



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**Metamodernism: An Up and Coming New Naturalistic Philosophy**  
By Freddy Davis

**The Search for Meaning in Life**

Most people don't realize that there are numerous belief systems that are expressions of a naturalistic worldview. Naturalism is the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. You have, no doubt, heard of such belief systems as Existentialism, Marxism, Secular Humanism, and Postmodernism. These are just a few of the belief systems that are based on a naturalistic worldview. All of them are atheistic, believe human beings are merely naturally evolved animal creatures, and assert that there is no God, or any kind of transcendent reality. And the most anyone can hope for in this life is to help our species survive, and along the way gain as much personal satisfaction as possible. There is nothing more.

Back before the European Enlightenment, most people believed in God. But as the Enlightenment took hold (approx. 1685-1815), a new way of viewing the world began to come forth. During that period, modern science began to emerge, and with it a fledgling belief that man could understand reality without invoking God. This philosophy gradually strengthened over time. It started out being more deistic, where people still believed in God, but also asserted that after He created the universe, He just wound it up and let it run without His intervention. Gradually Deism gave way to full blown Atheism.

Over the years, various atheistic belief systems became popular for a time, then gave way to other ones as naturalistic philosophers explored different possibilities – including those mentioned above.

Modernism was one of the early beliefs with its emphasis on science and technology. It elevated human reason over a belief in divine revelation, and asserted that man could create good morality without the need to believe in God.

As the world went through two world wars and saw the devastation that occurred because of powerful dictatorial regimes, the utopian mindset of modernism gave way, in more recent times, to Postmodernism. Postmodernism basically threw out the idea that reality could be conceived of as a metanarrative – an overarching storyline that provides a structure for people's beliefs – and turned to the idea of mini-narratives. Mini-narratives are small localized stories that are focused on individual experience rather than viewing society as a whole. It is primarily expressed in the belief that there is no such thing as objective truth. Believers consider that everyone can have their own truth – your truth is good for you, and my truth is good for me. That said, it is also atheistic and asserts the same basic underlying beliefs as all other naturalistic belief systems.

Over the last number of years, though, as postmodernism has been tried and found wanting, it has led to much hopelessness and despair. As always happens when that kind of feeling sweeps society, philosophers begin looking for the next big thing. And it appears that what secularists are looking to now is Metamodernism.

**The Advent of Metamodernism**

Metamodernism is a cultural movement that attempts to combine ideas from both Modernism and Postmodernism. It is a way of viewing the world that emphasizes pluralism and attempts to synthesize various cultural expressions. Some of the ways people have tried to characterize it include:

- Oscillation: It is an attempt to synthesize the logical structures of different cultures.
- Ambiguity: It is willing to embrace ambiguity and paradox. It doesn't feel a need to acknowledge objective reality.
- Dialogue: It seeks consensus based on collaboration and dialogue between different cultures, and even different worldviews.

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- Sincerity: Adherents prioritize sincerity, hope, and romanticism without any objective basis for doing so.
- Universal truths: It longs for universal truths and grand narratives in a world where it is not possible for it to objectively exist.

Looking at these characterizations, the most notable thing that sticks out is that it attempts to reconcile contradictions. Each of the characteristics above include irreconcilable beliefs within them.

This point of view has emerged because society has seen the emptiness of Modernism and Postmodernism. These have ultimately resulted in cynicism as there is nothing objective to tie one's life to. This has created a massive search for meaning and connection in people's lives.

The term "metamodern" seems to have been first used by scholar Mas'ud Zavarzadeh in 1975 to describe emerging American literature. Then, in 1999, Moyo Okediji applied the term to contemporary African-American art. He saw this art as a challenge to both modernism and postmodernism.

The term really started coming into its own in academia around 2010 when Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker wrote an essay called "*Notes on Metamodernism*." They described it as a "structure of feeling that oscillates between modernism and postmodernism, like a pendulum swinging ... between two opposite poles." More particularly, he saw the oscillation as swinging between:

- a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony,
- hope and melancholy,
- naivety and knowingness,
- empathy and apathy,
- unity and plurality,
- totality and fragmentation,
- purity and ambiguity.

In other words, Metamodernists believe it really doesn't matter what you believe. Nearly everything fits within the philosophy. However an individual wants to evaluate the world is okay.

## Christian Metamodernism

Brendan Graham Dempsey has attempted to apply Metamodernism to Christianity. According to his biography:

*Brendan Graham Dempsey is a writer, poet, farmer, and the director of Sky Meadow Institute, an organization dedicated to promoting systems-based thinking about the things that matter most.*

*He holds a BA in religious studies from the University of Vermont and a master's in religion and art from Yale University. His books include *Metamodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Cultural Logics* and *The Evolution of Meaning* series. He is also co-editor of the academic journal *Metamodern Theory & Praxis*.*

*His primary interests include theorizing developments in culture after postmodernism, productively bridging the divide between science and spirituality, and developing sustainable systems for life to flourish. All of these lead through the paradigms of emergence and complexity, which inform all of his work.*

Dempsey's view holds that the Jesus of history isn't identical to the Christ of faith. Rather, it is a way to characterize the deconstruction movement where people who were raised in the Christian faith become disillusioned with their faith, work through a mental process of taking their beliefs apart, then putting it back together (reconstruction). However, the reconstruction process is generally characterized as a way to maintain faith in one's life, while at the same time accepting the presuppositions of naturalistic philosophy. In other words, Christian Metamodernists say they believe in Christ, but redefine the Christian message to exclude the Christ of the Bible. They hold on to some of the traditional ethical teachings of the Bible while discarding the possibility that God is an objectively real person who can be known in a true personal relationship. They accept some traditional teachings but do not claim to have any final answers concerning the nature of reality.

For those who embrace Metamodernism, the Bible is not the sole source of revelation. They envision the Christian jour-

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## Contact Information

If you wish to contact us directly, you may do so by the following methods:

321 Anton Dr., Tallahassee, FL 32312

E-mail:

[info@marketfaith.org](mailto:info@marketfaith.org)

Phone: 850-383-9756

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ney as one that takes in wisdom from the past and attempts to reconcile it with wisdom from the future. This attempt at reconciliation includes not only the ethical teachings of the Bible, but also knowledge gained from modern science, from interactions with people who are from other religions, and insights from various branches of the social sciences (ex. sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.).

Honestly, what we have here is actually not a new philosophy at all. It is the same old attempt to wrap naturalistic philosophy in Christian vocabulary and call it Christianity.

Using a worldview paradigm:

- It doesn't believe in God the way He is revealed in the Bible. (View of God)
- It considers human beings to have a spiritual sense, but not in the way described in the Bible. (View of man)
- And it searches for life's meaning based on a sense of personal fulfillment. (View of salvation)

## Worldview Evaluation of Metamodernism

As Christians, it is important to be able to recognize what is being put out there. In this case, we do that by comparing "metamodern" beliefs directly to biblical beliefs. That is, how do the beliefs about God, man, and salvation compare?

### View of God

- *Metamodernism* - God perhaps exists, but He cannot be known in an objectively real personal relationship,

and He has not revealed Himself in the Bible.

- *Christianity* - God exists and can be known in an objectively real personal relationship. He has revealed Himself and His ways in the Bible, in nature, in the human conscience, and personally by the Holy Spirit.

### View of Man

- *Metamodernism* - Human beings do have a spiritual sense, but are unable to connect to God in a self-conscious personal relationship.
- *Christianity* - Human beings are persons made in the image of God, giving them a way to connect personally to God. At the same time, we are fallen creatures who are separated from Him and need a way to make the personal relationship a reality.

### View of Salvation

- *Metamodernism* - There is a recognition that life has some purpose to it, but we cannot know in an

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objective sense what that is. The search for life's meaning is a lifelong process, and is recognized as we experience a personal sense of fulfillment in our lives.

- *Christianity* - We can connect with God personally based on a personal acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

While the people who believe metamodern beliefs have created a new word to characterize what they believe, they have not changed their actual beliefs at all. Liberal Christianity is still liberal Christianity, just described in a different way.

There is a way reality is structured and it is not structured in any other way. God does exist and He can be known in an objectively real personal relationship. Those who do not believe that and are not willing to receive Him into their life will not know Him, and it will determine their eternal destiny.