

A Response to Cannon's Comments on My Book

David Naugle

ABSTRACT Key Words: worldview, *Weltanschauung*, objectivity, church, embodied, heart, vision, person, reflective, pre-reflective, plausibility structure, Kierkegaard, Michael Polanyi, Wittgenstein, Husserl.

In this essay, I respond Dale Cannon's critique of my book, Worldview: The History of a Concept. I am surprised that Professor Cannon, as a presumed devotee of Michael Polanyi, expected me to offer a scholarly objective discussion of the history of the concept of worldview. That I did attempt to do in part, but I also had the goal of rehabilitating the notion of worldview for use in a Christian context. I also respond to his criticism that I need to offer a more precise description of the concept of worldview itself as either pre-reflective or reflective in nature, and whether or not a worldview is epistemically representational or more Polanyian in character. I see it in both/and terms rather than the either/or ways Cannon has offered to me as options. I address his criticism that I neglect the place and role of the person in my resulting conception of worldview. While I could have spent more time on this issue, I point out that I ground the notion of worldview in the biblical teaching about the human "heart" as the seat and source of thought, affection, will and spirituality.

I am grateful to Professor Dale Cannon for his thoughtful review of my book, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans 2002). Cogent critiques of one's work are an honor because somebody has taken your work seriously, are humbling because they point out weaknesses in your scholarship, and they are also helpful because they sharpen our thinking about the topic under consideration. So it is with gratitude, humility, and appreciation that I make my response to this response to my book.

First of all, I was a bit surprised that Professor Cannon was surprised because he was expecting my book to be a "work of philosophically and theologically neutral scholarship...that would satisfy philosophers and theologians of whatever stripe...." That he was flummoxed that I had an apologetic purpose in mind seems counter to the central Polanyian notion, assuming Professor Cannon accepts it, that knowledge is tacit and fiduciary in character, "rooted," as he points out in the second paragraph, "in the ancient Augustinian model where faith establishes the basis for knowledge as a gift of grace." I am, indeed, Polanyian rather than modernist in my epistemic outlook. This accounts for my perspective on the notion of worldview as a whole, and for my critical defense of the ecclesiastical value of the notion in chapters nine through eleven (even though Karl Barth's criticisms of "worldview" were low on the totem pole of my concern, despite Professor Cannon's assertion to the contrary).

At the same time, in chapters three through eight, preceding my arguments on behalf of the use of the worldview concept in the church, I was attempting, however imperfectly, to offer a somewhat "objective" presentation of the history of the concept in philosophy and among the natural and social sciences. This was a central purpose of the book. The entire volume, therefore, was not intended to be apologetic in purpose, but to offer a history of the concept, as the actual title of the book suggests.

I am pleased (and relieved) that Professor Cannon regarded my treatment of Polanyi's thought and its bearing on worldview as acceptable. Undoubtedly, there is much more in Polanyi's thought to unearth in thinking about worldview than I have been able to mine, and this dearth is to my own and my readers' detriment. Esther L. Meek, for example, pointed out in a portion of a paper she presented at a mid-west regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2004 "What David Naugle Can Learn From Michael Polanyi." Her insights, especially regarding the embodied character of knowledge, have been very helpful, and have caused me to revise my own definition of worldview from a "vision of the heart" to a "vision of the 'embodied' heart."

Furthermore, as Professor Cannon points out, I did rely on secondary literature in my exposition of several key thinkers in the history portion of the book. But why not consult good works on a particular thinker whose thought lies beyond one's field of one's expertise? Also, in his estimation, I missed the interpretive boat in my exposition of several of them because of my neglect of the larger context of their thought, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Husserl in particular. That I depended upon secondary resources here and there was necessary in a book that treated upwards of thirty-five key thinkers on the worldview concept, and that I may have erred hermeneutically in my treatment of some of them is quite likely as well, assuming Professor Cannon himself knows better than I what these thinkers were all about (and he probably does!).

Despite these well-received criticisms, I am grateful that Professor Cannon finds my book overall to be an "extraordinary achievement" which is pleasing to hear. His general survey of the contents of my book is on target and seems to get what I was trying to convey and accomplish overall.

Professor Cannon makes two final comments at the end of his review that are very important and worthy of further comment. The first concerns the need for me to offer a more precise description of the concept of worldview itself. Is a worldview pre-reflective or reflective in character, and is it epistemically representational or more Polanyian in nature as "a matter of ongoing tacit relational acquaintance that permits and calls forth an indeterminate range of always partial representations"? And if the latter, how would "worldview" defined in Polanyian terms fit in with a commitment to absolute truth, especially of the Christian kind, after which Professor Cannon believes I am "hankering"?

These are excellent questions (or points), and they help clarify my own thinking about these issues. He's right that I do address these matters helter skelter in the ninth and tenth chapters of the book. Perhaps here I can crystallize my thinking. I suppose I want to have my cake and eat it too, but I grant to the word "worldview" a certain lexical flexibility, just as we do with the word "love." If "love" can be used to convey a preference for chocolate ice cream as well as to express an unconditional commitment to one's spouse (and we understand what we mean when we use it both ways), so I think it is possible to use the word "worldview" to stand for both a pre-reflective and reflective grasp of the cosmos (and both uses make good sense).

On the one hand, I find myself and others using "worldview" to refer to the unexamined, inarticulate intuitions or presuppositions we hold to unconsciously about life and reality. Here a worldview is like an umpire at a baseball game. An umpire at a baseball game controls all the action out on the diamond, even though very few fans pay any real direct attention to him. In this light, a worldview has a certain kind of "taken-for-grantedness" about it. It constitutes the unexamined "plausibility structure" that enables most people to make sense of the world and their place in it, even without their open knowledge or awareness. Why can't this way of knowing and being in the world legitimately be labeled a "worldview"?

On the other hand, and more Socratically, I find myself and others also using the concept to stand for a reasonably well examined and articulated philosophy of life. A worldview in this case is identified with or the intellectual outcome of considerable philosophic and religious reflection. Here a worldview as “umpire” is intentionally observed and known. Such purposeful observation and knowledge about life and reality are central to a good education as well as a thoughtful and, hopefully, a well-lived life. These two ways of knowing and being in the world — both assumptive and conceptual — can be called “worldviews” as far as I am concerned.

Furthermore, I am epistemically elastic when it comes to the nature of worldview knowledge, or knowledge about the world and about what transcends it. Surely we know some things for sure (that is, propositions that represent reality): God exists and is light, love, and justice; the earth is elliptical in shape and rotates around the sun; cold-blooded, murder with malice is wrong; $2 + 2 = 4$, and so on. On the basis of these examples, I suppose I am a card-carrying member of “the conventional philosophic understanding of refined explicit representationalism.” We do have some concrete knowledge of theology, astronomy, morality and mathematics that is trustworthy and true.

This, however, does not mean that I understand any of these propositions absolutely, perfectly, or non-relationally. There is always something personal, something more, something less, or something other than what I know about these and other things, whether pre-reflectively or reflectively. God, the cosmos, ethics, and numbers are mysterious, inexhaustible realities, and beyond the reach of the human mind to understand and represent fully. My, or our, knowledge of them, can always be improved upon and deepened, especially through critical and fruitful conversation (thus my appeal to Bakhtin’s notion of the “dialogical imagination”). For these reasons, I subscribed in my book to the school of “critical realism,” and can say on this score that I am also a card-carrying member of the Polanyian school of thought that regards knowledge as “a matter of ongoing tacit relational acquaintance that permits and calls forth an indeterminate range of always partial representations.”

My epistemology, including my religious outlook, therefore, is both confident and humble. As St. Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 13: 12, we do, in fact, see and understand. But our knowledge of things at this point is always partial and improvable. One day, by the grace of God, we will truly and fully understand, at least as far as finite human creatures can!

For now we are looking in a mirror that gives only a dim blurred reflection of reality as in a riddle or enigma, but then when perfection comes we shall see in reality and face to face! Now I know in part imperfectly, but then I shall know and understand fully and clearly, even in the same manner as I have been fully and clearly known and understood by God (Amplified Version).

The second point Professor Cannon mentions, as he concludes his review, is the place and role of the person in my resulting conception of worldview. He believes that I need to articulate more fully the relationship of any lexical, textual or symbolic entity and the person who holds or uses it, and that I only begin to address this issue in chapters 10 and 11. He also believes I should differentiate more sharply between the world itself, a view of it, and the person who holds to it, and, indeed, these are important distinctions that I should have addressed more thoroughly.

Nevertheless, I do speak to the issue of the relationship between the human person and worldview in chapter nine through a biblical anthropology that focuses on the notion of the “heart” (Hebrew: *leb* and *lebab*; Greek: *kardia*). As the seat and source of thought, affection, volition and spirituality, the heart, as the word literally

suggests, is the center and core of every human being. For this reason Proverbs 4: 23 states, “Watch over your heart with all diligence/For from it flow the springs of life.” Jesus himself affirms that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6: 21). In other words, as the heart is inclined, so also is the person. The human heart is where we are what we are (Augustine). For these reasons, then, I asserted that life proceeds “kardioptically” out of a vision of the “embodied” heart (acknowledging once again Esther Meek’s reminder of the physical dimension of the knowing process). While it would be too much to identify a person with his or her embodied perception of life rooted in the heart, nonetheless, there is a very close connection. To be sure, this link between our embodied views of life, who we are, and how we live is significant, and needs to be examined further.

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