics, but on its own it is incomplete.

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Is this a religion?

So how can we view alternative I have presented here?

This approach certainly has characteristics that are similar to religion:

- A focus our ultimate concerns, providing value, meaning & purpose.
- A universal narrative that describes our origins and our place in the world;
- An explanation of the origins of suffering and ways we can address it;
- Exemplary models – stories of people whose examples we can seek to emulate;
- An associated, justifiable set of values to guide our behaviour;
- Rituals for conducting and celebrating our lives;
- Embracing the mystery of existence and the beauty and majesty of the universe;
- A wealth of literature which explains, explores and expresses this *Way*;

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Court Case

In the Scientology case, the Australian High Court decided a religion must include a supernatural belief.

They defined a supernatural belief to involve:

- **more** than the reality normally perceived by our senses,
- **more** than mere reason and the evidence.

Our beliefs and values are consistent with this legal definition.

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The Transcendent

One criteria for religion is a belief in the transcendent:

- something that transcends the universe, such as a god, or something more than what we normally perceive.
- Or something that **transcends us as individuals**, ie something that is more important than ourselves, something we would sacrifice ourselves for.

To that extent,

we can say this worldview involves the transcendent, because these values are shared by many people, and many of us would risk ourselves to support these values.

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Reality and Perception

- We really do believe in a reality that is beyond our ordinary perceptions:
 - Sound scientific ideas such as Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and Poppers Falsifiability Principle lead us to accept that science will never know the true nature of reality.
 - Our notions of reality are socially constructed, so we aren't sure what ultimate reality is.

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Faith more than reason

- We choose our core values, *to some extent* on faith:
 - despite the scientific evidence that eg
 - our behaviour, beliefs and choices are caused,
 - we are in fact not all equal; and
 - despite the historical evidence of
 - selfishness, suffering and grounds for despair.
- Our core value choices such as **equality** and **hope** are **to this extent** contrary to, perhaps *more than*, reason and evidence.

We need to be even more sophisticated than this about the legal definition of the supernatural.

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More than Reason

The **more** in “*more than mere reason*” is not unreason.

The **more** is choice.

- Judges talking about religion are like the early Wittgenstein and Gould trying to picture distinct worlds, emphasising static *things*, obscuring that reality is dynamic.
- Processes are different from hardware.
- Values, morality, ethics and aesthetics, is making choices, a set of *events*,
- not some immaterial, mysterious *thing* permeating the ether.

To that extent only, this worldview involves the supernatural, *as it has been defined by the courts*.

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Religious or Secular?

So we can legitimately call this approach to life
a natural, rational religion.

- Many will prefer NOT to call this a religion because of the connotations of that word.
- You may prefer to call it a world view or a philosophy.
- It doesn't matter in most contexts.
- Either way, it is a sensible and emotionally satisfying philosophy of life.

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Conclusion ⁽¹⁾

Many people are already on the same path:

decent human beings
with a reasonable grasp of science and history
that flows into personal behaviour and politics.

The unique aspect of this *way* is:

to see this path as an adequate substitute for religion,
to assemble it into a comprehensive package, and
give it a label so we can refer to it and promote it.

We need people to help define and promote this approach,
as a “broad church” accommodating a range of views,
in which disagreement on specific proposed points is OK,
because all our current beliefs and values may change,
perhaps at the instigation of a new participant.

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Conclusion ⁽²⁾

As a start in the branding exercise we have drafted this logo:

Six knowledge domains, each with its own colour;

- the domains of philosophy, science, history & religion,
- that underlie personal behaviour and politics.

The seventh knowledge domain is culture, art & media:
infusing the other areas, drawing on them for insight, .

We discern a human figure, arising out of our culture, our identity:

- the right hand taking a theoretical analysis from philosophy;
- the left hand, reaching for expression, from religion;
– associated with the values of **truth** and **beauty**
- feet grounded in the practical analysis of science and history;
– supporting our values of **diversity, reality, life** and **love**.
- head enmeshed in individual and social action
– based on the values of **equality** and **responsibility**.

We see a direction – upwards, progress – reflecting our core value of **hope!**

It portrays integrated knowledge and action: a **Reasonable Global Way.**

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Conclusion (3)

So when a Christian evangelist or an Islamic terrorist
accuses me of having no faith,
no values, no meaning or purpose in life,
or a sceptic says there is no reason for hope,
I have something substantial to say.
I don't have to mumble about reason or science.
I know these aren't enough.

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Conclusion (4)

I can say that I *choose* a set of reasonable global beliefs and values,
which is a sensible philosophy of life,
scientifically and historically valid,
continually evolving, emotionally satisfying,
providing rich narratives defining my place in the universe,
and useful guidelines for life, and daily rituals,
which, for want of a better label, I call

A Reasonable Global Way.

Thanks for your time.

For more detail go to www.GlobalBeliefs.org. Send comments to feedback@globalbeliefs.org

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