

“One Ring to Rule Them All” Refuting Philosophical Materialism

by Nancy Pearcey

In high school, Dylan was a natural leader. Everyone expected him to succeed. But when he went to college, his Christian convictions were assailed by doubts in virtually every class.

In his science classes, Darwinian naturalism was an unquestioned assumption. In English class, a postmodern attitude treated all truth claims as disguised power plays. In psychology, the prevailing theories – from Freud’s psychoanalysis to Skinner’s behaviorism – treated Christianity as a symptom of mental pathology.

Dylan’s church had taught the basic gospel message, but it had not equipped him to meet the challenges of the university classroom. Deeply shaken, he dropped out of college and began to rethink whether Christianity was even true. Dylan eventually found his way to L’Abri, the ministry of Francis Schaeffer in Switzerland. There he finally met Christians who could teach him how to “destroy false arguments and every arrogant opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (II Cor. 10:5).

Research shows that Dylan is not alone. **When studies asked young people why they left the faith in which they were raised, the reason given most often was unanswered doubts and questions.** The researchers were surprised – they expected to hear stories of emotional wounding and broken relationships. But the top response from young adults themselves was that they did not get answers to their questions....

Thankfully, the Bible offers a universal strategy we can apply to all worldviews and systems of thought. The key passage is Romans 1. In this chapter, Paul unfolds the drama of divine-human interaction that is the source of all belief systems. The great plot line of history is

the tug-of-war between God and humanity. On one hand, God reaches out to humanity to make himself known. On the other hand, humans desperately seek to suppress that knowledge by creating God-substitutes.

The Romans 1 narrative provides the theological grounding for all apologetics [as well as for natural moral law]. All arguments fall into two basic categories:

- (1) We test a philosophy *externally* to see if it matches the real world; and
- (2) We test it *internally* for logical consistency.

Romans 1 teaches that those who reject the transcendent Creator will “exchange the glory of God” for something in creation. They create idols – anything put in the place of God as the ultimate reality.

The prevailing philosophy in the academic world today is **materialism**. Matter is considered the eternal, uncreated, self-existent source of everything that exists. In effect, it is a God-substitute. The secular thinkers that Dylan studied in college – Darwin, Marx, Freud, Skinner, Foucault, et al. – were all materialists.

To be consistent, materialism must deny the reality of anything not material. Human beings are reduced to complex biological machines with no will, mind, or soul. Richard Dawkins says humans are “survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed” by their genes.

But such a simplistic, one-dimensional view does not line up with what we all

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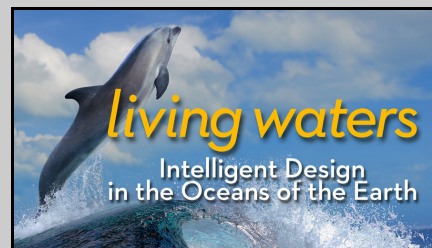
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“One Ring To Rule Them All”

(Continued)

know about human nature. No one lives like a robot. We make choices from the moment we wake up in the morning....

You don't have to be a Christian to recognize that materialism does not fit what we know about human nature. Any philosophy that exchanges the glory of God for something in nature always leads to a lower view of humanity. This is *reductionism* – reducing humanity to something less than their full humanity.

Every non-biblical worldview also fails the second test. Why? Because a reductionist view of humanity must account for the mind or cognitive faculties. But materialism reduces thinking to neurons firing in the brain.... But what does that imply for materialists'

own views? To be consistent, they must apply the same reasoning to themselves: their own materialistic assumptions are not a product of rational thought, but only of neurons firing in their brains. In that case, why should we give their ideas any credence? As apologist Greg Koukl puts it, this is how a worldview “commits suicide” – when its own definition of truth discredits itself.

This is called a *self-referential absurdity*, and Romans 1 tells you why it works and how to apply it to any nonbiblical worldview. Find the reductionism: that's the point where it will commit suicide.

Nancy Pearcey is a best-selling author, a fellow at the Discovery Institute, and a professor and scholar-in-residence at Houston Baptist University.

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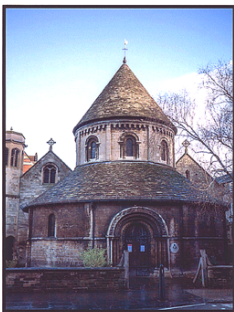
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The Round Church in Cambridge, built by crusaders circa 1130.



John Wesley monument



C. S. Lewis' home, The Kilns, in Oxford

For more information contact...

Millie Atkinson at milliecatkinson@gmail.com

The Areopagus Calendar

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A presentation by

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Vice-President of Mission Outreach,
Probe Ministries

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Wednesday, October 14th

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