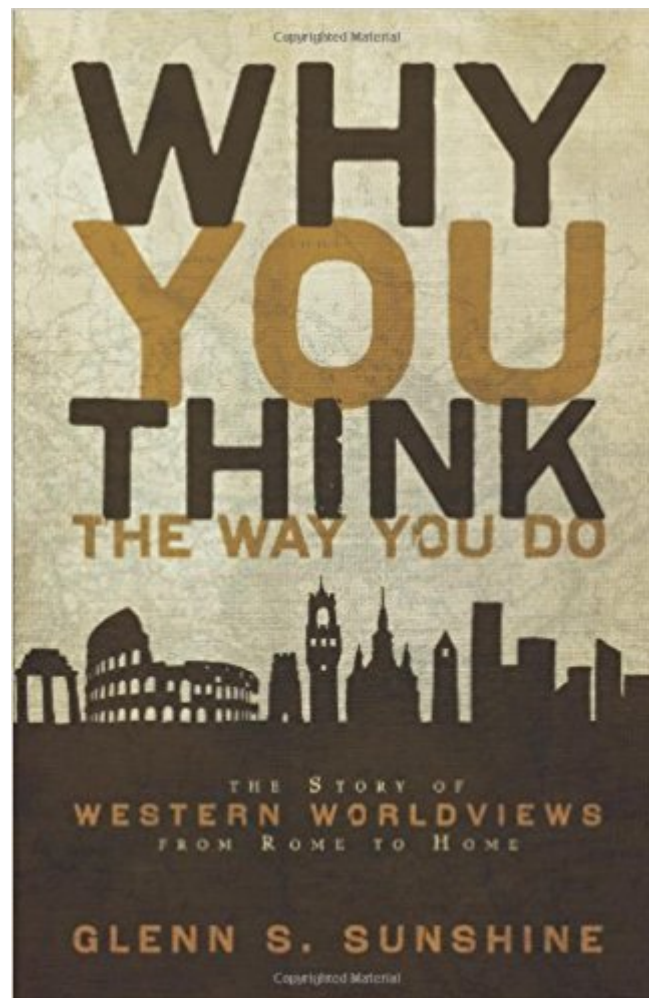




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Why You Think The Way You Do: The Story Of Western Worldviews From Rome To Home



Synopsis

People often talk about worldview when describing the philosophy that guides their lives. But how have we come by our worldviews, and what impact did Christianity have on those that are common to Western civilization? This authoritative, accessible survey traces the development of the worldviews that underpin the Western world. It demonstrates the decisive impact that the growth of Christianity had in transforming the outlook of pagan Roman culture into one that, based on biblical concepts of humanity and its relationship with God, established virtually all the positive aspects of Western civilization. The two-pronged assault in our time on the biblically based worldview by postmodern philosophy and the writings of neo-atheists has made it even more crucial that we acknowledge and defend its historical roots. Unique among books on the topic, this work discusses Western worldviews as a continuous narrative rather than as simply a catalogue of ideas, and traces the effects changes in worldview had on society. It helps readers understand their own worldviews and those of other people and helps them recognize the consequences that worldviews hold. Professors, students, and armchair historians alike will profit from this book.

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Customer Reviews

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Glenn S. Sunshine (PhD University of Wisconsin, Madison) is professor of history at the Central Connecticut State University and a faculty member of the Centurions Program at Breakpoint, the worldview training ministry of Prison Fellowship Ministries. Previously, he taught at Calvin College and was a visiting professor at the Universität der Bundeswehr-Hamburg (now Helmut Schmidt University) in Germany. He is author of *The Reformation for Armchair Theologians*, and *Reforming French Protestantism*, and contributor to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, and the *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*.

I was looking for a worldview title. I'd already read Sire and Pearcey and Naugle and Nash, and a few others. So I saw this and ordered it, and I quickly found it supplied material necessary for worldview understanding that the other great worldview books didn't quite go into, at least with the scope Sunshine's book does. It is basically an overview history of ideas, from ancient Greece and Rome to now. Worldview analysis will always be about the history of ideas to a good extent, with an emphasis on the practical nature of worldviews themselves. Thus to have this actual overview of the history of ideas is valuable. I really learned new things from this book, and I was also legitimately challenged to see some things differently or more clearly. I put it at the same level as the classic worldview books mentioned above.

Sunshine does a decent job scanning the surface of the Western worldview foundations. It's fairly plain he's a Christian apologist throughout his worldview weaving, but, at least initially, it rarely detracts from his historical survey. After all, to a large extent, the development of Christianity is the development of Western culture. It isn't until we reach chapter nine, "Modernity and its Discontents," that Sunshine's subjectivity clouds our reasonably objective and heretofore unimpeded historical sketch. Around p. 166 Sunshine gets strangely hostile to Darwinism and awkwardly defensive of

religious faith, generally. You get the sense that the enlightening and entertaining lecture you were hearing just took a turn for the worse and morphed into some weird, cultish diatribe against ... against what? Relax, Dr. Sunshine. Faith is faith and science is science. Be proud and confident in your faith, if you choose to have it -- don't be weird about it. And if you think Darwinism is also a faith -- so what? There are many abstractions propping up the Western worldview that are precisely principles of faith -- who cares? In any case, Sunshine's up-to-that-point entertaining book becomes somewhat off-putting. Adding to the awkwardness are the handful of instances where Sunshine uses "straw man" arguments for positions he dislikes; this happens far too frequently for his book to be taken completely seriously. Nor is Sunshine averse to ad hominem attacks: after offering an amusingly and alarmingly shallow "explanation" of Nietzsche's thought, Sunshine quips that "It is no accident that Nietzsche died in an insane asylum" (178). Are you kidding me, Dr. Sunshine? For better or worse, Nietzsche is one of the most influential thinkers in Western history -- yet an unknown like Sunshine feels the need to attack Nietzsche the man (or invalid) instead of having the stones to substantively confront Nietzsche's thought. Interesting approach, Dr. Sunshine. But I wonder, whose name will endure in the annals of history: Friedrich Nietzsche or Glenn Sunshine? Sunshine also has a crudely amateurish understanding of existentialism. He calls it "nihilism-lite" and claims it "means that we are radically free to determine what we do and who we are" (178). He utterly brushes off existentialism as a consequential mode of philosophical thought. Moreover, he ignores the existential thread that links (theistic) Augustine to its 20th-century incarnation; likewise, he makes no mention of the brilliant theistic existentialist, Kierkegaard. Instead, Sunshine merely notes Woody Allen as a "champion" of existentialism. To Sunshine, existentialism merely means "atheism." That's just woefully wrong. And I have to add this: Sunshine implies that Western morals didn't exist prior to Christianity (209)... By this point in the book, you'll be moving from your "he's a harmless Christian apologetic" to "this guy's using his faith as a launch pad for applying reason." Finally, while the book is decent as an overview of the Western worldview, it's not a scholarly work by any means. It lacks substantive citations, leaving the reader to only assume Sunshine either knows what he's talking about or is simply blowing smoke. Ultimately, it's best used as an informal introduction or orienting reference -- only if one takes his faith-based reasoning with a grain of salt.

Great sweeping history, but 100 pages of straight philosophy started choking my interest. Definitely a good, accessible reference, but probably not a reading you will knock off in two days.

I understood beforehand that this book was written from a conservative Christian viewpoint -and that is what I wanted because I have been researching how the modern conservative worldview could have developed into a worldview that has been called "Post Truth". Despite the red flag of an introduction from convicted Watergate co-conspirator Charles Colson, I was quite pleasantly surprised that the first two thirds or so is actually a rather concise and generally accurate history of the evolution of Western worldviews through the ages. Sunshine does perhaps the best job you'll see of condensing a lot of history and explaining a great number of philosophical ideas and their interrelatedness into very readable and often entertaining prose. One could read this far and put it down quite satisfied. In fact I plan to keep it around for reference. Unfortunately, he does what many conservative Christian historians do: present perfectly sound arguments and generally accurate information for the first two thirds of their efforts and then deviate from reality into their biases, perhaps in the hope their readers won't notice when the switch happened. I suppose I shouldn't suggest motivation here, but it is difficult to believe this is unintentional given the author's otherwise insightful understanding of history, philosophy and science up to the point he deviates. I felt very disappointed, because I'd grown to really like this writer and I'd already learned a great deal from him. Unfortunately, after the deviation things really fall apart as Sunshine apparently ignores huge swaths of knowledge and understanding in his explorations of evolution, climate change and economics. In his desperation to save his theology and stave off the inevitable progress of human knowledge and understanding, he makes unfounded -even quite silly- arguments that have been consistently and soundly refuted for many decades. Still, this is what I wanted, I guess; though I'd been led to hope for some heretofore unappreciated nugget of conservative wisdom. If someone as talented and knowledgeable as Sunshine could not do better; if this is the best conservatives can do to justify the more destructive aspects of their worldview, it's a very important understanding for the rest of us to have. This book convinced me that ultimately there is no there, there.

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