

SOME MAJOR WORLD VIEWS ON SOCIAL ISSUES

--notes by John MacDougall

INTRODUCTION

This is about several world-views that have been important in shaping the thinking—AND the actions—of both leaders and ordinary people since 1945, in many parts of the world. Numbers 1-3 are important features of the cold war. However the others have been influential too both before and after the end of the cold war. Also all have been present for decades—in some cases, centuries—before 1945.

Some of these worldviews are similar to the terms defined in Don Ostrowski's handout "Matrices of interpretation" which I believe is available on the course website. I strongly encourage you to look at this handout.

Comments on this would be most welcome!

These notes will hopefully be helpful in making sense of readings and classes—also I hope, especially useful for undergraduate assignment 3.

A worldview, as I see it, is a BROAD PERSPECTIVE regarding major problems in society in our time. It claims to "fit the pieces of the puzzle together" and it also usually calls people to action. If the call is strident, perhaps it would be better to call the worldview an ideology. We could also call worldviews paradigms.

What I give below are FAMILIES of worldviews, rather than individual ones. Also please note that An individual person, also a social group (family, political party members, neighborhood residents etc.) may hold MORE THAN ONE of these worldviews at the same time.

Please note that the following are NOT in the list below, because they are either not explicitly about social issues, or have not been widely acceptable since 1945.

- The naked pursuit of power, economic and/or political and/or military, especially through empires.
- Racism—both this and the naked pursuit of power are widely held, I think, but overt expressions of them are not fashionable in the early 21st century.
- Faith in science and technology—this is widespread but does not include an explicit view about the connections between scientific/technological process and specific social problems.
- Terrorism—this is a strategy, not a worldview as defined above.
- Mainstream denominations of major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam—others?). in these organizations, laypeople and ordained leaders usually say little about

the SOCIAL aspects of their faiths. An exception to this is religious extremists—worldview no. 5 below. Other exceptions are small “deviant” groups within these faiths that; e.g. “progressive” Christian groups like the Catholic Worker network, and Peace Churches such as Quakerism; also (I believe) Reconstructionist Judaism.

- Indigenous religious communities that are found all over the world, e.g. those among particular Native-American nations. I don’t list them below because they are usually confined to small geographic areas.

1. CAPITALISM. See the definition of laissez-faire in the Hunt text p.14. see also the definition in Don’s “matrices” handout. Many people say that a more extreme form of this became widespread since the 1970s, with the increasing influence of neo-liberalism—see Hunt text pp.345-46, 435.

2. REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY. This is often supposed to go along with capitalism. See the definition in Don’s “matrices” handout. A very well-known expression of this is the US constitution and Bill of Rights.

3. COMMUNISM AND SOCIALISM. These two of course are different, and have been defined very differently by different players (e.g. Stalin vs. Truman). Also the connection between these is very debatable. See Hunt text pp.4-6 and review your lecture notes for 6/23.

4. NATIONALISM. See Hunt text, pp.8-9. it is about a shared sense of identity, PLUS a call for action to ensure that this identity can be protected by a particular state. NOTE CAREFULLY that states and nations are not the same, even though many writers talk about the “nation-state.” Nationalism can be racist. Also, note that the area to which this applies may be within or across state boundaries, and it may take the form of what could be called regional nationalism (e.g. in Catalonia, Spain)

5. RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM. This worldview says: a) there’s only one way to practice a faith, b) those who don’t practice that way should be converted, if necessary by force, c) the failure of millions to practice correctly is a major (or even the only) cause of the world’s problems. This world view is found among some adherents of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. This worldview sometimes overlaps with nationalism.

6. HUMAN RIGHTS AND PEACE.

- A good expression of human rights is in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Hunt reader pp.427-32). This worldview espouses a more far-reaching view of democracy than representative democracy (worldview no. 2). It focuses especially on the rights of DISADVANTAGED groups, and includes the many movements advocating for those groups—e.g. the civil rights movement, feminism, the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer movement. Human rights also are both a) “substantive” e.g. about hiring people of color (see previous sentence), AND b) about process, e.g. not just voting but ensuring all voices are heard at public hearings....

- The peace movement is often allied to the human-rights one, and includes (i) opposition to

particular wars or weapons; (ii) building more constructive structures for handling conflicts, e.g. through nonviolent action, international treaties/laws, mediation and other forms of conflict resolution/transformation

7.EARTH COMMUNITY. I take this term from David Korten, *The Great Turning*, which I recommend. This worldview is prominent in the environmental movement, but is also present often in the various human-rights movements mentioned above, and in the peace movement. A good expression of it is the Earth Charter—see www.earthcharterus.org --also the optional reading *Deep Economy* by McKibben. The earth community worldview is not as explicitly expressed as the other 6 worldviews in this list, but (in my biased opinion?) it is gaining visibility and support—for instance it was prominent in the “antiglobalization” protests at Seattle in 1999 and thereafter (see Hunt text pp.460-61) It goes beyond many forms of environmentalism. It espouses both good ECOSYSTEM relationships –involving nonhuman beings, unlike any of the other 6 worldviews in these notes--and good human-to-human relationships, especially in small communities. Often this worldview draws on the beliefs of preindustrial societies. Usually too high priority is given to the self-sufficiency and autonomy of villages/small towns/neighborhoods.