

Worldview, the credit crisis and the 'unity of life'. From 'framework' to 'deep commitment'

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The term 'worldview' harbours different dimensions that are not always clearly distinguished. A worldview can be considered to be a personal matter, but it may also be a more collective phenomenon, as it can manifest itself for example within a certain sphere of life (e.g. politics or economics) as a full-blown ideology or a more implicit 'embedded worldview'. A second distinction can be made between the dimension of a deep, existential commitment and that of an encompassing mental framework, between spiritual inspiration and a more or less intellectually coherent system. There may be tensions between these various dimensions. Having a worldview as a person may imply being in conflict with other worldviews that are embodied in certain social fields. How can people deal with these conflicts? One can easily be seduced to avoid the conflicts and to shift gears between them. With the credit crisis and economics used as an illustration, this article explores some of the techniques that people – consciously, semi-consciously or unconsciously – may employ to navigate the differences between various social domains and their inherent worldviews. In order to support people to regain some unity, the notion of worldview may still be helpful, but interpreted primarily as 'deep commitment'.

Werklikheidsbeskouing, die kredietkrisis en die 'eenheid van die lewe'. Van 'raamwerk' tot 'diep verbintenis'. Die begrip 'werklikheidsbeskouing' het minstens twee dimensies wat nie altyd duidelik onderskei word nie. Die begrip kan na iets individueel verwys, maar ook na 'n meer kollektiewe fenomeen, byvoorbeeld wanneer daar binne 'n bepaalde sosiale domein (soos die politiek of die ekonomie) sprake is van 'n rigtinggewende ideologie of 'n meer implisiete verwysingsraamwerk. Tweedens kan die begrip verwys na sowel diepe eksistensiële keuses as na 'n omvattende, sistematiese geheel van oortuigings, dus na 'n spirituele inspirasie sowel as 'n sisteem wat intellektueel min of meer koherent is. Tussen hierdie verskillende dimensies kan spanninge voorkom. Die lewensbeskouing waaroor 'n individu beskik kan in konflik wees met ander lewensbeskouings wat in bepaalde sosiale domeine beliggaam is. Hoe kan persone met hierdie konflikte omgaan? 'n Mens kan maklik verlei word om die konflikte te vermy en om bloot hiertussen oor te skakel of 'ratte te verwissel'. Hierdie artikel maak van die kredietkrisis en die rol van ekonomiese wetenskappe gebruik om te illustreer watter 'tegnieke' persone kan aanwend – bewustelik, half-bewustelik of onbewustelik – om te navigeer tussen hulle inherente werklikheidsvisies en die verskeie implisiete werklikheidsbeskouings in die verskillende sosiale domeine. Die begrip 'werklikheidsbeskouing' kan waardevol wees om 'n mate van eenheid te herwin, maar dan primêr geïnterpreteer as die manifestasie van 'n eksistensiële keuse en diep verbintenis.

The Unity of a Worldview

A possible definition of 'worldview' that has become rather well-known in Christian circles is that of Al Wolters (1985:2), 'a worldview is the comprehensive framework of one's basic beliefs about things.'

After providing this definition, Wolters sets out to explain all the key concepts used: comprehensive framework, basic, beliefs, things. There is, however, one word that Wolters does not for one moment pause to elaborate upon: 'one's'. Apparently, this word is entirely unproblematic. A worldview is something that 'one person' holds.¹

The obvious criticism to this is of course that worldviews are usually, or at least to a large extent, held by human beings together in groups, tribes, peoples, even civilizations. It is a communal phenomenon. A person who has an entirely private worldview probably wouldn't be able to survive for a long time. One could argue this point using Wittgenstein's famous 'private language argument' as an analogy. But I'm not going to pursue that avenue here, apart from

1.Cf. Naugle (2002:260) 'A worldview refers to a person's interpretation of reality and a basic view of life.'

one rather important observation. Worldviews may be embodied in a certain social domain or practice without many people actually fully endorsing it as their own personal, encompassing framework. In recent years we have come to call 'neo-liberalism' a worldview, and it was a viewpoint that exerted its attraction or pressure on millions and millions of people, especially in politics and economics (cf. Harvey 2005). Yet it would probably have been quite hard to find individual persons in those spheres who took neo-liberalism as a fully encompassing view for their own lives. Arguably, even Milton Friedman had more to say about life and well-being than neo-liberalism proper would allow for.² Perhaps we can reserve the name 'ideology' for the collectively held worldviews within certain social domains or, allowing for its often inarticulate presence, use the phrase 'embedded worldview', as suggested by Sander Griffioen (2012:23ff.).

However, there is another problem with the 'one' that interests me here: it presupposes that the person who has a worldview, is 'one', is a unity in respect to his or her worldview. Wolters' definition not only presupposes (as do other authors' definitions) that a worldview is itself a unity ('comprehensive', 'framework', etc.), invoking some degree of consistency or systematics as characteristic of a worldview,³ but that the person who holds a worldview is 'one', a unity. Although he admits that people may not always be entirely consistent, this seems to him very much an exception to the rule.⁴

It is exactly this conception of the human person as a unity that has been challenged in recent times, especially by philosophers who are often identified as 'postmodern'. But before we are carried away by all kinds of highly contextual historical narratives of premodern, modern and postmodern ages, we should realise that the very problem of 'one' already seems to be present in very ancient texts. It looms large, for example, in an old Biblical poem, Psalm 86. In this Psalm we encounter the prayer 'Unite my heart to fear thy name'. Apparently the heart is divided. Unity is still to come. The unity cannot be achieved by the Psalmist himself, by his own power. Apparently he has to pray for it, and appeal to the Lord to establish the unity. Apparently, the human heart is not one: it is two, or three, or many – who knows? The Psalm does not give an extensive analysis of why the heart is divided but assumes that the reader will recognise and understand the situation.

An entirely different example of an inner division is to be found in the famous play, *Antigone*, by the Greek poet Sophocles. Antigone's brother Polynices was killed whilst he

2.Cf. Milton and Rose Friedman (1998:x). One of the opening statements of Rose Friedman, for example, tells us that she considers herself lucky for having had 'parents who provided love and caring in my formative years that unfortunately is missing in so many homes today.' Apparently there is more to life than the pursuit of self-interest.

3.See David K. Naugle (2002), who in relation to his interpretation of worldview often speaks of 'a system of signs generating a symbolic world' (p. 291); 'a semiotic system of narrative signs' (p. 330). See also Clément Vidal (2008).

4.Wolters (1985:5) '... not only might we hold to conflicting beliefs, but sometimes we might fail to act in harmony with the beliefs we hold.'

was attacking his own city Thebes. The new king of Thebes, Creon, issues an edict forbidding his burial. The corpse should be left uncovered so that dogs and birds will eat it, as a final humiliating punishment. Antigone, however, finds herself bound by a higher law, the divine customary law, that requires family members to be buried properly. So she is divided between the law of the king and the divine law. She arrives at a clear, single-minded decision: her brother should be buried – at all costs. For her, the justice of the divine family law is higher than the laws of the state. For this act she is sentenced to death by Creon. Haemon, the king's son, secretly loves Antigone. He tries to convince his father that he should be able and willing to ponder various points of view. Perhaps by breaking Creon's law, Antigone has made a valuable and respectable decision, he says. The son tells his father: 'Don't be too single-minded, then. Don't think you have a complete monopoly of the truth. Isn't it true that people who refuse to see any other point of view but theirs, often get shown up and discredited? There is no disgrace in being able to learn, being flexible' (Sophocles ed. 1965:50). The play, and especially the character Haemon, is interesting for it presents the ability to consider different points of view as something positive, as a virtue. Those who are single-minded, both Antigone and Creon, are presented here as bordering on madness and heading for clashes and even mutual destruction. In a sense both protagonists are portrayed as abnormal (although today's reader's sympathy is drawn to Antigone). There should be no monopoly on the truth. So a 'divided heart' (a phrase we don't find in *Antigone*) is not solely an unhappy state to find oneself in, but can also be a positive thing. Should we strive to be 'one'?

Apparently, 'one-ness' is not self-evidently characteristic of humans. On the contrary, perhaps it is the divided heart which is part of the human condition, *ubique et semper*, everywhere and always. That seems to be the opinion of Max Weber (1921) who in his famous 1917/1919 lecture '*Science as a Vocation*' speaks about the 'pure experience' that leads to polytheism:

The elder Mill, whose philosophy I will not praise otherwise, was on this point right when he said that if one proceeds from pure experience, one arrives at polytheism (p. 15).⁵

Apparently, many gods are attracting us and are offering to guide us and apparently we as human beings are inclined to acknowledge their claims, although they are diverse. Proceeding from 'pure experience' we may not immediately have the awareness of 'one thing needful'. We may leave our heart divided without being troubled by it.

Does then the awareness of the divided heart – as a problem – arise specifically in the encounter with the transcendent Creator-God of whom the Biblical Scriptures speak? The Psalm may suggest this option. It speaks of the many gods: 'Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord' (Ps 86:8). There is a plurality of gods, which in the future will

5.See Weber (1988; 1921) and for the English translations as used in this article see Max Weber, *Science as a Vocation* (1922).

give way to the universal acknowledgement of the One Lord, before whom all nations will bow down. But this is a future unity, and an individual like the Psalmist is not yet able to create this situation in his heart. The unity is 'not yet'. In the encounter with the Lord, we discover our internal plurality, but now as a problem and no longer as a matter of fact or a matter of fate.

This observation is in a sense also supported by Weber (1921). He suggests that the idea of 'unity' is very much tied to the great religions, Christianity included:

The grandiose rationalism of an ethical and methodical conduct of life which flows from every religious prophecy has dethroned this polytheism in favour of the 'one thing that is needful' (p. 15).

Weber even claims that '... our eyes have been blinded for a thousand years – blinded by the allegedly or presumably exclusive orientation towards the grandiose moral fervour of Christian ethics' (p. 16).

This would imply that for Weber (1921) a divided heart is more likely to occur in post-Christian times:

Today the routines of everyday life challenge religion. Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another (p. 15).

When Christianity loses its grip on the lives of people, the possibility of holding on to different gods simultaneously resurfaces with new strength. Weber relates this to the different spheres that manifest themselves in the course of the rise of the modern world, the differentiation of life spheres. Each sphere may, so to speak, embody their own worldview (the phenomenon that was indicated above with the term 'embedded worldview'). And the individual, far from being 'one', has no option but to deal with these various spheres.

For Weber, this implies that 'one' still has to make 'one' choice, one ultimate choice. The individual has to choose one demon, one god, to give guidance to his or her life (Weber 1921:15). But at this very point, Weber may claim too much and may be suffering from a kind of Christian 'hang-over' in the modern world. For true polytheists do not choose one god, they shift between gods, they are constantly shifting gears. In this way one person may well be able to hold different worldviews, and live according to these varying views as seems fit in each particular context. People shift gears as they move from one sphere of life to another. They navigate the differences between the spheres in this way.

How does this 'gear-system' actually work? How do people shift gears from one domain to another, crossing consciously or unconsciously from one worldview to another? And what are the threats and dangers that come with these navigating abilities? When and to what extent is it wise to be a 'polytheist', and when and where does this become a danger to one's integrity, to the integrity of the 'one', one's heart, one's personality?

Weber may actually have exaggerated the issue somewhat. The emergence of various social domains, which each has its own way of doing things, does not necessarily imply a deep conflict. They may also be the expression of a healthy diversity in human life and human action. A public official has to act according to the stated rules of the governmental bureaucracy, not according to his or her own whims or even worse, according to the money that some citizens can offer him or her whilst others cannot (had he or she been a salesperson of used cars, however, he or she would naturally be very much influenced by the price a customer offers). And a pastor in a church has to love his or her flock, but not in the same way that he or she loves his or her own wife or husband (if matters are well). At public occasions we tend to dress differently from a Saturday afternoon at home. These are all different types of behaviour that we may well engage in without suffering inner conflict. In the Dutch tradition of Christian social philosophy (articulated amongst others by Kuyper, Dooyeweerd, Goudzwaard and Griffioen), this is even fully acknowledged as God-given diversity. Human responsibility comes in the plural.

But in another sense, Weber may be on to something. That is particularly the case when there are 'embedded worldviews' (Griffioen 2012) or even full-blown ideologies at work (Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen & Van Heemst 2007). In these cases one may really encounter 'warring gods', competing for our allegiance and obedience. One either has to choose or ... find other solutions, for instance by disuniting oneself, by becoming 'polytheistic'.

To be sure, when we point out the problem of worldview in this way, we implicitly make a distinction between two meanings of the word 'worldview'. The term harbours at least two dimensions that are not always clearly distinguished. It refers both to a deep spiritual or moral commitment, involving ultimate choices between good and evil, and to an encompassing mental framework, that of spiritual or moral-spiritual inspiration as well as of a more or less intellectually coherent system. These two dimensions may sometimes go together, but that may be more incidental than essential. Someone who lives on the basis of some precepts from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount certainly has a deep commitment, but he or she doesn't need to have something like a 'comprehensive framework of basic beliefs' (Wolters 1985), let alone a 'system of narrative signs' (Naugle 2002).

A contemporary illustration: The science of economics and the credit crisis

These questions may seem rather abstract at first. However, they may become very concrete if we look at the 2008 credit crisis and its aftermath.⁶ I referred earlier to neo-liberalism as an 'embedded worldview'. The force of this worldview will become apparent when we ask why economists didn't expect, predict, or reckon with the possibility of a crisis such as the 2008 credit crisis. At a somewhat deeper level, this

⁶This also refers to the concrete background of this article. In September 2010 my colleague, Ad Verbrugge, and I were asked to teach philosophy of economics in the economics department of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

question is intimately connected to another one: how is it possible that reasonable, sometimes even highly intelligent people within a certain context operate with and on the basis of presumptions that they at the same time know to be wrong or at least deficient? How can they deal with, or navigate, the fundamental differences of outlook, perhaps even the differences between worldviews, that function within different spheres?

Within the field of economics, the paradigm of the *homo economicus*, the rational chooser of preferences, is still highly influential. And yet, many, if not all, economists know that there is much more to life than rational choice theory allows for.⁷ For example, probably only an extremely small number of persons would have selected their spouses on the basis of a purely rational calculation of maximum utility. And yet, as soon as they are economists and settle in the morning behind their working desk in their office, they act 'as if' every human being actually does nothing else but calculate his or her own interests.⁸ The people who design this 'as if'-world don't actually live in this world themselves, nor – probably – would they actually like to live there, if it existed. And yet, they evoke this world in their own 'virtual reality'. And then, at a certain point of time in the afternoon, the game is over, and they switch gears back again to 'normal', or – in case they have started to believe that their virtual reality is normal – to that other state of existence, their private life. How can one do that?

People may also construct beautiful mathematical models that seem to tell a lot about economic reality. Once you have constructed them, they seem to convey the message of mastery, the message of control over reality. If you change this parameter a bit, look how the outcomes change accordingly! That there are entire sets of parameters, better identified as dimensions of reality, that are not included in the model, may have been realised at the time of construction, but once the models have been used for a while, people tend to forget this, with the consequence that the model is mistaken for reality. Or, as Paul Krugman (2009) has identified the symptoms, 'mistaking beauty for truth'.

Fateful disunity

One could specify the problem of unity and disuniting and talk about it as something that specifically concerns Christians and a Christian worldview (in line with Weber), but it may be clear from the examples that I have just given that the problem is much broader than this and somehow concerns us all, regardless of our specific worldview. We have to face the question: how can people, who to a certain extent in their private lives may have something we would

7. Or they can at least know, if only by reading the influential (but clearly not influential enough) analysis of Amartya Sen (1977).

8. One could even win a Nobel prize for applying these kinds of obviously wrong assumptions to as many fields of human existence as possible, as the case of Gary Becker shows. He applied economic decision making models (cost-benefit analyses) to as many non-economic spheres as he could think of marriage, friendship, the continuation of marriage, crime, organ donation, racial discrimination, having children, and so forth. He was awarded the price in 1992 for 'having extended the domain of microeconomic analysis to a wide range of human behaviour and interaction, including nonmarket behaviour' or, as was said as well, for 'extending the sphere of economic analysis to new areas of human behaviour and relations'.

call a more or less coherent worldview, dissociate themselves from that worldview for a certain time each day when they enter a domain in which an entirely different 'worldview' may be embodied and/or practised?

I would propose the possibility that there are certain 'mechanisms' or 'strategies' that human beings have at their disposal in order to be able to divide themselves, to dissociate themselves. As was said earlier, it is in itself not problematic when one is able to participate in various spheres, according to rules and rule-systems that are fitting for those spheres. A judge is called to a different type of behaviour than a business woman or man, and a politician to something else again. One may characterise this as being faithful to one's job, to one's calling.

However, in this section I will elaborate on ways in which people develop not a faithful, but a fateful disunity within the heart. Disunity can be fateful when it implies a partial or wholesale abandonment or bracketing of moral impulses, allowing oneself to act in one context in a way that one would certainly deem morally despicable in another. We can speak of fateful 'disunity' when someone is not really able to look in the mirror at the end of a day's work and take responsibility for his or her deeds during that day. In terms of medieval and/or Christian moral anthropology one can speak of a silencing of one's conscience [*conscientia*], one's personal connection to a moral order.

There may be at least six different ways that people can travel in this respect, techniques that can be employed in order to 'disunite'. I call them respectively (1) enchantment, (2) thoughtlessness, (3) transfer of responsibility, (4) creating distance (5) the pursuit of 'divertissements' and (6) the public-private split. In a specific Christian context one can even add a seventh: (7) the separation of the sacred and the profane.

Seven paths to fateful disunity

Enchantment (or: letting yourself be seduced)

'Why did economists get it so wrong?' is the central question that Nobel prize winner Paul Krugman posed in 2009 to his colleagues in the *New York Times* essay to which I referred above. Not long ago, he noted, economists were congratulating themselves on the success of their field. Longstanding disputes had been solved, things were under control, there was 'a convergence of vision'. Economists had come to believe in the so-called 'inherent stability of the markets'. Then he comes up with the following stunning diagnosis: 'as I see it, the economics profession went astray because economists, as a group, mistook beauty, clad in impressive-looking mathematics, for truth'.

Something similar had happened before, for example in the early twentieth century. However, the great depression of the 1930s had blown away the idea of capitalism as a near perfect system. But now again, as this earlier memory of the failure of capitalism faded, '... economists fell back in love with the old, idealized vision of an economy in which rational individuals interact in perfect markets, this time gussied up with fancy equations'.

What Krugman states here is that one can become 'enchanted', carried away, seduced by the paradigms (to use Thomas Kuhn's term) of a certain domain in which one operates.

Stated more generally the key question is: when one has a certain worldview, is one able and willing to act on it when one enters various spheres of life, or does one become enchanted, entrapped in the dynamics of what perhaps is another worldview-in-action? One can be enchanted by the beauty of a field or the sheer dynamics of a certain domain, or be so impressed by the astonishing achievements of that field or of a certain empire (political, economic, ecclesiastical or whatever) that one wants to be 'part of the game', wants to be in, not out – at nearly all costs.

Thoughtlessness

A second 'technique' that people may use to dissociate or disunite, may be what Hannah Arendt has called 'thoughtlessness'. The case that she is discussing is a very serious one: that of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official who was administratively responsible for the deportation and eventual killing of many thousands of Jews. Arendt attended the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and was struck by the impression that this man was not all 'evil' in the classical sense of the world, beset by a dark spirit of destruction, a *diabolos*, but seemed to be a much more superficial figure. In connection with this she coined the phrase 'the banality of evil' (Arendt 1963). The key element of this 'banality' is the simple refusal to think. 'Thoughtlessness', is the term that Arendt uses (Arendt 1978:3ff). Eichmann knew his worldview. He even quoted favourably the philosopher Immanuel Kant and his 'categorical imperative' that urges humans to treat every human being as you would like to be treated yourself (one of the versions of this imperative). But Eichmann simply gave up his worldview and adopted another one, that of obedience to the *Führer* and to act in such a way that he would approve of my deeds if he knew about them. What would Hitler do? In this way Eichmann abandoned the inner dialogue, which for Arendt is what 'thinking' is about. For her, to think is to be consciously 'two-in-one', to examine oneself, to question oneself, and in this way prepare oneself for an independent judgement, not to surrender one's judgement to someone else (Arendt 1978:180ff). And so Eichmann simply refused the examined life; he did not care to think about himself and the world.

Transfer of responsibility

There is another aspect to the Eichmann case, the transfer of responsibility. In a certain institutional setting people can develop a tendency to eschew their own role, deny their own range of choices, and use the rules and dynamics of the institution as a cover. In her impressive verdict on Eichmann, at the end of her report, Arendt (1963) points out what the problem is when we are dealing with responsible adults:

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it was nothing more than misfortune that made you a willing instrument in the organization of mass murder; there still remains the fact that you

carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same (p. 279).

A famous experiment in this respect was undertaken by Stanley Milgram in the 1960s (Milgram 1974). In this experiment, participants were asked to give electric shocks to other people who were subjected to a series of questions. Every wrong answer was to be answered with a shock, with the voltage gradually increasing. A supervisor assured the participants that it was all right to administer the shocks, even when the subjects were screaming with pain. Eventually 37 out of 40 participants gave the full range of shocks (450 volts!). Milgram showed in this way that in an institutional context, with clear lines of authority, people can be brought to do almost anything, things that they would perhaps never do as a private person or at their own discretion, either because of their character make-up or convictions or simply because of a lack of courage.

Creating distance

A fourth way of disuniting oneself can be called 'creating distance'. It is a way that is particularly suitable in modern society. We are related to many people in a very abstract way. Many relationships are not face to face but are mediated by media, social structures, or institutions. This is the reason why the consequences of many of our actions and the impact it may have on other people are not immediately visible to us. Zygmunt Bauman has elaborated this point at length in his analysis of the relation between 'modernity' and the Holocaust (Bauman 1989). His claim is that the horrendous Nazi crimes were made possible by the creation of distance between people's actions and their confrontation with consequences. Bureaucratic procedures and obfuscating language were key elements here. The majority of those involved in the massacre of the European Jews were directly responsible for only a very small part of the entire 'procedure', being only little cogs in the machinery. In this way the normal moral emotions of people were barred. The day-to-day relationships between Germans and Jews were gradually broken down in order to replace the real flesh-and-blood Jew next door (who happened to be quite OK) with the abstract image of the 'metaphysical Jew' of whom the country should be purged. Rational procedures seemed to invite the bracketing of moral considerations.

'Divertissements' - Pascal

A fifth way can be what Pascal called 'diversions' or distractions. If you have certain convictions or if you have a certain worldview, which demands a certain conduct in a given situation, you can escape from the implications of your view and 'disunite' yourself by just doing something else, something that is more fun. Diversions for Pascal were activities that, in the words of his *Pensées*:

... principally hinder us from reflecting upon ourselves and which make us insensibly ruin ourselves. Without this we should be in a state of weariness, and this weariness would spur us to seek a more solid means of escaping from it. But diversion amuses us, and leads us unconsciously to death. (Nr. 171)

To avoid thinking about what we are doing, we just amuse ourselves. In this way we – in the words of T.S. Eliot's *Choruses From the Rock-VI* (1936:106) – 'constantly try to escape from the darkness outside and within'. In this regard we can also employ the distinction that Alasdair MacIntyre has made between 'internal goods' and 'external goods' (MacIntyre 1981:187ff). The 'internal goods' are rewards that we get within a certain 'practice', within a professional context, that have to do with the satisfaction of carrying out that practice well, both in moral terms and in terms of craftsmanship. We experience a sense of pride and satisfaction when we play a game of chess well, regardless of whether we get a lot of money for it (which we in almost all cases will not get). 'External goods' are goods that don't have any intrinsic connection to the work that we do but serve as an external stimulus just to get results, regardless of morality or craftsmanship. I may have played a terrible game of chess, but I don't care, because someone has promised me a large amount of money. I may even have cheated, but that is fine as long as the results are OK.

From the 'diversions' of Pascal via the 'external goods' of MacIntyre we can draw a straight line toward the bonuses, the closed circle parties for employees and other ways by which bank employees are seduced to put loyalty to the company, its shareholders and the maximisation of profits above the moral quality of service delivery to clients in the financial world.⁹

Public–private split

A sixth way to make oneself able to live in various, at a worldview level perhaps even contradictory, spheres, is to separate the private sphere and the public sphere, the sphere of one's own house and the sphere of the outside world. This is a key theme in the work of Max Weber, to which I referred earlier. In his diagnosis the modern world is characterised increasingly by a split between a 'disenchanted' public world, a world of pure instrumental rationality on the one hand and a private world of values and of meaning on the other hand. People can easily employ this method to avoid questions of values and meaning within the public sphere. They can even make the private sphere into a paradise-like island, a gated city in an unsafe world in which, during other parts of the day, they may participate (and which they may even sustain).

It almost seems as if modern day liberalism has cultivated this split and made it into a worldview of its own. In the private sphere you do whatever you want, as long as you stay within the boundaries of some external, procedural rules.

A Christian way to disunite: The sacred–profane split

A final method that I would like to single out in this respect is really only applicable to Christians. It actually is a variation

⁹The docu-movie *Inside Job* shows that sexual temptations and proposals were also a systematic part of the culture of illusions and delusions, of fateful 'divertissements', that paved the way for the 2008 credit crisis.

on the public–private split, but here applied to how one deals with one's faith. There has been a strong tendency in Christian circles to limit the impact of one's faith to Sundays and the world of liturgy and worship. But as soon as it is Monday, one lives as if Sunday has never occurred, and act according to the standards of the surrounding environment. Many Christian authors have identified this problem and given an analysis of it. Just to mention two: Lesslie Newbigin analysed the fact–value divide in his seminal *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989), whilst Bennie van der Walt wrote extensively on an integral Christian worldview (Van der Walt 1994, 2007, 2010).

Why does 'unity of life' still matter? - Authenticity

Is this disunity indeed a problem? Today we live in an 'Age of Authenticity', as Charles Taylor claims (Taylor 2007:473–504). Whether this is only a Western phenomenon, I cannot tell. But let us suppose it to be true at least in those regions of the world where much of the shape of modern life is still determined – the West and the often rather Westernised elites in other parts of the world. Characteristic of this age is the widespread occurrence of the idea that 'each of us has his or her own way of realising our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority' (Taylor 2007:475). 'Do your own thing' is the guiding maxim of this (in Taylor's words) 'ethic of authenticity'. It seems that this age will give a deathblow to the very idea of a worldview. For is a worldview not exactly that, 'a model imposed on us from outside'?

However, it seems to me that right now we are moving into a second stage of the 'age of authenticity'. The first stage is (was) that of liberation, the freeing of ourselves from the 'Great Stories' of modernity. No more ideologies, be they socialist, liberal, racist or religious. Any 'comprehensive framework of basic beliefs' seems to be oppressive, so I have to stay clear of all of them. Long live plurality, including a plurality of beliefs. If I need anything like a basic framework, I may as well make one myself. Sociologists today are characterising this attitude as *bricolage*, the putting together of different stones by a bricklayer. And I don't have to be consistent either.

However, for a new generation, the demise of ideologies is now a matter of an already quite distant past. Now the dim awareness grows that many different kinds of things are imposed on people anyway, but that they don't have the means to analyse exactly what it is that is imposed on them and why should they anyway? Students of economics have, for example, been studying the textbooks on economics as if they contain the ultimate truth. The textbooks don't present themselves as partisans of any worldview, but as objective. And yet, under the surface, it is clear that a particular picture of humans and of interhuman relationships is offered, the *homo economicus* who orders his or her preferences

and calculates his or her losses and profits. So in a way a worldview is still 'imposed on them from outside'. But how is it possible to recognise this? The problem is broader than that of hidden ideology in textbooks. In the contemporary Western world an entire way of life, the consumer lifestyle, is somehow imposed on us. We are supposed to live as *homo economicus* – it is not enough to take him or her as an axiom in our mathematical models. However, is this a good way of life? Will it give any fulfilment in the future? How can we live a meaningful life, as 'authentic' human beings, not just the life that our culture seems to prescribe? How can I remain 'myself'? The fear that the self may lose itself becomes more and more pervasive.¹⁰

It may well be that here a new role for something like 'worldviews' is to be found, not as a 'comprehensive framework' but as exploration of more meaningful over against less meaningful or even meaningless ways of life. In this context, it is precisely authenticity that may require some sort of anchoring in a larger picture or in a more lasting basis. Perhaps one cannot be 'authentic' if one lives from moment to moment, without any distinction between what one considers as really important and what is just trivial. Charles Taylor speaks in this context about 'inescapable frameworks' that provide the possibility for making qualitative distinctions, distinctions between 'higher' and 'lower', between 'more meaningful' and 'less meaningful' (Taylor 1989:3–24, esp. 17; 1991:ch. 4).

A 'worldview' may then be quite similar to what Plato at the end of the *Republic* in the so-called *Myth of Er* calls 'patterns of life' that the souls have to choose before they can actually enter their earthly existence (Plato 614b–621b). In an 'age of authenticity' we find ourselves in this earthly existence in the very same situation in which Plato saw humans before their earthly life: we have to choose a pattern of life, a 'lifestyle'. In the *Myth of Er* it becomes clear that it is indeed quite impossible to live life simply as a sequence of unrelated, momentary fragments, and that there is 'path-dependency': my choice today influences my choices tomorrow. That is not only for the obvious reason that if I choose today to be a carpenter, it will be very hard to acquire the necessary skills to become a medical doctor later in life, but for the more important reason that the choices that I make today become part of who I am, they become part of the process of my habituation. If I choose today to become a 'profit-maximizer', it will gradually become my habit to think and act in those terms. But what may be the consequences in the long run? In Plato's myth there is someone who chooses to become a tyrant, because it seems good to have all the power! But then he finds out that to be a tyrant is part of a 'pattern of life', in which you should also be prepared to kill your own children as soon as they become a threat to your power or emerge as rivals. Choices of life patterns have their consequences. But how then to make right choices? This question is highly urgent, especially in an individualised age of authenticity.

10. Aptly phrased by Manuel Castells (1996:23), quoting an essay by Raymond Barglow, as 'Totally isolated, the self seems irretrievably lost to itself.'

If I say that worldviews can perhaps play a new role in this situation, I am not referring to more or less intellect-driven 'comprehensive frameworks' but to reflections on various 'patterns of life'. I am referring rather to 'deep commitment' than to a 'system'. Of course, in the articulation of these ways of life, it is possible that intellectual dimensions can be expressed and thought through. But it is also possible that it will merely be limited to one or two rather fragmentary insights.

The exploration of the 'patterns of life', of the deep commitments they entail, may take different forms. I see at least two. The first form may be that of narratives: novels, myths, parables, biographies, theatre plays, movies and so forth.¹¹ In many (if not all) of these kind of narratives, ways of life are explored and analysed, some of whom may seem attractive at first, but then turn out to be quite harmful to oneself or others, whilst other ways of life may be just the other way around. In the background of the stories one can also sometimes discern deeper issues that come close to what is called 'a worldview'. There are stories in which the protagonist may actually act on an almost Darwinian view of life in which the survival of the fittest seem to be the deep dynamics of the universe. However, in an 'age of authenticity' the primary focus is probably going to be on the question whether a certain story helps me to understand life in general and my life and the existential choices that I have to make in particular.

A second form that 'worldview' may take in an 'age of authenticity' is that of personal examples and personal inspiration. The key question may not simply be what your 'encompassing framework' is, but: 'by whom are you inspired?', 'who is your great example?', 'who is your hero?'. This line goes a long way back in Christian history, of course: whom are you going to follow? Do you choose the *imitatio Christi*? Or are there other leading stars in your life? Next to storytelling, this second form requires personal, face-to-face encounters.

What then is at stake in either the stories or the encounters? Not primarily the 'encompassing framework' or the 'system of signs', but rather what touches you, by what or whom you are touched in such a way that whatever you do and in whatever situation you find yourself, you would refuse to give it up. Whether this is an 'encompassing framework' or just a fragmentary moment of insight or the memory of an impressive encounter with a significant other, is not as relevant as the question whether one sees this as something of defining value for what one aspires to be. It may be a conversation with a high school teacher, it may be the memory of one's parents, it may be Jesus, it may be just a simple story from the Bible, it may be a song or a poem, but it accompanies you from day to day.¹²

11. David Naugle (2002) rightly emphasises the narrative character of worldviews, but still talks about a 'system': 'a semiotic system of world-interpreting stories', p. 291 (o.c) and *passim*.

12. Recently, in an upgrading course for high school teachers, we shared these kind of memories or 'self-defining moments'. It continued through the night and the outcomes were amazing.

The aim of elaborating on 'what touches you' as a central concern is not to figure out 'one's basic beliefs', but to invite a student, or oneself, to acknowledge the inner divisions, the many voices that make themselves heard within us. The key question then becomes that of discernment: what voice is for me the true voice, the voice I am listening to, my voice? In terms of Max Weber it is about the choice of one's 'demon', one's personal guiding spirit. This discernment involves inner struggle: am I in different contexts, in different spheres, still in touch with my voice? And can I recognise the temptation to 'disunite'? How can I remain faithful to my ultimate concern? The 'unity of heart' mentioned in Psalm 86 is something that has to be achieved from day to day.

Ultimately, what is at stake when we talk about 'deep commitment' is what one loves, to what or whom one is ultimately committed in such a way that one's concrete choices of actions are directed to it. What one loves is what one does; what one does is what one loves. 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Mt 6:21).

Concluding: Worldview 'New Christian Style' (with some educational suggestions)

Given the situation just adumbrated, it is my belief that the idea of worldview still is of great importance. To be 'united' or 'integrated', and not to live according to entirely contradictory standards, is at the heart of an 'ethics of authenticity'. I believe that the idea of worldview is highly relevant exactly at this point. But the primary emphasis is then going to be more on 'deep commitment' than on an intellectual phenomenon of building a comprehensive framework.

Of course, a more elaborate framework may still emerge, either in one's head or as a communal matter. As soon as one starts to reflect on commitment and on choices, and on the various contexts in which one is called to act, and if one in those various contexts wants to achieve a basic level of consistency, one starts to build a more encompassing framework – nothing wrong with that. One has to ask oneself questions about, for example, differences and commonalities between economics and the private sphere, between civil society and the market, etcetera. There is nothing wrong with intellectual engagement and analysis.

However, the preliminary question that needs to be discussed is about the deep inspiration, the deep, existential commitment that may be fragmentary but calls for enactment, for a certain degree of faithfulness. What or whom do you love? What, or whom, do you really care about? Where your heart is, there your treasure will be.

For a 'worldview' conceived in this way to function there are certain preconditions, certain basic attitudes that one has to practice. I see four of them:

1. Dialogue, inner and outer. The first precondition is the willingness to engage in dialogue, both an inner dialogue (what we could call 'conscience') and outer dialogue, with one's fellow citizens, peers, colleague, family members, and co-believers. The inner dialogue is what Hannah Arendt would call 'to stop and think' (Arendt 1978:4), to allow oneself to be 'two-in-one' (Arendt 1978:185ff), to ask oneself what one is doing, to interrogate one's own heart: what are you up to, heart? In this way one can explore the various voices that are present in oneself, and see which ways are harmful, and which way has a future (cf. Ps 139:24). One has to allow oneself to be 'two-in-one' in order to reach the 'united heart' that Psalm 86 is talking about. Often, it may be necessary to extend this dialogue to others, who may help to figure out what really motivates one, what one is doing. No one is an island!
2. Wisdom. Wisdom is the insight into what love, one's commitment to the good of others, implies in this concrete situation (in this social domain, in this profession, for this person). Love makes you think! It doesn't make you blind.
3. Courage. Courage is the concretely embodied thinking, the coming together of the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. Walk your talk, even if it may bring you in a minority position. The inner struggle will yield concrete choices, concrete action.
4. 'Spirituality' or 'fear of the Lord'. In the Biblical tradition the 'fear of the Lord' does not refer to anxiety, but to the joyful and humbling recognition that you are not king of the universe, and that there is a God before you, after you, over against you, behind you, next to you, above you, underneath you. This God is primarily the unique dialogue partner, who really is able to clarify one's inner struggles. The inner dialogue really gets an entirely new dynamic when the searching of the ways that are present in one's heart starts with the invitation to this Great Partner: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart!' – I have already implicitly referred to Psalm 139 above.

It is especially at the first point that education comes in. Education should in part be directed to the invitation into this dialogue. The whole range of narrative forms can be of great help here movies, poems, novels, myths, parables, biographies, tragedies; from classical, biblical and contemporary sources. Moreover, there is sometimes the possibility of staging an encounter with inspiring people, who within the context of today's society have managed to maintain their 'authenticity'. In this way, one can support students in 'testing' worldviews, in testing the various 'patterns of life' that Plato talked about, hoping that they may find ways of *agape*, ways of justice and *shalom*.

For students in economics, for example, movies such as *Wall Street* (Stone 1987) with the famous speech of Gordon Gekko on '*Greed is good*', docudramas on the Enron-scandal and the documentary *Inside Job* can be very helpful to bring to the fore the existential problems and choices that students face.

In Gekko's (Stone 1987) speech there certainly are almost metaphysical themes, for example when he speaks of greed:

'Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind (n.p).'

However, what Gekko stands for is also a pattern of life that eventually takes him to the isolation of prison. One can analyse the movie in terms of its 'comprehensive framework'; it will certainly yield important results. One should in any case touch on the deeper level that Gekko loves nobody but himself. Enlarging the options for love beyond the self – that may be a beautiful task for (Christian) education.

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