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Truth



Minding Biblical Truth



Ken Requard

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**Chapter  
5  
Sin and  
Autonomy**

# BIBLICAL CRITICAL THEORY

How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense  
of Modern Life and Culture



CHRISTOPHER  
WATKIN





# Autonomy: AUTOS (self) NOMOS (law): self-law or 'law unto oneself.'



The heart of all idolatry in the Bible  
is the de-godding of God.

— D. A. Carson —

If God is all-knowing, then we cannot 'know'  
better than him what is good!

My take: Would you want to put your trust in a  
God who was not all-knowing?

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**Reason**

I think, therefore I am.

(Rene Descartes)

**No, you were created with the ability to reason.**



# Autonomy, Dignity, and Choice.



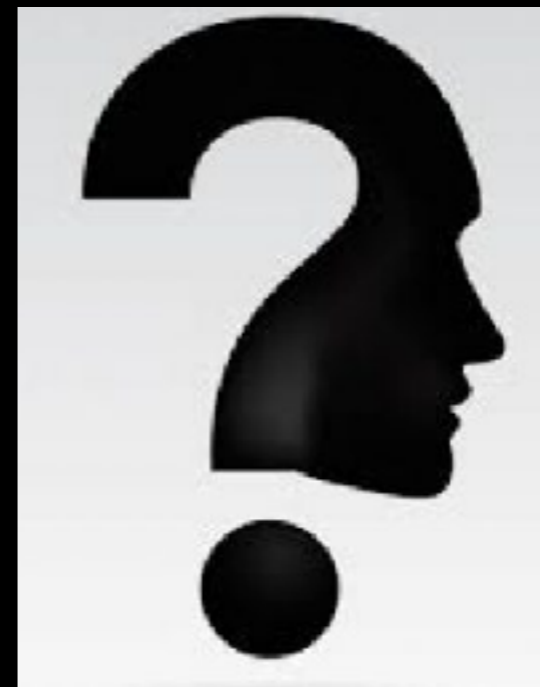
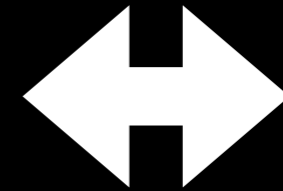
'Have the courage to use your own reason'  
- motto of the enlightenment.

## God-Man Relationship:

We are his workmanship (Acts 17:24-26)

Our lives are contingent on his ongoing work  
(Hebrews 1:3; Col 1:17)

We are created in His image and for Him (Col 1:16).



Identity ?

*It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.  
"Invictus" by Ernest Henley.*

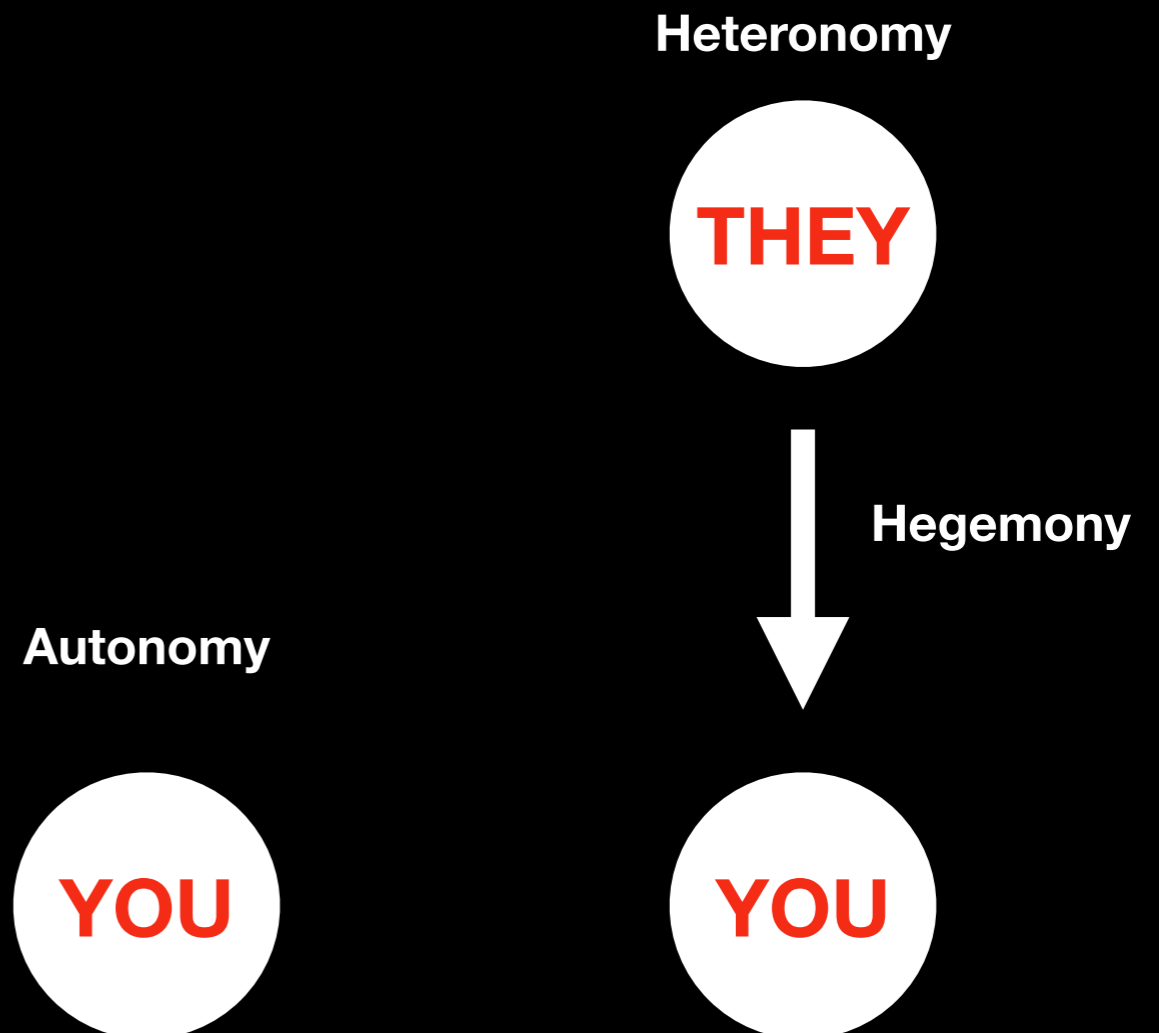


The self must lose the pretension to be its own creator (Paul Ricour).

Irony: If I define my own dignity, then there can be no objective source of dignity outside of me. This is why the post-modernist person **MUST** have others recognize their right of self-dignity.

**My take: The dignity of being made in God's image is sacrificed on the altar of autonomy.**

The further danger is that if you feel like a failure at creating your own dignity then others will confine you to the dignity they choose for you.

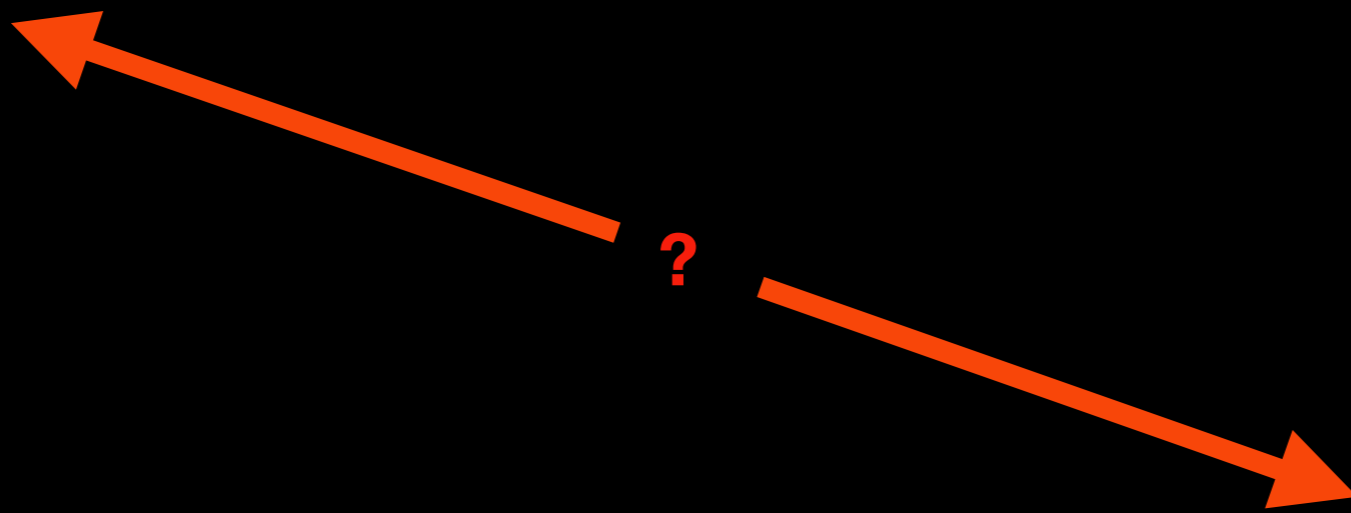




# Autonomy - Heteronomy Dichotomy

Modified from Watkin.

**Human  
Mastery of  
Autonomy**



**Heteronomy  
Mastered by  
Other people**

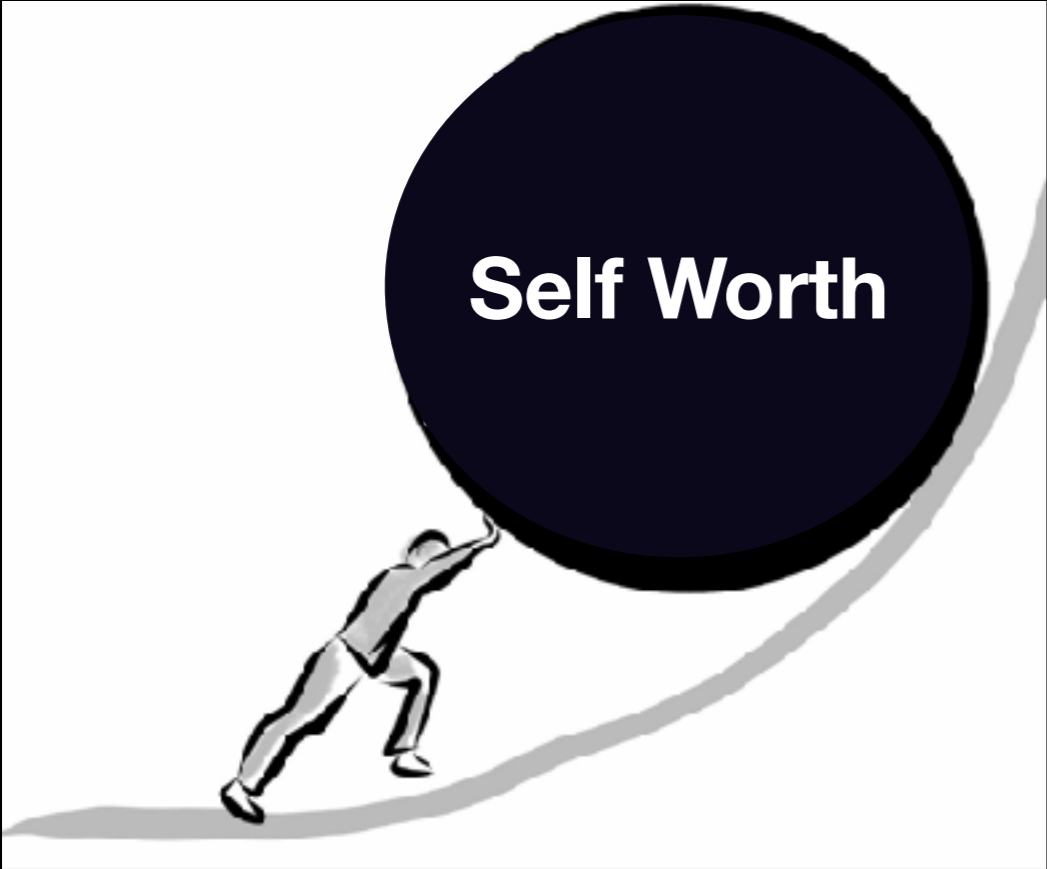
**My take: The choices are the burden of creating your own dignity or significance or being having your worth defined (usually denigrated) by others.**





# My take: What is the Root Cause of the Critical Race Theory Intellectual Movement? Hegemony of Heteronomy.

Deep down in our subconsciousness I think we 'know' or 'sense' that we can never define our own dignity or self-worth and it becomes an enormous burden.



Glorified by man



Denigrated by man



# Autonomy - Heteronomy Dichotomy Diagonalization by Trinitarian Agape (selfless love)

**Human  
Mastery of  
Autonomy**

**Freedom from self-  
definition.**

**Trinitarian Agape:  
Creative / responsive gift.**

**Freedom from being  
defined by others.**

**Heteronomy  
Mastered by  
Other people**

Watkin offers a complex quote from David Bentley Hart to define "Trinitarian agape." My paraphrase: Trinitarian agape is a selfless love among equals who are unique but find their essential identity in their unity - their relationship because without relationship they would lose their triune identity!



# Autonomy - Heteronomy Dichotomy Diagonalization by Trinitarian Agape (selfless love)

**Human  
Mastery of  
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**Freedom from self  
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**No relationship:  
No identity!**

**Trinitarian Agape:  
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**Christianity only works when it is defined as selflessly-loving redemptive community.**

# Life Together

*"It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."  
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer*



# Autonomy, Reason, and Power

Adam and Eve are deceived into 'reasoning' that they should be autonomous.



Adam and Eve had two potential opposite emotional responses to the tree: resent its presence because it is forbidden or anticipate it as a 'future gift' from God. An expanded name: The tree of the knowledge necessary to choose between good and evil. God said they must not eat from it - not that they would NEVER be able to do so. To tempt man with something that you had no intention to EVER provide would be cruel like a package under a Christmas tree that could never be unwrapped.



**How could Adam and Eve receive the gift of the tree? By knowing and living trinitarian agape-love.**



**God says Adam and Eve are ready for this.**



**Satan deceives Adam and Eve that they are ready for this.**



# The Rational - Irrational Dialectic

Created things or beings cannot define good and evil because only the creator is 'outside' the creation and can see the 'big picture' - the future results of all possible choices.

It commits the fallacy of 'begging the question:' appealing to REASON as the ground (or reason) for REASON!

*"Evil be thou my good = nonsense be thou my sense."  
- C. S. Lewis.*



**It is irrational for us to think that we have the wisdom and power to define good and evil.**

**Definition of child: "A psychotic dwarf with a good prognosis - IF nurtured into maturity."**

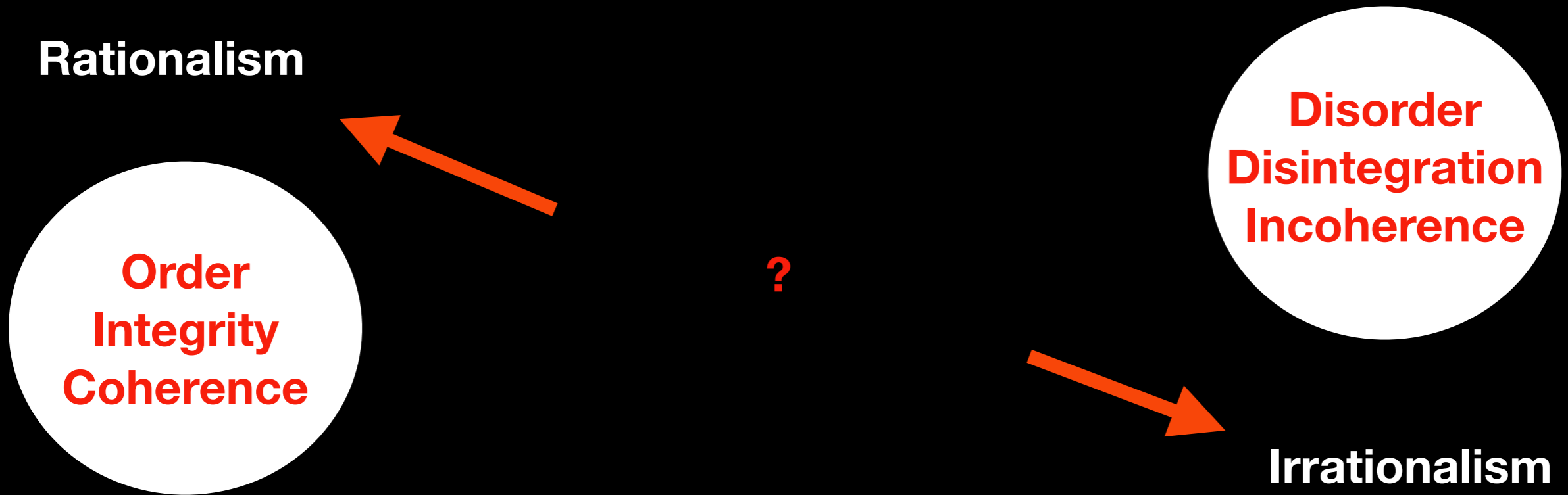
**Maturity of children requires submission to the parent to define good and evil. As God's children, we only become mature through submission to Him - holding on to Him in trust.**







# Rationalism - Irrationalism Dichotomy



*A University student at a forum proposed to the Christian speaker that we don't need order or coherence. He responded: Do you want a coherent or incoherent response to your statement?*

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"This is the terrible picture of the modern world: an agonistic reality of warring principles that can **neither reconcile nor go their separate ways, bound together** with one hand while furiously stabbing with the other."

- Watkin.

**Trinitarian state: bound together but never stabbing.**

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**"Embracing human autonomy leads both to hyper-rationalism and radical irrationalism at the same time."  
- Watkin.**

**Our great leaders of the past did not see themselves or their nation as autonomous from God.**



**Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right.**

**The determinations of Providence are always wise, often inscrutable; and, though its decrees appear to bear hard upon us at times, is nevertheless meant for gracious purposes.**

George Washington



# From Rationality to Irrationality

"The more comprehensive the reign of the rational, (the greater the risk) that it becomes its own end, a self-justifying system detached from human reality and human needs."

-Watkin.

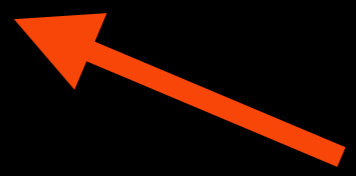


My take: Creating 'order' is usually good but when 'the rational order of man' reigns supreme, it often leads to irrational outcomes.



# The Diagonal Solution: Absolute Personality Theism

**Rationalism**



**Absolute Personality  
Theism**



**Irrationalism**

**Trusting God to make the rules allows us to  
escape the extremes of autonomous  
humanism.**



# *Autonomy and the Ethic of Violence*

*In the world of human autonomy, conflicts are inevitable and often resolved by violence. When everyone defines goodness for themselves, what is seen as good by one will be seen as evil by others. This is prevalent today. People have always had different opinions but now an opposing view is not merely wrong but actually evil.*

*Contradiction: People rebel against submission to God but if everyone is autonomous then some powerful person or small cadre of persons will demand submission to their worldview. The desire for freedom from God leads to repression by man.*



In "Being and Nothingness", Sartre recognizes that the autonomy of the individual is a threat to the autonomy of others.

When we are characters in God's story rather than he in our stories, our freedom is limited but in a way that leads to peace among men rather than conflict.

Watkin's suggested syllogism of Sartre's philosophy:

Freedom exists. (A)

God and freedom cannot coexist. (B)

Therefore, there is no God. (C)

The problem (as I see it) is that part B of the proposition is only true if you define freedom as the absence of rule by God. What if freedom is being free of defining ourselves, relying on God to define us?



**Autonomy and Cosmic Plagiarism:  
What Alvin Plantinga calls "creative  
anti-realism."**

Contradictory Views of Man:

"As gods" - as unremarkable animals

Source of our own meaning - meaningless

**Irony: "Cosmic plagiarism" - coined by Tim Keller - refers to how this anti-realism borrows from Christian theism which Nietzsche realized was a fact by referring to his cadre as "godless anti-metaphysicians." (Metaphysics refers to supernaturalism so it means to be opposed to belief in a supernatural realm.**





## *Philosopher Simon Critchley:*

*"The problem of secularization is that ... God is dead, and yet we still inhabit theological modes and habits of thinking... philosophy (which) is inseparable from religion, and inconceivable without religion. And yet we cannot believe the stories that we would like to tell ourselves."*

*My take: We can't trust an anti-realistic worldview, and we cannot be at peace or have true freedom living in an untrustworthy paradigm.*



Atheist Bertrand Russell on his resolve to live in a meaningless universe:



"Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."

My take: Riddled with contradictions: If the universe is meaningless then there are no truths on which any can agree. There is no way that anything 'firm' or 'safe' can be based on despair. How can a meaningless universe support the idea of a 'soul?'

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**“Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong  
forever on the throne,-  
Yet that scaffold sways the Future, and,  
behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping  
watch above his own.”**

~ JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL



Jesus

**When we  
hang Jesus  
who is the  
truth, we  
enthrone  
Satan who is  
the lie.**

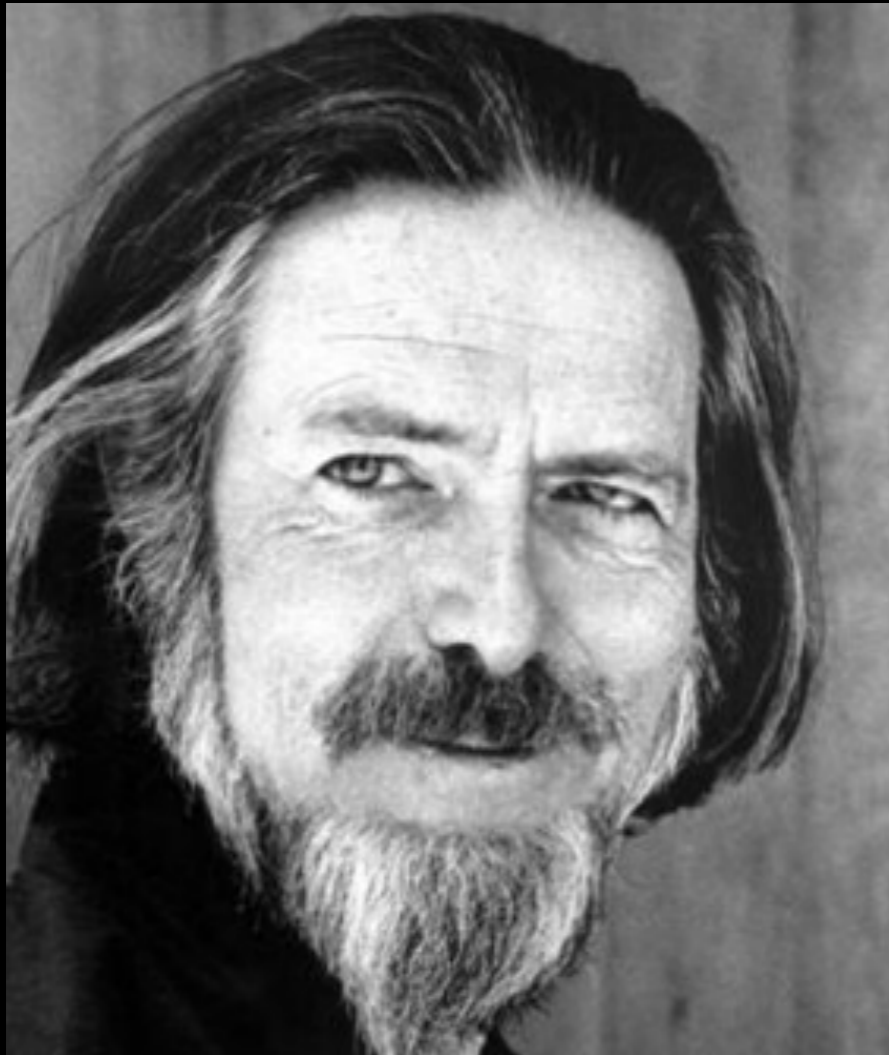


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# Facing Up to a Meaningless Universe:



If the universe is meaningless, so is  
the statement that it is so. If this  
world is a vicious trap, so is its  
accuser, and the pot is calling the  
kettle black.

— Alan Watts —

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# Making your own firm foundation?





# Maurice Blanchot on living in a meaningless universe: paraphrased:

If I hold tight to the absence of meaning, then I must renounce hope, renounce rest, renounce everything.

Absence from whom we  
love is worse than  
death, and frustrates  
hope severer than  
despair.

William Cowper

And who are we  
to love but God,  
our creator?

Jesus' separation  
from the Father  
on the cross was  
worse than death.



# The Result of Sin: Alienation and Death.

The Lightning Bolt of Alienation strikes 7 times in Genesis 3.

- God alienated from us: v11.
- We are alienated from God: v10.
- We are alienated from ourselves (ashamed): v7.
- We are alienated from our bodies: v16.
- We are alienated from each other (blamed): v12-13.
- We are alienated from the rest of creation: v17.
- Creation is alienated from itself: v18.

**ALL CREATION**  
**groans and suffers**

Romans 8:22

“A great secret pain throbs through nature.”  
- Jacques Ellul



The means of anti-realism preclude the ends:  
want autonomy? > get alienation!



Sow Autonomy



Reap Alienation

"We are the source of autonomy that needs to be addressed, both in the desires of our hearts and in the structures and figures that we have created."

- Watkin





**Autonomy Can't Keep Its Promise of the Good Life because Man cannot rightly define what is good.**

The lack of a shared vision of what is good causes more division, breaking up the family, casting out people socially, and amplifying inequality.

**"The irony is that here, too, just where we think we (modern people) are most free, we are most coerced by the dominant beliefs of our own culture."**

**- Robert Bellah in "Habits of the Heart."**



# The Narrow Place (our choice) or the Broad Place (God's choice for our good).

INDEED, HE DREW YOU  
FROM THE JAWS OF  
DISTRESS TO A SPACIOUS  
AND BROAD PLACE, TO A  
TABLE FULL OF RICHNESS.

- *JOB 36:16*

I CALLED ON THE LORD IN DISTRESS;  
THE LORD ANSWERED ME  
AND SET ME IN A BROAD PLACE

PSALM 118:5

**My take:** The irrational world where people exist according to their own standards is like a dark swamp with narrow trails bordered by quicksand where it is impossible to run freely. In several places in scripture, God invites us into a 'broad place,' an expansive safe place where we can live with joyful abandon because we choose to live by God's standards, in fellowship with Christ.

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Do you feel at peace with your view of the world? If not, is it because a part of your view is denying the presence of sin in ALL people?

**THINK ABOUT IT**



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*Thanks for watching.*