

## BOOK REVIEW

of

Ronald H. Nash,

*Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy,*

Zondervan, 1999.

This book is in the Evangel Library,  
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

Ronald Nash is a professor of philosophy and theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, and taught for many years at a secular university, Western Kentucky University, before joining the faculty at RTS. In the Preface Dr. Nash explains that during his many years of teaching “I had difficulty finding a satisfactory textbook for my introduction to philosophy courses. All of the books I examined and many that I used seemed to have been written not for students but for a relatively small group of philosophers. Now that it’s finished, this book is the kind of text I wish I’d had when I began teaching.” Therefore, his purpose in writing this book is to *introduce* the subject of philosophy: to indicate the importance of the subject, to explain the several most important conceptual systems that have been proposed to study philosophy, and to expose the reader to the important problems that philosophy attempts to address. He presents all of this in a very well-organized, well-written book from a Christian perspective. Or rather, he illustrates how the Christian world-view illuminates and yields answers to “Life’s Ultimate Questions” where other systems of philosophy fail. He writes in the first part of the book in such a way as to suggest that he intended the book to be at least considered for use in secular universities. He writes fairly and non-dogmatically, seemingly attempting to give non-Christian points of view a fair hearing. However, he does not shrink from openly and convincingly, from my perspective at least, demonstrating the superiority of Christian thinking on “Ultimate Questions,” and would therefore, probably not be acceptable as a textbook for most non-Christian philosophers. However, for Christian universities, this seems to be the kind of introduction to philosophy that all students should be required to take. In fact, the level of writing is such that Christian high-school students should have little difficulty with it, and it would be excellent preparation for those intending to attend a secular university.

The book is divided into three sections – Introduction, Part One: Six Conceptual Systems, and Part Two: Important Problems in Philosophy. The Introduction consists of one chapter: Worldview Thinking. In Chapter 1 Nash indicates that any worldview will contain at least five central beliefs: beliefs about God, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and anthropology. All of these terms are defined, and it is stressed that everyone already has worldview beliefs about each of these, even if not well thought-out or articulated. After all, it is the purpose of the book to help readers think through and articulate their positions on these things. Having thoughts and positions on these things is part of what it means to be human. As Gordon Clark has commented, everyone has a philosophy, it’s just that some have a better philosophy than others. Since these issues relate to “Life’s Ultimate Questions,” it makes sense to want to think about them correctly. We hear comments daily from the news media, the entertainment media, cab drivers, and neighbors that are very worldview laden. Thinking clearly about such things is perhaps the very essence of what it means to be educated.

Part One consists of six chapters: Naturalism, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, and Aquinas. The names in this list are recognizable to most of us. What is perhaps surprising is that they represent, almost exhaustively, the conceptual systems that almost everyone embraces whether consciously or not. All are presented with respect and care, with the intent to accurately present their contributions and why they are so respected and have been for so long. The quality of this publication is excellent, with great attention to organization, many graphical sketches, tables and diagrams, and each chapter concludes with a suggested list “for further reading.” The first chapter in this Part, Naturalism, is based on Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus and Lucretius. It is particularly important in that Naturalism is the philosophy of our society. Nash states that “It is important to recognize how much of contemporary naturalism is largely a restatement, however sophisticated it may appear, of ideas known and opposed by all of the other systems discussed in” the remainder of Part One. He also states that “For much of the twentieth century, the worldview of naturalism has been the major antagonist of the Christian faith in those parts of the world described by the label of Christendom.” In Nash’s critique of naturalism, serious inadequacies are found, not the least of which is that “It is difficult to see how metaphysical naturalism can provide an adequate reason why human reasoning can ever be valid or that our sense organs can be trusted.”

Part Two consists of eleven chapters on “Important Problems in Philosophy.” In this Part, Nash clearly shows not only the superiority of Christian thinking that gives reasonable answers to some of life’s most difficult questions, but the intellectual bankruptcy of other conceptual systems to provide adequate or even reasonable answers to “Life’s Ultimate Questions.”

I have tried to disguise my enthusiasm for this book above, perhaps without much success. This is a book that not only should be read, but reread and reread again.