

# Inklings

ON  
PHILOSOPHY  
AND  
WORLDVIEW

A new way of  
learning about our  
connections to  
Truth & Reality

MATTHEW DOMINGUEZ



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRELUDE *xi*

INTRODUCTION *1*

## **PART ONE Trust and the Nature of Reality**

- 1: Created to Trust *11*
- 2: Faith and Faith Island *15*
- 3: Trust Lists: The Concept and the Tool *25*
- 4: The Suicide of Thought *33*
- 5: What Is Really Real? *43*



## **PART TWO Philosophy and the Four Views of Reality**

- 6: Philosophy: A Practical Tool *53*
- 7: The Power of a Question *59*
- 8: A Closer Look at Pure Idealism *77*
- 9: A Closer Look at Authentic Materialism *83*
- 10: A Closer Look at Complete Monism *91*
- 11: A Closer Look at Religious Theism *99*
- 12: My Trust List, Revisited *107*



### **PART THREE Christ: The Fullness of Reality**

- 13: Open Our Eyes So We Can See *115*
- ✨ 14: Connecting Truth *121*
- 15: The Light of the World *125*
- 16: Idealism: Lights On and Off *131*
- 17: Materialism: Lights On and Off *143*
- 18: Monism: Lights On and Off *155*
- 19: Religious Theism: Lights On and Off *161*
- 20: The Power of Paradox *167*
- 21: The Treachery of Images *189*
- 22: The Road Goes Ever On and On *197*

HONOR AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS *201*

NOTES *207*





*You will know the truth, and **the truth** will set you free.*

JOHN 8:32

*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on **Christ**.*

COLOSSIANS 2:8, NIV

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but **let God transform you** into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

ROMANS 12:2

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**.*

1 PETER 3:15, NIV





# Prelude



I trust you will find the information on these pages helpful on your journey.

As you peruse the bits of material dappled here and there, it is important to keep in mind:

*The daily decisions we make in life are based on our conclusions concerning the nature of reality.*

*Everyone is trusting.*

The only way we live, eat, sleep, move, communicate, and eke out an existence is to make decisions based on whatever we consider trustworthy.

As long as humans have engaged in conversation and shared ideas, we have differed on the object of our trust, our faith, our belief, our confidence.

Most philosophers agree that Plato and Aristotle's works on the true nature of reality are a foundation for all human interaction, and although epic cultural shifts have ensued . . . races and religions have been defined . . . empires have risen and fallen . . . every individual continues to make every single decision based on whom and what he or she trusts—as true, as real, as *worthy* of trust.





# Introduction



The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history.  
The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation.  
This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the  
"inner consistency of reality." There is no tale ever told that men  
would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical  
men have accepted as true on its own merits.

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

We all have to pick a story to help us make sense of our world. The story we choose to trust frames our day-to-day realities. Erwin McManus, an insightful pastor in California, says that in our competitive, media-packed modern culture, "whoever tells the best story shapes the culture."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say that often the truth is lost in bad storytelling, and falsehood is spread through a well-told story.<sup>2</sup> I think this has been true for humanity ever since the earliest story times around warm, intimate fires.

We all live a life of faith. And consequently, we all live our lives trusting in one story or another. Furthermore, as we trust these various stories, transmitted from generation to generation, creatively invented or adapted, unconsciously consumed or intentionally adopted, we often forget that these tales are human attempts to explain the inexplicable and to comprehend

the incomprehensible. More importantly, we often forget (or deny) that these stories are theories. They are our best attempts to get it right. We all want to know what is really going on in the universe, and our stories—our worldviews—are the distilled essence of our collective efforts to describe what is really real, what is truly true, what is worthy of trust.

My approach to worldview and philosophy is simple and practical. It builds on and extends the ideas of the iconic works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle on the nature and consequences of our beliefs regarding Prime Reality. In essence, these brilliant minds helped us see that the spiritual (the nonmaterial) and the material are the two basic elements for the fabric of reality. From this foundation I propose there are four basic story lines available to humanity:

- + **Idealism** trusts that only the spiritual/nonmaterial world is real.
- + **Materialism** trusts only in the reality of the measurable realm of matter.
- + **Monism** trusts in the unified existence of the spiritual and material realm as one gigantic entity.
- + **Theism** trusts the reality of both the spiritual realm and the material realm but maintains an understanding of real unity and real distinction between the two.

In this book we will study these four main options in conjunction with the ways they answer several of life's essential questions. We will also see how these four options point to the fullness of Christ in a life-giving, Christ-centered worldview. Doing this will give us clarity about and awareness of our own

views and those of others, and we will begin to see how our objects of trust have shaped our personal choices. This knowledge will empower us to make intelligent and informed decisions about the multitude of religions and “isms” available to each human and to engage in honest, honoring dialogue with those whose views are different from our own. And we will also see how the truth found in all worldviews points us to the truth found in Christ. As Augustine says, “Let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master.”<sup>3</sup>

As you read this book, study these ideas, and examine your own choices with new understanding, my hope is that your personal story will be shaped and changed. This book has the potential to impact your life in a significant way that may then change the rest of your story.

Before I give a brief overview of this book, I need to make my position very clear. It is essential for all people to have freedom and dignity to choose their personal beliefs, and I want this book to create a safe and healthy forum for exploration and authentic self-discovery. I have no desire to create a weak, insufficient, or biased description of another worldview in order to sway your opinion or manipulate your decisions. Rather, I want you to have a greater sense of self-awareness and ownership not only for what you choose to believe but also for why you believe what you believe in the context of so many options.

However, it is also important to note that particularly the last part of this book is an overt, unashamed invitation to my readers to learn more about Jesus Christ as the fullness of reality. In my years of teaching philosophy to students at a Christian high school, I have shared the four main worldviews again and

again, and I have each time come back to a quote by G. K. Chesterton. In his book *Orthodoxy*, he writes, “They have torn the soul of Christ into silly strips.”<sup>4</sup> As I teach my students that each worldview is but a portion of the truth—though we trust in the worldview we hold to as if it were the whole—I am convinced that the fullness of truth and reality are found only in the undivided person of Christ. The story I choose to believe as the true story holds Christ’s birth, incarnational life, sacrificial death, powerful resurrection, and bold commissioning as its centerpiece. This center provides the main plot for the entire story of human existence—an unfolding drama we are all in. I believe all great stories point toward this greatest story and invite us to awakened and intentional participation in it.

Therefore, the last part of this book speaks to those who want to learn more of what it means to see Christ as the center of history or who are interested in what authentic Christ-followers believe. I understand this does not describe all readers. If you are not interested in trusting Christ at this moment on your journey, I hope this book enables you to see why other people do choose to trust him. Either way, this book should clarify your understanding of the major worldviews available to humans and also offer a fresh perspective of the grace and truth found in the person of Jesus.

I grew up striving to be worthy of the apostle Peter’s call to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV). I worked hard to be prepared to defend my trust in Jesus. Unfortunately, I was not actually living out the call as Peter originally wrote it. I was working in order to gain others’

approval, which I was convinced would elevate my value as a human being. I worked from a desire to be recognized and loved; I cared more about my public image than about the impact I had on the people around me. I learned painfully late in my journey that 1 Peter 3:15 *actually* says, “Always be prepared to give an answer . . . for the hope that you have. But do this *with gentleness and respect*” (emphasis added). The apostle Paul compels us to do everything with love or our efforts will amount to nothing. Without authentic love for others, my words and actions are merely a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

How does this truth apply to our study of worldview? Choosing a particular belief system—any belief system—without incorporating love, gentleness, respect, and honor will do you and the world a disservice. On this journey, it is essential to treat all people with dignity and respect. Christianity sometimes has a sour reputation for being abusive in this global worldview discussion. Unfortunately, we are known for trying to be right at any cost instead of being known for showing love at any cost. The apostle Paul knew what that feels like, and two thousand years ago, he set the standard for Christ-followers: “While knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church. Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn’t really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one whom God recognizes” (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). With those words in mind, the approach to examining worldview described in this text is based on a foundation of love, honor, and dignity, and it supports the use of grace and truth as we interact with others.

## THE STRUCTURE

This study of worldview is divided into three parts.

In part 1, we will examine the common denominator of *trust*. No matter which worldview we follow, we are trusting something. Everything is based on trust. The only way we live is to make decisions based on what we consider trustworthy, though we differ on the object in which we place our confidence. We give authority to what and to whom we trust, and it is essential for us to understand that every decision we make is based on our conclusions regarding the nature of reality.

In part 2, we'll look at the four main worldviews in which humans place their trust and how each of these answers some of life's essential questions. Idealism, materialism, monism, and theism each hold a portion of the truth, and each provides those who trust it with answers that influence how they live. Here I am neither endeavoring to exalt any one worldview above another nor setting each up only to knock it down. I want us to examine each one with as unbiased a view as possible.

Regarding the subject matter presented in part 2, I deal with only four basic views in their purest forms for two main reasons. First, this text is intentionally not a text on comparative religion or a grocery list of isms (there are plenty of those). This text is concerned with how to use the specific lens of philosophy to think critically about what we trust and particularly *why* we trust what we trust. This lens not only gives us a fresh look at what we believe; it also empowers us to understand why others choose to believe what they believe. Second, addressing only four basic views makes it manageable for us to learn about the particulars of our trusted beliefs in the context of other beliefs. Many writers have found other excellent—though more complex—ways to study

and teach world religions, isms, and comparative worldviews, and I have been inspired by several of these authors, including C. S. Lewis and James Sire. The simpler philosophical approach offered in this book is not antithetical to these texts; rather, this book should serve to enhance your access to other approaches.

Part 3 puts the “silly strips” from Chesterton’s quote back together and examines Christ as the fullness of reality. The truth from each of the four worldviews is put together, seamlessly, in Jesus Christ. We often work so hard to make our one strip of Prime Reality into the entirety. We stretch it to make it fit every question or issue or reality we encounter, but only in Christ do we find both complete truth and complete grace. And only in the power of paradox do we find the freedom and integrity to live in harmony with the life-giving tensions and apparent contradictions implicit within Prime Reality.

A companion volume to this text—*Inklings on Christ-Centered Biblical Discipleship* (2021)—will examine what embracing the tensions of the paradoxes of Christ looks like practically in a life following his. This text—*Inklings on Philosophy and Worldview*—is about the various stories humans tell about the world and themselves; the companion text *Inklings on Christ-Centered Biblical Discipleship* looks specifically at what it means to find ourselves in the grander story, the “true myth” as Lewis calls it,<sup>5</sup> of what God is doing in the world through Jesus Christ and in us to continue to build his Kingdom of love here and now. There is also an accompanying guidebook to this text if you want to explore the ideas presented here through activities and additional reading designed to take you deeper into this discussion and into personal ownership and development of your philosophy and worldview.

## FINAL EXHORTATION

I ask you to remember a few things as you read this book. First, this is not a traditional book on philosophy or apologetics. Professionals in those fields have already provided excellent resources on those topics. I am a husband, father, brother, son, friend, and fellow pilgrim who is offering a practical and useful way to organize the information, questions, and answers we are bombarded with on this adventure of life. In many respects, I am offering it to you because it works for me in my day-to-day endeavors to love and, as Ulysses says in Tennyson's poem, "drink life to the lees."<sup>6</sup> This book will not be able to prove the truth to you in the traditional sense of the word *prove*. It is not intended to do so. It is designed as a mirror for discovering your own object of trust and as a map for you to use as you continue your journey and quest for truth.

Second, I did not write this book to make you or anyone more "religious." I hope to show you truths that can break down walls, open locked doors, expose lies or fears, and invite you into joy, freedom, and love. I invite you to go beyond religion, trust lists, and worldviews into a relationship with *the* living, loving Being. The apostle John wrote of him, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). My unashamed, unambiguous, and ultimate hope is that this book brings you closer to the Christ, who can and will powerfully transform your life.

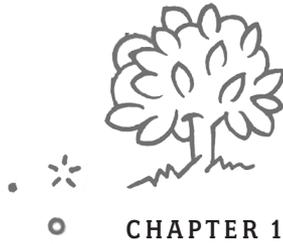


PART ONE

# Trust and the Nature of Reality







# Created to Trust

Everyone trusts. The only way humans live, eat, sleep, move, communicate, and eke out an existence is to make decisions based on whatever we consider trustworthy. This has been the case throughout all of history. Even through seismic cultural shifts, the defining and redefining of races and religions, and the rising and falling of empires, people have made decisions based on whom or what they trust as really real, as worthy of trust. But also all through history, humans have differed on the object of this trust. They have not agreed on where to put their confidence. Both of these are still true today. We still operate on trust, and we humans do not agree on whom or what is worthy of that trust.

We give authority to whom and what we trust, and the more we trust something or someone, the more authority we give.

Who do you turn to when you have a complex decision to navigate? Many people turn to their parents, teachers, coaches, or mentors. Some people would never turn to a teacher or parent and do not have coaches or mentors. Many teachers are transformative; some are unfit. Many coaches are inspiring; some are simply abusive. Many mentors are true leaders; some are blind guides. We take medicine from doctors we trust; we steer clear of those who have poor reputations. I would not let a surgeon cut me open or an anesthesiologist put me under if I did not trust him or her with my life. We do not take our cars to mechanics we do not trust. I only rock climb with trusted friends. Friends we trust sway what we wear, eat, say, and watch. Pastors positively and negatively shape our lives and habits. The books you read and the movies you watch shape your daily activities and verbiage. The list goes on and on.

Consciously and subconsciously, whatever we give authority to or have given authority to in the past directly and indirectly influences our current thoughts and behaviors. Ultimately, and without being fully consciously aware of it, we each develop personal “lists” of what we deem to be worthy of our trust. These personal trust lists become the primary influence on how we view and interact with the world.

Unfortunately, not everything to which we give authority is worthy of our trust. Moreover, we often find ourselves in situations in which others assert their authority over us even though we do not trust them. This type of authority often uses fear, inflicts pain, devises external motivators, and exploits ignorance to influence behavior. It often takes great courage to address the issues of trust and trustworthiness, particularly when it involves changing what we put our trust in or finding freedom from

unhealthy, unwanted situations of imposed authority. Many of these negative untrustworthy situations can be redemptively helpful in guiding us toward that which is truly trustworthy and life-giving. Additionally, these people and institutions can help us learn what not to do and who not to emulate—and why!

This is a great place to start our story. My hope is that this book leads you into a story of courage and freedom. Facing the truth about trust and authority, and potentially changing the motivation or object of our trust, could be the most courageous thing any of us will ever do. For some of us, standing firm in what we trust to be the truth in the face of opposition will take similar courage. This is where the adventure begins and, ironically, ends: in trust and courage.

