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God and Truth VI: Is There Meaning in the World? Religion or Secular Humanism: That is the Question? Panel Discussion
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Religion and the Secular after Disenchantment

Thesis: Existential meaning is impossible without a rational fit between thinking and being. If there is no isomorphism between reason (the laws of thought) and being (what *is*) there can be no meaning in speech and no purpose in human action. We are left with nihilism if reason is not ontological. Loss of meaning is a result of the lack of the *Logos*.

1. **What do we mean by "meaning"?**
   a. More basic sense: Reason is ontological. Reason, the laws of thought, applies to being (reality). Aristotle and significant (meaningful) speech.
   b. Less basic sense: Existential meaning, life has objective purpose.

2. **Disenchantment:** (Charles Taylor *A Secular Age*) Loss of transcendence in the world (the world is no longer enchanted). Brief history of loss of transcendence (is this a necessary outworking?). The history of Western philosophy is a struggle to understand and explain the relationship between thinking and being. It is the search for the *Logos*. The *Logos* is being worked out in world history. The perceived conflict between "religion" and "secularism" is unique to the late Modern and Postmodern stages in that history. How did we get here?
   a. **Stage 1**: Reason is ontological and there is no God (first philosophers and the search for the *Logo*s)
      i. The senses are in touch with the observable world
      ii. The *Logos* is all around us
      iii. All is matter (flux or permanence?)
      iv. What is the source of permanence?
      v. How is knowledge possible?
      vi. Skepticism, sophistry and the loss of meaning
   b. **Stage 2**: Reason is ontological and God exists (The *Logos* of John's Gospel and medieval philosophy)
      i. Reason is in human beings as that by which we know the world and God
      ii. The world is created by God with natural laws
      iii. God is the infinite, eternal, unchangeable Creator of all that is temporal
      iv. The Good for human beings is based on human nature
      v. The common good is based upon moral laws
      vi. Voluntarism, the shift towards fideism and the loss of meaning
   c. **Stage 3**: Reason is not ontological and God exists (Abandonment of Logos; Modern philosophy and Deism)

i. High view of reason
ii. Moderate empiricism
iii. Deism (moving towards atheism) and realism
iv. Human nature is part of the natural order (evolution and progress)
v. Society is shaped by individuals agreeing to a Social Contract
vi. Nietzsche and the shift towards the death of God, the "immanent frame" and the loss of meaning

d. **Stage 4**: Reason is not ontological and God does not exist (Anti-*Logos*; Post-Nietzschean Nihilism/ death of God). The disenchanted world.
   i. Instrumental reason (critique and world construction)
   ii. Radical empiricism and skepticism
   iii. Radical materialism and anti-realism
   iv. Human nature is based on sentiments
   v. The good life is fulfillment of subjective desire
   vi. Society is shaped by the State

3. **Religion:** Belief in transcendence (supranatural - God, the Good, True, Beautiful, soul) and the fullness of life is found through this transcendence. Belief is contrasted with unbelief (no transcendence, only the sensible world exists). In unbelief, the fullness of life is found in "exclusive humanism". Exclusive humanism is synonymous with "the death of God." It is what we are calling "secular humanism." Do belief and unbelief serve the same purpose?
   a. Problem of otherworldliness
   b. Problem of naive belief
   c. Problem of fideism (religious nihilism)

4. **Secular**: "The World;" Taylor's three dimensions of secular:
   a. S1: Secularized public spaces: separation of church and state
   b. S2: Decline of belief and practice (secularization thesis and the advancement of science and the retreat of religion).
   c. S3: New conditions of belief where exclusive humanism becomes a live (and now dominant) option
      i. Problem of this worldliness/ the "immanent frame" (existential meaning is entirely subjective)
      ii. Problem of belief under the condition of critique (is all belief now fideistic?)
      iii. Problem of skepticism and nihilism
         1. Negative nihilism and the loss of meaning
         2. Positive nihilism and the will to power

5. **For critical reflection**:
   a. Is reason ontological? If so, what does that do for our discussion?
   b. Is reason transcendental? If so, what does that do for our discussion?
   c. What if we recast "religion" as the belief or set of beliefs that we use to give meaning to our experiences? Who is religious?

d. The question of meaning is first a philosophical question prior to it being a religious question. Can we get back to doing honest metaphysics? Can we argue for our assumptions about what is real?
e. Can we apply reason as a test for meaning to see which metaphysical assumption is true?
    i. Is it true that all of our knowledge is through the senses?
    ii. Is it true that the only world is the sensible world to the exclusion of the suprasensible?
    iii. Is it true that skepticism, fideism, and resulting nihilism are our only options?
    iv. Can we use reason (the laws of thought) to grasp meaning, find truth, and the Good, the source of existential meaning?