

Schuon Lectures 2026 – Day 2

“Are Perennialist Against the Modern World?”

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Nota bene: This lecture is the second of four lectures in a series entitled: “Schuon’s Path of Truth & Beauty: The Perennial Philosophy in the Modern Era.”

The original lecture was presented with PowerPoint and contained over forty illustrations. This transcription of the audio portion of the lecture cannot convey all of the information on the slides. Interested readers should view the entire film recording of the lecture.

Are Perennialists against the modern world? We hear it again and again: the Perennialists are against the modern world. That accusation is misleading. The primary quarrel is not with the modern world, it is with “modernism.” The distinction is important. What is modernism? I did an internet query. It tells us that “modernity is characterized by a belief in progress driven by science, technology, and rationality which replaced older religious and traditional world views.”

I opine for my purposes that “modernism is the consequence of the false premises of the modern world view that are characterized by a loss of a sense of transcendence and a loss of the sense of the sacred.”

Is western society losing its belief in God? That question is an interesting place to start. We will continue talking about that question. One way to address this is with opinion polls. We will ponder the wisdom of a noted philosopher, Mark Twain. He reminds us, “there are three types of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics.” Alas, I am obliged to present statistics to illustrate what I believe is a rapid loss of faith in the West. The only certainty is that the pollsters will disagree with me and within themselves over the specific numbers.

As we measure the loss of faith of the entire US population, we will compare the 1950s with 2024. In 1950, only 2% of the population were atheists or agnostics; now, it is at least 15%. Those who go to church regularly show a drop from 60% in the ‘50s to ≤20% now. I remember that time well. What about the younger generation? It is much worse: agnostic and atheist are 24% of the population. Those who attend church regularly are less than 10% of the population. About half of those ages 18 to 24 are unchurched (no religious affiliation) and they are also much less engaged in social institutions.

In the U.K., it is much worse. 55% of the entire population are irreligious. This next result is extremely important. 33% of the self-identified Anglicans polled doubted the existence of God. So, they consider themselves to be Anglican, but they doubt the existence of God.

What is the overall picture of religiosity in the West? The majority of the pollsters agree that the statistics tend to underestimate your religion. When you ask someone if they are religious, they tend to say “yes.” They are embarrassed to say they do not believe in God—their faith is weak. The higher the level of education, the greater the loss of faith in God. The majority in Western Europe have been irreligious for many years.

Will the picture change during times of worldwide violence? This is a question with currency. Prognosticators disagree. We can talk about that on Day Four. Their debate often misses the more important question: “Has faith in modern science been responsible for displacing faith in God.” We will return to this question again and again.

What is the difference between science and “scientism?” Science is theoretically content to report what it discovers through a systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical world. Therefore, *in principle*, perennialists have no quarrel with science. The primary quarrel is with scientism. Scientism is characterized by the belief that *empirical* science is the ultimate source of truth **and** that its methods should be applied to all areas of human inquiry.

What is scientism? An Internet query returned this summary of scientism:

- asserts that the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) are the most authoritative, or even the only valid, ways of obtaining knowledge about reality.
- emphasizes the scientific method, which relies on empirical evidence and repeatable experiments, as the only reliable path to truth.
- involves extending the reach of science into areas where its methods and conclusions may not be appropriate, such as ethics, metaphysics, or aesthetics.
- often dismisses or undervalues other fields of inquiry such as philosophy, religion, and the humanities, suggesting they are less reliable or even irrelevant.
- is associated with a reductionist view, where complex phenomena are reduced to purely scientific explanations.

In effect, scientism denies the existence of God and any metaphysical dimension because realms beyond the physical world cannot be measured and quantified.

Schuon provides some context: “Modern science tries to explain the quintessential properties of our bodies and the intimate functioning of our souls, but it does not know what existence and intelligence are. Consequently, given its principles, it cannot be otherwise than ignorant of what man is.” In a different context Schuon adds, “A science that penetrates the depths of the infinitely great and the infinitely small on the physical plane and yet denies other planes is a greater evil than ignorance, pure and simple. It is in fact a counter science and its ultimate effects cannot but be deadly.”

My journey of discovery. Today's initial critique of modernism and scientism is largely based on my personal journey of discovery. During my freshman year of college, I was speeding through life at 90 miles an hour on a fast track to medical school. The first semester of my sophomore year I took organic chemistry, developmental anatomy, and second year physics. The combined curriculum included the prevailing hypotheses underlying three important theories related to the human state: the origin of the cosmos ("The Big Bang Theory"), the origin of life (the "Primordial Soup Theory"), and Darwin's "transformist evolution theory."

I began that semester with a blind faith in fact in science. I was not searching for metaphysics. But during that semester, I came to realize that modern science could not answer certain fundamental questions about life—I had serious doubts. My mind exploded with its own "Big Bang." That semester changed my life. We now travel to the autumn of 1969, my sophomore year, and examine the key questions that troubled me. We will later contrast these views to the answers provided by the Perennial Philosophy.

So, how does science explain the origin of the cosmos? Big question. A Belgian priest, Georges Lemaître, posited the Big Bang Theory in 1920. It says that the origin of the cosmos is the result of a Big Bang that occurred 13.7 billion years ago. The whole universe suddenly came into existence in a gigantic explosion out of a single, infinitesimal, super-atom that expanded outward. Lemaître called it the "primordial atom." Here is the consequence. This hypothesis says that the Big Bang is the original source—the original source—of:

- all space
- all matter
- all energy
- time, as we know it

So naturally, my question was "what was before the Big Bang?" We will come to that in due time.

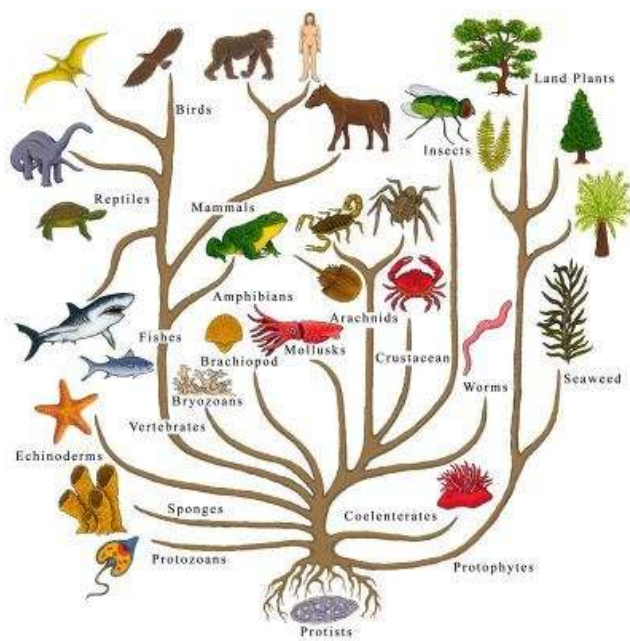
How does science explain the origin of life? In the 1920s, two scientists separately hypothesized the "Primordial Soup." This theory assumes a hypothetical set of conditions in Earth's oceans 3.7 billion years ago—the so-called Primordial Soup. The theory posits that a series of random chance chemical reactions between simple organic molecules took place in the Primordial Soup and eventually led to the first one-celled life forms. These one-cell life forms eventually turned into self-replicating life forms. These first origin of life forms and the eventual self-replicating mutation are now considered to be the so-called "root" of transformist evolution.

Next, what is Darwin's theory of “transformist evolution.” “Transformist evolution” and “transformism” are early 19th Century terms about the change of one species into another.

Charles Darwin’s 1859 publication, *Origin of the Species*, details his proposition that all species of life have descended from a common ancestor as the result of “natural selection.” Darwin theorizes that through the process of natural selection—“survival of the fittest”—those plants and animals with traits better suited to their environment are more likely to survive and reproduce, passing on the advantageous traits to their offspring.

He posits that there are variations in the species in the natural world and those variations start the process of natural selection and eventually become humankind. This theory is still generally accepted and considered a fundamental scientific concept. It is notable, I believe, that Darwin did not publicly speculate on the actual origin of life, only the theory of transformist evolution.

Darwin drew the first “evolutionary tree,” or phylogenetic tree. The diagram, left, is a modern interpretation. The tree is intended to trace the progressive evolution from one cell organisms to human beings. The tree purports to trace how various species are related through a common ancestor and highlights the branching points when various kingdoms, phyla, classes and orders of living things diverged from each other.



Fossil records identify both the developmental anatomy of the life form **and** the time each life form first appeared in creation. This is important. Transformist evolution requires sufficient time between the sequential appearances in the fossil record for the process of variation in natural selection to take place.

Where are we? What's the big picture?

- A **“Big Bang”** is the source of all space, all matter, all energy, and time.
- The first life form—a one-celled organism—emerged by accident from a **“Primordial Soup.”**
- **Transformist Evolution** explains how a one-celled organism evolved into *homo sapiens* through variation and natural selection.

Together, these three theories attempt to explain:

- **The origin of the cosmos**
- **The origin of life**
- **The origin of the human state**

My first question: “What is the origin of the Big Bang?” It is hypothesized that time came into being at that moment of explosion. So, what happened before the Big Bang? Modern science is silent. The silence on these questions is in part because it is impossible to measure anything that precedes the Big Bang, given that it is the source of matter, energy, time as we know it. So science just ignores the question.

I was discussing this lack of a decent answer, or even addressing the question, with a friend of mine who is a scientist. He said the scientific theorists are not particularly concerned with the origin, or what I call “the how and why of things.” They are content that the laws of physics explain various observable phenomena. His quote, “the structure of the atom or the many different types of energy, such as they are, are a consequence of the laws of physics, such as they are. As far as modern science is concerned, the objective is to discover the laws of physics and explain the phenomena based on those laws.”

So, what is the origin of life? As we know, the Primordial Soup Theory posits that one-celled life originated in Earth’s oceans by chance 3.7 billion years ago. The conditions that are thought to be present at that time can be replicated in a laboratory. For over a hundred years, scientists have tried to reproduce the *abiotic synthesis* of life in the laboratory. Even if you have all of the components of a cell at hand, extract them from a living cell and try to recombine them to create life, you cannot do so:

A living thing cannot be created by assembling non-living material components.

Modern science *failed* to prove the Primordial Soup Theory. Now to be fair, empirical science cannot prove the impossibility of the Primordial Soup Theory, but its improbability created doubts that compelled me to search for answers outside of physical science.

Does physical science support transformist evolution? Variations and natural selection within a single species are obvious. And, there are evident similarities between different species, including genetics. All living organisms on Earth, including humans, animals and plants, share many of the same fundamental genetic building blocks of life. However, there are enormous gaps—missing links—throughout the evolutionary tree when attempting to trace the progressive transformations from a one-celled organism to *homo sapiens*.

So, does the fossil record support transformist evolution? Assuming life emerged 3.7 billion years ago, very few fossils appear on the evolutionary tree until the so-called

“Cambrian Explosion.” [Circled in red in the diagram in the PowerPoint.] That geologic period began approximately 540 million years ago and lasted for 15 to 20 million years. The moniker “explosion” is apt because many complex life forms suddenly appeared in the fossil record during the Cambrian period, including practically all major animal phyla. When viewed on a 24-hour scale, the period within which the Cambrian explosion occurred (15 to 20 million years) would translate to a few minutes. Is this short period of time sufficient for all the differences between phyla and classes of life to take place? One of Darwin's key hypotheses is the evolution of fish into amphibians. An expert opines:

Let's take an example of the transformation of fish into amphibians. The transformation of fins into legs. What is necessary if a fin should be transformed into a leg? The fin is a pure organ of movement as the weight of the fish is carried by water. In the amphibian which wants to walk on solid ground, the leg must not only move forward but must bear weight. In addition, it needs a shoulder girdle, pelvic girdle, upper arms, forearms, thighs, fingers, etc. This requires a whole new construction. However, any change of the fin that goes toward a leg is not an improvement of its function as a fin. Every movement. No miracle then that paleontologists have found no fossils of the countless intermediate forms ('missing links'), which should have existed according to Darwin's ideas in all areas of life.”

Reinhard Eichelbeck

There is also the impediment of the simultaneous transformation of fish breathing underwater to amphibians breathing in the air, with the myriad physical changes that entails. And all of these transformations supposedly took place during the short time of the Devonian Period, between 415 to 355 million years ago.

The “4 most glaring gaps” in the scientific explanations. If you take nothing else from my talk today, remember these “4 most glaring gaps” when you are talking to someone about the transformist evolutionary theory.

1. **Nothingness** (before Big Bang) → **Non-living matter** (after Big Bang)
2. **Non-living matter** → **Vegetative life** (one-celled organisms, plants)
3. **Vegetative life** → **Animals** (sense-perception, consciousness)
4. **Animals** → **Humans** (rationality, language, objectivity, contemplate the Absolute)

Assuming the human form can result as theorized by scientific explanations, how did humankind become endowed with an innate intelligence? What Schuon called subjectivity that can reason and a soul that can conceive transcendent realities. Schuon:

To exist is no small matter; the proof is that no man can extract from nothingness a single speck of dust; similarly, consciousness is not nothing; we cannot bestow the least spark of it on an inanimate object. The hiatus between nothingness and the least of objects is absolute, and in the last analysis this absoluteness is that of God.

So, how do scientists now support transformist evolution? They argue that the similarity of the genome sequence is the only evidence that they need to prove transformist evolution. For example:

- ≈ 94% of human genes are common to dogs
- ≈ 80% of human genes are common to all mammalian species
- ≈ 60% of human genes are common to fruit flies and bananas
- ≈ 50% of human genes are common to all plants

Source: The National Human Genome Research Institute

But what does this prove? First, the fact that 94% of human genes are common to dogs explains why we like dogs! More importantly, the common genetics with all creation proves what the American Indians already knew:

***mitákuye oyás'īn* = “all things are related” or “we are all related”**

The genetic similarities do not explain the “four most glaring gaps,” nor the questions arising from the improbably short time frames in the fossil record. Do these facts tend to prove Divine origin or transformist evolution? We will keep asking that question.

My reaction. My initial reaction was shock that modern science chose to give credibility to the theory of transformist evolution, given the myriad of missing links in the fossil record and the improbably short time periods for significant evolutionary mutations to take place, not just within species, but among widely divergent phyla and classes of animals.

My conclusion: Modern science presents a binary choice: either accept transformist evolution or accept the idea of a transcendent God Who created the universe. I concluded that accepting transformist evolution was not so much the result of scientific discoveries as the consequence of a predominantly secular society and the absence of a sense of the sacred, which is the necessary prerequisite, in my opinion, for the widespread acceptance of these modernist theories.

So, what did I do? Well, immediately following the completion of my organic chemistry, developmental anatomy, and advanced physics courses, I changed my major to religious studies. I found the answers to my questions in the Perennialist School of thought, primarily Schuon. I was very fortunate. There were two prominent Perennialists who were

professors in the religious studies department at Indiana University, Joseph Epes Brown and Victor Danner.

Why am I presenting a logical critique of modern science? The definitive critique of modern scientism must be based on immutable metaphysical principles: only on that basis can one see the limitations encoded in the very assumptions that modern scientism makes regarding the nature of reality and the nature of the human condition. Why, then, take the time to critique specific theorems “from within,” so to speak, given that most scientists will argue with my conclusions? My spiritual awakening began with a rejection of prevailing scientific theories about life and consciousness based on logic. Metaphysics came later.

I “hypothesize” that there are others who are also traveling through life at 90 miles per hour, as I was, without being aware of “the gravity of the human condition.” I hope my elementary logic may encourage a few individuals to slow down and critically assess prevailing scientific theories. If so, it will further the purpose of my lectures this week: to challenge individuals to ask themselves “what are my core beliefs and how do I want to live my life?”

Where are we? We know why I rejected science or should say scientism. Now we will turn to Schuon's views on the nature of reality and modernism. We will then consider the ways modernism has changed the prevailing world-view. In order to understand Schuon's critiques of modernity, it is important to understand his view of Reality, with a capital R. Passages from four spiritual traditions provide an overview.

What is the Taoist view? Schuon had a deep appreciation for the opening verse of the *Tao Te Ching*, which proclaims the ineffability of Absolute Truth. “The *Tao* that can be expressed is not the eternal *Tao*.” The calligraphy shown here is Schuon's calligraphic rendering of the opening verse that he drew in 1928.

What is the Plains Indian view of Reality? Black Elk, Lakota, we heard yesterday: “We should understand that all things are the work of the Great Spirit. We should know that He is within all things; the trees, the grasses, the rivers, the mountains, all the four-legged animals and the winged peoples; and even more important we should understand that He is also above all these things and peoples.”

Yellowtail, Crow: “When we pray, we always say, ‘*Acbadadea*, Maker and Creator of All Things, we pray to you. You are above and beyond all things that are in this world, and You are also present through all things and continue to give life to this world.’”

Schuon, on Plains beliefs: “The Great Spirit is the hidden Reality of all things. There are two truths to combine: in one sense, He is infinitely above us and we are totally other than Him, and in another sense, He is within us and He is nearer to us than we ourselves are.”

What is the Vedic view of reality?

“God alone is real; the world is illusion; the soul is not other than God.”

(*"Brahma satyam, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah"*)

This three-part Vedic maxim is one way to summarize Schuon's view of Reality.

Schuon: “The entire message of the *Upanishads*, of the *Brahma-Sūtras* of Bādarāyana, and finally of Shankara, may be condensed into the following words: ‘*Brahman* alone is real; the world is illusion, *Māyā*; the soul is not other than *Brahman*.’”

God alone is Real—“*Brahma satyam*”—is like the words of God to Moses at the time of the Burning Bush. It is the divine Reality announcing “I am.” But this Reality can be envisaged according to a perspective of Transcendence (beyond all things) or according to that of Immanence (within all things).

Schuon explains: “The essential here is discrimination between *Ātmā* and *Māyā*, between Reality seen as “Self”, and relativity seen as “cosmic play”: since the Absolute is infinite—failing which it would not be the Absolute—it must give rise to *Māyā*, a “lesser reality” and in a sense an “illusion.” *Ātmā* is the Principle—the Primordial Principle, one might say—and *Māyā* is manifestation or effect.”

What is the Sufi view of Reality? Schuon uses the Sufi term “**The Five Divine Presences,**” and also “The Degrees of Reality” to explain the cosmic and meta-cosmic hierarchy of Reality. They are, in descending order:

- 1. Beyond Being:** the Godhead, the Divine Essence, the Supreme Principle,
the Absolute Unqualified
- 2. Being, the Creator:** the Personal God, the Uncreated Logos or Spirit
(the prefiguration of Manifestation in the Principle)
- 3. Spirit, the Angelic:** Celestial, Avataric Realm, the Intellect, the Created Logos or Spirit
(the projection of the Principle in Manifestation)
- 4. Soul, the Psychic Realm:**
- 5. Body, the Corporeal Realm:** the realm of matter, energy, and form

How can we compare modern science to ancient ideas? Schuon:

Modern science is right about many physical points and even about certain psychological points, and indeed it is impossible for this not to be so, given the law of compensations; in other words, it is impossible for modern men not to be right on certain points where ancient men were wrong. . . . What is decisive in favor of the

ancients or traditional men in general, however, is that they are right about all the spiritually essential points.

How does modern science ignore metaphysical relativity? Schuon explains:

Modern science is a totalitarian rationalism that eliminates both Revelation and Intellect, and at the same time a totalitarian materialism that ignores the metaphysical relativity—and therewith the impermanence—of matter and the world. It does not know that the supra-sensible, situated as it is beyond space and time, is the concrete principle of the world, and consequently that it is also at the origin of that contingent and changeable coagulation we call ‘matter.’ It shuts itself up entirely in physical reality—or unreality—and there it accumulates an enormous mass of information while at the same time committing itself to ever more complicated conjectures. Beginning with the illusion that nature will eventually yield its ultimate secret and allow itself to be reduced to a mathematical formula, this Promethean science repeatedly collides with enigmas that invalidate its postulates and appear as unforeseen fissures in its laboriously erected system; these fissures get plastered over— great phrase, “plastered over”—with fresh hypotheses, and the vicious circle continues unchecked.

Where are we? We know Schuon's view of Reality and critique of modern science.

What about Schuon's views on human consciousness?

The first ascertainment which should impose itself upon man when he reflects on the nature of the Universe is the primacy of that miracle that is intelligence—or consciousness or subjectivity—and consequently the incommensurability between these and material objects, be it a question of a grain of sand or of the sun, or of any creature whatever as an object of the senses. . . . It is not our personal thought which preceded the world, but it is absolute Consciousness, of which our thought is precisely a distant reflection; our thought which proves to us that in the beginning was the Spirit. Nothing is more absurd than to have intelligence derive from matter, hence the greater from the lesser; the evolutionary leap from matter to intelligence is from every point of view the most inconceivable thing that could be.

All of these considerations are linked with what we have said before on the phenomenon of subjectivity, in that this phenomenon proves by its mere existence the inanity of the evolutionist and transformist thesis. Just as neither consciousness nor *a fortiori* intelligence can spring forth from “matter”—whatever explanation be given for this latter—neither can that modality of consciousness that is love be

derived from it, always for the simple reason that the greater cannot come from the lesser; and it is a question here of an infinitely greater.

Does Schuon deny all evolution? No. He explains: “We do not deny that evolution exists within certain limits as is indeed evident enough. But we do deny that it is a universal principle, hence a law that affects and determines all things, including the immutable. . . . What has to be categorically rejected is the idea that truth evolves or that revealed doctrines are the product of an evolution.”

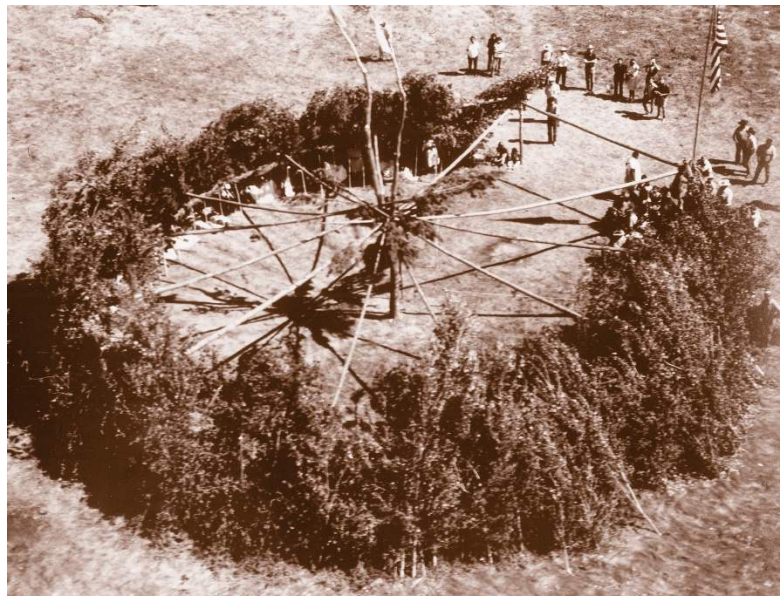
We continue with Schuon’s insights on evolution:

Evolutionism is no more than a kind of substitute: it is a compensation “on a plane surface” for the missing dimensions. Because one no longer admits the supra-sensible dimensions, one seeks the solution to the cosmogonic problem on the sensory plane and one replaces true causes with imaginary ones which, in appearance at least, conform with the possibilities of the corporeal world. In doing this, one forgets what man is, and one forgets also that a purely physical science, when it reaches vast proportions, can only lead to catastrophe.

How do Perennialists view the origin of the cosmos and the human state?

We begin with the Plains Indians:

The “feathered sun” [below left] represents the cosmos for the Plains Indians. The Great Spirit is at the center, and the archetypes radiate *ab intra*, that is “from the center out,” and travel through the different concentric circles of the cosmos, from Heaven, to the animic sphere (the world of the spirits, for the Indians), to the outermost rim, which is the physical world. The feathered sun is both an image of the cosmogenesis, as well as of the return of all things to the Great Spirit.



The Sundance Lodge [above right] represents the same symbolism. The center pole of the Sun Dance lodge is the place where the Great Spirit touches the earth—the center of universe. The periphery of the lodge represents the material world. The poles that connect the center pole to the periphery represent the emanation of power from the Divine to the human and the spiritual journey of each individual to return toward God.

In complete contrast, evolutionary theory denies the Center and denies the radii, and tries to reduce every question of causality to just the curve of the periphery (the material world). We also find this symbolism in many forms of their material culture, including the bolo that I am wearing today,

Why is evolution a replacement for the theory of emanation? Schuon explains:

In reality, the evolutionary theory, to stress this point once again, is a replacement for the traditional theory of emanation and consists in denying the periphery-center relationship. Thus, the very existence of the Center, source of emanation, and of the radii leading to it, is denied, and an attempt is made to situate every hierarchical relationship on the curve marking the periphery: instead of proceeding upward, starting from the corporeal level and passing through the animic sphere, then mounting toward realities at first supraformal and finally principial or metacosmic, an evolving hierarchy is imagined, advancing from matter, through vegetable and animal life, to human consciousness, itself considered as some kind of transitory accident.”

What was original man like?

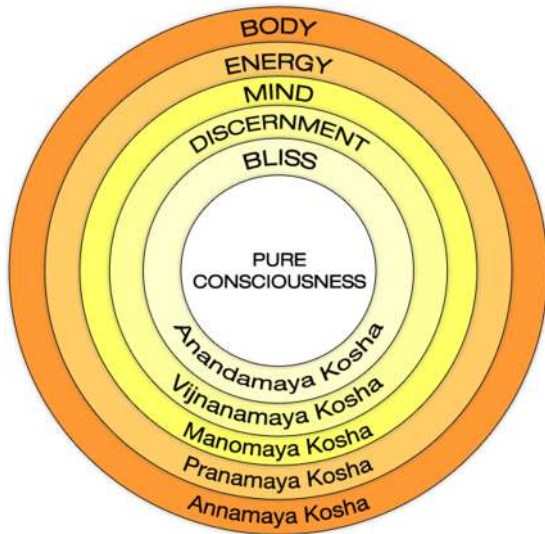
Original man was not a simian being barely capable of speaking and standing upright; he was a quasi-immaterial being enclosed in an aura still celestial, but deposited on earth; an aura similar to the ‘chariot of fire’ of Elijah or the ‘cloud’ that enveloped Christ’s ascension. That is to say, our conception of the origin of mankind is based on the doctrine of the projection of the archetypes *ab intra*; thus our position is that of classical emanationism — in the Neoplatonic or gnostic sense of the term — which avoids the pitfall of anthropomorphism while agreeing with the theological conception of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Schuon explains that original man was a quasi-immaterial being, enclosed in an aura that was still celestial. The chariot of fire that carried Elijah to Heaven, without bodily death, or the cloud that enveloped Christ at his ascension, are analogous to this “celestial aura” which enclosed original man.

What is the Hindu doctrine of the *koshas*? Schuon summarizes:

We do not ask physicists to be content with an anthropomorphic and naive

creationism; but at least it would be logical on their part—since they aim at a total and flawless science—to try to understand the traditional onto-cosmological doctrines, especially the Hindu doctrine of the ‘envelopes’ (*kosha*) of the Self (*Ātmā*); a doctrine that, precisely, presents the Universe as a system of circles proceeding from the Center Principle to that extreme limit which for us is matter.



Representation of the *koshas* radiating
ab intra from Pure Consciousness

What does Schuon say about the Big Bang? The Big Bang theory is plausible from a metaphysical point of view. Schuon does not have a quarrel with the idea:

Assuming that the origin of the physical universe was a cosmogonic ‘explosion’ (the ‘big bang,’ in the jargon of certain Anglo-Saxon scientists), there will be no difficulty in also assuming that it is the supernatural place of the explosion that remains the center of space; the universe will then have the form of an expanding spherical shell situated between two voids, one ‘interior’ and one ‘exterior’. The divine ‘event’ was like the sudden crystallization of a super saturated chemical solution, following upon the ‘overfull’ existentiating tendency of Being; the explosion coinciding with the origin of time, which finally will be ‘reabsorbed’ in the apocatastasis or *mahāprālaya*. And it is after the initial creative ‘Be!’ that the creative ‘incarnations’ were able to arise, in successive waves, at once by ‘emanation’ and by creation *ex nihilo*, and not starting from a pre-existing substance.”

The gross state (Creation) emerges from within the subtle state much like a crystal suddenly emerges from within a supersaturated solution. The moment when our gross physical universe emerged from an enveloping subtle state was a Big Bang, symbolically and physically.

Where are we? We have a view of consciousness, modern science, creation, and evolution. Next, we consider “how has scientism changed the prevailing world view.” We then consider conflicting views of the course of human history posed by modernity versus traditional belief.

How has scientism changed the prevailing worldview? People are so impressed with the apparently unending flow of spectacular scientific discoveries that science takes on an aura of infallibility—a blind faith. There is an implicit belief that modern science—which was originally supposed to explain only material bodies—is also adequate to explain philosophical questions.

In consequence, these are now widely held beliefs. You will recognize all of them.

- transformist evolution is an accepted fact and universal principle
- humanity will continually evolve toward various forms of individual empowerment and enlightened consciousness
- society will experience a perpetual progress toward a material utopia through a continual stream of scientific inventions modern society already is wiser and superior (more virtuous?) than those who came before
- science contains the solution to society's problems, not religion
- religions need to adapt to the changes in the modern society.

What is modernism's role in the treatment of indigenous cultures? The modernist perspective has historically viewed traditional cultures as outdated and “primitive,” even harmful. This has led to policies and practices designed to liberate indigenous people from their traditional beliefs and lifestyles by assimilating them into modern civilization, often at the expense of their unique cultural identities, languages, and traditional ways of life. The American Indian experience is just one example of the tyranny of the modernist world-view toward many minority collectivities around the world over the past 500 years.

How does modernity view the course of human history? Today's prevailing ideologies view the course of human history as a progression from a benighted past to an enlightened present. The result—modern civilization—is the first culture in history to believe that mankind is involved in an evolutionary process that moves from matter to an enlightened human consciousness. These modernist beliefs conflict with the traditional ideas of the course of human history. To decide which view is correct we first review the end point of transformist evolution before turning to the traditional views of cosmic cycles.

What is the end point of transformist evolution? Schuon explains:

With a thoughtlessness that is infinitely culpable when they call themselves believers, some people imagine a superman who is destined to take man's place, and who consequently would also render Christ's humanity derisory; and a certain genius imagines at the end of the evolutionist and progressivist chain something he is not ashamed to call 'God' and which is no more than a pseudo-absolute decked

out in a pseudo-transcendence; for the Eternal will always be Alpha and has always been Omega.

What is the traditional understanding of cosmic cycles? Schuon's point of view on history and modernity coincides with the traditional understanding of cosmic cycles. The variations of this doctrine in religions are "diverse, but nonetheless homogeneous with regard to the essential."

What is the Plains Indian view of cosmic cycles? Schuon recounts Black Elk's view of cosmic cycles and its similarity to the Hindu view of traditional cycles:

A most striking feature of the North American branch of the Primordial *Sanatana Dharma* is the doctrine of the four *yugas*: the sacred animal of the Plains Indians, the buffalo, symbolizes the *mahā-yuga*, each of its legs representing a *yuga*. At the beginning of this *mahā-yuga* a buffalo was placed by the Great Spirit at the West in order to hold back the waters which menace the earth; every year this bison loses a hair, and in every *yuga* it loses a foot. When it will have lost all its hair and its feet, the waters will overwhelm the earth and the *mahā-yuga* will be finished. The analogy with the bull of Dharma in Hinduism is very remarkable; at every *yuga*, this bull withdraws a foot, and spirituality loses its strength; and now we are near the end of the *kali-yuga*. Like the orthodox Hindus, the traditional Red Indians have this conviction, which is obviously true in spite of all the mundane optimism of the modern world.

What is the Hindu view of cosmic cycles? Hinduism offers a well formulated expression of this universal doctrine. Everything "comes from Brahman" (transcendent God) and everything "returns to Brahman." Schuon:

The doctrine of Relativity or of "Illusion," or of the "Divine Magic," is joined to that of cosmic cycles: the world, or the manifested universe, the creation, therefore, is like the "breathing" of the Divinity; it is essentially subject to phases, to "divine lives," as the Hindus would say. . . . Each *maha-yuga* is divided into four ages or *yugas*, namely: the *krita*-, the *treta*-, the *dvapara*- and the *kali-yuga*; these are, analogically speaking, the golden age, the silver age, the bronze age and the iron age. Doubtless, there are variations in the different cosmological symbolisms, but the fundamental pattern remains identical; be that as it may, what matters essentially is to know that the world is an "optical illusion," and that this illusion necessarily comprises modes and cycles, as is shown, moreover, by the modes and cycles of nature around and within us.

What do the Abrahamic traditions say about cosmic cycles? Well, the three Abrahamic monotheisms all agree on the symbolism of a continuous fall from an original Golden Age.

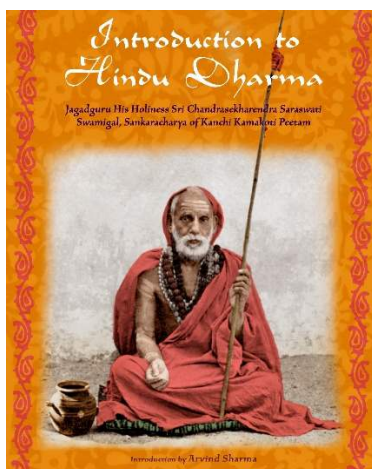
Schuon observes: “Semites take into consideration only one cycle, so they are right in accepting only one creation; total cosmic manifestation, co-eternal therefore with God, could not be of interest to them.” It is simply a different point of view.

Where are we? We have an overview of the conflicting views of the course of human history posed by modernity versus traditional beliefs. We next consider how various traditions view modernity. We then hear Schuon provide a context for comparing traditional civilizations to modernity.

What does Hinduism say about modernity? Schuon: “By all traditional data we know that we have been in the *Kali-Yuga* for a long time already; ...we are in an advanced phase, a phase whose description in the *Puranas* corresponds in the most striking fashion to the characteristics of our present epoch.”

This passage from the *Vishnu Purana* clarifies:

Riches and piety will diminish daily, until the world will be completely corrupted. In those days it will be wealth that confers distinction, passion will be the sole reason for union between the sexes, lies will be the only method of success in business, and women will be the objects merely of sensual gratification. The earth will be valued only for its mineral treasures, dishonesty will be the universal means of subsistence, a simple ablution will be regarded as sufficient purification. . . The observances of castes, laws, and institutions will no longer be in force in the Dark Age, and the ceremonies prescribed by the Vedas will be neglected. Women will obey only their whims and will be infatuated with pleasure. . . men of all kinds will presumptuously regard themselves as equals of Brahmins [priests].



The picture shown at left is the 68th Jagadguru Shankaracharya of the Kanchipuram, Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswathi Mahaswamigal (1894–1994). He and Schuon corresponded for decades in writing and through intermediaries. The Jagadguru’s discourses confirm Schuon’s remarks on Hindu doctrines and Schuon’s opinions about the present state of modernity.

Hopi prophecies about modernity. In 1948, tribal elders appointed Thomas Banyacya to disclose secret prophecies. This is an excerpt from an address Banyacya gave at the United Nations:

The white man, through his insensitivity to the way of Nature, has desecrated the face of Mother Earth. The white man's advanced technological capacity has occurred as a result of his lack of regard for the spiritual path and for the way of all living things. The white man's desire for material possessions and power has blinded him to the pain he has caused Mother Earth by his quest for what he calls natural resources. . . .This must not be allowed to continue for if it does, Mother Nature will



react in such a way that almost all men will suffer the end of life as they now know it. The Great Spirit said not to allow this to happen even as it was prophesied to our ancestors. . . . Today almost all the [Hopi] prophecies have come to pass. Great roads like rivers pass across the landscape; man talks to man through the cobwebs of telephone lines; man travels along the roads in the sky in his airplanes; two great wars have been waged by those bearing the swastika or the rising sun; man is tampering with the Moon and the stars. Most men have strayed from the path shown us by the Great Spirit. For Massau'u alone is great enough to portray the way back to Him.

I first met Thomas Banyacya, above, in 1993 in Chicago. He was Mr. Yellowtail's roommate at the 100th Anniversary of the Congress of World's Religions. My wife and son and I later visited him in his home in Kyokotsmovi, Arizona. Banyacya corresponded with John Murray, who wrote on behalf of Schuon, starting in 1946, the year before these prophecies were revealed. John Murray was very close to Schuon and was one of Joseph Brown's best friends.

Does modernity encourage the seven deadly sins? Slightly different lists of the “seven deadly sins” were compiled by various Christian theologians. This list was compiled by Pope Gregory I in the 6th century and Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century:

Pride: Excessive belief in one's own abilities and failure to see God's grace. The root of all sins.

Greed: Excessive desire for material possessions or wealth.

Lust: Excessive sexual desire.

Envy: The desire to have what others possess.

Gluttony: Overindulgence, particularly in food and drink.

Wrath: Uncontrolled anger and hatred.

Sloth: A lack of self-discipline and spiritual laziness.

I leave all of you to think about the extent to which these attitudes permeate our society.

Do the Ten Commandments warn us about modernism? The most important of the Ten Commandments is, "Thou shalt have no gods before me." Has our society placed modernist ideologies before God? Consider Seyyed Hossein Nasr's observation:

The deification of historical progress has become so powerful and such a compelling force that, in the souls of many human beings, it has taken the place of religion. Nowhere is this more evident than in the role that the theory of evolution plays in the mental and psychological life of those scientists who claim to look upon all things from a detached scientific point of view but who react with violent passion when the theory of evolution is discussed critically from any quarter—whether it be logical, theological, or scientific. In many ways and for profound reasons, evolution has become the substitute for religion for many people who defend it with complete intolerance while claiming to be very reasonable and tolerant beings without any strong religious beliefs.

Do Perennialist recognize that some good exists in the modern world? Yes. Schuon does not deny that good exists in the modern world. He offers this context:

When the modern world is contrasted with traditional civilizations, it is not simply a question of seeking the good things and the bad things on one side or the other; good and evil are everywhere, so that it is essentially a question of knowing on which side is the more important good and on which side the lesser evil is to be found. If someone says that such and such a good exists outside tradition, the answer is: no doubt, but one must choose the most important good, and it is necessarily represented by tradition; and if someone says that in tradition there exists such and such an evil, the answer is: no doubt, but one must choose the lesser evil, and again it is tradition that embodies it. It is illogical to prefer an evil which involves some benefits to a good which involves some evils.

Where are we? Is our society moving upward or downward? To answer, it is helpful to have an overview of some other aspects of modernism. I have had to essentialize and identify only three of what Schuon termed "the guises of modernism":

Relativism

Materialistic society

Environmental consequences of modernism

Each of us must then make the binary choice of whether to accept modernism or traditional doctrines.

What is Relativism? This is a problem that pervades society. There is complete confusion. Relativism posits that there is no single objective and universal truth that applies to

everyone. Truth, morality and beauty are seen as a matter of perspective and individual beliefs and tastes, or social context. *De facto*, relativism denies all religions because it denies the existence of revealed Truth. Relativism is the inevitable consequence of a predominantly secular society. Understanding the tyranny of relativism is crucial—it infects most of the young adults I know to one degree or another. Schuon explains:

Relativism sets out to reduce every element of absoluteness to a relativity, while making a quite illogical exception in favor of this reduction itself. In effect, relativism consists in declaring it to be true that there is no such thing as truth, or in declaring it to be absolutely true that nothing but the relatively true exists; one might just as well say that language does not exist, or write that there is no such thing as writing. In short, every idea is reduced to a relativity of some sort, whether psychological, historical, or social; but the assertion nullifies itself by the fact that it too presents itself as a psychological, historical, or social relativity.

What are the consequences of relativism? This is one of the two most important points for each of you to take away from today's discourse:

Relativism engenders the spirit of rebellion and abolishes the sense of sin.

Schuon:

Relativism engenders the **spirit of rebellion** and is at the same time its fruit. The spirit of rebellion is a chronic malady directed against Heaven and against all that represents Heaven or is a reminder of it. When Lao-Tse said that “in the latter times the man of virtue appears vile,” he had in mind this spirit of rebellion that characterizes our century; yet, for psychological and existentialist relativism, which by definition is always out to justify the crude ego, such a state of mind is normal, it is its absence which is a sickness; hence the would-be **abolition of the sense of sin**.

The sense of sin is really the consciousness of an equilibrium that surpasses our personal will and which, even while wounding us on occasion, operates in the long run for the good of our integral personality and that of the human collectivity; this sense of sin is a counterpart of the sense of the sacred, the instinct for that which surpasses us and which, for that very reason, must not be touched by ignorant and iconoclastic hands.

What is a materialistic individual? We use here the prevalent meaning in society of a “materialist:” a materialist is a person who is primarily concerned with accumulating material possessions and wealth, often at the expense of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values. Materialistic individuals drive economic growth and consumption; but materialism

also leads to competition for natural resources, environmental degradation, increased inequality, and a focus on social status rather than inner satisfaction.

Does materialism permeate our society? To what extent are you a materialist?

What are the environmental consequences of modernism? Nations are developing critical technological products and infrastructure based on “*RARE earth minerals*.” The race to exploit “rare earth minerals” largely ignores environmental protections. How can rare and environmentally damaging minerals be an essential ingredient for our future?

Every nation aspires to attain the standard of living enjoyed in the United States, thus industrialization and competition for natural resources is rampant the world over. If everyone on Earth lived like residents of the U.S., we would need all the natural resources of about **5** Earths to sustain the current global population, *not* counting for population growth. This is because the U.S. consumes more resources and produces more waste per capita than the global average. Important scientific advances will not overcome this constraint.

There is no end in sight to the intense global competition for natural resources. It is difficult to foresee sustainable solutions to avoid environmental desecration.

Compare prevailing attitudes for immediate gratification and short-term decision making to the principle of “Seven Generations,” a philosophy deeply rooted in the traditions of many Indigenous cultures. It emphasizes the importance of considering the impact of decisions on the next seven generations, or approximately 150 years into the future.

Is there global warming? The debate about the extent to which our civilization is responsible for global warming misses the larger reality:

We are poisoning the bed we sleep in!!

The desecration of earth's natural wonders is the result, as Schuon said earlier, of this loss of the sense of the sacred and the resulting materialism that characterizes our society. Schuon: “Human civilization has ravaged God's creation in an unprecedented fashion, just as it has created vast inequalities of wealth and warfare on a previously unimaginable scale.” This is so important it bears repeating: “Human civilization has ravaged God's creation in an unprecedented fashion, just as it has created vast inequalities of wealth and warfare on a previously unimaginable scale.”

Does professional life claim the whole of man? Schuon:

[I]n the name of humanitarian egalitarianism, vocations are crushed and geniuses wasted, by schools in particular and by official worldliness in general; every spiritual

element is banished from professional and public life... On the other hand, by a kind of compensation, professional life more and more assumes a 'religious' air in the sense that it claims the whole of man, his soul as well as his time, as though the sufficient reason for the human condition were some economic enterprise and not immortality.

Now we ask . . .

Which theories require a greater leap of faith?

The modernist beliefs:

- life and human intelligence were created by chance
- there are no higher states of reality
- empirical science provides the solutions to today's problems
- we are in the midst of a continuous evolutionary progress toward both a material utopia and an enlightened humanity

or,

The traditional doctrines:

- there is an all-powerful God who is both above and beyond our material world and within all things
- humanity is spiraling in a downward trajectory that will end in a Divine Judgement
- each individual is responsible for his or her own salvation and the great Revelations offer us the means to save our souls

What does Schuon say about how to reform mankind?

The world is miserable because men live beneath themselves; the error of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant contradiction, this attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity, can only end in the very abolition of what is human, and consequently in the abolition of happiness too. Reforming man means binding him again to Heaven, re-establishing the broken link; it means tearing him away from the reign of the passions, from the cult of matter, quantity and cunning, and reintegrating him into the world of the spirit and serenity, we would even say: into the world of sufficient reason.

Recall: what did we learn from the Plains Indians? A universal belief in a Great Spirit. A sacred Spirit is above all creation, but it also is within all creation, resulting in the certainty that there is a profound interconnectedness. The "Seventh Generation" principle requires individuals to consider the impact of each decision on the next seven generations.

Schuon on the Indian character: “courage, self-domination, dignity, generosity and piety.”

What is the wisdom from an American Indian paragon? Ohiyesa:

It is my personal belief, after thirty-five years’ experience of it, that there is no such thing as “Christian civilization.” I believe that Christianity and modern civilization are opposed and irreconcilable, and that the spirit of Christianity and of our ancient religion is essentially the same.

Now imagine you were a Plains Indian in the late 19th century. You are witnessing the utter devastation of your sacred way of life, including the environmental, cultural and metaphysical collapse of all you hold dear. The dominant society is largely bereft of morals.

Are we in a similar position? How do you respond? We will ponder responses on Day 4, including Schuon’s advice to serious seekers. On Day Four, we will hear Schuon answer dozens of questions on the spiritual life, including such questions as “what happens when I die,” to “how can I avoid damnation.” to “what is life.” And you will hear his stories—it will be a bit like having a general audience with Schuon.

I close the same way as the Plains Indians:

Mitákuye oyás’iŋ: “All things are related” or “We are all relatives”

Q&A:

Q: You posed a question yesterday but did not give answer. Will the picture of society's loss of faith change during times of worldwide violence? What is your opinion?

A: Of course, this is controversial. A number of people believe that if there is some major war then large collectivities will return to religion. Some prognosticators believe that is impossible. Some believe that it is possible. Jacob Needleman was the editor for Penguin and a well-known academic. In the 1980s he wrote to Schuon and had two interviews with him, followed by the men passing letters back and forth. Two of the letters are in the book of Schuon's letters. Needleman believed that a major event, what he calls a "shock," would turn people back to religion. Schuon responded—this is a question that has come up before—that "only individuals can be saved from modernism." In Schuon's reply, he talks at length about Needleman's thesis that a shock could send people back to religion. Schuon points out that the French Revolution, then communism, fascism and Nazism were all shocks, but they were exteriorizing and people did not turn back to religion. The shocks that were interiorizing include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—these shocks were interiorizing. However, Schuon observed that the decay in today's society has degenerated to a point where none of these more recent shocks that we listed had any lasting effect because they were exteriorizing. So, certainly wars will send "individuals" back to religion and back to prayer, but not "collectivities." I'll quote Schuon: "All this amounts to saying that in our century only individuals can be saved from modernism, not collectivities. In a way, modern man is a creature that stubbornly does not want to be saved." The letter is quoted at length in the book of letters.

Q: Schuon says, "Modern science is engaged in a vicious circle of conjectures. Can you give us some examples?"

A: That is a fortunate question. When I originally prepared this lecture, I included a number of other slides that I was obliged to remove to shorten the lecture. One slide can answer this question. Let me see if I can find it.

In 2011, the Nobel Prize for Physics was awarded to three men who carefully measured the velocity at which the galaxies are moving away from each other. They found that the velocity at which galaxies are moving away from their point of origin is continuously increasing with time. In his Nobel Prize acceptance lecture, Adam Reiss noted their findings "immediately suggested a profound conclusion." *Something* is powering the acceleration of the universe. After more testing, they found: "The universe is filled with a mysterious *dark energy* that accelerates the universe.... We are not confident *why* it is

there.” To laughter from the Nobel Prize audience, Reiss then quipped: “The theorists say they are working on it.” This is 2011. He went on to say,

I want to end with a philosophical note. This is our universe; this is the recipe. It turns out it is very humbling.... Only about 4% of the universe is made of the stuff we are familiar with (planets, stars, and gas). 25% is ‘dark matter,’ which is quite mysterious; 70% is ‘dark energy,’ which is even more mysterious.

Scientists have no idea what is happening to speed up the velocity at which our universe is expanding. The existing laws of physics prior to 2011 were shattered. So, they are “plastering over”—this is Schuon’s phrase—the old conjectures with some new conjectures. This new observation revises the origin of the cosmos as we know it, the universe as we know it. Have you ever heard of something that actually increases with velocity as it goes forward from an explosion in time and space—in this case the Big Bang? It is not normal. In any event, this is an example of what Schuon would say “plasters over” an outmoded theory with some new theory as they try to figure out what has happened here.

Q: How well accepted is the Perennial Philosophy in colleges?

A: It is not well accepted. Most academics in religious studies are focused on presenting a scientifically rigorous approach in order to have their work accepted by the wider academic community. For example, the two founders of the emergent academic field of “western esotericism”—Faivre and Hanegraaf—developed a methodology intended to be scientifically rigorous and not tainted with metaphysical discourse. Academia has now widely accepted this new methodological approach, known as “empirical research” and “empirical method.” The concern for scientific rigor under the guise of the need for empirical validity results in “the rejection of metaphysical premises” (Faivre) in the academic study of esotericism.

Faivre and Hanegraaf intended to exclude perennialism: “the first necessary step towards establishing the study of esotericism as a serious academic pursuit would be to demarcate it clearly from the perennialist perspective.” (Hanegraaf) “Scholars”, an academic summarized, “as scientists, can discuss religion only from the perspective of a one-tier cosmology, that of the empirical world, because scientific research can only be conducted about the observable world.” (Platvoet)

James Winston Morris, a friend, wrote years ago something to the effect—I paraphrase loosely—that almost every professor in religious studies has read Schuon but he is not used often in coursework because of the unique process of what Morris called “academic canonization.” I think that is pretty well said. Dr. Oldmeadow has just finished a book,

Voices in the Wilderness, in which he profiles the leading Perennialists. Dr. Nasr wrote the Foreword. He sent Harry a list of about 50 of his students who now have their doctorate and are out teaching. So, there are some people in academia who are very familiar with the Perennial Philosophy, but I think it is safe to say that it is in ill repute in academia. I can no longer recommend that any student major in religious studies because of this scientific “empirical method.”

One of the proofs of the dark times in which we live is that the academic study of religion and esotericism attempts to exclude a discussion of Perennialism *and* Divine Realities. Is it any wonder why there is an increasing loss of faith in God?

Q: As a traditionalist living in the modern world, how should one approach the use of modern technology? And how does one prevent modernism from intruding into one's spiritual life?

A: Very carefully. There is no one simple answer other than “very carefully.” It is a question of discernment. On Day Three we will be talking about the role of art in the spiritual life. There are a number of stories that will be told about Schuon and you will see a film interview with him talking about this question. We will also see sacred art from throughout history and across the world in an attempt to help people understand what is possible in terms of aesthetics in the modern world. In the course of that lecture, we will talk about some specific suggestions that Schuon has in terms of concentrating on what is beautiful and not on what is ugly, which helps to create an environment that is conducive to a life of prayer.

Schuon himself did not use a typewriter or a computer. All his books and letters are handwritten. There was no telephone in his home in Pully. When Mrs. Schuon wanted to use the phone, she had to walk next door to the Perry house. So, Schuon himself was very guarded and very careful not to allow modernism to slip into his life. For most of us, it is impossible to avoid modernism in one or another of its guises. But we have talked about some of those guises and being aware of them and keeping them in your mind already provides a protection. And, then the protection provided by the umbrella of an intrinsically orthodox religion helps to be vigilant and helps to maintain good comportment.

Q: René Guénon, in his book, *The Reign of Quantity*, directly attacks physics and modern physics and he is against science also. Do you see any difference between Guénon and Schuon in this respect?

A: No. No, I do not see any meaningful differences. I said that our “primary quarrel” is not with science and that is true. Science, in principle, simply measures and reports what it has measured. I prefer to use the term “scientism” because, in my experience, people are

more open minded to listen, ask questions and discuss if I use the term “scientism.” That term also lends itself to a discussion of “modernism” because scientism is “one of the guises of modernism,” to use Schuon’s phrase.

In an analogous way, I prefer to use the term “modernism” rather than “the modern world.” As you heard from Schuon, he does not deny that there is some good in the modern world—It is a question of the lesser of evils and the greater good. But there is nothing good in modernism. It is similar with science and scientism—there are some good things in modern science, but nothing good in scientism. There is no meaningful difference between Guénon and Schuon on this subject because the pervasive nature of scientism means, *de facto*, that modern science is a problem. What I try to do in my lectures is to focus on the kernels of the problem: scientism and modernism.

Q: The Quran says “Kun”—“Be.” Does this command to “Be” refer to the Big Bang?

A: Yes, exactly. I do not remember precisely how Schuon puts it in the quote where he is talking about the Big Bang, but that is precisely it. Schuon in his quote does not come out 100% and say that he supports the Big Bang, but that is the clear implication. Schuon did not like the term the “Big Bang”—referring to the term as “in the jargon of Anglo-Saxon scientists”—but it is the current parlance and there is nothing I can do to change society’s vocabulary. The reality is that some type of enormous cosmic explosion, the cosmogenesis of the universe, began expanding outwards from the materialization of a super saturated Divine solution—what the traditional doctrines call emanation. This was the Big Bang—the moment that was the Divine origin of the physical world.

Q: In his work, Schuon refers to Shankara, an Advita Vedanta Hindu, as representative of his own thinking about the Sophia Perennis. But, he also refers to Ibn ‘Arabî as doing the same. Shankara’s view is pantheistic—God and the universe are identical. And, Ibn ‘Arabî’s view is generally interpreted as being panentheistic—God is in the world but is beyond the world. I wonder if in his writings or in your conversations with him, he made a distinction between these two metaphysical descriptions of ultimate Reality.

A: Well, I disagree with the fundamental premise that Shankara was a pantheist. As Schuon says, we should go to the three-part Vedic formula that summarizes Shankara’s doctrine: “*Brahma satyam, jagan mithya, jivo brahmaiva naparah.*” God alone is real, the world is illusion, and God is not other than the individual soul. So, God is within each of us and, at the same time, God is beyond the world of forms. Shankara is not a pantheist. Shankara and Ibn ‘Arabî are very similar in terms of their belief that there is a Divine Power that is both beyond all creation and within each of us.

Q: If the evidence for transformist evolution became overwhelmingly strong, would that undermine the perennial philosophy in your view? What would be lost? Would not metaphysics, morality, and values remain? Could there be a form of evolutionary creationism that is congruent with the Sophia Perennis?

A: There are three or four questions there. Let us start with the last one. Is there a form of *transformist evolutionism* that could be consistent with the Sophia Perennis? No. not in terms of transformist evolution, which, I believe, is what the question presupposes—the evolution of man. Schuon is very clear on that. There can be no evolution of religion. There can be no evolution of mankind to what de Chardin would refer to as the “omega point.” That is a preposterous idea, as Schuon says in that quote, “the Eternal will always be Alpha and has always been Omega.”

This is why I do not believe it is possible to prove transformist evolutionism. So, I cannot really speculate on something that I think is a complete 100% impossibility. There is no doubt that scientists will stand up and shout and say this finding or that finding proves evolutionism. They have been doing that for over a hundred years, and they will continue to do it. But there is no real proof. There are “the four glaring gaps.” And to this day, the various physicists and geneticists that are studying transformist evolution no longer use a phylogenetic tree. They use a “rootless tree” that just shows variations within a species because they have never found physical evidence in the fossil record of the evolution of one species to another species. As we spoke before, science has no response to the Four Glaring Gaps. So, I do not believe it is possible to find anything that would prove transformist evolution to what I will call a “coolheaded” or a “cold-headed” objective analysis.

Q: This is a more personal question. My professional work is in the empirical sciences, and I had the same response to what you called “the Four Glaring Gaps” when I encountered them 20 years ago. I continued my work but, in my heart, I took a different turn. Is there a point in trying to convince people, not necessarily through lectures, but individually—to try to convince people who may benefit from these kinds of words but who have in their hearts sidestepped these big questions?

A: There is a fundamental question. Does that person have tenure? Will speaking out jeopardize your livelihood? I know it sounds humorous, but it is absolutely true. Young PhDs who are just making their way in their profession are obliged not to create too many waves. It is just the reality of professional life. But, once you have attained stability in your job situation, you are free to speak your mind and your heart. I am lucky because I am not in academia. Schuon reports that someone once told him he should get his PhD. He responded to the effect that “why would I ever want to do that and have to engage in the

politics of academia?” The perfect response. So, I want to encourage anyone who has a stable situation to write from their mind and their heart, as they see things. But, I can certainly understand that professional reality prevents that in some cases.

Q: A final question. The sermon on the mount tells us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust will not destroy them and thieves will not break in and steal them. There is a Lakota saying that “what you give away, you keep and what you keep, you lose.” Can you contrast this to modernism?

A: We spoke about materialism briefly. It is the result of ignoring the “seven deadly sins” of Christianity—ignoring your moral sense and wanting more, more and more. Materialism is the absolute antithesis of the American Indian way. Now, the reality is that we live in a circumstance when it is very difficult to be in abject poverty and give away everything. So, one has to be measured. In a number of conversations that I had with Mr. Schuon, I asked “how much should one put away and at what point do you back out of your professional life?” He said you have to have a sense of proportions and know when enough is enough. For me, I more or less backed out of professional life in 1998, when we started to really build up World Wisdom. Writing, publishing and speaking out became more important for me, and I tried to have a sense of when enough is enough. I think each person needs to address that question and consider what they are doing with their, to use the Islamic term, *zakat*—with their charity. How are they using it? In what ways can they help people?

I thank whoever wrote the question for drawing our attention once again to the American Indian wisdom. The saying is perfectly apt. You know, I like stories, so I am going to tell another story from 1971, the summer I lived with the Yellowtail family. Their son, his wife and six or seven of their grandchildren were living with them in this little cabin. I actually lived out and back, first in a tepee and then in a little trailer. They were poor. They did not have much money. I helped a lot with the groceries. And then one day a man walked up the long gravel road and driveway and introduced himself to Mr. Yellowtail. He had never known the man, but the man said he was a friend of Yellowtail's father. He explained that his car had broken down and he was in difficult circumstances—even his boots had holes in them. Yellowtail took his best pair of boots, gave them to him, fed him, gave him \$40, and helped him to get his car repaired so the man could go down the way. That taught me more about true generosity than any experience prior to that. It is still burned in my memory. We spoke yesterday about what it means to be an old-timer. As I said then, I cannot really tell you what it is about, I cannot put it into words. But these types of sacrifices that people make for their fellow humankind are heartbreaking. And it is just such a beautiful thing to hear American Indian wisdom and see how they still practice that wisdom.

Thank you.