

***A Word from Woody. . .***  
**“Madonna vs. Paul the Apostle”**

In the mid-1980's Madonna enlightened the world by singing, “. . . we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl”. Regardless of whether one recognizes the merits of Madonna's observation, the truth is we all are material. It is said that 99% of the human body is composed of six elements: oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. But is that basically *all* we are?

A reductionistic worldview answers Yes. Without the existence of God, we human beings are just an accidental material product of a random, cold, meaningless universe. Thus whenever an atheist wants to assert there is meaning to our lives, such as morality, one should press the question of what example can be found in this world where meaning can be found in randomness? Should we look to such things as the arrangement of leaves on the ground to discover whom to marry or what our occupation should be? Should we consult the shape of the clouds in the sky before we order our next meal? Atheist philosopher Walter Sinnott-Armstrong from Duke University expresses this important question in his book's title-- *Morality Without God?* – and surprisingly answers affirmatively. However, it is always refreshing when an atheist, such as Columbia University's theoretical physicist Brian Greene, follows the logic of his worldview. In an interview in *Time* magazine (March 2/March 9, 2020, pp. 22-23), Greene rejects the idea of universal morality and a purpose to our existence. He even rejects the idea of our having free will: “Your particles are just obeying their quantum-mechanical marching orders. . . You have no ability to intercede in that quantum-mechanical unfolding. None whatsoever.” He further explains, “My feeling is that the reductionist, materialist, physicalist approach to the world is the right one. . . There isn't anything else; these grand mysteries [of religion] will evaporate over time.” Nevertheless, Greene is exultant, not despondent. He marvels that it is simply the “stuff” of the universe that is responsible for such things as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the *Mona Lisa*. One must ask, however consistent Greene is in following the implications of his worldview, is he right to be exultant, or is he a tragic example of pathetic wishful thinking?

The lie of a reductionistic, materialistic worldview is found, among other things, in the core human experience. When we feel moral outrage at five million

Jewish people slaughtered in the Holocaust or at 168 people murdered in the Oklahoma City bombing, is this a free expression of us adhering to a moral law that transcends the material world? Or is our outrage simply a knee-jerk reaction, like a hiccup or a yawn, caused by our inner particles which are following their quantum-mechanical marching orders? If the latter, then forget about worrying where the advances in artificial intelligence are heading-- we are already there! However, I submit that *everything within us cries out that reductionism is a complete misunderstanding of the human condition*. We are, in truth, more than the sum of our parts, more than the six chemical elements which make up 99% of our bodies. I am convinced the fact that there is undeniable experiential meaning and morality to human existence—as Sinnott-Armstrong rightfully, though inconsistently, acknowledges-- points us accurately and inevitably to an Intelligent Designer of the Universe.

In the 1940's C.S. Lewis prophetically warned that we would continue to confront such reductionistic nonsense as Greene proposes. "There will always be evidence, and every month fresh evidence, to show that religion is only psychological, justice only self-protection, politics only economics, love only lust, and thought itself only cerebral biochemistry" (from his message, "Transposition", found in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, pp. 114-115). Lewis believes, rightly, that those who adhere to such evidence condemn themselves to see "all the facts but none of the meaning", like a dog seeing the fact of his master pointing (for him to go out the door) without understanding why he is lifting his arm and extending a finger (pp. 113-114). It is when we confront reductionism that we find the good news of Christianity's promise of the resurrection so refreshing. Our material bodies, made with dignity in God's image, will one day be refashioned and made eternal. The resurrection of Jesus actually allows us—indeed, implores us through the historical evidence!—to have both now and in the future hope and joy, meaning and purpose. By contrast, the reductionist only finds misery in scraping together a self-made meaning compounded by non-existence at the grave. The apostle Paul, a witness to Jesus' resurrection, calls us to lift up our eyes to the heavens: "Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is

written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'" (1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

Paul the apostle would agree with Madonna that we live in a material world, but he would want to inform her she is far more than a material girl.

Yours in the Joy of Jesus,

Woody