

David Brooks, The Second Mountain, New York, 2019.

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Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Brooks has produced an admirable work with an overall message which I, as a social scientist, agree is much needed in modern complex society. This message: Stop pursuing a worldview excessively dominated at all levels of society by the perspective of individualism; Instead, support the restoration of appropriate input from the communal/relational perspective at all social scales so as to create the needed balance between Me and We oriented points of view.

I have spent my career dealing in one way or another with this imbalance issue. I offer my solution to this difficult matter under the concept of “Dynamic Humanism.” See my website for both overviews and more detailed essays [www.dynamic-humanism.com]. Brooks began his career as a liberal, then converted to conservatism, and now has shifted to a more socially moderate viewpoint. Brooks struggles bravely in The Second Mountain to highlight and suggest how excessive individualism in modern society can be rectified. In the process, he describes his parallel personal journey.

From my point of view, Brooks is short of getting it all together. First, he does not recognize the fundamental problem we all share that our tool for exploration and communication about reality – language – is an artificial filter utilizing categories [nouns and verbs] imposed on the unified continua of reality leaving us always short of full intellectual conceptualization and understanding. Second, Brooks does not adequately distinguish the competitive from the cooperative, the spiritual from the religious, the intellectual from the intuitive, the objective from the subjective, the analytical from the synthetic, separation from unification, the material from the energetic, and the moral from the ethical.

Brooks could avoid being “drawn” to religion in one form or another if he recognized the role of the human intuitive mental faculty to provide humans with access to the spiritual complex [subjective-moral-connectedness-paranormal-unification] experience of and perspective on reality. It is this basic experience and perspective that provide the support for the social complex [communal-ethical-relational-cooperative-philanthropic-altruistic] orientation in human worldviews. And if Brooks understood the universal, immaterial energy basis of all of reality and its role in connecting all of reality into one entity and identity, he would realize 1) that separation among “things” and “actions” is an illusion of the material perspective, 2) that identity is shared among all “things,” and 3) that treating others with respect and care is treating an alternative manifestation of

oneself with respect and care. The implications of energetic unity and the spiritual connectedness of all entities are sufficient to justify humanity's moral and ecological obligation in reality without feeling the need to appeal to any independent God based [or God like – Universal Consciousness] agency from any dogmatic religion. And, importantly, all of human expressive culture – all the arts and rituals – are designed to take us to this spiritual-energetic awareness. Unfortunately, in the modern context, when intuitive-spiritual based art and ritual are reduced to sensational secular “entertainment,” we lose the important input of these vehicles for transporting us to the spiritual understanding of reality and its support for the communal and moral perspective in our worldviews.

Most human societies in the 98% of human history when humans lived in bands and tribes included the intuitive based spiritual perspective on self, society and reality as fundamental in their worldviews. They also fostered the development and use of the synthesizing intuitive faculty equally balanced with development of the analytical intellectual faculty. The emergence of complex societies together with the development of institutionalized religion in support of the emergent power elite began the process of humanity losing immediate, constant and personal contact with the spiritual. Modern competitive and secular humanism/materialism/individualism has further amplified this loss. And ironically, the individualistic modern forms of fundamentalistic religion compound the problem by substituting dogmatic commitment to specific religious belief systems for universal spirituality – thereby promoting division and conflict to the point of warfare.

Recovering spirituality and the support it provides for universal morality, cooperation, responsibility, generosity, community, and natural ecology is a huge challenge. Literally all of humanity's major current global scale problems are promoted and sustained by our failure to recognize and address this challenge.

Brooks has identified the challenge and its importance, even if he has not fully exposed some of the significant “variables” involved in both the problem and its solution.