

how should we then live francis schaeffer 2

how should we then live francis schaeffer 2 explores the profound philosophical and theological implications of Francis Schaeffer's seminal work, "How Should We Then Live?". This article delves into Schaeffer's central arguments, examining his unique approach to understanding history, culture, and the Christian faith in the modern world. We will unpack his critique of the "two-tiered" system of thought and its impact on art, morality, and the human spirit. Furthermore, we'll analyze how Schaeffer's ideas provide a framework for individuals seeking a coherent worldview and a meaningful way to live in contemporary society. The discussion will cover his emphasis on the reasonableness of Christianity and its capacity to offer genuine answers to life's most pressing questions.

Understanding Francis Schaeffer's Core Arguments in How Should We Then Live?

Francis Schaeffer's "How Should We Then Live?" stands as a landmark in twentieth-century Christian apologetics and cultural commentary. At its heart, the book addresses a fundamental question: in a world increasingly shaped by secular humanism and a fragmentation of thought, how can individuals find meaning, purpose, and a coherent framework for life? Schaeffer argues that a pervasive philosophical divide, which he terms the "two-tiered" system, has bifurcated Western thought. This system separates faith and reason, religion and empirical reality, leading to a spiritual vacuum and a crisis of meaning.

His thesis posits that when the absolute basis of truth—God's revelation—is abandoned, all subsequent truth claims become relative. This erosion of objective truth, according to Schaeffer, has demonstrably impacted various facets of culture, including art, morality, and social structures. He traces this historical trajectory, demonstrating how the abandonment of a Christian worldview, rooted in the Bible, has led to the rise of existentialism, nihilism, and ultimately, a society struggling with a loss of shared values and ultimate reference points. Understanding Schaeffer's critique is crucial for grasping his proposed solutions.

The "Two-Tiered" System and its Cultural Impact

The Divorce of Faith and Reason

One of Schaeffer's central concerns in "How Should We Then Live?" is the damaging separation of faith and reason within Western intellectual history. He observes a cultural trend where religious or spiritual beliefs are relegated to a private, subjective realm, disconnected from the objective, observable world of science and history. This "two-tiered" approach creates an artificial dichotomy, implying that faith is irrational or that objective

truth can only be found outside of a divinely revealed framework. Schaeffer contends that this division leaves individuals without a unified understanding of reality, forcing them to compartmentalize their lives and experiences.

This philosophical divorce, as Schaeffer portrays it, has profound consequences. If faith is deemed separate from reason, then the Christian worldview is perceived as merely a personal preference rather than a comprehensive explanation of reality. This opens the door for secular philosophies to dominate public discourse and academic inquiry, often leading to conclusions that are fundamentally at odds with a biblical understanding of humanity, morality, and the cosmos. The resulting intellectual landscape is one of fragmentation and uncertainty, as Schaeffer vividly illustrates through historical examples.

The Erosion of Objective Morality

The impact of the "two-tiered" system extends directly to the realm of ethics and morality. When God is removed as the ultimate moral lawgiver, the foundation for objective, universal moral standards crumbles. Schaeffer argues that without a transcendent source of authority, morality becomes subjective, shifting with cultural trends and individual preferences. This leads to what he describes as a "tyranny of the relative," where any ethical system that gains popular acceptance can be deemed valid, regardless of its grounding in timeless principles.

He traces the progression from traditional moral frameworks to the moral relativism that characterized much of the twentieth century. This erosion of objective morality, in Schaeffer's view, has significant implications for society, contributing to the breakdown of family structures, the acceptance of widely divergent ethical viewpoints, and a general confusion about right and wrong. His work prompts a critical examination of the sources of our moral convictions and the implications of abandoning a divine basis for ethics.

The Influence on Art and Culture

Schaeffer dedicates significant attention to how this intellectual and moral fragmentation manifests in the arts and broader culture. He analyzes artistic movements throughout history, highlighting how shifts in worldview are reflected in painting, music, and philosophy. From the Renaissance's integration of faith and art to later movements that embraced abstraction, subjectivism, and even nihilism, Schaeffer argues that art serves as a barometer of a culture's underlying worldview. The abandonment of objective truth, he suggests, leads to art that becomes increasingly personal, abstract, and disconnected from shared meaning.

He examines how the loss of a unified worldview results in art that often expresses alienation, despair, and a search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless universe. Schaeffer's analysis of specific artists and movements aims to demonstrate that when the foundation of truth is removed, the resulting cultural expressions often reflect a profound existential angst. This perspective encourages readers to critically assess the messages

embedded within the art and media they consume, understanding them as indicators of deeper philosophical currents.

Schaeffer's Proposal: A Unified Worldview

The Reasonableness of Christianity

In stark contrast to the fragmented secular worldviews he critiques, Schaeffer champions Christianity as a uniquely rational and comprehensive system for understanding reality. He insists that the Christian faith is not merely a matter of blind belief but is grounded in historical events, empirical evidence, and logical coherence. Schaeffer's apologetic approach emphasizes the truth claims of Christianity, asserting that they provide a solid foundation for knowledge, morality, and meaning in all areas of life.

His emphasis on the "reasonableness" of Christianity is a direct response to the secular intellectual climate that often dismisses faith as irrational. Schaeffer argues that a biblical worldview offers satisfying answers to fundamental questions that secular philosophies struggle to address, such as the existence of objective morality, the nature of humanity, and the ultimate destiny of the universe. By presenting Christianity as intellectually robust, he seeks to persuade individuals that it is not an outdated relic but a vital and relevant framework for contemporary life.

The Christian as a Radical Humanist

Schaeffer's assertion that Christians should be "radical humanists" might initially seem paradoxical. However, he uses the term "humanism" to denote a focus on humanity and its flourishing. He argues that true humanism, which seeks the best for humanity, is found in the Christian worldview. This is because Christianity, in his view, provides the correct anthropology—an understanding of humanity created in the image of God, fallen but redeemable. Therefore, a Christian framework, by respecting the inherent dignity and purpose of each individual, is the ultimate expression of genuine humanism.

He contrasts this with secular humanism, which he believes, in its attempt to elevate humanity by removing God, ultimately diminishes humanity by stripping it of its divinely ordained purpose and dignity. Schaeffer's call for Christians to be radical humanists is a challenge to engage actively and thoughtfully with the world, offering the fullness of the Christian message as the solution to humanity's deepest needs and aspirations. This involves living out the Christian faith in a way that demonstrates its relevance and superiority in addressing the human condition.

Living Out the Christian Worldview

For Schaeffer, the question "how should we then live?" is not merely an intellectual exercise but a call to action. He believed that a genuine

understanding and acceptance of the Christian worldview must inevitably translate into a distinct way of living. This means engaging with culture critically, not by retreating from it, but by offering distinctively Christian perspectives and solutions. It involves living consistently with one's beliefs, demonstrating the superiority of a biblical framework in personal, social, and intellectual life.

Schaeffer encouraged Christians to be involved in apologetics, art, politics, and all spheres of life, presenting the truth of Christianity with clarity and compassion. His life and ministry were characterized by a passionate engagement with the cultural issues of his day, demonstrating that faith is not confined to the private realm but has profound implications for public life. The ultimate aim is to live in such a way that the reasonableness and transformative power of the Christian faith are made evident to the world.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central thesis of Francis Schaeffer's 'How Should We Then Live?' in relation to the modern world?

The central thesis is that the erosion of a cohesive, biblical worldview in Western civilization has led to moral relativism, societal breakdown, and a loss of meaning. Schaeffer argues that understanding this historical trajectory, from the Renaissance to modern times, is crucial for individuals and society to find true answers and live meaningfully.

How does Schaeffer connect the rise of humanism and existentialism to the societal issues he discusses?

Schaeffer links humanism and existentialism to the decline of objective truth and the abandonment of God as the ultimate reference point. He argues that when humanity places itself at the center, it leads to a subjective and ultimately despairing view of life, where meaning and morality are constantly in flux.

What role does Schaeffer assign to Christianity in addressing the problems he outlines?

Schaeffer champions historic Christianity as the only worldview that provides a solid foundation for truth, morality, and meaning. He believes that a faithful, intellectual engagement with Christian principles is the solution to the relativistic and nihilistic trends he observes in the modern world.

What does Schaeffer mean by 'the line of despair' and how does it relate to his argument?

'The line of despair' refers to the logical conclusion of a worldview that denies God and objective truth. Schaeffer illustrates how art, philosophy, and eventually society itself, move towards incoherence and meaninglessness as they abandon a transcendent basis for reality. He argues that without God, there is no ultimate answer to life's fundamental questions.

How does Schaeffer's analysis of art and culture in the book contribute to his overall argument?

Schaeffer uses art and culture as significant indicators of the prevailing worldview. He analyzes shifts in artistic expression from representational art (reflecting order and meaning) to abstract and fragmented forms (reflecting a loss of coherence and meaning) to demonstrate the broader cultural consequences of a decaying worldview.

What is the practical implication for Christians after reading 'How Should We Then Live?'

The practical implication for Christians is a call to intellectual engagement, cultural discernment, and a confident articulation of the Christian worldview. Schaeffer encourages believers to understand the philosophical and cultural currents of their time and to offer the truth and hope of Christianity as a relevant and compelling alternative.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the themes and impact of Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live?*, along with short descriptions:

1. *The Abolition of Man*

C.S. Lewis, in this seminal work, explores the potential dangers of reducing human nature to mere scientific manipulation. He argues for the importance of universal moral principles, or "Tao," which he believes are essential for a meaningful and coherent civilization. The book is a profound defense of objective morality against the rise of relativistic and scientific philosophies, resonating with Schaeffer's concerns about the erosion of Western thought.

2. *Mere Christianity*

Another classic by C.S. Lewis, this book distills Christian theological concepts into accessible arguments. Lewis addresses fundamental questions about God, morality, and the nature of Jesus Christ, aiming to provide a rational basis for faith. Like Schaeffer, Lewis seeks to bridge the gap between intellectual understanding and spiritual conviction, addressing the prevailing skepticism of his time.

3. *The Closing of the American Mind*

Allan Bloom critiques the state of higher education in America, arguing that the embrace of relativism and the decline of intellectual rigor have left students unprepared to engage with fundamental truths. Bloom's concerns about the loss of shared cultural and philosophical frameworks echo Schaeffer's anxieties regarding the disintegration of Western values. Both authors lament the narrowing of intellectual horizons in contemporary society.

4. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*

Dallas Willard focuses on the practical application of Christian faith, emphasizing the role of spiritual disciplines in transforming character and behavior. He argues that true spiritual growth requires intentional effort and commitment, not just intellectual assent. This aligns with Schaeffer's call for a lived, authentic faith that impacts all of life, not just abstract beliefs.

5. *Orthodoxy*

G.K. Chesterton, in this autobiographical theological exploration, defends Christianity with wit and logical brilliance. Chesterton argues that Christian doctrines are not outdated superstitions but rather the keys to understanding reality and human nature. His defense of the coherence and foundational truth of Christianity parallels Schaeffer's efforts to demonstrate the viability of a Christian worldview in the modern age.

6. *The Weight of Glory*

C.S. Lewis delivers powerful sermons that address the longing for transcendence and the eternal destiny of humanity. He discusses themes of pain, love, and the ultimate fulfillment found in God's presence. The collection reflects a deeply Christian understanding of human purpose and longing, a core element Schaeffer sought to reassert in a secularized world.

7. *A Grief Observed*

C.S. Lewis's intensely personal account of losing his wife, Helen. This work candidly explores doubt, anger, and the struggle to reconcile faith with profound suffering. It demonstrates a wrestling with the realities of life that is essential for authentic faith, a nuance that Schaeffer himself embodied in his lived theology.

8. *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith, Persecution, and the Miracles of Life in the Bible Belt of Persecution*

Nik Ripken shares the testimonies of persecuted Christians, highlighting their unwavering faith in the face of extreme adversity. The book underscores the power of a robust faith to endure suffering and maintain hope. This resonates with Schaeffer's emphasis on the importance of a faith that is not only intellectually sound but also resilient in the face of life's hardest challenges.

9. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Masterpiece of a Relationship with God*

Dallas Willard presents a compelling case for a life lived in constant, active relationship with God. He argues that Christianity is not merely a set of doctrines but a vibrant, ongoing partnership with the divine. This vision of engaged, transformative faith directly supports Schaeffer's call for Christians to live out their worldview authentically in all spheres of life.

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