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A Worldview Clash in View — A Gift from Literature

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No one should underestimate the extent to which fundamental worldviews produce very different understandings of reality. These different understandings of reality produce radically different perspectives on the real-life issues with which we are confronted.

One key issue here is the reading of history. In simple terms, these different readings of reality lead to different understandings of where history leads. Western liberal thought has long been shaped by the myth of inevitable progress. This is inevitably fueled by a legitimate celebration of developments ranging from democracy to air conditioning and antibiotics. There are also legitimate grounds for celebrating moral progress on fronts including slavery, racism, and other issues. The liberal mistake is to assume that this means that all moral change is progress. This mistake is accompanied by an assumption that moral progress always means the expansion of individual autonomy.

The clash between fundamental worldviews is often difficult to capture, but sometimes literature does what a news report cannot. Consider this passage from Cormac McCarthy's novel, *No Country for Old Men*. In this passage, one of the main characters reflects on this clash:

Here a year or two back me and Loretta went to a conference in Corpus Christi and I got set next to this woman, she was the wife of somebody or other. And she kept talking about the right wing this and the right wing that.

I aint even sure what she meant by it. The people I know are mostly just common people. Common as dirt, as the sayin goes. I told her that and she looked at me funny. She thought I was sayin something bad about em, but of course that's a high compliment in my part of the world. She kept on, kept on.

Finally told me, said: I don't like the way this country is headed. I want my granddaughter to be able to have an abortion. And I said well mam I don't think you got any worries about the way the country is headed. The way I see it goin I don't have much doubt but what she'll be able to have an abortion. I'm goin to say that not only will she be able to have an abortion, she'll be able to have you put to sleep. Which pretty much ended the conversation.

That exchange also pretty much sums up the clash of worldviews. Sometimes literature captures a universe of meaning in a minimum of words.

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