

# Uncovering the Effects of Cultural Background on the Reconstruction of Ancient Worldviews

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### Abstract

This paper looks at some of the problems inherent in the reconstructing of ancient worldviews by focusing on the Germanic Reconstructionist movement. Specifically, many of the problems revolve around the idea that modern interpretive efforts are complicated by the fact that most reconstructionists have been borne into and raised within an urban environment where the philosophy of life is based on the herd mentality and a world-rejecting spiritual outlook which interferes with the ability to investigate the ancient worldviews objectively. By being able to isolate and identify these cultural filters, one may choose to broaden the scope of his

interpretive powers which may then result in more accurate reconstructions than have been previously available.

## 1 Introduction

First, this paper is about worldviews and how they function in our lives. Modern heathenry, that is, ancient worldviews, in general, is a central theme, but it is not the main focus. It was chosen as the central theme for a large number of reasons but the main reason is that modern heathenry, i.e. a way of living based on the philosophical ideals and cosmology of the Viking Age Germanic peoples, is of special interest to the author and has been for many decades. The thesis is worldview and, interestingly, Germanic heathenry was not the author's first encounter with the necessity of shifting from normal modern thought processes to a completely different way to view, to think about, to describe and then proceed to solve problems utilizing a system completely foreign to him; the medical field was the initiatory phase.

In 1995, the author as part of a team effort at a state funded hospital decided to investigate the feasibility of utilizing diagnostic techniques and treatment methods associated with Galenic medicine, i.e., medicine as practiced during the Middle-Ages in Europe and used as the standard form of medicine until close to the end of the 19th century. The rationale for the decision was simple—the hospital treatment team in long-term care needed diagnostic and treatment procedures so that problems of the digestive system including swallowing could be handled efficiently and be of the greatest benefit to the patient and it was known to several members on the team that “medieval medicine” had been very effective in this area. The team based its decision on the following list of assumptions:

1. Texts on the history of medicine are all in general agreement that Galenic medical practitioners knew much about digestion and the treatment of digestion through diet modification, in fact, almost all medical treatment for any form of disease was primarily “through the stomach.”
2. Diagnostic procedures should be relatively simple based on a “simplified version of urinalysis” and a simplified version of a physical examination since these procedures had been developed and refined in a “pre-scientific” era.
3. Diagnoses themselves would of necessity be simple, straightforward descriptions of the symptomology at hand and since they were no longer considered “medical diagnoses” the nursing and rehab staffs should be able to utilize them specifically for swallowing and digestive tract difficulties.
4. Treatment should be within the scope of any kitchen food and diet modifications were the primary forms of treatment.

The team agreed to meet in two weeks for the preliminary report and begin work on a plan design. Two years later, the second meeting had only been half done: the preliminary report had been given. Work on plan design never came to fruition, at least not with the “treatment team”

The initial researchers dwindled down to two and eventually became one. Assumption #1 above had been found to be correct but numbers 2, 3, and 4 were within the initial two weeks found to be completely incorrect. Medical practitioners were indeed trained highly on the digestive tract and treatment (often very effective) was primarily through this system. However, unbeknownst to any team member during the first meeting, these medical practitioners not only had science, a scientific method for approaching problems and suggesting solutions, but they also had a very well developed sense of anatomy, physiology, metabolics, urology, phlebology and were able to use their “science” to generate complex diagnoses for complex disorders. Two years later, one of the original team members was able to apply this ancient science to the original task of “diet modification” with great success. This final team member continues to utilize these methods on the job and continues studies in this particular field of science, not so much because there is so much more to learn in the field (which there is) but because the ongoing clash of the two systems continues to reveal to him more and more about the inner workings of his own mind.

The application of Galenic medicine in the modern era is extremely difficult. Diagnoses must be “translated” into modern terminology, which is not impossible albeit somewhat difficult, but the justifications necessary to modern hospital settings are almost if not completely impossible. Talking about humours and the proper movements of humours—normal and abnormal, temperaments and faculties of organs, faculties—animal, vital and natural, radical moisture and innate heat which need to be balanced through the four administering virtues of attraction, retention and expulsion. The problem, however, is not the system; in fact, if anything, the system works great. It is very logical leads to very specific diagnoses and very specific treatments which rarely fail to produce the desired results. The clash of the two completely systems is very difficult to resolve.

It is a rare individual who can suppress 9 years of training in a modern scientific field and all the while suppressing a lifetime of information regarding how diseases are caused, passed on, treated and or prevented, one who can suppress common knowledge about the common cold which can be found everyday in common places like a grocery store book section or a corner newstand. Ignoring assumptions like bacteria and virii are the cause of disease and picking up “new” assumptions such as “the imbalance of normal or abnormal humours is the cause of dyscrasia” is not a simple task because the subconscious chimes up at the most inopportune times “*What about the fact that E. coli or pseudomonas is the known cause of this type of pneumonia?*” Total suppression of a lifetime of experience is probably impossible and compartmentalization of the information sets is possible except there are always those little subconscious “bleed-throughs” for the subconscious mind is no respecter of the artificial borders of set by the individual to isolate the information sets. In fact, the subconscious mind was there, probably smiling, during the border-setting ceremony.

This article describes a similar process being engaged today by individuals not simply wishing to pick up a new set of logic which may conflict with common 21st century knowledge but a whole new way of perceiving, interacting oneself within and conducting oneself through the world of the 21st century. The task is daunting. It requires constant vigilance not only in a few small areas but in virtually all arenas of life. To maintain any type of momentum, the individual must be strong in his convictions and dedication to the task. The author had set himself to the initial experiment of one field of study, galenic-medicine, but the overall principles remain the same.

## 2 Classifying Modern Heathens by Group Intention

It is generally accepted that northern Germanic Europe was converted around 1000 CE. Historians, folklorists, and anthropologists maintain that the conversion to Christianity was not complete, however, until sometime between the late 1400s and 1750 CE depending on the source one reads. Some modern fantasy groups in both America and Europe maintain (à la Margret Murry) that some pockets of the Old Religion (their term) remained intact until into this century. There is much speculation on everyone's part. This paper looks at some of the better documented information regarding the conversion of northern Europe, some of the vestiges of the older heathen philosophy and way of life which lingered on for centuries afterwards in the more agrarian areas, and how urbanization has effected a change in worldview in an attempt to disentangle this overall complex picture. Finally, several methods will be presented which can help reveal the subtle alterations in thought which impede true reconstruction of ancient worldviews, specifically the Viking Age Germanic worldview.

Since the 1940s, most dramatically in America and the United Kingdom, there have been attempts to revitalize the so-called Old Religion. Such movements have actually been making whirlwind appearances since the late 1700s but none had caught on and hit mainstream until the appearance of "wicca" and "wicca-like" groups midway through the 20th century, all of which seem to have their origin with Gerald Gardner<sup>1</sup> and his self-motivated distillation of M. Murray's,<sup>2</sup> Frazer's,<sup>3</sup> and Leland's<sup>4</sup> highly speculative works combined with his own knowledge of Freemasonry, ceremonial magic groups of the turn of the 19th century, British folklore and Malay magical practices. It has been Gardner's followers who have at the forefront of promulgating and perpetuating a very mythologized form of European heathenism/ paganism up to the present.

The driving philosophy behind the neo-wiccan writers<sup>5</sup> has been, according

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<sup>1</sup>See Ronald Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* and Aiden Kelly's

<sup>2</sup>Margret Murray *The Witch-cult in Western Europe*, 1921, (Oxford University Press; London) reprinted in 1962.

<sup>3</sup>Frazer, *The Golden Bough*

<sup>4</sup>Leland *Aradia: Gospel of the Witches*

<sup>5</sup>*Neo-wiccan* is used here to mean post-Gardener. There is no attempt in this paper to

to interviews of wiccans by this author, that

“at this point it does not matter what the truth actually is since we will never know the complete truth anyway. The important thing is that paganism survived in Europe and that we are the only who seem to care enough to write about it. At least we know that the *real* truth is in there somewhere.”<sup>6</sup>

The above quote was a justifying response to this author regarding modern wicca’s transparent policy of freely mixing celtic, anglo-saxon, native American, modern irish, druidic, buddhist, Hindu and South American traditions. For many, the idea is much like mixing 100 common household cooking ingredients into a pot and then serving it as dinner with the disclaimer “Don’t worry what it’s called or what the flavor is, there is a *real* soup and a *real* dessert in there somewhere.”

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was another move by several separate groups on both the north American and European continents to revitalize ancient indigenous religions. Several groups in the United States, at least two in England, one in Germany and one in Iceland all independently began reconstruction of the ancient Germanic religion of the Viking Era;<sup>7</sup> one group in Greece began serious reconstruction of the Hellenic religion; one group within the United States began reconstruction of the ancient roman religion; and one group based in the Baltic States began reconstruction of Romuva, their name for the indigenous religion of northeastern Europe. Since the 1990s, there have also been serious attempts to revive the ancient Russian and druidic religions. All these reconstructive efforts focus themselves on a time frame between 500 CE to the point of conversion for each respective ethnic group because written documentation is available from that period of time and the archeological record is clear enough to establish the veracity of the written reports.

The approach to reconstruction of these ancient religious beliefs differs significantly from the earlier attempts by 18th and 19th century academics and by the wiccan movement of the 20th century in the following respects:

1. There is no attempt to recreate a combined pan-european paganism.
2. Researchers attempt to stay within research guidelines developed over the course of the past century for handling documentation generated in the time periods that they are studying.
3. A multi-disciplinary approach is utilized capitalizing on results from various fields as historical literary research, anthropology, religious history, political history, archeology, forensic anthropology, historical sociology, etc. with an overt attempt to avoid pseudo-sciences.

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give Wicca any historical credibility earlier than 1940.

<sup>6</sup>Taken during an interview with a wiccan in Albuquerque, New Mexico, ca. 1979. The interview occurred during a *sabbat* celebrated in the south valley of that same city.

<sup>7</sup>This reconstruction is discussed in a previous paper by this author *Germanic Spirituality*, 2003 which can be found at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/spirituality.pdf>.

4. There are serious attempts to recreate culture, politics, science and art of the period in order to better understand the environment within which the religious beliefs were practiced.

It is also important to note that modern mythologies (Atlantis, UFOs, etc.) and modern occult practices as well as modern pseudo-sciences are avoided for the most part and that when they surface, as they inevitably will, they are immediately dissected, analyzed, labeled, and promptly discarded by the more serious reconstructionists. This approach has not been infallible, however.

It should be mentioned here that serious reconstruction of ancient religious practices is not only fascinating to the researchers themselves (regardless of whether they have actually adopted the focus of their research as actual practice) but has, of course, caught the fancy of wiccans and other new age occult groups because of the depth of content and closeness of the field of study to their own personal practices. Many of these can be found on the Internet email and chat groups late at night. Some are quite capable and adept at accepting that serious reconstruction differs from their previous (or current) practice of the modern mixed bag of wicca and often become serious researchers themselves while others, often those newly introduced to the concept of a reconstructed religion, find themselves quite incapable of separating myth/ fantasy from history. Over time, usually tossing appellations of “fundamentalists,” “elitists,” or the politically inappropriate “Nazis” in their wake, the latter will either begrudgingly fall away from the seriousness of those busying themselves with research and leave in search of new territory to conquer, or, less often, will tough out the relentless debunking and corrections (which can occasionally border on the abusive) by the adherents of reconstructed religions.<sup>8</sup>

Adopting a reconstructed religion for personal practice has both merits and pitfalls in the area of research. Not only does the adoption usually fulfill a personal need for a lateral move to an alternative religion,<sup>9</sup> but can also serve as a driving force to adhere strictly to the guidelines for research listed above. Often adherents take it upon themselves to diligently study reputable historical sources (often in the original languages), learn ancient and modern languages, gain a working knowledge of the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and archeology, physically recreate ancient artifacts utilizing period specific technologies so as to better understand the environmental and disciplinary conditions supporting the ancient worldview, and participate in shared learning with non-adherent researchers. The downside of studying these ancients ways of life from the inside, of course, is a recurrent human need for their personal lives to be ‘rosy,’ ‘pleasant,’ ‘noble,’ ‘good,’ ‘honorable’ or any combination of these and to fill this need fantasy can sometimes be introduced to “fill in the gaps.” Although this is but a single need its effect can be pervasive and highly destructive; fortunately,

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<sup>8</sup>Many of these email groups or newsgroups can be found at <http://groups.yahoo.com> with HEATHEN, ASATRU, NORSE, ROMUVA or under newsgroups (nntp protocol) under alt.religion.\* It should be noted that many of the newsgroups have been beleaguered by numerous hacking groups within the past several years so user caution is recommended.

<sup>9</sup>Some of these needs, at least those of the early reconstructionists, are discussed in my earlier *Germanic Spirituality*.

in this area as well as others, there is safety in numbers and the overall goals of research will be maintained. Reconstructed religions, in opposition to their wiccan counterparts, tend to 'toss out' far more than they accept. For outsiders this often appears to be a plethora of verbal violence, but for insiders this safety-in-numbers concept keeps the reconstructed worldview from straying too far out into the realm of fantasy.

What makes a reconstructed religion more solidly believable as a re-creation is the idea that virtually all reconstructed religions/ worldviews are based on written documentation, i.e. 'primary sources,' which are then compared to the known archeological record, but one of the greatest impediments to reconstruction of an ancient belief system is the fact that written documentation, or at least 90%-95% of it, was penned by Christians who also made little or no attempt to record history impartially since much of their documentation was to be used as propoganda against the heathen religion rather than be used strictly as a historical record. Where the difficulty comes in is knowing exactly how much of each individual writer's documentation was based on selective observation, ie documenting only those things which would serve the writer's intent while ignoring others which would not, and how much was either skewing of the facts, propagandistic phrasing, or blatant deception in service of the writer's intent. In almost all cases, the writer's intent is rarely clearly defined and can only be surmised by comparison to similar writings. Because of these complicating factors, no complete 'heathen religion/ worldview' has ever been re-created.

The following information considers the works of both heathen and non-heathen researchers, but the results are directed primarily towards those serious researchers who also accept the quarry of their research as a way of life. These are commonly called Ásatrú (at least by 'outsiders') but within this rather large poorly-defined community there are many different factions. Some work specifically at reconstructing regional variations focusing on groups such as the Anglo-Saxons, Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders, Germans, Goths; however, it is important to take note that there are also very specific subclassifications to take into account which have a definite bearing on the quality of research engaged in. For the purpose of this paper, a *classification of intent* will be utilized rather than the more common linguistic, time-period, or geographic classifications:

**reconstructionist** one who looks seriously at reconstructing the ancient way worldview not to understand history better but often to investigate the applicability of such a worldview in the 21st century. These often remain strictly focused on one of the ancient Germanic language stocks.

**revivalist** one who worships the Æsir and Vanir and often the demi-gods of the ancient Germanic peoples, such as elves. The focus is generally on reviving the religion of Ásatrú the 21st century and regenerate it as a distinctly modern religion. This group of adherents is much less likely to stay within a single language stock, but rather tends to mix traditions from the entire Germanic realm.

**neo-heathen** this is a large group but the membership is often transitory.

Often these come to the heathen community through a new age religion such as wicca or through a spiritual persuasion such as neo-shamanism and are less likely to engage in reconstructionist research. Their research is usually focused on how Ásatrú and Germanic folk traditions can benefit the new age community at large.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted by the reader that even these are listed as “categories,” they are not static descriptions of any single individual. In fact, they should be viewed more properly on a continuum with *reconstructionist* and *neo-heathen* representing the extremes. In any given individual, there is normal shifting that is bound to occur between any two categories and probably, over the course of several years, all three categories will be passed through.

Throughout all three classifications, there is the prevailing attitude among members that Christianity is the ‘traditional enemy’ of the heathen religion, hinders modern attempts at reconstruction, and, consequently, the response/reaction is to ‘avoid all things considered Christian.’ It is also quite common to hear modern heathens exclaim that “the heathen religion doesn’t have a concept of sin” or “doesn’t have a set of commandments.” How this is interpreted often becomes little more than taking all those things deemed Christian and then *doing the opposite*. Christianity demands the following of one god—heathens embrace polytheism; Christianity considers thievery a sin—heathens revel in tales of Viking raids; the Old Testament laws make the eating of pork illegal—heathens praise the pig as the “official” meat of the feast. Christianity is blamed for the poor state of affairs in the world today and is held responsible for depression and other psychological disorders prevalent in the United States today, for a generalized breakdown of community, for the breakdown of the extended family, for injustices committed on American soil as well as on foreign soil. The list goes on, but “quick reaction does not good research make.”

Among those new to heathenry, Christianity is most definitely viewed as the enemy and the heathen worldview is generally formed out of ‘reactions’ to

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<sup>10</sup>This is a modification of a paradigm that was presented by Garman Lord in an article originally published in *Iðunna*, Vol. 4, No.1. His actual paradigm contained the following classifications:

1. **arch-heathen** the original source, i.e. heathens of the past.
2. **retro-heathen** the reconstructionist, see definition above.
3. **neo-heathen** which for the purposes of this paper encompasses both Ásatrú\_proper and Neo-heathen.

The rationale for the modification of the paradigm is that Garman’s classification of arch-heathen is not applicable to 21st century Ásatrú, and, therefore, for the purposes of this paper and his Neo-heathen unfairly combined those who were serious revivalists (but not reconstructionists) with those who wish to associate with Ásatrú as a religion for various other reasons.

It should be noted by the reader that appearance of Garman’s article was viewed by many as being unfair towards serious *revivalists* (*my term*), which at any given point in time is the largest single group with the overall heathen community. On the other hand, there was a fair number who were spurred on to move towards much more serious research as reconstructionists, and this faction continues to grow in numbers as of this writing.



it. The best efforts to avoid Christian concepts and philosophy have resulted in a hodge-podge religion quite often built in *imitation* of Christianity: basically, the same religion with different gods. Many of the problems impeding the re-creation of the ancient pre-Christian Germanic worldview is that the reconstruction is being handled by many who unknowingly espouse and maintain a Christian worldview both through their reactions to it and because the Christian worldview is essentially the foundation of all their mental processes at the levels of the conscious *and* the subconscious. The remainder of this paper, then, discusses some of the problem areas and common impediments to shifting from a Christian mindset to a heathen one, provides rationale and methods for exposing and examining one's current worldview, and lays down some groundrules in an effort to avoid the pit-trap of viewing Christianity *as the enemy* or attempting to reconstruct an ancient way of life based on reactionarism.

*"The group avows itself in all silence to neo-paganism. They celebrate here their winter-solstice ceremony. The fire is a beacon of light for the sun which gradually blesses the earth with longer days, and during the closing of Nights of Yule-Tide—so say the old myths—the seeds buried in the earth slowly awake. At the same time this bonfire will magically draw the sun ever closer to mankind. The group's leader [goði, in common parlance] offers some sage, St. John's wort, and brot [to the fire]. The 'gifts' which draws the group closer together are supposed to express thanks to all the spirits of nature. Like thousands of other neo-pagan groups all over the world, this small community attempts to revive the ancient practice of the winter-solstice ritual that is still practiced by many indigenous peoples today."*<sup>11</sup>

"As this example shows the neo-pagans themselves have expressed very little to do with the actual Germanic religion—and the skill and knowledge with which they do this is little more than modest. A rekindling of the Viking Age religion of Thor, Odin and Frey and with it a revival of the ancient Germanic mythology is not to be found, at least in neo-pagan circles."<sup>12</sup>

If Germanic heathenry *is* to be revived as some of the organizations both in the U.S. and abroad would have it, some legitimacy will have to be accrued. Some of the non-legitimate reconstructive attempts such as the one above, circa 1991, commented on by respected researcher, Rudolf Simek, will have to be claimed for what it is: stock borrowings from New Age alternative religions<sup>13</sup> which in

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<sup>11</sup>Sweidlenka, #19, quoted in Simek, Rudolf *Die Religion und Mythologie der Germanen, 2003*, (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; Darmstadt, Germany).

<sup>12</sup>Simek, Rudolf *Die Religion und Mythologie der Germanen, 2003*, (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft; Darmstadt, Germany), p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>In a sister article to this one, *Germanic Spirituality*, 2003, by this author, the relationship between New Age religions with particular emphasis on wicca was demonstrated by lining out the history of the reconstructive movement and specifying times of the actual borrowing and in some cases naming the persons borrowing as well.

turn are little more than a reactionary alternatives to the organized dominant religion of the U.S. which is Christianity.

### 3 A Brief History of the Development of Conversion Techniques

The christianization of northern Europe took place over a period of slightly more than a millennium with the first monks moving into the British Isles around 350-400 CE to the final declaration of Christianity as the official religion of in Lithuania in 1387 CE. It was during this 1000 year time period that Christianity had time to refine its method of conversion.<sup>14</sup> Often, at least at the beginning, brute force was used particularly by kings who had been converted. St. Ólaf, for examaple,

“investigated how Christianity was being kept [in Vingulmork] and when he considered that there was need of improvement, He taught them the right faith. And he laid such stree on it that if he found that someone did not want to abandon heathendom, he drove him out of the land. Some he maimed, having their hands or their feet lopped off, or their eyes gouged out, others he had hanged or beheaded, but left no one unchastised who refused to serve God. And thus he proceeded all through the district.”<sup>15</sup>

And although the conversion process has toned down a bit over this past millennium, brute force conversion is still being practised the world mostly through harrassment but in many 3rd world nations physical violence or threats of physical violence are still being used as techniques of conversion alongside more contemporary means.

By 950 CE, tamer, more subversive methods of conversion were being utilized. By this time Christianity had been absorbed into local holidays such as Yule which appears to have been celebrated throughout most if not all of Germanic Europe and the local version of a spring festival (whose date appears to have varied significantly depending upon local custom).<sup>16</sup> Local heathen festival sites, holy grounds, and sacred groves became the foundation for the new religion's churches. Many of the Gospels had been translated into local tongues, but most subversive of all was the fact that local writers were recording histories, particularly family histories, from a Christian perspective, and new poetry

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<sup>14</sup>The reader is referred to *A History of Pagan Europe*, 1995, by Nigel Pennick and Prudence Jones and also to *The Germanization of Early Medieval Europe*, 1994, by James C. Russell. Both these works were used in the preparation of this document particularly to pin down dates of official religious transformations.

<sup>15</sup>Snorri Sturluson, trans. by Hollander, Lee, *Heimskringla: A History of the Kings of Norway*, 1991 (U of T Press; Austin, TX), p. 309. This is the translation used unless otherwise specified.

<sup>16</sup>Refer to letter from Pope to Bonifacio.

was being written by the newest generation of skalds:<sup>17</sup> *Cædmon's Hymn*, *the Dream of the Rood* and the Old Saxon poem *The Heliand*. Although neither propaganda nor rhetoric was new, this was certainly the longest running and most broad-scoped campaign in history up to this time.

By the mid-1300s, 900 years after the start of the campaign, conversion was complete in the sense that almost all existing countries in northern Europe had adopted Christianity as the “official religion.”<sup>18</sup> Christian thought was pervasive throughout all of Europe except for small pockets in the far northeast, high in the mountain regions of Spain and eastern slavic Europe.<sup>19</sup> Christian thought and philosophy dominated science, music, literature, visual arts, architecture, politics, war and peace, and, for the most part, this had been accomplished at least two centuries before the colonization of the western hemisphere.

The western hemisphere unlike old Europe was quickly conquered within about 250 years by the Christian hordes. The indigenous Americans were no match for Christian armies with their advanced technologies. Christian policy categorized *these savages* into the same social class as horses and slaves, and the Christian leaders mobilized an early American war machine which included the well-established techniques of conversion to significantly lessen the strength of the natives so that they could be no threat to the new nation. The US Constitution adopted in 1789 CE clearly drew a line between organized religion and politics, but the intent at the time was really to prevent any one branch of Christianity from lording over another as had happened in recent years in England, France and the German States. Very few at the time, however, could conceive of a *civilized* nation which was not Christian. Although to some degree, groups of simple German farmers and Scandinavian ranchers and lumbermen retained some sense of ethics directly linked to their heathen forefathers, the conversion of the European political mind had been so complete that civilization was Christian by definition, and groups of non-Christians such as those in Africa or in unsettled territories of the Americas were judged by the civilized Christian to be *herds* and were handled as such. Any vestiges of European heathen thought, custom and manners among the agrarian county folk, would finally be cast out with broad sweeping move towards urbanization later in the latter half of the 20th century.

In spite of quickly becoming a world power and a leader in all forms of science and technology, the United States of America is far more religiously

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<sup>17</sup>The words *skald* (ON = “poet”) and *skaldic* will be used throughout this document to refer to ON or OE poets, both Christian and heathen, as opposed to *poet* and *poetry* for the same being written after ca. 1300 CE.

<sup>18</sup>Poland was a late-comer, adopting Christianity sometime in the early 1400s

<sup>19</sup>Hybrid forms of heathen religion, mixtures of heathen belief deeply embedded in Christianity, continued to exist in rural regions in all European countries until well into the 20th century. These disappeared as private farms were sold over to corporations. These hybrids are fairly well documented as folklore and was very popular among collectors for more than 200 yrs. Fascination with regional forms of folklore continue to this day but primary sources have been dying out at a rapid pace. At any rate, these hybrid forms can no longer be considered “a heathen religion” but it must be noted that they do form an unbroken link to the heathen past.

conservative than any European country. Religious fanaticism and extremism are tolerated as long as regulations regarding guns, explosives, and drugs are not broken, as long as civil liberties are not violated, and as long as church and state remain separate (so that no particular branch of Christianity may rise above the others).<sup>20</sup> For the most part, organized religion has found a comfortable place inside the United States, and in the last 50 years with a sharp increase beginning during the mid-1960s continuing up to the present, offshoot Christian religions which are becoming increasingly more militant, artificial alternative religions, a large array of Christian and non-Christian cults, and traditional non-Christian religions have thrived as well. Because of these changes power and control have shifted out the hands of Christians and the response by Christians has been quick and heavy.<sup>21</sup> Christianity, by and large, continues to foster the belief that it is “under attack” by a ‘heathen horde-mentality,’ and for the last 50 years has been upgrading its counterattacks.<sup>22</sup> Techniques of forcibly spreading their belief system which were forged, sharpened and finely honed during the first millennium are still being used at the beginning of the third.

A primary conversion technique started in Anglo-Saxon England was to slowly and methodically *christianize* the heathen worldview by modifying heathen art, philosophy, music, sense of time, manner of dress and self adornment, etc. without actually forcing the Christian religion; the religion is acquired slowly over a long period of time in an environment that is somewhat heathen-tolerant. This process is called *syncretization* and can be seen in many third world countries as well as on many of the native American reservations in the United States even at the turn of the Second Millennium of the Common Era. Voudoun, Condomblé, Santería, and Yoruba are some other very well known examples of syncretizations which have become quite popular among young people in the latter half of the 20th century. In essence, a syncretization lays the groundwork for a later, easier conversion much the same as tilling the earth and laying a bed in a specific manner makes for the planting of tulip bulbs much easier and far more successful than simply dropping the bulbs in a hole and trusting to luck. In the Icelandic sagaic literature, it will be noted that many of the early na-

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<sup>20</sup>Of course, this statement does not refer to political reality in the United States but reflects more the “political ideal” fostered by the federal government and subscribed to by the common man. The current federal administration has put the common man’s faith and tolerance to test in much the same manner that the Johnson and Nixon administrations did during the 1960s. “Political reality” and the current state of affairs, however, is only marginally relevant to this discourse.

<sup>21</sup>It is an interesting phenomenon and an exercise in the examination of *nationalistic egocentricism* when one considers the average educational and socio-economic levels of Americans in comparison to those of the non-industrialized world on the one hand while, on the other, considering generic American views regarding levels of tolerance for religious fanaticism in the U.S. vs. the same, for example, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

<sup>22</sup>This, according to political scientists such as Noam Chomsky et al., has been used by right wing politicians for the past century as a form of *scare-tactic propaganda* to encourage the general populace to bend to their political agenda which has been to coalesce and centralize legal and executive control of the United States under the banner of the right wing. The current move to ban homosexual marriage through amending the U.S. Constitution utilizes this same argument *scare-tactic propaganda* (See Section #4.4 below). The conservative factions, of course, deny such accusations as being unnecessarily paranoid and groundless.

tive northern Germanic Christian heroes, have qualities and characteristics very similar to the northern gods and heathen warriors. On the one hand, they appear very “saint-like” but, on the other, espouse qualities highly redeemed in the ancient warrior tradition: cold, ruthless, calculating and tenacious. The bulk of Snorri’s *Heimskringla*<sup>23</sup> revolves around the history of many of these Christianized heathen warriors with St. Ólaf standing at the fore. The *Heliand*<sup>24</sup>, on the other hand, is a lengthy retelling of the New Testament (obviously for an audience during the early conversion era) where the poet has syncretized Jesus and the Apostles as a roving warrior king with his twelve warrior-thegns. What is most interesting about these two literary pieces is the authors’ choices of characteristics and qualities known to be endeared by these early converts and potential converts; comparisons between these two pieces can be quite revealing about the early converts’ and late heathens’ mindsets. In Christian thought such syncretization is acceptable as being the “planting of the seeds of Christianity” and is an extremely powerful method of conversion, albeit slow in process, because it mimics the natural evolution of religion. In a sense, it is natural evolution and once Christianity is established in this way, it can be very difficult to eradicate. The overall effect can be likened to that of tumor growth in the brain: tumor material becomes so deeply embedded and enmeshed that simple excision is no longer an effective method of treatment. Other methods must be utilized in conjunction with surgical removal.

One method of planting a seed of syncretization is by counting on the natural reactions of the opposition. One of the more interesting effects of Christianity’s move into northern Germanic Europe was the development of the Thor’s Hammer, for example, a piece of jewelry shaped like the renowned hammer of the god with its recognizable short handle,<sup>25</sup> as a recognizable symbol of the heathen religion most likely in response to (or *in imitation of*) the Christian crucifix donned by those who had been converted to the new religion.

“In the Viking Age Thor’s hammer, Mjollnir, became the most important symbol for Scandinavian heathendom in its opposition to Christianity; this is confirmed by the . . . on runic grave stones of the Viking Age, as well as the numerous little silver amulet-hammers; late Viking Age casting moulds, which could be used either for the production of Christian crosses or else for Thor’s hammers, emphasize the symbolic significance.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Several translations of this are available online with <http://www.northvegr.org> being a very good source. The most commonly used translation in the U.S. is Lee Hollander’s *Heimskringla: A History of the Norwegian Kings*, 1964 (University of Texas Press; Austin, Tx.).

<sup>24</sup>Also available in Old Saxon at <http://www.northvegr.org>. A good functional translation is G. R. Murphy’s *Heliand: The Saxon Gospel*, 1992 (Oxford Univ. Press; Oxford, UK & New York).

<sup>25</sup>Mythologically, the short handle was the result of Loki’s interference with the dwarves who were forging the magical hammer in their smithy [*Skáldskaparmál* 33, Snorri Sturluson] or according to Saxo Grammaticus, the handle was broken off in battle [*Gesta Danorum* III, 73].

<sup>26</sup>Simek, Rudolf, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, 1993 (Boydell & Brewer, Inc.; Rochester, NY), p. 219.

Although it is clear that the Hammer of Thor was regarded as a sacred object before the the introduction of Christianity to the north, the use of the hammer-amulet as *counter-propaganda* began in the middle of the Viking Age when the influence of Christianity was growing and Scandinavians were actively opposing conversion.

The “Hammer” as it is commonly known among modern reconstructionists is a piece of jewelry that was a *response* to the Christian cross and is in every sense the syncretized imitation of the crucifix. Moreover, it represents a modern Christian *value* that such a piece of jewelry *must be worn outwardly as a symbol of one’s self dedication to his religion and god(s)* and it is that *value* itself which is the *locus of syncretization* not necessarily what the symbol represents.<sup>27</sup> Study of the early Germanic peoples and their sense of personal adornment reveal no indication that early Germanics found it necessary to display their *dedication* outwardly although other form of jewelry were common. Studies of the *sense* of religion of these people indicate that for early Germanics religion was deeply entwined with culture/ customs/ traditions and life, in general, in their small communities so that an outward symbol of dedication was unnecessary. The need for outward symbols develops when religion becomes a modular adjunct to (rather than an embedded part of) everyday life, i.e. after the introduction of Christianity into a community.

## 4 Continuence of the Conversion Process in the United States

There is significant evidence that the conversion to Christinity in northern Europe, to date, has never truly been completed.<sup>28</sup> Many heathen values persisted in Europe for a very long time and were even exported to the United States and survived for a time among immigrant farmers in small farming communities pocketed in rural areas of the upper midwest. In most cases, these were eventually adopted as *Christian ideals* (in other words, they were *germanicized*,

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<sup>27</sup>As E. T. Hall points out in *Beyond Culture*, 1976, pp. 25-56 (Anchor Books; New York); however, the outward wearing of symbols becomes necessary in a low context culture because of a large number of differing groups living together, as opposed to living within a single-culture context where subtle differences in behavior, manner, dress, are enough to signals to others a significant meaning. In modern mixed cultures, it becomes important for Christians, and now non-Christians as well, to make broad sweeping announcements regarding meaning and intent so that these will less likely be misunderstood.

Since modern reconstructionists, following in the footsteps laid by the ancients, are rarely acting at odds with the rest of the community—which will be discussed later—such broad sweeping announcements are generally not necessary. The practice of wearing large Thor’s Hammers, T-shirts bearing heathen messages, etc. can be shown then to be in imitation of the Christian *need* for demonstratives rather than stemming from the Germanic worldview.

<sup>28</sup>See Russel’s *The Germanization of of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Oxford Univ. Press; New York) 1994. Russell contends that Christianization was basically completed by the late 1700s, i.e. the onset of the industrial age; however, this author author argues that while the industrial age affected urban life early on, the effects of urbanization and its machine of Christianization only slowly filtered into the more conservative rural areas.

according to Russell's thesis). These were taught and passed on through the traditional catechisms of fairy tales and nursery rhymes which remained customary in these communities until the advent of the television which happened in the mid-1960s.

There have been many changes in child-rearing and thus worldview shaping since the 1960s. Many of these can be directly attributed to Christian philosophy and influence. The older saying "Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm" (*The apple doesn't fall very far from the tree*), meaning that "One will grow up to be very similar to his parents in terms of social class, psychological make-up, and decision-making," which was common among German-American community even when this author was a child back in the 1950s had been replaced during the 1960s with the "Any child can grow up to be President of the United States" or "You can be anything you want to be; you just have to put your mind to it."

Christianity and its long influence as a primary force in the shaping of the American worldview presents a large set of problems for those newly arrived at the gates of Ásatrú. Most of the difficulty comes a general inability to *interpret* Norse mythology, Norse values, and world events through any other *filters* other than those which have been put in place by Christianity over its 200 years of being the primary shaper of cultural values. Additionally, most newcomers are monocultural, that is, very few have had the opportunity to view another culture *from the inside*. This requires some explanation and some exploration of the common American culture.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that although *intent* and *a conscious direction* seem to underlie the Christianization of northern Europe, this is probably an unwise and erroneous idea. Not only does syncretization mimic the process of the normal evolution of a religion but it is, *in fact*, a normal evolution. So long as Christianity remains a primary religious force in an area undergoing transformation, the natural evolution will lean towards communities within that area becoming "more and more" Christian (although much of the area's indigenous culture/ customs will remain intact). The reasons why this exists are very complex and some of the general theories will be discussed below in "Heathenizing America." Suffice it to say, at this point, that although many methods used to convert large numbers of people from an indigenous religion to Christianity may seem brutal and subversive in humanistic terms, the overall intention is not malicious, in general. The process can be easily likened to America's foreign policy regarding Iraq as of 2003 CE which in essence is to bring a more humane way of life to a people who were denied this previously: i.e. the Christian concept of giving aid to those previously denied and to succor the downtrodden.

## 4.1 Urbanization

A second albeit non-religious force, and possibly a greater and more formidable force than Christianity is urbanization. Since the early 1800s, in the United States, there has been an ever increasing migration from the rural areas to the cities and now with the globalization of electronic communications basically all rural areas now have access to cable television, radio, and through

telephone lines the alledged information “SuperHighway of the Internet/ World Wide Web.” Urbanization is the *natural* byproduct of the combination of advances technology and science on the one hand with advances and increases in commercialistic capitalism and consumerism on the other. The end result is an environment which is completely foreign to that which produced the worldview of the ancient germanic peoples but oddly enough is the perfect matrix for culturing and mass producing Christianity and a host of closely related alternative religions. The significant difference is the change in worldview. As urbanization continues, the following changes can be easily observed:

1. “Land” becomes less important than “things.”
  - (a) land becomes a material possession,
  - (b) the sense of land-*stewardship* is replaced by land-*ownership*.
2. Quantity and mass production are more important than quality.
3. Efficiency and the drive for efficiency has replaced
  - (a) people with machines and names with numbers in the workplace
  - (b) a sense of satifaction at a job well done with a sense of speed and mass production
  - (c) a sense of social responsibility towards employees with a need to quantify and boost output
  - (d) the idea that a job fills its own time-frame with pre-set deadlines (*Time is money.*), and
  - (e) craftsmen and jouneymen with assembly-line workers and unskilled laborers.
4. Accumulated wealth is the measure of a man rather than ability, skill, or temperament; status and social rank is bought rather than earned.
5. Knowledge has become a marketable commodity; ideas are now *owned* and *sold* rather than shared; copyright laws now protect *ownership* and *sales rights* rather than restore credit.

On the other hand, those same things which previously identified an individual and an individual’s ranking in a community have been diminished:

1. The written contract has replaced a man’s word (“*If it isn’t written down, it didn’t happen!*”).
2. *Earnings per year* have replaced the family name.
3. Identification is now solely with arbitrary and meaningless (therefore, anonymous) numbers.



4. Cultural or ethnic background has become a source of shame, on the one hand, since it is *politically incorrect* make judgements utilizing such as a criterion, and it is now considered *elitist* to claim one's own heritage; on the other hand, modern culture has further demeaned *cultural heritage* by moving it from being the by-product of one's birth to making it into a fashion statement for general consumption.
5. Family and family name has been broken up into *individuals*; individual may now sue individual over rights, money, and property; the burden of crime is now borne only by the individual.

Depending on the viewpoint, these changes resulting from urbanization can be viewed either as progress or the natural evolution of a technologically advanced society or as the disintegration community values and much has been written arguing the point either way. For our purpose here, a value judgement is not being made. It is important to note, however, *urbanization* and its effects on society have further modified modern man's way of understanding, of seeing, his world, these changes are not physical nor directly observable but affect how events observed in the world are viewed, interpreted, and responded. These changes underlie conscious decision-making and interpretation. They have become the *order of things*, the matrix within which we place all observable events. It is the interplay between the *order of things* and the observed events of the world which eventually lead one to the answer to the great spiritual question "What is the meaning of life?"

The *order of things* is neither fixed nor stable. The human mind, however, has the tendency to simply accept the *order of things* as "Well, that's just the way things are" and finds reflection on *the order of things* extremely difficult and complex. To illustrate how the human mind adapts to the artificiality of *order of things* how it learns to accept such order as being natural and right, one need only look as far as the language of the nation. For example, the average native speaker of American English finds the sentence "He had a pair of big, red socks" to be syntactically correct, i.e. in the right order, but "He had a pair of red, big socks" is deemed incorrect and stands out as foreign-sounding even in the middle of conversation where one's attention is normally on meaning. This difference is dramatically pointed out when looks at the difference in word order between two very different languages. Table #1 shows variations of the same sentence in both modern German and English and it is important to remember that English is essentially a Germanic language.

The above example utilizing language is concrete, observable, and documentable as is required in this day and age, but the world is made up of much more than just words: relationships between things are all ordered. Relationships between a man and his family, his mayor, his boss, his wife, his president, his god, his culture, his community, his co-workers, etc. are all ordered essentially in the same almost indefinable, but rule-bound, way as as the adjectives "big" and "red" in the example given above. This "underlying order of things" will be discussed below as being the primary impediment the the reconstruction of ancient worldviews.

Table 1: Showing the differences between word orders between German and English.

Correct American word order	Correct German word order
He took the car to the store yesterday.	He is yesterday with the car to the store gone.
Yesterday, he took the car to the store.	Yesterday is he with the car to the store gone.
	With the car is he yesterday to the store gone.
	To the store is he yesterday with the car gone.

## 4.2 Urbanization as a Catalyst for Christianization

“Any one who turns from the great writers of classical Athens, say Sophocles or Aristotle, to those of the Christian era must be conscious of a great difference in tone. There is a change in the whole *relation of the writer to the world about him*. [my italics] The new quality is not specifically Christian: it is just as marked in the Gnostics and Mithras-worshippers as in the Gospels and in the Apocalypse, in Julian and Plotinus as in Gregory and Jerome. It is hard to describe. It is the rise of asceticism, of mysticism, in a sense of pessimism, a loss of self-confidence, of hope in life and of faith in normal human effort; a despair of patient inquiry, a cry for infallible revelation, an indifference to the welfare of the state, a conversion of the soul to God. It is an atmosphere in which the aim of the good man is not so much to live justly, to help the society to which he belongs and enjoy the esteem of his fellow creatures, but rather by means of a burning faith, by contempt for the world and its standards, by ecstasy, suffering and martyrdom, to be granted pardon for his unspeakable unworthiness, his immeasurable sins. There is an intensifying of certain spiritual emotions; an increase of sensitiveness, a failure of nerve.”<sup>29</sup>

James Russell in *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Socio-historical Approach to Religious Transformation* in the first 100 or so pages of his book discussing the social, economic, and political precursors to the acceptance of a revealed, world-rejecting religion by the general populace. Russell’s contention is that Christianity was not completely adopted into the north of Europe during the so-called Conversion but was instead *germanicized* to better suit the needs of the northern European who did not live in the same social, economic and political environment, nor under the same constraints, nor with the same spiritual needs and requirements as the early Christians who generated the original dogma of Christianity.

“A strong sense of of social unity and collective security also

<sup>29</sup>Quote by Gilbert Murry in his *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (1925; reprint, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955) taken from James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 64 (Oxford Univ. Press; New York) 1994.

prevailed among the Germanic peoples in the early Middle Ages. Although they may have been less culturally sophisticated than the contemporary Japanese,<sup>30</sup> like them, the Germanic peoples did not have immediate social and spiritual needs which Christianity might fulfill. Also the homogeneity of early medieval Germanic society, like that of Japan, did not predispose to the Christian message. Christianity tends to flourish in the heterogeneous societies in which there exist high levels of anomie, or social destabilization. . . . The relationship of social structure to ideological structure and religious expression . . . play[s] a significant role in this inquiry.”<sup>31</sup>

Russell looks at prerequisites which have recurred through history which act as the harbinger of the acceptance of a revealed world-rejecting religion (as opposed to an ancestral or community [state] religion. These revolve around Durkheim’s definition of *anomie*, a state of social anonymity resulting in apathy and meaninglessness for the individual:

“...it is implicit: Economic decline has an obvious ‘spiritual’ component, which shows up as apathy and meaninglessness—what the French sociologist Emile Durkheim called ‘anomie,’ and which is reality lurking beneath the façade of Spengler’s classicism. In the classisist phase, the culture no longer believes in itself, so it typically, undertakes phony or misguided wars,<sup>32</sup> or promotes its symbols and slogans all the more. As the organizational costs rise, yielding increasinly fewer benefits, so does the formalism, the pomp and circumstance . . . .

. . . it would seem that four factors are present when a civilization collapses:

1. Accelerating social and economic inequality
2. Declining marginal returns with regard to investment in organizational solutions to socioeconomic problems
3. Rapidly dropping levels of literacy, critical understanding, and intellectual awareness
4. Spiritual death—that is Spengler’s classicism: the emptying out of cultural content and the freezing or repackaging of it in formulas-kitsch, in short.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Although the Japanese accepted the revealed religion of Buddhism as it moved through the far east and, to some minor degree, Christianity, Japan as a state retained its strong ties to its ancestral religion, Shintoism. The Germanic peoples in a similar vein retained strong ties to their heathen way of life by modifying Christianity which is the overall thesis of Russell’s investigation.

<sup>31</sup>Russell, James, *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>Misguided wars essentially bankrupted the Roman empire as early as 250 CE.

<sup>33</sup>Berman, Morris, *The Twilight of American Culture*, 2000 (W. W. Norton & Co., Inc; New York), pp. 18-19.

These, indeed, were the precursors to the decline of the the state religions of Rome and Greece, but, more pertinent to our discussion here, these were not listed by James Russell but by Morris Berman, and he was not describing Europe during the Conversion but rather the socio-economic environment in the United States 1000 years later, circa 2000 CE. This is the very cultural background through which the northern European *weltanschauung* is being interpreted and reconstructed. It is the environment that is ripe for the acceptance of a revealed religion; in this case, Christianity.

Christian upbringing and environment are inescapable. There is nothing within the United States at the moment, including New Age religions, which has not been formed, manipulated and shaped by the forces of urbanization and its by-product, revelatory religion, Christianity. This *is* the implicit *order of things*. Interestingly, Morris' fourth precursor, spiritual death, has resulted in backlash within the United States from which has sprung all manner of *paths to salvation*, including the ubiquitous Old Religion, Wicca.

Wicca is a religion which was 'revealed' during the hardships endured in industrialized England during World War II. Spreading relatively rapidly to the United States, it has become the basis of virtually all alternative religions. The primary intent of Wicca has been, as the name implies, an 'alternative' salvation from the feelings of anomie prevalent in both the U.K. and U.S. during the latter half of the 20th century through its doctrine of reincarnation and its world-rejecting.<sup>34</sup> It has become the primary force in Morris' "repackaging in formulas and kitsch" and has been interfering with the reconstruction of the northern Germanic worldview since that time. The impact of this 'repackaging in formulas' has been evident in the reconstruction of the heathen practice of northern Germanic Europe since the late 1960s and can be seen in the popular writings of the Ásatrú community.

The conditions in the United States including the legal system, the issues of human rights, political correctness, socioeconomic status, views of the individual's role in community and family, and the state of modern education as a system (rather than a process) reveal that the United States is now well within Spengler's stage of *classicism*, i.e. exactly where Rome was at the beginnings of early Christianity. The United States then, in spite of its outgrowth of alternative religions, has brought the process started Conversion, ca. 500-1000 CE, to its conclusion. The heathen threads of culture so carefully preserved by the *agri-culture* of northern, Germanic Europe have been eradicated; the social and spiritual needs which were absent in medieval Germanic society are now present.

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<sup>34</sup>Although vehemently denied by wiccans themselves, Wicca's adoption of the oriental philosophy of life as a cycle of incarnations to purify and distill out the dross of the soul indicates that it is a furthering of the idea of *salvation of the soul* much in the same manner as Christianity, and also implies that wiccans view themselves as having a 'base' beginning in this world which must be refined as they go through the various cycles of death and rebirth. See the discussion in the following section.

### 4.3 Defining Worldview and Culture

Two terms are used in this paper which require some definition because they tend to overlap somewhat. They are not interchangeable.

**worldview**, n. 1) The logic used by an individual to label, categorize, generalize, make inferences about or to explain or demonstrate relationships between events perceived; 2) the logic used to explain one's personal relationship to the world perceived outside the self.

**culture**, n. 1) Relating to one's ethnicity including art, manner of dress, language, mannerisms, foods and their preparation, and/ or the markings which identify an object or action as belonging to a specific ethnicity. 2) The abstract embodiment of a specific ethnicity to which one may feel aligned and often resulting an individual as belonging to a specific ethnic group. 3) A primary force in shaping an individual's worldview.

Culture then is *not* a worldview but it is a force in shaping worldview, and a single worldview may actually be shaped out of the interaction between two or more cultures plus level of education, political and religious associations, socio-economic level, and personal experiences.

Of the two terms defined above the most personal, flexible and dynamic is worldview. Changes in culture occur but are much slower because culture is generally most active at a group level. Much has been written in anthropology linguistics and sociology literature regarding the interplay between the more static *culture* and worldview which is constantly in a state of flux. Minor modification of a worldview can be done simply by reading a single, influential article in a journal, for example, but major modification, i.e. changing that part built by culture, can be a daunting task, indeed. The difficulty lies in the fact that a bulk of cultural education is subconscious, and the effects of an individual culture upon worldview are pervasive:

“Indeed, my culture is the logic by which I give order to the world. And I have been learning this logic little by little, since the moment I was born, from the gestures, the words, and the care of those who surround me; from their gaze, from the tone of their voices; from the noises, the colors, the smells, the body contact; from the way I was raised, rewarded, punished, held, touched, washed, fed; from the stories I was told, from the books I read, from the songs I sang; in the street, at school, at play; from the relationships I witnessed between others, from the judgments I heard, from the from the aesthetics embodied everywhere, in all things right down to my sleep and the dreams I learned to dream and recount. I learned to breathe this logic and to forget that I had learned it. I find it natural. Whether I produce meaning or apprehend it, it underlies all my interactions. This does not mean that I must agree with all those who share my culture: I do not necessarily agree with all those who speak the same

language as I do. But as different as their discourse may be from mine, it is for me familiar territory, it is recognizable.”<sup>35</sup>

The effects of one’s culture on worldview is strong mainly because it is also closely bound to the individual’s sense of identity as the member of a group. Culturally, one’s sense of *self* is also partially derived from one’s role within his community and drawing culture, i.e. ethnicity, into question is very threatening to one’s sense of belonging. Questioning another’s culture is not merely a simple ethnographic study but also questions where the individual’s loyalties lie, one’s morality and sense of honor, and, ultimately, one’s sense of self. To question oneself is one matter and can often be painful and difficult, but to be confronted by other people often feels menacing (and is, perhaps, intentional on the part of the other members) and threatens not only group membership, but also, to a large degree, the self, which further results in self-doubt, feelings of abandonment or alienation, and occasionally self-loathing.

Major changes of worldview are very difficult at least to maintain because too large a change results in a judgement by the community as an “outsider.” Occasionally, an individual will bravely “turn his back on his community” and completely enter another, and if he survives the change, he may be regarded a hero. Such was the case with Cassius Clay when he adopted Islam back in 1965 and changed his name to Muhammed Ali. After 9 years of challenge, disbelief, distrust, and derision by the general public which included stripping him of the world title in boxing, constant berating by the news media, threats against his life, and a jail sentence because of his “*unnatural* opposition” to draft into the US military, Muhammed Ali not only was able to reintegrate himself back into mainstream American culture but was able rise up to the status of “hero.” Many others, however, perhaps the largest percentage either do not make it out alive (such as Malcolm X or Martin Luther King), make it outside the influence of community but are unable to reintegrate themselves back in (such as many veterans of the VietNam conflict), or, eventually reintegrate themselves back in by reaffirming adhesion to the prevailing worldview (such as the transformation of many hippies and Diggers of the 1960s into Yuppies of the 1980s). Those undergoing a large changes in worldview, surviving resistance by the community, and reintegrating with the changed worldview intact are rare.

An alternative to the rigorous work of self-investigation and to the changing of worldview completely and, perhaps, the most common method used today is to simply adopt a *surface change*. This is really more like “presenting the image of *X-worldview*” rather than actually going through the far more difficult process of actually changing a worldview. This is going one step beyond what is generally meant by *lip-service*. Nock considers this form of conversion to be a modification of one’s beliefs rather than a true conversion. It is what he would classify as an *adhesion* rather than a *conversion* which is much more of a radical change of worldview. An adherent may accept those doctrines which

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<sup>35</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, trans. by Carol Volk, *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French American Experience*, 1988, (Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago), p. 3.

he or she finds functional and will reject those which are not fitting with the personal world view.

“Adhesion was usually derived from intercultural contact and did not lead ‘to any definite crossing of religious frontiers, in which an old spiritual homewas left for a new one once and for all,’ and ‘did not involve the taking of a new way of life in place of the old.’ Adhesiion is often the result of ‘changes in belief and worship often due to political development or cultural interplay’ and not the result of a ‘difficult decisioonto make between two views of life which make its every detail different.’”<sup>36</sup>

By definition, such a ‘conversion’ is not complete, nor can it be, and the adherent will vascillate between worldviews based on convenience, level of understanding, or level of stress. Often, the veracity and seriousness of the conviction can be tested; most affectations will be exposed upon confrontation.

In the latter half of the 20th century in the United States, it has become quite fashionable and trendy to modify one’s worldview through adhesion and offers the adherent a sense of belonging to a group as well as a distinguishable sense of personal identity. In a time and place when personal identity is replaced with anonymity, belonging to such a group is comforting and was, in fact, one of the greatest treasures that early Christianity was able to offer to the people of the north at the start of the Conversion. The modern process<sup>37</sup> seems to have had its large scale beginnings immediately after World War II when mind-altering or psychedelic drugs began to be popular among America’s so-called Beat Generation in the 1950s. The 1960s with civil unrest over both domestic and foreign treatment of people brought forth a wave of “new” religions, philosophies, and spiritual movements which regarded the treatment of people (as a collective) to fall on a negative continuum which ranged from degrading at best and inhumane at the worst. These new forms of spirituality, then, were formed in response to what was deemed the “corrupt perceptions of organized religions,” and touted themselves as being a “return to the more natural religions” of a golden, albeit forgotten, Age often based loosely on Native American, indigenous European, Indic, or Oriental cultures or, sometimes from highly mythologized versions of Camelot, Egypt, or even Atlantis. The adherents, themselves, attempted, and continue to attempt, to maintain the belief that they were making a complete break with Christianity when, in fact, their beliefs regarding individualism, the importance of the individual, compassion, etc. are clearly reflected in the writings of Augustine, Paul, Bonifacio, and many of the early Catholic pontiffs.

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<sup>36</sup>The views of A. Nock (*Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1933) were quoted by James Russell in *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, 1994, [Oxford Univ. Press; Oxford, UK], p. 30.

<sup>37</sup>It should be noted by the reader that smaller scale movements and some large scale movements such as the “flappers” of the *Roaring Twenties* and various artistic movements have always been around, but the discussion here is directed more toward spiritual movements at a national level.

#### 4.4 The Final Move towards World-Rejection

It could probably be safely argued that the springing up of alternative religions never was in reality a move to break away from organized religion as it was a final rejection of the vestiges of the older heathen worldview regarding community, social class, and interpersonal relationships long held in the agrarian communities, and the energizing force behind the move is exactly that which drives urbanization. If one considers that racial intolerance (left over from slavery), sexual conservatism, gender specific social roles, suppression of individualism or subservience of the individual to family/ immediate community, the war-like attitude of “an eye for an eye” style of revenge and vengeance, social stratification by class<sup>38</sup>, the concept of class-inheritance<sup>39</sup> as belonging to the older, agrarian sector, and that the illusions of elevation of the individual, equality (in the sense of “commune-ism” rather than in the sense of Amendment 15 to the United States’ Constitution) and classlessness belongs to the newer, urbanized culture, it is quite easy to see that *organized religion* was never the root of the problem but rather the social value system espoused by agrarian communities. And, although some readers may react strongly to the use of the term “illusions,” the term must remain given the facts regarding the social, economic and political states of affairs in the United States as of this writing. During the 1960s, migration away from the agrarian communities, and it is the rejection of the philosophies of rural living cited above which are most often given as justification for voluntary migration. Most interestingly, it is in the urban environment where most of the so-called “earth religions” or natural religions thrive, in the very same environment built to nurture the universal religion of Christianity.

During the 1950s through the 1980s, the the metaphor of “searching for oneself” was commonplace and was, in fact, one of the fundametals underlying the *hippie movement* of the mid-1960s. Indeed, becoming a spiritual pilgrim is still the the prefered metaphor, and common phrasology today consistantly uses terms which indicate the underlying belief that “life is a journey,” “a path,” or “a search for meaning.” Nowadays, this is, of course, presented primarily by adherents to one of the “new religions” but it is generally not acknowledged that what is really taking place is the fulfillment of an older ideal. One *must* engage in spiritual pilgrimage.

“He must become a *peregrinus*, an exile or pilgrim, make of his life a *peregrinatio*, a pilgrimage, cutting loose like a monk from the wordly ties that bind and accepting instead the liberating society and disciplines of the city of God: ‘The Heavenly City, while on its earthly

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<sup>38</sup>Social class here refers to the modern American concept of *blue-collar/ white-collar/ administration* as oposed to the pre-Christian *thrall/ freeman/ chieftain* or the post-Christian *peasant/ “landed”/ ruler*. The concept of social class here is that which was set in an earlier paper by this author which can be downloaded at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/spirituality.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup>The concept of social-class was discussed in an earlier paper by this author, *Germanic Spirituality*, 2003, downloadable at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/spirituality.pdf>.



pilgrimage, calls forth its citizens from every nation and assembles a band of pilgrims; not caring about any diversity in the customs, laws and institutions whereby they severally make provision for the achievement and maintenance of earthly peace.”<sup>40</sup>

The fulfillment of this early Christian recommendation of being on a personal path or journey and personal spiritual fulfillment continues today even among those who deny the acceptability of the so-called *organized religion*.

What has been rejected is the heathen concept that *spiritual fulfillment* is equal to the performance of one’s duties to family and community and that the ‘meaning of life’ has been lost. Indeed, in the year 2003, so complete is the Christianization of America that it is very difficult for the average person to understand that the foundation of a folk tradition/ religion is a tight focused attention on the here-and-now and the maintenance of harmony within family and community. For at least 50 years, spirituality and religion have meant seeking a personal relationship with the great spiritual force of the universe. Most adherents of new age alternative religions such as wicca, goddess cults, and a large variety of *orders* and *lodges*, often based in ceremonial magic or freemasonry, maintain this same philosophy: the meaning of life has been lost implying, then, that it must be *sought*. Even ethnic religions and spiritual philosophies which in their native countries are classified as *world-accepting* traditions such as the many native American religions, once introduced to the modern American, become simply another way of seeking a personal relationship with the Kingdom of God, i.e. *offshoots* of Christianity. ‘Altruism’ with the family as being the smallest indivisible unit within a culture has taken on a negative character due to its close relationship to ‘materialism,’ i.e. its relationship to here-and-now, family and community, and has been replaced with individualism/ individuality which is in modern terms ‘ego-ism.’ Of course, ‘egoism’ is still considered ‘selfish’ and, therefore, tantamount to sin so the newest terms to avoid the now maligned ‘altruism’ are ‘transpersonal’ or ‘universal.’

The Path of Personal Salvation is the concept that if one adheres to a specific set of rules, the individual will be elevated from the simple lowly human status to some spiritually higher level and that this elevation will be sanctioned by a personal patron/ savior. This basic idea that man is ignorant and a slave to the material world is fundamental to understanding the words ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ in the industrialized world and is a basic component of the three main revelatory religions: Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity. James Russell in *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* modified Bellah’s classification system of religions being either “world-accepting” or “world-rejecting” with prophetic or revealed religions generally falling into the category of *world-rejecting* described as

“not only an ‘extremely negative evaluation of man and society

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<sup>40</sup>Fletcher, Richard, *The Barbarian Conversion from Paganism to Christianity*, 1997 (Henry Holt and Co., New York), p. 30—quoting Augustine, an early Christian writer (*De Civitate Dei*). Augustine’s writings ca. 418 CE formed a basis of what we now accept as the Catholic religion.

and the exultation of another realm of reality as alone true and infinitely valuable,' but also attitudes of general indifference or opposition toward the sociobiological principle of group survival through in-group altruism. World rejection implies a *desire* [my italics] to transcend or substantially transform one's current earthly existence, whether through asceticism, meditation, or sociopolitical action during one's lifetime, or through eternal life after death"<sup>41</sup>

Buddhism, with its basic tenet of reincarnation, is included as a world-rejecting religion along with Islam and Christianity because the primary thought driving the belief is that man is of base nature and must be purified through successive incarnations until the moment of perfection when one is absorbed into the Oneness.<sup>42</sup>

*World-rejection*, then, can be described as a philosophy that spiritual fulfillment will only be completely attained through prioritizing a concept of God or an abstraction of perfection above all physicality whereas *world-acceptance* is a maintenance of spiritual fulfillment through one's standing within a described community, i.e., one's *world*, through adhesion to a prescribed set of social principles defined by the community. Generally, within the latter tradition, one does not seek salvation from the temptations of the world but rather seeks to broaden his base within his community through responsibility, thought and deed. In such a tradition, one is born, already accepted, to a family. Over the years, first by being trained by the parents and older family members, then by close friends/acquaintances, and later, in more formal settings such as school, perhaps university, one's 'circle of community,' i.e. circle of acceptance, widens. Within this tradition, then, there is no concept of spiritual vertical movement, *elevation of the soul*, but rather a broadening as one's skills and natural talents are refined and put to greater use within the community setting. Spiritual development within the world-accepting tradition is horizontal rather than vertical.

Thus, we can see from the preceding arguments that our own backgrounds, i.e. our own worldviews which we are not able to see or analyze easily, function as a opaque barrier preventing us from seeing back in time more than just a few years. Indeed, many born in the 1940s-1950s will have a difficult time even understanding events of their childhood especially if they had grown up in an agrarian community. Segregation, single-income families, no television (i.e. local as opposed to global education), hand-shake contracts, absence of door-locks, possession of firearms, lynch-mobs, home-canning, medical treatment, politics, attitudes towards war, attitudes towards education, discipline of children, gender specific activities, sense of fashion and style, attitudes toward land-holding/house ownership/ moving, and family size and family *purpose* are all difficult to

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<sup>41</sup>Russell, James C., *op.cit.* *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* pp. 53-54.

<sup>42</sup>Zen Buddhism in its Japanese form (rather than the American form) was a movement against these world-rejecting concepts which is why in Japan Zen Buddhism is most often more closely aligned with the world-accepting tradition/ religion of Shinto rather than true Buddhism. Shinto as a religion in many ways resembles the heathenism of northern Europe more than any of the prophetic religions.

explain in modern terms and logic, and often the speaker must resort to “Well, that was a different time and a different place.”

Here is a common scenario: a newcomer, generally with Christian upbringing within a predominantly Christian community, perhaps having spent some time studying wicca, new age alternatives, or americanized versions of indigenous religion/ tradition/ spirituality decides to take the next step into one of the reconstructionist religions. The first step is to *Christianize* in the sense that they must look for familiar territory to which they can relate. In reality, this is a form of syncretization reversed from the normal; syncretization usually occurs when a traditional people begin to adopt Christianity, but in this case, adherents are towards heathenry and so drag Christian concepts with them because of familiarity. Voudou, Santería, and Condomblé are examples of pagan to Christian movement where many of the pagan gods are syncretized with Catholic saints. In heathenry, it is the revivalist and neo-heathen groups described above which tend to syncretize Christian concepts into heathenry.

1. First, there is the *conversion*. Most newcomers to heathenry, as a matter of course, reject the term, 'conversion' mainly because of close ties to the very religion they are rejecting, but it can be argued that the *need* for an *epiphany*, the experience of sudden *enlightenment*, is part and parcel to the general American cultural make-up.
2. Following the epiphany, there develops a sense that the world is not random and that those who elect to do evil will either be punished in this life or the next. (In modern heathenry, this often takes the form of utilizing the 168 strophes of the *Hávamál* as a strict moral code in the manner of the 10 Commandments of Moses.)
  - (a) There is the seeking of a patron god/ spiritual force who will both assist in the development of the the individual's character and will accept the individual's spiritual accomplishments as they are attained.
  - (b) Thoughts regarding an individualized Afterlife become increasingly complex with rewards ( and punishments ) based on how one has lead one's life, i.e. has followed the prescribed set of actions.  
(Adherents will often claim that the most important aspect of being heathen is the development of a personal relationship with their patron.)
3. There is a sense of “equality,” a *classlessness*, which accompanies the above, often resulting in the individual's claiming to be a *child of, friend of, or goði of [god or goddess's name]* with the claim that the deity has spoken or commanded this. Often this will also be accompanied by a change in name.
4. There is a growing sense of *personal development* resulting from the adherent's daily religious practice which is often both physically worn as personal adornment and discussed with others of like mind.

Historically, of course, none of these seem to have been part of the germanic worldview. There was no *conversion* to the heathen way of life mainly because one was born within a cultural, and local, set of traditions. In fact, there is no real indication that the early pre-Christian germanic people even had a separate sense of *religion*. All of the early terms translate to “custom,” “the way we commonly do things,” “tradition,” or “knowledge” and cannot really be separated out from any other action. To consciously engage in an activity strictly as a spiritual exercise is only necessary in *world-rejecting* religions. Christianity, like other new age religions, is modular; it *can* be separated out from tradition and is generally regarded as being transcultural. Christianity and wicca are similar in that both can be added to a culture to produce a new variation centered around the same theme. Heathen germanic religion/ tradition/ worldview, on the other hand, like most indigenous folk worldviews was closely tied to the very land where it was practiced, and cannot easily be separated from it. One was simply born into it. Within a *world-accepting* tradition taking any responsible action within the moral constraints of the tradition *is engaging* in a spiritual activity.

One of the most confusing products of the armchair anthropologists of the New Age their interpretation of the spirituality of indigenous peoples; this exercise is treated by them as a spiritual activity

Personal or spiritual growth is usually accomplished in the late 20th century through *adhesion* to a spiritual discipline. There is no indication that early germanic people thought in this manner at all, and, in fact, spiritual development as it is commonly understood in the year 2003 CE is relatively new in the United States was a rarity among the rural communities and began to grow in force only making a real showing in the arts of the Beat Movement of the late 1940s-50s. It has the appearance of being ancient mainly because the transformation occurred over a timeframe encompassing 2.5 generations, but prior to the Beat generation, the development of self was considered a personal responsibility of the individual and the measure of the development was by the effect it had within the individual’s community. This could be viewed, in a sense, as a community-based feedback loop resulting in a spiral of personal development often progressing with a layer of development being heaped onto the individual with the completion of each cycle.

1. An individual pours all his current knowledge and creativity into a task, learning through experience and perhaps under one regarded as a master of the task.
2. The product is then presented to the consumer-community who judges the task for quality, value, etc.
3. Feedback is fed back to the individual; community-based constructive criticism.
4. The individual restarts the task this time armed with knowledge of experience, knowledge learned from the master, and knowledge of the effect upon the community.

The cycle would be repeated over and over with the individual sometimes passing through “levels” such as apprentice, journeyman, master always with the consumer-community as the ultimate judge. The result was that an individual learned “to take pride in his work” and most often made attempts to surpass his previous efforts and using his master’s results as a goal to either aim for or to try to pass.

Such methods of learning, as a matter of course, naturally results in *class* divisions and, ultimately, at the level of an entire community develops into some type of class system. During the late 1950s and through the 1960s there were numerous efforts, particularly on university campuses in large cities around the U.S., to dismantle the older, deemed defunct, class systems. Professors and students banded together in an attempt to eliminate grading systems and to diminish or completely abolish the campus class systems. The master-apprentice or more properly the professor-student contrast was purposely blurred. Seniority was regarded as belonging to the materialistically minded and was replaced by *intent* (“*As a student, I am the equal of any professor as long as my heart is in the right place.*”) “Pride in one’s work” was reinterpreted as *personal pride* (one of the Seven Deadly Sins) and was judged as belonging to the materialistic, i.e. non-spiritual. Of course, the class system itself came under attack as the course of events continued. Christianity, or more specifically, the Catholic Church, because it has a rigid internal class system came under fire at the same point in time and enrollment in the Catholic Church began to drop drastically. Alternative religions began to grow quickly at this time as well and were often based on highly mythologized tribal civilizations and were often associated with communal living (communes) organized loosely democratically. Oddly enough, by the 1970s-80s, almost all communes had adopted/ adapted a class system rigid enough to rival both Catholic Church and rural communities which were rebelled against less than two decades earlier. The difference now is that it is considered politically correct to wear blinders, i.e. improper even to discuss a class system, even though basically the same class system continues to exist.

The early Germanics, like the early Greeks, Jews and Romans, do not appear to have been overly concerned about either an Afterlife or a personal relationship with a god for the most part. The equation “As the difference between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ increases, so despair, civil unrest, and hopelessness increases with a proportional decrease in sense of well-being resulting in the of better and more just Afterlife reward system.”

“The communal and transcendent aspects of early Christianity are likely to have been attractive to those urban inhabitants of the Roman Empire whose existence was fraught with loneliness, fear and despair. Featuring greater organizational stability and solidarity than other religious or philosophical groups, Christianity offered the alienated individual, without regard to sex, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, membership in a caring community, together with the hope of bodily resurrection. The high degree of Christian solidarity in the midst of widespread social anomie is thought by Dodds to

constitute “a major cause, perhaps the single greatest cause, of the spread of Christianity.”<sup>43</sup>

“A primary factor in the emotional and spiritual reorientation toward individual salvation may be traced to Alexander’s policy of cosmopolitanism, or *oikoumene*. When a cohesive society is destabilized by invasion, immigration, or civil strife, it seems likely that those citizens who formerly derived a sense of unity, stability and even immortality from their common ancestral religion may begin to feel alone, alienated, and threatened. In such a psychological state, the appeal of mystery cults that offer individual salvation is likely to increase.”<sup>44</sup>

With the economic state within the U.S. gradually shifting resulting in a disappearance of what was the middle-class, with the lower classes less likely to be self-sustaining, with the ability to own and maintain land decreasing and with an increasing need for both parents to work (sometimes 2 or 3 jobs among the lower class families) to sustain increasingly smaller families and with the control of economic and welfare state moving away from the individual towards centralized administration coupled with the increase of anomie as evidenced by the use of the prison-like identification number and increasing threat of the use of a kafkaesque identification microchip, it would appear that conditions in the U.S. are definitely shifting towards Russell’s rephrasing of the sociologists, Dodds and Alexanders, observations. It has been well documented that mystery cults in the United States, both fundamentalist Christian and New Age, has sharply increased since the late 1950s.

Urbanization is an important forerunner to the overall development of a world-rejecting religion. In fact, there are a number of these necessary, primary ingredients which precede the the final move to a world-rejecting religion:

1. The loss of “landedness,” i.e. a dissociation of people and land. Basically, this is the result either of extreme overpopulation in a country such as India, China, or Japan or the result of a gross economic imbalance—the middle class falls into debt large enough to essentially effect a shift to an ever enlarging lower class of debtors with a concomitant shrinking of the upper class to those who can afford to buy up the debts, i.e. *the indebted*.
2. Loss a sense of being able to achieve life-goals. The lower classes lose all sense of a future and live with the feeling that they are doomed to a life of labor paying off past debts with money generated through the generation of new debts.
3. Anomie shifts in flavor from being a desired personal freedom reflective of power and wealth and the ability to act with impunity to a “namelessness in a sea of slavery” reflective of loss of status.

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<sup>43</sup>James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 91 (Oxford Univ. Press; New York) 1994.

<sup>44</sup>James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 64 (Oxford Univ. Press; New York) 1994.

4. Loss of power, control within the state/ nation. Personal freedom is severely cramped because of #1 and #2. Families are controlled by the state/ nation in terms of size, mobility, housing, and function. Government moves from elected officials to some form of dictatorship. Rebellion is held at bay through fear tactics by an ever increasing police force.
5. Growing of corruption and unfairness within the state/ nation.
6. Growing sense of inequality between the classes, i.e. the rift between “haves” and “have-nots” widens and becomes apparent to all.

At the historical point when virtually all world-rejecting religions developed these fundamentals were in place.

“Everyone was dissatisfied with the existing political and social conditions with the exception of the wealthier families, many of whom were priests, known as the Sadducees. This ruling faction kowtowed to their overlords. Fear, hatred, and bitter resentment were in evidence everywhere; and, on top of these things, there was much poverty. In spite of recurrent warfare, the population had increased during these centuries [63 B.C. to A.D. 135]. Declining food supplies and wasteful governments made desparate the plight of all citizens, except for some of the provident and hardworking peasants and artisans. Commercial and maritime trade had greatly increased during the era of the Hasmoneans and the Herods, but this influx of wealth had not improved conditions among the masses. It tended rather to uproot them from their lands and, in chaotic times, to make them a restless group of malcontents.”<sup>45</sup>

Conversion to a world-rejecting religion depends upon a generalized dissatisfaction with the world in its current state and a desire to return to a golden era in a time of plenty for all and a place where all are equal. These conditions were not met easily in northern Europe at the beginning of the conversion to Christianity and as a consequence more than a millenium was required for complete conversion. Interestingly, in the north, unlike the southern and middle-eastern countries where the above conditions were met early on, it was the upper socio-economic classes who first accepted Christianity rather than the middle and lower classes mainly because they stood to benefit the most from such a change in worldview. The urbanization of the United States has essentially been completed in the latter half of the 20th century; all 5 criteria have been met with the ultimate focus on the accumulation of wealth by the already wealthy, the general population of the United States is landless<sup>46</sup>, political and educational power is

<sup>45</sup>Taken from J. Russell, quoting James L. Price, *Interpreting the New Testament*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 45-46.

<sup>46</sup>‘Landless’ here means that the individual either does not own land or if he does, the amount owned is incapable of sustaining the individual for a minimum of 3 mos. out of the year.

now in the hands of major corporations<sup>47</sup>, literacy is falling<sup>48</sup> the groundwork for new variations of world-rejecting religion has been laid.

The new alternative religions, commonly called New Age, are little more than the newest crop of mystery cults in the US which have sprung from a topsoil of dissatisfaction, uncertainty, distrust of neighbor and government with accompanying feelings of isolation, and a generalized breakdown of both community and family. The focus of these new cults is the development of a magico-religious system which will restore a sense of localized power through the establishment of a personal relationship with a deity/ savior who will exact revenge on enemies and reward loyal followers. The conditions of 63 BCE which set the stage for the development of the messianic cult Christianity are exactly the same in 2003 CE. Because most of these conditions affect the general populace at the subconscious level, most find difficulty in viewing the world through any other filters. The development of alternative religions/ mystery cults are really little more than a replication of the very same process which generated Christianity. In other words, it becomes the same religion with different gods.

What this means is that those who wish to break ties or who firmly believe they have already broken ties with organized religion, particularly the Christian religion, have a daunting, perhaps even impossible, task in front of them. Ásatrú, along with other reconstructionist religions such as Hellenism, Romuva, and Druidism among others, and even along with a few sects out of the modern modern, created, neo-pagan religions such as Wicca strive to recreate a pre-Christian worldview, but the primary impediment is the fact that to do this, they must collect and analyse information through mental filters which were created by the Christian culture which trained them to collect and analyse in the first place. On the surface, the task seems to be akin to a brain surgeon performing the removal of a tumor on his own brain, or a Freudian psychiatrist analyzing, diagnosing, and prescribing for himself, but it is not. There are ways of analyzing one's own culture, as *if* one were an uninterested party. Sometimes, the application of these methods can be fun, sometimes they feel impossible, but always they are informative.

The tasks presented to the reconstructionists are numerous and complex, but are quite possible. To simplify the problem, instead of "religion," which seems to have been bundled together with activities of daily living, we will consider a more generalized *Sitte*, "a common or customary way of doing things."

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<sup>47</sup>"From 1973 to 1993 . . . it was only the highest quintile, the rich, that enjoyed a significant increase in wealth. The top 1% saw its income level grow 78% between 1977 and 1989, and Federal Reserve Board figures from 1989 reveal this elite group own 40% of the nation's wealth. By 1995, . . . this figure had risen to 47%," p. 21, Berman. Essentially, the United States is in the same position as was the Roman Empire of 250 CE when all the land between Rome and Constantinople was divided up and owned by only 2000 individuals, the rest were landless peasants attached to corporate estates.

<sup>48</sup>The United States, as of 2000 CE, stands at number 49 in the area of literacy out of the 158 nations comprising the United Nations. p. 36, Berman.



## **The Problem**

The problem is that a small group has come together to attempt to recreate the ship-building procedure in order to experience and to better understand the process as it must have occurred in the age of pre-scientific technology complete with obstacles, artistic input (as the Oseberg ship shows), and feelings of success so that these elements may become part of the historical record. The methodology to be utilized during the reconstruction is similar to that used by modern forensic anthropologists:

1. Recreate the exact environmental conditions that existed at the beginning of such a process as closely as possible.
2. Utilize only those technologies known to be available at the time of the period being studied.
3. Utilize a step by step procedure gained from analysis of references to the actual procedure being recreated, technologies known to have existed at the time (including tools, numbers of men available for the task, and science known to have existed during the period), and the end product being recreated.
4. The recreation must be finally put to use to determine functionality, practicality, and if the use of the recreation actually matches known descriptions of use.

## **Factors to be Considered:**

There are certain factors which must be considered both prior to the recreation and during analysis/ interpretation:

1. How knowledgeable are the members of the reconstruction team of the period being studied.
2. Identifiable presumptions on the part of the team members which may impede subconsciously influence reverse-engineering procedures.
3. Accuracy and veracity levels of ancient descriptions of the procedure. Some will most likely be accurate with a high level of probability some may actually be bits of 2nd and 3rd hand information.
4. Level of commitment of each of the team members to exact recreation as closely as possible so that “corners will not be cut” in the process.

All the above elements must be taken into consideration otherwise the ship being built is a modern imitation and very little information would be gathered from such a procedure. In this post industrial age we have the capability to “imitate” almost anything which was the original reason for the creation of the field of forensic anthropology

in the first place: if we really want to *know*, i.e. *understand* the exact thinking and physical processes involved, *we* must be exacting in our efforts to re-create.

Commonly, the work is difficult in such a duplication process, so much so that all but the most dedicated will typically give up and settle for the next best thing which is to “imitate,” i.e. become *neo-shipbuilders*. It is often easy to simply abandon the original purpose which was duplication of the *process* and settle for an imitation product. Typically, then, justifications will be given, but the final result is the same *the process*, i.e. *the worldview*, has been abandoned for shortcuts. It is whether one chooses shortcuts or not which is one of the major dividing points between retro-heathen and revivalist.<sup>49</sup>

## 5 Breaking Out of the Cultural Catch-22

### 5.1 Finding a Starting Point

When changing one’s worldview as opposed to a surface-change, i.e. complete conversion as opposed to adhesion, as defined above one is confronted with a daunting problem:

One is dealing with *filters of perception*. A worldview lies far below the level of consciousness and is the subconscious function of organizing conscious and unconscious perceptions. The attempt to manipulate *worldview* generally ends up with the manipulation-attempts simply being stored in the existing system. Changing over to the heathen worldview results in *interpreting the heathen worldview through and storing the interpretations within the existing Christianized system* rather than true conversion. The end result, then, is surface change (mainly a change in vocabulary, i.e. lip-service). True conversion takes place at a very fundamental level and results in a complete transformation.

This is an anger-provoking subject, but in spite of that fact that it is unnerving, persistence will bring results.

The first major impediment is *self-delusion*. Most attempting such a major change will encounter this. The phrase itself will almost immediately provoke an emphatic “No, perhaps someone but not me!” from the reader mainly because it is generally taken to mean “fooling oneself.” Here, self-delusion is used to mean the general inability to distinguish between worldviews. Since a worldview is a system for interpretation and storage of information, neither worldview is correct nor incorrect. Self-delusion, then, strictly means inadvertently thinking

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<sup>49</sup>The reconstruction of the Viking Age worldview has been fraught with the use, and sometimes extensive use, of shortcuts. Documentation of this, however, has been rare but some has been recorded in the author’s *Germanic Spirituality*, 2003, which can be downloaded from <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman>.

that one is interpreting a system *through* the worldview that is being studied, in this case, that of the heathen Germanic, when one is really interpreting and understanding through one's existing system, in this case, modern American Christian. Exacerbating matters is that fact that there is no good touchstone for determining which worldview is currently in use—that is the very nature of a 'cultural catch-22.' More about this later.

The overall remedial technique for self-delusion and other impediments is, of course, a willingness to honestly examine every part of one's belief system. Honesty, like the color 'grey,' comes in numerous shades and also like 'grey' it varies even more when one takes into account environmental conditions. Honesty is easy to come by when one is examining shoe size or cooking techniques, for example, but when one is asked to question moral or ethical rights and wrongs, the issues becomes sticking points. For example, the concept of 'free men (and women) is fairly easy to examine, but what about the fact that there was a strict set of social classes in the period of time we are studying? What about slavery? What about the 'no-mix policy' of classes in social relationships such as marriage? What about arranged marriages? In general, for the modern heathen these are simply thrown to the side with excuses such as "Well, these don't really apply to the modern heathen," but the ancient 'correctness' of these outdated attitudes must be carefully examined if one is to truly understand the worldview, and in the course of examination, one may actually discover 'incorrectness' in the modern worldview.

Again, it must be iterated that neither worldview is correct nor incorrect. To clarify this some, here is an example from the author's personal experience which occurred back in the early 1980s while the author was still at university.

I was working a work-study job filing card back into the card catalog at the main library on the campus of the University of New Mexico. We worked in teams most commonly, and my partner at the time was a dark complected middle-aged man from southern India. Dhirendra was of the Brahmin class, his father being wealthy, and he had just returned from a stay in India during which he was wed to a woman whom he had never met prior to the wedding date. I was curious about the wedding arrangements never having personally known anyone in an "arranged marriage."

Me: "You mean you got married to a woman that you never met?"

Dhirendra: "Of course. It is a very common practice in India. American style marriages are still rare for us, and besides, we don't really like them."

Me: "But your parents picked out the girl?"

Dhirendra: "Yes, thirty years ago."

Me: "Thirty years ago?"

Dhirendra: "Yes, that is quite normal. She was already one year old."

Me: “You’re kidding, right? I mean, about it being normal. There’s *nothing* normal about it. She was only a year old! Why? Why would they (your parents) do something like that?”

Dhirendra: “That is just the way we do things. It is quite normal. In fact, we think your way of marriage is ridiculous.”

Me: “What’s so ridiculous about the way we get married? Two people fall in love, they want to spend the rest of their lives together and they get married. *That’s* normal!”

Dhirendra: “Actually, we don’t see it that way. You Americans get horny and have sex. You mistake that for love and then 10 years later, you’re divorced. We think that is crazy. Our way is much better.”

Me: “How can you say that? You trying to tell me you don’t have divorces? What do you do just stay together and tough it out even though you hate one another?”

Dhirendra: “Of course, we have divorce but it is very uncommon. You get married young and when the lust wears off, you divorce. Instead, we learn to love each other over time.”

Me: “See? You don’t even love each other and you’re getting married. *That’s* ridiculous. At least we love each other before we get married.”

Dhirendra: “No, you lust after one another before you get married and then you wind up not even liking each other later on when you’re no longer horny. Me, I will learn to love and respect my wife through the years instead of hating her.”

Me: “See? You don’t even love her! What are you supposed to do for sex with your wife then if you don’t know her even never mind love her?”

Dhirendra: “Oh, go to the prostitutes. Most people don’t have sex right away anyway. We usually wait several months or sometimes a couple of years.”

Me: “You go to the prostitutes? Doesn’t your wife get mad? Shoot, here that’s grounds for a divorce!”

Dhirendra: [shrugs his shoulders] “That’s what prostitutes are for.”

Me: “I don’t get it. I still think you guys are nuts for getting married to somebody you don’t even know. I think the American system at least has the love-component in there. Our marriages might not last long, but at least we love one another before we get married.”

Dhirendra: “And I think you Americans are crazy because you confuse lust for love. At least our marriages last long and the love and respect just keeps growing. Our system is better, I think, for the parents always go to good families to make the arrangements. We

must have a good system because we've been doing it that way for thousands of years. You haven't even been around that long!"

The discussion went on for days. It was my very first major introduction to my own worldview through the phenomenon called culture-clash. I had experienced culture-clash previously but only on a minor scale as I moved around the US in my early 20s.

In the above conversation, one can see that not only is the institution of marriage being brought into question but also love, sex, divorce, respect, and the institution and morality of prostitution. As it was, I was still not able to understand the reasoning behind arranged marriages in India. It would take several years, with hundreds of experiences similar to the one above before I began to feel comfortable drawing my own world view into question, and it would take meeting a large number of couple from India and seeing first hand the love and devotion the couples had for one another before I could grasp this simple concept of arranged marriages and why, my friend, Dhirendra, continued to insist that the American system of love and marriage was ridiculous and inefficient. It is always that way, honest examination of one topic becomes an entire tossed salad of topics before it's over.

Back to *honest examination*, Raymonde Carroll in his *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French-American Experience* well reports his experiences in honest examination:

“[The practice of honest examination] demands patience and a great deal of intellectual discipline, but it is not difficult from the intellectual point of view. It is, nonetheless, a strenuous, sometimes exhausting undertaking from an emotional point of view. Cultural analysis can be more painful than psychoanalysis, as painful as the latter may be. It occurs through a questioning of the very tissue of my being, and it demands an effort which is all the more difficult as I am perfectly integrated into my group and function within it without difficulty. It is also an undertaking that I must accept with the knowledge that I can never completely change my way of being and thinking, which has become involuntary and necessary to me, like breathing. This means that, like it or not, I may find certain traits in myself which I have noticed in other members of my culture; that I may also discover a relationship, which I will find dispicable, between certain members of my culture whom I disapprove of or even hate, and myself. This also means that I am, in a sense, going to alienate myself from myself, examine myself when I least expect it.”<sup>50</sup>

Honest examination must include

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<sup>50</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, trans. by Carol Volk *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French-American Experience*, 1990 (The Univ. of Chicago Press: Chicago, Ill.), p. 11.

1. A willingness to question in spite of the fact that we may discover in the course of examination that some of our most cherished beliefs may have been accepted on blind faith rather than rational thought.
2. A willingness to question those things which our community accepts as true, ethical, moral, or any combination of the three. The fact that we question these things may actually put us at odds with our community at times.

Only through honest examination can self-delusion be kept to a minimum. It is only through perseverance over a long period of time that will bring the individual through the adherent phase into the convert phase.

The United States and the United Kingdom and spreading as of this writing to the European Continent sport a great number of adherents who are well into self-delusion. New Age conferences are scheduled somewhere in these countries almost every weekend and the self-deluded are fairly easy to identify: curly blond-haired neo-natives in American Indian garb usually a mixture of the the various native cultures mixed with New Age paraphernalia, red-headed Sikhs, caucasian Voudouists. These can be further identified by the complexity of their responses or their stark emotional insistance upon being challenged. The author recently challenged a 'medicine woman' about her alleged American Indian ancestry based on the fact that she has light brown hair and blue eyes:

Me: "So you're not really Native American<sup>51</sup> are you?"

Ms. Morris: "Yep. Mohawk born and raised. Wolf clan."<sup>52</sup>

This reponse show little emotion but rather a simple answer to a simple question. The responses from adherents are much more complex, filled with emotional defenses, claims that the white race is now in a position to help carry on the tradition, the time has now come for the white man to benefit from Native American wisdom. New Age philosphy is generally well mixed with equal mixture of traditions and philosphy from various cultures. Under our classification system above these are typically the Neo-heathens.

## 5.2 Creating A New Feedback Cycle

That the worldview of modern America is primarily Christian is irrefutable. Most of the greatest minds behind the design of modern American culture have been Christian and have used that particular set of doctrines to design the

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<sup>51</sup>I use the term *Native American* during conversation because it is generally accepted as being politically correct. However, the term itself reportedly is the creation of a a white man circa 1972. I personally prefer the older and still correct term *American Indian* when speaking of the indigenous population of the western hemisphere collectively and prefer the name of the specific tribe when necessary for that is how they refer to themselves.

<sup>52</sup>Ms. Morris refers to herself as Mohawk; the collective term that she and most others whom the author has interviewed over the last decades prefer the collective term *indians* (pronounced "in-nyuns" rather than with the 'd' as is common among white Americans.

implementation of law and education and to formulate ethical humanistic responses to moral dilemmas. These time-honored values passed on by parents to their children from the pre-linguistic stage of development into adulthood are the Christianized values of the parents' parents and these mental filters permeate all interactions between people from the cradle to the grave. It matters little that an individual may not have grown up in a particularly religious family for these same values also form the basis of the community's sense of social mores, i.e. what is acceptable behavior and what is not. This, then, is analogous to #2 under *Factors to be Considered* listed in Section #3.4 above.

Regardless of what one believes or thinks, most Americans are raised from birth to be good, productive citizens from a Christian point of view *even though they may not be Christians themselves*. The value and moral system of communities in the United States taught from birth in families, schools, on television in literature, newspapers, comic books, Saturday morning cartoons, movies, and within the judicial system all reflect the strong Christian background of the United States' short history. Americans also tend to be xenophobic, believing a strong correlation to exist between the civil liberties enjoyed by the masses and the strength with which they pursue a monolingual-monocultural existence. Since the advent of television, even regional accents have come under attack with a general striving towards a generic midwest "non-accent" by the three major broadcasting networks to the point where they will even hire dialect coaches to "train their newscasters to speak properly. Christian values belong to this same drive for a standardized America.

What complicates matters more is that the effect of culture occurs at a subconscious level and individuals will often deny the existence of such an effect much the same as an American speaker with a strong Texan or Pennsylvanian accent will *insist* that not only does he *not* have an accent but also that "everyone else talks funny." Americans like to think of themselves as being very cosmopolitan, knowledgeable about the world. As world travelers, though, Americans are the butt of many local jokes, not only for being very narrow-minded when it comes to dealing with foreign cultures, but also for the strength of their denial of being narrow-minded. Since the 1960s, as stated above, Americans have been absolute leaders in seeking out indigenous cultures, which they then promptly *americanize*, i.e. reframe to suit the American value system, which is then passed off as traditional. Hence there exists traditional Buddhism (of Tibet, China, Korea, etc.) and *americanized* Buddhism; traditional shamanism (of the circumpolar regions, South America, and the far east) and *americanized* shamanism; traditional African and South American systems of possession by indigenous gods and the americanized version which is now possessed by white, middle class urban housewives; traditional American Indian religions of the various tribes and language stocks of the North American continent and the *americanized* 'Red Road.' The list goes on, but denial remains strong.

Followers justify the necessity of americanization with claims of "bringing the tradition up-to-date" but vehemently deny that they may not have any real understanding or comprehension of the underlying tradition at all, and certainly deny that Christianity has had any effect on the process of americaniza-

tion. Americanization, though, is essentially synonymous with Christianization. Christian values and philosophy are the filters through which most Americans perceive the strange and wonderful world at large, and, without the sense of security that these cultural filters provide, Americans feel that they would lose the right to call themselves American. The fight to remain American is a drive both very strong and subconscious which interferes greatly with the ability to understand and internalize *foreign* languages, cultures and systems of logic. It is possible, however, to disengage this drive and this is often done (with varying degrees of success) by foreigners immigrating to the United States and much more rarely by Americans emigrating to foreign lands.

It is strongly noted here, however, that blanket denial exists mainly because the filters themselves are invisible to the carriers of the culture. Referring back to the work by Raymonde Carroll

“Part of this logic [behind these filters] is tacit, invisible, and this is the most important part. It consists in the premises from which we constantly draw our conclusions. We are not conscious of these premises because they are, for us, verities. They are everything which ‘goes without saying’ for us and which are therefore transparent.”<sup>53</sup>

Side-stepping this issue is probably the most complicated and is a well known problem in the field of anthropology. R. Carroll in his *Cultural Misunderstanding: The French-American Experience*, Edward T. Hall in *Beyond Culture*,<sup>54</sup> Marvin Harris in *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches*<sup>55</sup> and *Our Kind*<sup>56</sup> clearly define and illustrate for the layman this particular problem of interpreting data culturo-centrally specifically in relationship to the common American background.

“French people are rude, they don’t let you get a word in edge-wise, they interrupt you all the time!’ I am merely referring to the implicit rules of American conversation. But, in order to understand this, I must first become aware of my reading, of the interpretation I bring to the cultural text, of the filter through which I learned to perceive the world. In other words, before learning to understand the culture of the other, I must first become aware of my own culture, of my cultural presuppositions, of the implicit premises that inform [*underlie* - author’s note] my interpretation, of my verities. Only after taking this step, which is in fact the most difficult one, can I begin to understand the cultural presuppositions of the other, the implicit premises which inform [*underlie*] formerly opaque text.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, trans. by Carol Volk, *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French American Experience*, 1988, (Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago), p. 3.

<sup>54</sup>Anchor Books/ Doubleday; 1981.

<sup>55</sup>The author’s edition has unfortunately been permanently borrowed.

<sup>56</sup>HarperPerennial edition, a subsidiary of HarperRowe Publ., New York; 1990.

<sup>57</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, trans. by Carol Volk, *Cultural Misunderstandings: The French American Experience*, 1988, (Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago), p. 4.



What is not clear in this paragraph is that for the American in the above it is not that the rules of French conversation are opaque but that the rules of *both* French *and* American conversation are opaque with the only real difference being that American inherently albeit subconsciously understands the American rules of conversation. Without bringing these, however, up to a conscious level, the individual is no better off than any one else, in spite of wanting to learn about another culture. An American may learn German, for example, flawlessly perfect, without accent, but without developing and understanding of the logic implicit in the rules of German conversation, he will forever be deemed “the rude American” in the same way that French who speak flawless American carry an air of arrogance and rudeness about them. In fact, rude “having little or no knowledge of proper protocol or breaks with protocol as a form of insult.” Being the monocultural people that we are, the latter definition is generally applied in both instances (which, interestingly, is *rude* by international standards).

Unless one was *raised* (as opposed to “*lived for a short period of time*”) within a non-English speaking region of the United States such the Cajun bayou, the non-urban hispanic southwest, or on an indian reservation, one’s worldview contains the following elements:

- aristotilean logic
- linear sense of time
- sense of ethics recognizable as acceptable by the community
- a sense of man being imperfect as opposed to the perfection of a distant Godhead
- a sense that adhesion to a religion implies
  - a separation between the individual and his god(s)
  - that death brings the end to earthly suffering
  - a sense of powerlessness in the face of or a dependence on a spiritual power
- a sense of disconnection from mythic times with the gap being widened by modern science and technology.

These vary only slightly depending on socio-economic level, level of education, and regional upbringing. But, for the most part, we are generic, homogenized Americans with little sense of what it means to step outside the American worldview. In fact, when confronted with the another culture we tend to

1. be somewhat xenophobic;
2. be somewhat paranoid when in crowd where a *foreign* language is spoken;
3. want to apply *our sense of logic* as a supreme standard, therefore others are

- (a) ignorant
  - (b) backwards
  - (c) superstitious, or
  - (d) silly;
4. view ourselves as the *standard* by which all others must be measured; feel very uncomfortable if we are regarded as an outsider.

When the prospective heathen decides to take on an alternative outlook on life, for example, a heathen one, he may have the starting point, i.e. his dissatisfaction with the present world view but is unable to to break the cycle. He accept the new starting point, but returns quickly to those standards with which he was raised. One adherent may deny the Ten Commandments because they have no relevance to heathenry on the one hand, but immediately turns around and scoops up the so-called Nine Noble Virtues.<sup>58</sup>

Breaking the feedback-back cycle of picking up new ideas and then immediately filtering them through the same subconscious system as had always been previously done is 1) normal (since this is the only system available for interpretation), 2) is difficult to stop and may actually be impossible to stop completely, 3) must be worked on consciously and honestly (without self-deception), and 3) can only be worked on piecemeal, one bit at a time, often requiring years for one to alter one's worldview. The following is an excerpt from Edward T. Hall's *Beyond Culture*.<sup>59</sup>

“I once had occasion to decipher a rather extraordinary pattern in a small country in the Far East where there few Americans. The members of the U.S. official missions were the only Americans in the country. Exquisitely beautiful and populated with people who were kind, friendly and gentle, the country was as close to a tropical paradise as one could find. But there there was a fly in the ointment. On official visits, the Americans were kept waiting inordinately long. It was almost as though they weren't there. Some waited for hours. Even the newly appointed U.S. ambassador was kept waiting! In ordinary diplomatic circumstances such treatment would constitute an official insult to our government. Yet something told the Americans that this might not be the case; there

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<sup>58</sup>The Nine Noble Virtues (NNV) are the heathen equivalent of the Ten Commandments. In a previous paper, *Germanic Spirituality* (July, 2003; privately published at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/spirituality.pdf> and at <http://www.northvegr.com>,

the author expounded somewhat on the Christian basis of the so-called NNV. This appears to have been almost inevitable because the having some form of the Ten Commandments seems to fill a *spiritual void* or a *spiritual need*. This issue of *spiritual need* and its effects are discussed further below.

<sup>59</sup>Professor Hall has spent much of his career studying the the phenomenon of the juxtaposition of two opposing worldviews, commonly known as *culture-clash*, and the reader is well-advised to read his research.

were too many cues to the contrary. Besides, relations between the two countries were friendly and there was no reason to insult everyone indiscriminately, even before the first meeting. The Americans were mystified, of course. For those familiar with Southeast Asia, horoscopes will come to mind, because there was always the added complication of horoscopes which had to be cast before all important events. In fact, the astrologers reading prefaced every form of involvement. Yet the horoscope did not seem to be the significant variable in the long, heel-cooling reception room delays, because the neighboring countries, where horoscopes were also used, did not keep the officials waiting.”

(The Americans then implemented a 20-minute wait period after which they were instructed to leave. This approach did not solve the problem)

“The case was interesting to me because it reaffirmed earlier observations of how Americans unconsciously structure time: For official business between people who are not on intimate terms, the eastern-seaboard middle-class pattern holds; it’s expected that one will be prompt. Five minutes late calls for a small apology; ten minutes a bit more must be said; fifteen minutes requires a definite apology plus an explanation; 30 minutes is insulting; and so on. Waiting time is similarly structured. For Americans, these are not ‘mere conventions,’ which function at the higher levels of consciousness . . . , but constitute an entire communication system as well as a basic pattern for organizing activities. The twenty-minute limit set for official visits was not an accidental figure pulled out of a hat for some bureaucrat. . . .

“ . . . let us . . . discuss what was actually happening as they [the Americans] were kept waiting. I was able to eventually identify a pattern that explained the puzzling behavior of their hosts. The Americans were kept waiting because they were not known and had not taken on substance. A newly arrived official in someone’s outer office was like an undeveloped film, there was no tangible, experiential image of the man. No one knew him as a friend or as a human being. You could see him and hear him bellowing about being kept waiting and how important he was, but in terms of relationships in a social system he was at best a shadow and one that didn’t look too promising at that. Americans who were willing to come back repeatedly and meet their hosts outside the office had a better chance to become flesh-and-blood, active members in a social system. Ultimately, they had no trouble being ushered into offices. Americans saw people in terms of their status, whereas the hosts saw them in a larger frame that took more time to integrate.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Hall, Edward T., *Beyond Culture*, 1989 (Doubleday/ Bantam Books; New York), pp. 46-52.

Hall describes that many of the Americans were unable to actually break the feedback-cycle and, therefore, were never successful at actually changing their worldview. The ones who were successful at it (rather than simply supplying lip-service) understood two things:

1. their American worldview was not only not applicable but was undesirable in the new setting; and,
2. it took a length of time where they were forced to examine their own values for what they were and the *suspend them* while adopting the new—this required both time and work.

Further Hall gives suggestions for working within a new worldview which have been adapted for our purpose here. These were formerly written down in a previously published paper by this author.<sup>61</sup>

1. Accept that Ásatrú, the Northern Way, as a worldview is probably complete (but not fully interpreted) and can stand on its own.

*Note: Assuming that becoming heathen is simply a matter of switching one religion for another is left-over baggage from the late 20th century. Such a practice lacks in any in-depth understanding of the worldview.*

2. Accept that Ásatrú as a spiritual way to live is the expression of the underlying worldview.
3. Ásatrú spirituality is based on interacting with the real world in a way which supports the well being of family and community.

*Note: This is exactly the dividing point between a world-accepting and a world-rejecting religion.*

4. “Final rewards” for the Germanic are directly correlated to the memories left behind after one’s death.

*Note: The concepts of reincarnation, salvation, special judgment by a divinity, or special rewards afterlife have never really been part of the Viking Age germanic way of life; they are rather the hallmarks of a world-rejecting religion and began to show up during the time of conversion. Understanding and being satisfied that one has added to his clan by good works during life, thereby leaving behind good, fond memories after death, and so that one is welcomed into to the home or land of the dead is the hallmark of world-accepting religions such as early Greek, Shinto, tribal religions, etc.*

5. The family is the smallest recognizable unit in Viking Age philosophy; the individual is but one part of the family. ‘Rugged individualism’ is both a foreign and a modern concept.

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<sup>61</sup>Linzie, Bil *Germanic Spirituality* (July, 2003; privately published at <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman/spirituality.pdf> and at <http://www.northvegr.com>. )

*Note: individualism is a deeply ingrained part of the American way of life with few exceptions such as the Native American or the Amish who maintained the older germanic concept of community. The idea of individualism is so deeply embedded in modern American thought and philosophy that it colors every aspect of American life. Individualism during the Viking Age was not about personal, spiritual philosophy but rather how an individual could apply personal skills to the betterment of both family clan and community.*

6. The geographic community is the last line of defense for a family, and even though it may be 'mixed,' it should always be handled with respect.

*Note: During the conversion years communities stuck together regardless of adherence of the individual to Christianity. The overall worldview as shown by James Russell did not really begin to change until the general decline of the rural community.*

7. The land upon which a geographic community is built and supported is holy.

*Note: Here the word 'holy' does not mean 'sacred' in the sense of the the Catholic Eucharist, Bible, or Crucifix but rather retains its older meaning of 'holy' meaning 'whole' or 'complete' (see discussion below in Section 5.3). In other words, land was not separate from its 'owners.' An insult dealt to a piece of land was handled the same as if the insult were dealt to the owners directly. The land of a clan was its central focus, its heart, and is more akin to what is meant by the Russian phrase "warm Mother Earth"<sup>62</sup>*

8. The community is naturally divided into three classes; each is expected to worship appropriately—individuals praying directly to gods was borrowed from Christianity a millenium ago. Ancestors, land-ghosts, and ghost of the home should be rightfully reinstalled.

*Note: This goes very much against the modern idea of political correctness which is basically an outgrowth of the Christian concept first brought to the north during the conversion that "We are all equal in the eyes of the Lord."*

### 5.3 The Role of Spiritual Need

A neurology professor once told this author that humans like any other animal are driven by the "four 'F's', i.e. fighting, food, family, and sex." A threat to any one of these areas generates fear which propels the individual into survival mode which can be either expressed as aggressiveness/ anger or withdrawal

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<sup>62</sup>See Honko, Lauri, Senni Timonen, Michael Branch, and Keith Bosley *The Great Bear: A Thematic Anthology of Oral Poetry in the Finno-Ugric Languages*, 1994 (Oxford University Press; New York) p. 195 and also the brilliant work by Umo Holmberg, *Finno-Ugric Mythology*, 1924 (Vol. 3 of *Mythology of All Races* ed. by J. McCullough) regarding the treatment of earth by northern Indo-European peoples and Finns.

depending on the make-up and training of the individual. Spiritual needs are often described as being at this level for they certainly, for the most part, lie below the level of verbal awareness. Hundreds of books can often be found in a single grocery store's shelves dealing with the topic of spiritual needs and the fulfilling of spiritual needs. Americans are a spiritually needy people. In fact Morris Berman, a professor of history and a social critic in his *The Twilight of American Culture* says that America is suffering from "spiritual death—that is Spengler's classicism: the emptying out of cultural content and the freezing or repackaging of it in formulas—kitsch, in short"<sup>63</sup> and considers it to be one of the four harbingers of the pending collapse of an empire.

At this point, for clarity, "spiritual need" probably should be defined, it is here where the problem and at least part of the definition begins to develop. If a hundred different people are asked to define "spiritual need," one hundred different answers will be forthcoming, so the first parameter is that

- "*spiritual needs*" are specific to the individual.

According to our methodology here of questioning, the following come to mind:

1. Are people taught to be spiritually "needy" or is spiritual need inherent to being human?
2. Are spiritual needs simply a response to the environment ?
3. Are spiritual needs related to current "spiritual fads?"
4. Are spiritual needs really the by product of spiritual paths; in other words, do spiritual paths generate their own spiritual question/ solutions?  
and lastly
5. Is spiritual need a real need as in the "four F's" of neurology. or are they fantasy?

The answer to these questions seems to be closely correlated with the classification system outlined in Section #1 of this paper.

The first two questions are closely related for purpose of discussion. On the one hand, everyone seems to possess *internal spiritual needs* but as noted in the first paragraph, spiritual need varies greatly not only from person to person but also according to the environment within which one lives daily life: spiritual need is related to intent. But where do spiritual needs stem from? Are they inherent, or are they environmental?

Environment certainly seems to play a role in the development and maintenance of spiritual need. Berman observes that the end result of the urbanization of America accompanied by loss of personal power, personal identity and access to an education focused broadly across the humanities and sciences as opposed

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<sup>63</sup>Berman, Morris, *The Twilight of American Culture*, 2000 (W. W. Norton & Co., Inc; New York), pp. 18-19. See also Section #3.2 above.

to the technical “job training” currently being foisted off as education today<sup>64</sup> is highly correlated to “spiritual hunger.”

“The inevitable result of all this is the inability of the American public to distinguish garbage from quality. In fact as Paul Fussell points out, they identify garbage *as* quality. Thus, for example, the rise of a huge New Age industry, [is] immensely successful financially, and based on the premise that your rational mind is your worst enemy. The rubbish content of this stuff such as *Mutant Message Down Under* or *The Celestine Prophecy*, is phenomenal, and sales are in direct proportion to it. . . .

“Now apply this to *cultural* evolution, and what would seem to be the rule is not survival of the fittest, but of the slickest. How precarious real intelligence is in the world of Oprah and & Chopra, in a world where the dumb and titillating have become a standard of value!<sup>65</sup> . . . This is Spengler’s classical phase with a vengeance, the merger of natural selection with Gresham’s Law (“*bad coinage drives good coinage out of circulation*”). PBS, after all, is hardly embarrassed by their superficial programming; they think it’s hip.

“One further aspect of our current spiritual collapse is our inability to relate to one another with a minimum of courtesy or even awareness. . . . At root there is a fear of any kind of involvement at all, for real friendships require risk and vulnerability, and more and more, Americans feel that they lack the psychological strength for that. Bottled rage and resentment are the norm, as millions live in

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<sup>64</sup>That the educational system in the U.S. is sadly out of shape is well known. The numbers reflecting the state of literacy in America are that of the 159 countries in the UN, the United States ranks 49th. The recent rash of reports in newspapers across the country reporting the numbers of teachers in the public school system who were unable to pass standard competency exams and the ensuing rationales by the superintendants of the schools systems in question stand as monument to the degradation of modern educational standards. The loss of literacy, focus on the “classics” both in humanities and sciences is related to the inability to apply even the simple rules of logic in problem solving.

As a result of growing concern for the state of the American educational system and its shrinking standards, Pres. G. Bush has used “No child left behind” as his political slogan while cutting federal funding to the Headstart Program first installed during Pres. Kennedy’s administration. Again simple logic is faulty: if  $A = \text{“not behind,”}$  i.e. “a headstart”; then a “*headstart = not Headstart*” or  $A = \text{not } A$ . As will be seen below, this argument is faulty, based on the unacceptable premise called *False Dilemma*, but this can be rectified: granted the President’s rationale is that church groups and private organizations should be able to handle the teaching of pre-academic skills, but since the standards for teachers have been shown in recent years to be falling off rapidly, and since the church groups and private organizations were failing previously which is one of the major reasons why Pres. Kennedy’s administration started Headstart in the first place, so the logic of  $A = \text{not } A$  still is being applied and it is still faulty.

The bottom line is that while Americans are gaining in technological skills, their logical skills and knowledge bases from which to work show a steady and rapid decline.

<sup>65</sup>A reference by Berman to the current state of American television, the news media, and the internet as well as to the “home boy, redneck” personality of the current President of the United States created by his public relations crew, former employees of Fox Network.

isolation, without any form of community and are content to have soap-opera characters for “friends.” In this regard, I found it interesting that by 1996, academic conferences began to be held on “the erosion of civility”—something that was unheard of even five years before that. And the extreme dark end of the spectrum here is represented by the high school massacre in Littleton, Colorado, on 20 April, 1999 (Hitler’s birthday, symbolically enough), when two badly alienated teenagers in black trenchcoats set about murdering their fellow students.<sup>66</sup>

The human need of spirituality and the problems heaped onto the individual by the environment are entangled in viscious, frenzied dance. Loss of power and personal identity are definately related to threats to human survival; the loss of education/ ability to think for oneself is an environmental problem, coupled with threats of war, unemployment, and a failing economy which results the need for both parents to work are resulting in ever “increasing spiritual need.” Adherants are looking to fill this growing need often by switching from traditional American Christianity to an alternative religion to pick up where Christianity has seemed to fail.

This is the motivation, then, for many trying to adopt Ásatrú as an alternative source for spiritual fulfillment. The problem becomes one of worldview, then. As James Russell and others have pointed out, world-rejecting religions develop hand in hand with a sense of loss of personal power and a loss of identity and generate themselves out of the crumbling foundations of a powerful empire. Spengler provides us with a list of precursors to the fall of an empire which Berman shows to be present in the U.S. at the turn of the second millennium according to the common era. Here is the crux of the problem:

the problematic needs are those threats to the individual at the subconscious level of “fighting, food, family, and sex” which, in turn, sets the individual on a *spiritual quest*, resulting in the founding, joining or maintaining of a *world-rejecting* religion. Since the Viking Age worldview is of the sort which breeds a *world-accepting* religion, it will be a simpler approach to reject the older worldview for the most part except for a few ambiguous bits, and replace it with the worldview of the late 20th century U.S.

Such an approach is resulting in the altered interpretation of not only the early Germanic way of life, but also early Celtic, Slavic, Chinese, Mayan, Siberian, and numerous other traditional, world-accepting worldviews, a spiritual form of the Pygmalion Effect.

The history of “spiritual need” should also be brought into question.

“The term ‘spirituality’ was first used in ancient times as a contrast to materialism and signified attention to spiritual as opposed to

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<sup>66</sup>Berman, Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-60.



material realities. “Spiritual realities” were understood quite simply as those that like the wind or the fragrance of a rose, one experienced but could not literally see, touch, or especially, possess in the sense of *command*.

“The word ‘spirituality’ then fell out of usage for almost 1600 years, when the postmodern age resurrected it, again as a contrast—but now less to “materialism” than to religion. The vocabulary of punishments and rewards, the motives of fear and greed, the sense of “us” against “them”: Many modern people found religion more interested in closing boundaries than in opening them, more concerned with sanctions than with release, more an attempt to occupy space than to find it.”<sup>67</sup>

Spiritual need appears to be a recognition that the “material” environment and the psychological/ physical state of the individual are out of sync with one another and is simply a name for “the measurable difference between the internal and external environments.” This being the case, then “spirituality” is the methodology for rectifying the difference. What is most interesting, though, is the statement by Kurtz and Ketcham that “The word ‘spirituality’ then fell out of usage for almost 1600 years . . .” for this would imply that individuals prior to the latter half of the 20th century either

1. did not have spiritual needs, or
2. did not feel a need for spirituality to rectify the differences.

Exploration of traditional, world-accepting worldviews/ religions shows that this argument, as implausible as it sounds at first, may indeed be the case.

First, most traditional peoples of world-accepting cultures do not seem to have a good, single word which means precisely “religion.” In the same vein, early Germanic languages utilized variants of the word, *die Sitte* [ModG.] which is often used today to mean “a collective body of religious customs” but which previously meant “the customary way of doing things” such as in “the customary way to run a farm” or “the proper way to bake bread.” *Religion* in these languages is generally lumped together under the umbrella of “customary/ proper” and is not considered separate. Secondly, because worldviews are different between world-rejecting religions and world-accepting cultures, spirituality, which is the nurturing of the soul either in preparation for or during times of failure (*spirituality* is rarely a necessity during times of plenty, success, and easy leisure), is instead handled by reliance upon family and community. The tradition of *Sitte* (“custom/ tradition”) and *Sippe* (“family/ clan”) remained part and parcel to rural culture in the United States and can still be observed in rural areas. Instead of spirituality as a “safety net” the individual utilized family and friends, and family and friends utilized community. In many traditional cultures

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<sup>67</sup>Kurtz, Ernest and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*, 1992 (Random House/ Bantam Books; New York, NY), p. 24.

even the ubiquitous “one must develop a personal relationship with one’s God” is viewed with suspicion; in these cultures, one must partake in the *community’s* festivals to receive the blessings of ancestors, gods, or local deities, and according to a large number of researchers in Germanic Studies and Antiquities today there is every indication that the Viking Age communities functioned in this manner.<sup>68</sup>

Spiritual need or spiritual necessity as concepts have varied greatly over time to the point where the *need* was not actually expressed in relationship to *spirituality* until the latter half of the 20th century. Claiming that a change of religion was necessary to fulfill a personal spiritual need is actually part of a different worldview, i.e. the modern worldview of Christianized America and has little to do with exploration of the ancient. The individual wishing to explore this subtle phenomenon may actually need to look no further than how funerals are conducted. Death is always regarded as a majorly disruptive force within a family, but exactly how a family relieves itself of the turmoil is interesting and can reveal much about one’s own culture. In modern, urbanized America, funerals are held, people attend and then go home. Often, family members will offer each other some support which may also be supplemented by grief-counseling (the latter may actually be handled by one or more members of the immediate family who is acquainted by works in the area). A community based world-accepting culture (including many of the traditional subcultures of rural America such as Cajun, and American Indian of the reservations or city neighborhoods populated with immigrants and their first generation-children) views death differently. First, the community may actually be involved in the dying process itself which may mean that 10-12 people are huddled in the single room while the individual is dying (this is irritating for modern urbanized hospital workers or hospice care workers). Once the death has occurred, the community will put together funeral arrangements which will generally include some form of wake, a religious funeral service of some sort, a disposal of the body, a feast afterwards which may last several days, scheduled memorial observances (often memorial feasts, perhaps at 30-day, 90-day, and one year intervals). Additionally, there is an expected period of mourning usually lasting no more than a year—a child born during that time may take the name, and, therefore, the “luck” of the deceased. The community then will support the mourners through their period of grief, but if any individual continues grieving beyond the set period of time (with the exception of observing the memorial feasts), community sanctions may be forthcoming mainly because the individual’s behavior has now become a detriment to the stability of the community itself. Differences such as these can help reveal parts of the deeply ingrained Christianized worldview of the urbanized American. Because the opportunities still exist for generating this type of culture clash, they become an educational exercise for those moving towards the reconstructionist end of the spectrum.

Germanic communities of the Viking Age didn’t appear to have the same

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<sup>68</sup>One is referred to works by John Lindow, Bernard Maier, and Rudy Simek, Peter Foote, Vilhelm Grönbech, Kris Kershaw and others. See the bibliography.

sense of “spirituality” as is common today much of which seems to involve in engaging in acts not generally thought to be essential in a direct way to activities of daily living. In fact, much of what is considered spiritual today involves (often) some form of meditation, quiet reflection, a worshipful demeanor, demonstrations of humility which are then occasionally accompanied by physical trappings (beads, feathers, bells, books, candles, etc.). The Germanic heathen (and early Germanic Christians), however, have left behind no recorded word which implies “worshipful” (in the modern sense), “prayful,” “spiritual,” or “ceremonial.” They did, however, leave us “*heill*” (ModG. = *heil*) and “*sæll*” (ModG. = *die Seele* [‘soul’]).

In the following translation of this passage from Grönbech the translator chose to utilize the word ‘luck’ as the translation, but it is important to understand that the meaning is closely tied to the following words in modern English as well: “whole,” “holy,” “health,” “well-being,” and “hale.”

No matter where we look in the world, we are confronted by the power of luck, of *Heil* [‘wholeness’]. This expression which does not mean simply random luck, coincidence and the dependence upon powers outside ourselves which are included in the meaning, probably is best defined through the perceptions of the ancients, and we must, if we are to completely comprehend the word in its original sense, patiently and without preconceived notions, reconstruct old germanic thought processes.

*Heil* shapes every bit of progress. Where it fails, life wastes away. It seems to be the most powerful force in all the world, the power of life itself.<sup>69</sup>

*[Wohin wir in die Welt blicken, begegnen wir der Macht des Glückes, des Heils. Der letztere Ausdruck, der nicht den Glücksfall, die Zufälligkeit, und die Abhängigkeit vom Äußern einschließt, deckt sich besser mit der Auffassung bei den Alten, und doch müssen wir, um das Wort vollständig in seinem Sinne zu verstehen, geduldig und ohne Vorurteile die altgermanischem Gedankengänge rekonstruieren.]*<sup>70</sup>

Spirituality in the modern world is to lead the individual to a sense of well-being, a sense of being whole and at peace with the world. To do this, one engages in what one believes (or has been taught to believe) to be *spiritual acts*. The ancient Germanic peoples of the Viking Age, heathen and Christian alike, understood that not only daily activities, but also noble acts of warfare, bravery, revenge as well as sharing, giving, and act of honoring served to increase ‘luck’ (ON = *heill*), not only for the individual, but for the *Sippe* (clan), and for the community. ‘Selfishness’ was considered *unkind* (in the older sense of *inhuman*); therefore, these acts would not be done for self-aggrandizement. There

<sup>69</sup>Translated by the author.

<sup>70</sup>Grönbech, Vilhelm, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, Band 1, 2002 (Primus Verlag; Darmstadt, Germany), p. 135

are a large number of poems in the collection known as the Elder Edda which outline in very clear language what was considered *heil* and what was deemed *unheil*.

When underhandedness<sup>71</sup> is called unluck (*Unheil*), the term is not to be taken as an excuse; to the contrary, the word conveys a strong judgement that the man is deemed as being without 'luck,' without worth.<sup>72</sup> When King Hakon, in the afore mentioned condemnation of the taking of revenge on a wrong man, calls such an act unluck, he is choosing the very most caustic, specific term he can find in his vocabulary, the word that comes nearest to the idea of a mortal sin. *Unheil* is sacrilege, and a *heillos* ('luckless') man is the equivalent of a niding, i.e. worthless, or in certain cases, a actual niding. The bluntest way to turn a man who bids for friendship away is by saying: "You don't look to be a lucky man, and it's the smartest thing to have nothing to do with you;" these words contain bad misgivings regarding morality and intelligence; to get the full meaning contained in the sentence we must give two parallel renderings: you have no 'luck' in your doings, and cannot bring those close to you anything but 'ill': 'one cannot count on you, with you, anything could happen.' And even when Njal says of his sons that they are not 'men of luck', the sentence, back then, probably had a bitter undertone that we still sense; it implies, that the young men lack humor and forethought, and further, it means, that they are lacking in self-control and moral restraint. [translated by the author]

*[Wenn Neidingschaft Unheil genannt wird, ist diese Bezeichnung nicht etwa als eine Entschuldigung aufzufassen; im Gegenteil, die Worte ehthalten eine strenge Verurteilung des Mannes, der als »heillos« verklagt wird. Wenn König Hakon in der früher erwähnten Verurteilung des Rachenehmens am unrechten Mann eine solche Tat Unheil nennt, wählt er den allerschärfsten Ausdruck, den er in seinem Wortschatz finden kann, das Wort, das der Totsde am nächsten kommt. Unheil ist Frevel und ein »heilloser« Mann ist dasselbe wie ein Neiding oder, in gewissen Fällen, ein angehender Neiding. Die größte Art eine Mann abzuweisen der sich um Freundschaft bewirbt, ist ihm zu sagen: 'Du siehst nicht aus wie ein Heiling, und es ist das klügste nichts mit dir zu tun zu haben'; diese Worte enthalten böse Befürchtungen sowohl in bezug auf die Moral wie auf die Klugheit. Um die volle Bedeutung dieses Satzes zu erfassen, müssen wir zwei parallele Lesarten anführen: du hast kein Heil in deinem*

<sup>71</sup>The German word is *Neidschaft* ('the actions resulting from being consumed by a hateful envy') and was a word which Grönbech used to mean 'vile,' 'base,' 'thoughtless,' etc. In modern terms, a common purse-snatcher, mugger, or swindler would be engaging in *Neidschaft*. The term also carries undertones cowardice as well.

<sup>72</sup>The word '*heillos*' would literally mean without 'luck'; however, because the actual concept of luck impinges on "the most powerful (positive) force in the world" and affects not only the individual but also family and community we opted for 'without worth.'

*Tun und kannst deine Umgebung nur Unheil bringen, – und: man kann sich nicht auf dich verlassen, von dir kann man alles erwarten. Auch wenn Njal von seinen Söhnen sagt, daß sie keine Heilinge sind, hatten die Worte zu der Zeit einen bitteren Unterton, als wir jetzt spüren: sie besagen, daß die jungen Männer Witz und Schärfsinn fehlt, und sie bedeuten ferner, daß es ihnen an Selbstbeherrschung und moralischem Rückhalt mangelt.]<sup>73</sup>*

Not only was *Heil* desirable and ways to increase it were sought out through proper action within the family and community, it's opposite was not only shunned, but the carrier of *Unheil* was also shunned.

The sinister symptoms of this type of underhandedness lie in the fact that 'luck' and honor are identical. Luck is the combination of frith (peace) and honor seen from another side, and unluck, in the old sense, is simply the reverse of that feeling of kinship we have now learned to understand.

*Heil* acts so that men may maintain their sense of well-being, their friendship, their ability to keep their promises, and that they forgo acting dishonorably. But *Heil* ('luck') is more than that. It gives men the will to act morally, or better, it *is* the moral will itself. When Hrut expresses his misgivings: 'I do not know whether we'll have 'luck' together,' he is thinking of the power to have and cherish a mutual love, and their ability of creating frith in their home, as much as of their power of enjoying each other and having offspring.

In [early] Germanic thought, moral assessment is always ready to rise to the surface; in fact, for the expressions of 'good,' 'spiritual' and 'upright,' the early Germanic peoples have no better words than 'lucky' ['full of *Heil*,' i.e. 'whole, wholesome'] (today, the word 'holy' [related to *Heil*] has received a definition specific to Christianity, and also the word 'soul' from the ON *sæll* cognate to the Gothic word *sels*). Originally, these words embraced the concepts: wealth and health, happiness and wisdom. In later linguistic periods, the ethical side of the concepts often dominated and set the use of the words in Christian writings. Thus, for the early translators of the Bible, the Gothic *sæls* and its opposite *unsæls* were the best equivalent for the "good" and "evil" of the New Testament. [translation by author]

*[Die unheimliche Symptome der Neidingschaft beruhen darauf, daß Heil und Ehre identisch sind. Das Heil ist die Verbindung von Frieden und Ehre von einer anderen Seite aus gesehen, und Unheil im alten Sinne ist ganz einfach die Kehrseite Verwandtschaftsgefühls, das wir nun zu verstehen gelernt haben.*

*Das Heil Bewirkt, daß die Menschen ihren Frieden, ihre Freundschaft, ihre Versprechungen zu halten vermögen, und daß sie es*

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<sup>73</sup>Grönbech, Vilhelm, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, Band 1, 2002 (Primus Verlag; Darmstadt, Germany), p. 161.

*unterlassen, unehrenhafte Handlungen zu begehen. Aber das Heil ist mehr. Es gibt den Menschen den Willen, moralisch zu handeln, oder richtiger, es ist der moralische Wille selbst. Als Hrut die Befürchtung äußert: 'Ich weiß nicht, ob wir beide miteinander Heil haben werden,' der dachte an die Kraft, gegenseitige Liebe zu haben und zu hegen, an die Fähigkeit in ihrem Heim den Frieden zu schaffen, und auch an die Kraft, sich über einander freuen zu können und Nachkommen zu haben.*

*In germanischen Denken ist die moralische Wertung immer bereit, an die Oberfläche zu steigen. Für das, was wir unter gut, fromm, rechtschaffen verstehen, haben die alten Germanen keine andere Ausdruck als glücklich, **heilhaft** (das Wort 'heilig' hat heute eine spezifisch christliche Bedeutung gewonnen, so auch 'selig,' das aus dem altnordischen **sæll**, dem gotischen **sels** entspricht). Ursprünglich erhalten diese Wörter die Begriffe: Reichtum und Gesundheit, Glück und Weisheit. In späteren Sprechperioden hat die ethische Seite des Gedenkens oft die Oberhand gewonnen und den Gebrauch des Wortes in christlichen Schriften bestimmt. So waren **sels** und der Gegensatz **unsels** für den gotischen Bibelübersetzer die beste Äquivalente für das 'gut' und 'böse' im Neuen Testament.<sup>74</sup>*

The modern concept of spirituality really had no place in heathen thinking. This is not to say that Germanic heathens had no sense of 'holy,' for example, for the word used today was taken from the heathen vocabulary. Rather, it is another case, similar to the case of learning Galenic Medicine presented in the Introduction where a detailed and complete logic existed outside of our normal set of assumptions (our worldview). If the modern researcher can but suspend his own assumptions about 'spiritual \_\_ fill in the blank \_\_', about religion, and the relationship between God, man and community, a whole new approach, complete with logic and its own assumptions may open itself out of the time worn pages of history.

Returning to the topic of 'spiritual need' and the role it may play as an impediment to the reconstruction of an ancient worldview, the overall effect on how a community views its relationship to its individual members is subtle but highly significant. Christianized communities tend idealize the individual and regard the individual as the smallest component of a community, therefore, a community where *anomie* is high is very conducive to this way of thinking; whereas, the heathen regarded the extended family as the smallest unit. In the heathen worldview (as is common with most traditional cultures), a family is held as being responsible to the community for the crimes of the individual and is expected to pay restitution. Christianization alters this worldview drastically: the civil rights movement, i.e. the rights of the individual, was the ultimate goal of Christianization for in the mind of the Christian, it is the *individual* who must at the end of life stand before his God to be judged for his life and his role in it.

<sup>74</sup>Grönbech, Vilhelm, *Kultur und Religion der Germanen*, Band 1, 2002 (Primus Verlag; Darmstadt, Germany), p. 161-162.

The effect on the Christianized community is that *each individual is answerable only for himself*.

The concept of 'spiritual need' *seems* real enough but it appears to be something that is specific to a culture, a time and a place. To be sure there are more generalized *needs* related to internal crises or turmoil resulting from the inability of an individual to respond comfortably or appropriately to external events such as the loss of marriage, a loved one, a pet, a home, a job or an event which threatens the well-being of one's self or family. As moderns, the tendency for handling the spiritual crises is to turn inwards and build up a *spiritual connection* to the powers above. Such an inward move seems natural and proper, but this also appears to be learned behavior since direct observation of traditional peoples who appear to be just as spiritual as anyone other group handle the situation by reaching out of the self and engaging in proper action within a community which then assumes the role of comforter.

Modern interpretation of the spiritual activities of traditional peoples such as can be found in any New Age bookstore is generally falsely leading the reader to think that by using the trappings of a traditional culture, one has gained an understanding of the worldview of that same culture. Nothing can be further from the truth, however; one has learned only to switch out one vocabulary list for another and has learned close to nothing about the traditional worldview. By acting in such a manner, one has only further perpetuated the idea that modern Americans are an arrogant and self-absorbed mono-cultural people. When *spiritual need* shows up in one's personal self-examination, it needs to be dissected as well.

#### 5.4 Questioning One's Own Worldview

Above all questioning one own worldview is beneficial to the entire process of self-examination. Too often papers are written or websites are posted with broadsweeping statements regarding interpretations of the Viking Age northern Germanic worldview especially regarding 'religious practices.' Rarely, do the authors of these little treatises question their own interpretive standard by which they are measuring and making these statements. Rarely, are the writers completely forthright about their own cultural background, and the prejudices which they have inherited by their predominantly Christian communities, educators, families, and friends within a socio-economic/ political system which has evolved into a system not only very similar to that which is fertile for the development of world-rejecting religions/ worldviews but which also spawned and nurtured and maintained the early Christian Church. Many of these papers are written by revivalists who wish little more than to decorate their personal internalized worldviews with early Germanic trappings but are reluctant to take the next step forward to a deeper understanding of an ancient noble people. In the early 1990s, an estimated 90% of those claiming to be Ásatrú fell into this group, and the small percentage of reconstructionists were labeled with any number of perjoratives, but 15 years later the trend seems to be reversing at

least to some degree.<sup>75</sup>

As Raymonde Carroll in his *Cultural Misunderstandings* points out this may very well be “an undertaking which [one] must accept with the knowledge that [one] can never completely change [one’s] way of being and thinking which has become completely involuntary and necessary . . . , like breathing.”<sup>76</sup> but one that is a beneficial exercise nevertheless.

“... cultural analysis is not an act of arrogance<sup>77</sup> but, quite the contrary, an act of humility by which [one tries] to temporarily forget [his] way of seeing the world (the only one [he has] learned to consider valid) and briefly replace it with another way of seeing the world, a way which by definition [he] cannot even adopt (even if [he wants] to) but the validity of which [he] can assert by this act.”<sup>78</sup>

The primary method for initiating *cultural analysis* is to question one’s own prejudices made visible by the presence of another worldview.

Before listing out questions, however, like the methods used throughout this little treatise, it is best that the word “questions” itself be clarified somewhat. Like the word ‘religion’ discussed throughout this paper, the word ‘question’ is simple enough, most children learn its generic meaning by the age of 3½ years, but as this author has experienced while the head English tutor at the University of New Mexico for 6 years, the word ‘question’ and its meaning begin to fall apart and become confused in the English 101 argumentative essay and become the the underlying reason for many failed grades.

Where the word ‘question’ begins to lose its meaning, is when an individual becomes intelligent enough to begin to utilize the abstracts of logic and reasoning to find the answer to a problem or to present a plausible answer to a problem. The fault shows up when one is required to present a hypothesis. In the argumentative essay the main focus is called the ‘thesis’ which is a question presented in statement form, The transformation from hypothesis to thesis is subject to different treatments by the prospective author, many of which a fallacious. In their book *How to Think about Weird Things: Critical tThing for*

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<sup>75</sup>The numbers cited here, of course, cannot be exact because during the previous decade the situation had gotten to the point where even the exact numbers of those claiming to be heathen were questionable. Many recruits for the task had come from the ranks of Wicca and other New Age battlefields, where philosophical territory was fought over for which shamnic techniques were the best, which ‘trad’ was more ‘trad,’ who was to be hailed as the new leader, etc. Many claiming to be heathen were simply looking for new territory claim. The numbers here, then, represent the general trends as represented by opinions and trends gleaned from the large number of mailing lists and newsgroups available on the internet.

<sup>76</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>77</sup>“Arrogant” is by far the most common appellation for modern Americans by most people of non-English speaking countries and by American Indians. The adjective refers essentially to the fact that most Americans are monolingual and when they learn a foreign language there is an attitude that English pronunciation applied to the foreign orthography should be acceptable. Modern Americans are notorious for “putting ketchup on everything” rather than attempting to acclimate to foreign tastes, blatantly retaining American style clothing, and displaying what is often considered excessive pride in politics and religion which many “hosts” unbecoming for one who is a guest.

<sup>78</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, *op.cit.*, p. 9.



a *New Age* Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn list out the informal fallacies under three general headings:

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Unacceptable premises

**Begging the question** – an argument begs the question– or argues in circles–when its conclusion is used as one of its premises.

Ex.: Some people claim that one should believe that God exists because the Bible says so. But when asked why we should believe the Bible, they answer that we should believe it because God wrote it. . . . Here's another example: 'Jane has telepathy,' says Susan 'How do you know?' asks Jill. 'Because she can read my mind,' replies Susan.

**False Dilemma** – An Argument proposes a false dilemma when it presumes that only two alternatives exist when in actuality there are more than two.

Ex.: 'Either science can explain how she was cured or it was a miracle. Science cannot explain how she was cured. So it must be a miracle.'

Irrelevant Premises

**Equivocation** – Equivocation occurs when a word is used in two different senses in an argument.

Ex.: (i) Only man is rational. (ii) No woman is a man. (iii) Therefore no woman is rational. [The word *man* means *human being* in the first premise and *male* in the second.] Here's another example: 'It's the duty of the press to publish news that's in the public interest. There is great public interest in UFOs. Therefore the press fails in its duty if it does not publish articles on UFOs.'

**Composition** – An argument may claim that what is true of the part is also true of the whole [or] . . . what's true of a member of a group may not be true of the group itself.

Ex.: 'Subatomic particles are lifeless. Therefore anything made out of them is lifeless.' [And it's partner] . . . 'Belief in the supernatural makes Joe happy. Therefore, universal belief in the supernatural would make the nation happy.'

**Division** – The fallacy of division is the the converse of the fallacy of composition. It occurs when one assumes that what is true of the whole is also true of its parts.

Ex.: 'We are alive and we are made out of subatomic particles. So they must be alive too.'

**Appeal to the Person** – When someone tries to rebut an argument by criticizing or denigrating its presenter rather than by dealing with the argument itself, that person is guilty of the fallacy of appeal to the person [often called by its classical name *ad hominem*].

Ex.: 'You can't believe Dr. Jones claim that there is no evidence of life after death. After all, he's an atheist.'

**Genetic fallacy** –To argue that a claim is true or false based on its origin is to commit a genetic fallacy.

Ex.: 'Jane got that message from the Ouiji board, so it must be false (or true).' [The problem here is that many people discover important ideas while dreaming (F. Crick and the discovery of DNA), daydreaming (Kekulé discover the benzene ring while staring at a fire and seeing the image of a serpent biting its tail) or while drugged (The theory of evolution came to Wallace while he was in a delirium). Another common error is to deny veracity of something because of the means by which the knowledge was obtained–Nazi medical experimentation in Konzentrationslager, experiments on children, animals, illegal experiments by the CIA, etc.]

**Appeal to Authority** – We often try to support our views by citing experts. This sort of appeal is perfectly valid – provided that the person cited really is an expert in the field in question.

Ex.: [This is a common enough error, but where it shows up for the purpose of this paper is when one New Age author cites another who cited another and so on, commonly called “perpetuating the myth.” Ronald Hutton, PhD in history, revealed for example how the myth of the Wiccan 'Burning Times' where 6 or 9 million<sup>79</sup> wiccans had been allegedly burnt at the stake for crimes of withcraft, heresy, etc. was and still is

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<sup>79</sup>The number still varies depending on the source.

a myth perpetuated over the course of more than two hundred years.<sup>80</sup> ]

**Appeal to the Masses** – A remarkably common but fallacious form of reasoning is: 'It Must be true (or good) because everybody believes it (or does it).'

**Appeal to Tradition** – We appeal to tradition when we argue that something must be true (or good!) because it is part of an established tradition.

Ex.: 'Mothers have always used chicken soup to fight colds. Therefore it must be good for you.' [Note that it is well established the chicken *is* good for people from a nutritional point of view and that there is evidence that it may contain chemicals which may assist the immune system to fight colds, but the argument as presented is clearly false.]

**Appeal to Ignorance** – The appeal comes in two varieties: using an opponent's inability to *disprove a conclusion* as proof of a conclusion's correctness, and using an opponent's inability to prove a conclusion as proof of its correctness. In the first case case, the claim is since there is no proof that something is true, it must be false. In the second case, the claim is that since there is no proof that something is false, it must be true. . . . The problem with these arguments is that they take a lack of evidence for one thing to be good evidence for another. A lack of evidence, however, proves nothing. In logic, as in life, you can't get something for nothing.

**Appeal to Fear** – To use the threat of harm to advance one's position is to commit the fallacy of the appeal to fear. . . . Threats extort; they do not help us arrive at the truth.

Ex.: 'If you do not convict this criminal, one of you may be her next victim.' . . . 'You should believe in God because if you don't you'll go to hell.'

Insufficient Premises

**Hasty Generalization** – You are guilty of hasty generalizations, or jumping to conclusions, when you draw a general conclusion about all things of a certain type on the basis of evidence concerning only a few things of that type. . . . An inference from a sample of a group to the

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<sup>80</sup>Hutton, Ronald *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, (Oxford University Press; New York), 1999.

whole group is legitimate only if the sample is sufficiently large and every member of the group has an equal chance to be part of the sample.

**Faulty Analogy** – An argument from analogy claims that things which resemble one another in certain respects resemble one another in further respects.

Ex.: 'Astronauts wear helmets and fly in a spaceship. Mayan carving seems to be wearing a helmet and flying in a spaceship. Therefore it is the carving of an ancient astronaut.'

**False Cause** – The fallacy of false cause consists of supposing that two events are causally connected when they are not. . . . Only if it has been established beyond a reasonable doubt that other factors were not involved—through a controlled study, for example—can you justifiably claim that there is a causal connection between two events. [Sometimes known as *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, or as a professor of neurology once told this author as a student “Correlation does *not* mean causation.”]<sup>81</sup> <sup>82</sup>

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Where a student's thesis generally failed him was almost always resulting from the lack of a true hypothesis. Rather than asking a question, generating a statement from it and then setting up mental experiments to test the hypothesis for retention or rejection *prior* to generating a thesis and supportive argumentative essay. This is sometimes known as a *priori* research method and is generally frowned upon since it is generally a claim based on a hypothesis which has neither been proved or rejected. The result is usually a failing grade for the student, a non-sensical New Age treatment of a traditional culture, or a flame-war on a mailing list.

To illustrate how questioning can be applied to one's own worldview, we will use an example from a letter received by the author through his website.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Taken from *How to Think about Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age*, 2nd ed., by Theodore Schick, Jr. and Lewis Vaughn (Mayfield Publishing Co.; Mountainview, CA), 1999, pp. 284-90. Although very harsh for New Age adherents, the author feels this little volume to be completely indispensable for those delving into and experimenting with different worldviews, i.e. those attempting to reconstruct the worldview of the Viking Age, for example.

<sup>82</sup>A healthy and interesting exercise in critical thinking:

1. Record a segment from CSPAN regarding the current movement to ban gay marriage in the U.S. through a constitutional amendment.
2. Analyze both the Republican and Democratic arguments line-by-line for the above fallacious arguments.
3. Make a determination (not necessarily your own personal conviction) as to whether the arguments presented by either side have been presented logically and fairly.

<sup>83</sup><http://www.angelfire.com/nm/seidhman>

In response to a rant about reincarnation, the author of the letter (name and association have been altered) writes:

**“re: Reincarnation in the Lore**

"Hogni was the name of a king whose daughter was Sigrun. She became a valkyrie and rode through the air and over the sea. SHE WAS SVAVA BORN AGAIN." Poetic Eddas, Helgakvitha 2 in Hollander, Bellows, and in Thorpe translates as "regenerated" instead of "born again". With what limited lore we have just this one mention in the Lore is good enough for me to know that our ancestors believed in a form of Reincarnation. Its pretty cut and dry, short, sweet, and to the point.

I love your rants however.

A. G.

Lore Speaker Any Kindred, US “

The argument is straight to the point; however, the equation 'born-again = reincarnation' has not been clearly established. 'Reincarnation' in its simplest form does, in fact, mean 'to be born again into a different body.' But several other points need to be investigated:

1. 'Reincarnation' is also part and parcel to many culturally specific spiritual philosophies, particularly oriental religions, wherein the more complete definition is generally akin to

*a philosophy where it is accepted as truth that an individual is a soul which starts its cycle in a primitive state and through a successive cycle of incarnations in different bodies the soul learns and evolves to a higher state of being until such point where perfection is reached where the soul is absorbed into the perfection of the Godhead.*

This, then, is the definition to which the author of the letter was responding. This is the standard generic New Age and wiccan definition and can also be seen on various so-called heathen websites and is often used in arguments on various mailing lists.

2. Svava, according to the poem *Helgakviða* was, in fact, “born again.” The question remains, does this constitute an example of an existing spiritual philosophy of reincarnation during the Viking Age?
3. In fact, there are three commonly cited examples similar to this occurrence. There are probably other allusions to such. Do they, in fact, support a spiritual philosophy of reincarnation, or do they represent a completely different philosophy such as the need for revenge to bring closure to an event can be so strong that a rebirth may be necessary if the space of time needed for revenge crosses into another lifetime? Such is fairly common in European folklore up to the turn of the 20th century and is not generally considered by experts to be supportive of a generalized philosophy of reincarnation.

4. There are not enough occurrences of 'rebirth' in the eddaic, sagaic, or folkore record to be a sufficiently compelling argument for a generalized philosophy of reincarnation.<sup>84</sup>
5. While it is well attested that family luck was viewed as being passed down from generation to generation even into this century in the more rural areas of Europe and traditional ethnic communities in the U.S., can this be viewed as a form of reincarnation or does this fall rather under the general thoughts about inheritance? (*Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* is not the "The same apple grows on the tree until it has perfected itself.")<sup>85</sup>

In general, the fascination with the concept of reincarnation in connection with the reconstruction of the Germanic worldview has been around since the late 1970s with the wiccan immigration into the territory of Ásatrú. James Russell views reincarnation as being part of the the movement towards world-rejection in religion and essentially identifies it similarly with the concept of salvation which occurs in the the Afterlife. In his discussions in the first several chapters of his book<sup>86</sup> he outlines the differences between the two worldviews (of world-rejecting and world-accepting) and clearly the indications are that reincarnation as a spiritual philosophy is more closely aligned with the world-rejecting religions. The modern adoption of reincarnation by revivalists and neo-heathens has more to do with their rationales for adopting the northern Germanic worldview as adherents in the first place for it is among these two groups that one will most likely encounter "the fulfillment of spiritual need" as a primary reason.

There is another question which must be asked which brings the topic back around to "questioning one's own worldview": where exactly is the subject of reincarnation stemming from? Here are some questions then:

1. Is the "evidence" from an *a priori* study? Was the hypothesis of reincarnation thoroughly tested or was reincarnation simply picked because of its popularity?
2. Have the occurrences been sufficiently compared to one another for commonalities beyond the fact of "rebirth" and do those commonalities match

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<sup>84</sup>Stephan Flowers does indeed list several instances where either the term *aptrborinn* and *endrborinn* are utilized and are generally translated as 'born-again.' Linguistically, the ModG cognate and direct translation is *Nachgeboren* which means 'posthumously' as in the sentence 'His luck [or sense of duty] was passed on to his son posthumously.' See "Is Sigurðhr Sigmundr »aptrborinn«?" (*Iðunna*, Vol.4; No.1) by Stephen Flowers.

<sup>85</sup>In his article "Is Sigurðhr Sigmundr »aptrborinn«?" (*Iðunna*, Vol.4; No.1), Stephen Flowers in a truly, well-thoughtout academic style addresses the very topic of *aptrborinn* and *endrborinn*; his conclusion is as follows:

"Fundamentally, this phase of the Norse, *Sigurðhr saga* describes a process in which the innate powers of Sigmundr are "reborn" in his posthumous son."

The conclusion is very like those reached by the German researchers Bernard Maier and Rudolf Simek.

<sup>86</sup>Russell, James C., *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, (Oxford Univ. Press; New York) 1994.

well-enough to the definition generally accepted as the spiritual philosophy of reincarnation enough to say that the Viking Age sampling is representative of a spiritual philosophy of reincarnation or do the commonalities between the Viking age occurrences of rebirth suggest that perhaps this is part of a completely different spiritual philosophy which operates by completely different mechanisms having only the idea of reirth in common with reincarnation?

3. What is the spiritual background/ education of the person making the claim? Biases may be in place simply due to lack of exposure to traditional cultures, and these biases could be interfering either with research design or interpretation of the results.
4. Has a large sampling of afterlife experience from both sagaic and eddaic literature been examined to determine if rebirth was deemed “normal” during the Viking Age, and does this, then, mesh well with evidence taken from the archeological record and folklore following the Viking Age to determine if a spiritual philosophy of reincarnation was really extant? Or are the numbers of occurrences low enough and evidence from folklore and archeology poor enough to suggest that these occurrences were probably isolated incidences?

The author of the above letter clearly states that lack of evidence is not a deterrent to her accepting the spiritual philosophy of reincarnation. This author is inclined to disagree, and would add that most likely her underlying *purpose*<sup>87</sup> for accepting ‘reincarnation’ instead of ‘investigating *aptrburðr*’ is to satisfy a need for ‘salvation through spiritual practice’ which bestowed upon her at a very early impressionable age by the world-rejecting culture she was raised in.

To explore the topic of ‘a need for salvation’ which appears to be possessed by most raised in a predominantly Christianized community in urban America, here are a list of lines lifted from emails on mailing lists.

- *When I die, I expect to see my Goddess Freya.* (modern, neo-heathen seið-practitioner)
- *I expect to go to the Hall of Freya, when I die.* (member of the Ring of Troth)
- *I will go to Halls of Odin.* (male seið-practitioner)
- *I will go to the Hall of my Lord, Freyr.* (member of the Ring of Troth who is also gay)

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<sup>87</sup>‘Purpose’ is the proper word here because the needs being discussed here lie far below the level of consciousness. The ‘reason’ for this section, for example, is to help bring cultural indoctrination lying at the level of the subconscious up to the level of consciousness through persistent questioning.

In fact, for the purpose of writing this paper, the author went to the internet and found a mailing list, of which he had been a member, with a public archive, retrieved a topic thread dealing with life after death, and counted the number of respondents participating in the thread and matched their responses to a little survey:<sup>88</sup>

1. 16 out of 20 different participants were destined for the Hall of a Norse god or goddess.
2. In the 20, 2 respondents were destined to the Halls “of their Goddess, Hel”
3. 18 respondents regarded Hel as a ‘Goddess’ rather than a place.
4. 4 respondents were going into the Halls of their *patron*<sup>89</sup> to await their reincarnation.
5. 2 respondents, including this author as one, argued that ‘dying into the folds of the family, preferably within the land-holdings of the family,’ was, in the Viking Age worldview, the probable destination for most excepting those dying either in battle or by drowning.

The thread took place over the spring and early summer of the year 2000. As can be imagined, #5 was the least popular suggestion and eventually resulted in spin-off threads filled with *ad hominem* attacks; on the other hand, #1 and its extension #4 were the most popular. The personal questions, for the purpose of this section, should be

- *Where am I getting my information from?*
- *How might my interpretation of the Viking Age worldview be biased by my upbringing?*
- *What are other possible interpretations based on the actual evidence I have at hand?*

Starting such an investigation by collecting large samples of descriptions of life-after-death, then breaking the descriptions down to basic components, matching or categorizing components, then building new generic descriptions, *without interpreting*, based on categories can be a very helpful exercise here.

As a last note, in a little comparison exercise while collecting the above numbers from the mailing list, the author noted similarities in tone, conviction and phrasing between the statements by neo-heathens and common statements

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<sup>88</sup>To do a truly ‘scientific study,’ one would take the observations made here as a hypothesis, build a research design which, of course, would contain the group being studied and matched control groups. The results would then be analyzed for consistencies so that careful interpretations could be drawn from it.

<sup>89</sup>‘Patron’ is a term used among neo-heathens to indicate that this is a specific god or goddess whom they have chosen to follow and emulate. This appears to be a modern interpretation of the ‘friend of Thor’/ ‘friend of Freyr’ in the body of sagaic literature typically used to describe a family tradition of *blótsmenn*.



often heard by the author when conversing with fundamentalist or pentacostal Christians, for example:

1. The consistent speech pattern of speaking in the first person (*I am/ldots* , *I will go/ldots* , etc.).
2. The use of the the first person genitive when referring to a god or goddess.
3. The indication that 'life will somehow be better after death', i.e. less pain, suffering, grief, disease, etc.
4. The underlying but implicit sense of reward for 'good behavior.'

Questioning one's own worldview is important if as is suggested by Raymonde Carroll that one can at least temporarily step out and into the worldview of another, and it appears that the subtlest differences between what seem to be very similar concepts can make some of the greatest differences in the interpretation. Take the seemingly concept of God, not the history of whether God exists, just the concept of *a god*. Most will *feel* that they have a concept of what a god is: the concept or abstract of a supernatural being who is generally worshiped by a people or who is, at least, *capable of being worshipped*.<sup>90</sup> What is often disregarded as being insignificant the the relative distances between a man and his god, but these relative distances can vary quite significantly and when one is attempting to reconstruct a worldview so that the religious significance can be worked out, i.e. the interpretation, the relative distances can be quite meaningful. In the modern Christianized the scale of relative distances might be represented like this with all men being "equal in the eyes of God":

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blue collar. .\
white collar__ \ . . . . . Jesus. God
aristocrat. . ./
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There is a large distance between men and their god but the spiritual distance between classes of men is virtually nonexistent. For traditional prewar Japanese and ancient Egyptians the relative distances are different and were at the time of World War II difficult for Americans to conceptualize:

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worker. . . .aristocrat. . . . . emperor/
god
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Here an emperor (or pharaoh) is virtually the same as a god. The Viking Age Germanic people seem to have shorter relative distances between man and god:

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<sup>90</sup>Some gods are not actually worshipped by a people but they nonetheless regarded as gods. An example would be Loki of the northern Germanic people or Coyote Man of certain American Indian tribes.

slave. .landowner. . . .nobleman. .king . god . . . . .

The Germanic gods being long-lived but mortal appear to almost have been viewed as part of the community rather than as having an existence far beyond man. This difference in spacial relationships can make all the difference in how one goes about recreating an ancient worldview. Here again, the trick is being able to uncover preconceived notions and their influence on interpretation.

Looking at words, especially if one can handle himself *fluently* in another language is another useful form of self-questioning. One should assume that there is most likely *no direct translation* (as Stephen Flowers was able to demonstrate in his article regarding *aptrborin* vs. reincarnation<sup>91</sup>) from one language to another, then, most assuredly since language is reflective of worldview, translating from to the other without cultural accomodations is close to impossible.

Because not everything is opaque; on the contrary, the vast majority of cultural exchanges occur without a hitch.<sup>92</sup> Just as it is possible to “get by” in a foreign language, even to speak it “fluently” but remain totally incapable of producing a good translation of a text in this language, it is also possible to learn all sorts of explicit rules and to respect them (even while doing violence in one’s own feelings). One can live for a long time in a foreign country, speak the language, and make many “friends,” without ever really understanding their culture, without ever ridding oneself of a certain division between “them” (that is, those who are “bizarre” in some way) and “us” (adaptable, but guardians of a better system). /ldots But as soon as I remove these (protective) barriers from my daily life, whether I encounter this other culture in my work, in my friendships, my temple, or in the education of my children, I have thousands of occasions to experience intercultural misunderstanding to interpret in my own way an act or a discourse that pertains to a different way of doing things and that requires a different filter; thousands of occasions to treat an opacity as if it were transparent.<sup>93</sup>

Here, then are not thousands, but at least several, words which according to research do not translate directly across the centuries and are often highly affected by the cultural background of the interpreter and, therefore, lend to the reconstructionist “occasions to experience intercultural misunderstanding”:

<sup>91</sup>Flowers, Stephen “Is Sigurðhr Sigmundur »aptrborinn«?” (*Iðunna*, Vol.4; No.1), 1992.

<sup>92</sup>Carroll here is speaking of cltural exchanges between the modern French and modern American; the issue becomes far more complex when comparing two cultures where there are vast differences between technology, art, aesthetics, politics, economic bases, natural resources, socioöeconomic conditions, politics, nevermind mind the ubiquitous “time-frames.”

<sup>93</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, *ibid.*, p. 10-11.

god	goddess	religion	evil	good
honorable	law	home	world	people
priest	death	leader	afterlife	magic
worship	to own	disease	journey	gift
luck	social class	family	fate	taboo
right	holy	time	soul	sin

The author is not suggesting that “concepts” have any pat or direct translation to the worldview of the Viking Age Scandinavian, but rather, each concept, if used properly, can be an “occasion to experience intercultural misunderstanding” so that the potential researcher may be able to more closely investigate *his own* set of cultural filters which must, both by definition and through practical experience, interfere with the ability to step out of one’s own cultural realm and into that of another.

Lastly, it should be clear that the author himself is slightly inclined towards reconstruction of a worldview as opposed to the simpler adhesion. And so it is that the reader himself is left to make his own choice. In the broader picture, one may wonder, about the purpose itself behind reconstructionism. Will such an effort improve one’s family, one’s community, one’s health or sense of well-being? Perhaps, the world? Any response to such questions, of course, be highly speculative and mostly personal. Exploration into one’s cultural baggage can at times be exciting, frightening, lonely, beneficial to the self and others, educational, but one thing is certain, for good or bad, it is enlightening.

“For those readers who reject this kind of [self] analysis, I can only accept the failure of my attempt to seduce them. I know of no other way to reach them. For the others, I will have only played the role of a catalyst. Indeed, these people have long been seeking, though perhaps unconsciously, to understand: they travel, open their homes to otherness, make the disjunction familiar. For these people [this type of ] analysis will be a valuable tool. This tool does not belong to me: I am merely transmitting it, with instructions for use.”<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, the author realizes that, at best, he is a revivalist who on a regular basis delves deep into reconstructionism. It would, indeed, be extremely difficult to live 100% of the time as a reconstructionist if not completely impossible. The burden of being a 100% reconstructionist would put one at such odds with the community of the 21st century that becoming a hermit would be the only possible way this could be accomplished.

In spite of my own personal proclivities, I am not particularly against the intentions or practices of either revivalists or neo-heathens because the choice of whether to engage in such personal analysis of one’s worldview is purely personal. On the other hand, I believe that for those with such inclinations, the path to reconstruction of ancient worldviews should be laid more open through methods as described above so that rehashing of modern misconceptions re-

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<sup>94</sup>Carroll, Raymonde, *ibid.*, p. 125

garding the worldview of the Viking Age may be replaced understanding and conscious decision.

## 6 Conclusion

Worldviews are internal constructs; they are “mental filters” as opposed “physical artifacts.” Each individual builds a worldview over a lifetime constructing it out of bits of experience, cultural training at the hands of parents and educators, snippets of conversations with friends and respected elders, but mostly out of constant interaction with a familiar, cultural milieu which provides relentless shaping of the set of filters, nudging it this way and that as trends, socio-economic conditions, and political shifts occur in the environment. It is a work in progress with the individual version’s being a finished opus when it is punctuated by six feet of dirt. In spite of the constant shifting of trivialities, there is a sameness about one’s worldview which continues over the course of one’s life unless, as occasionally happens, the individual decides for whatever reason to suspend the use of his current set of filters and utilize a different set.

Like learning to speak in a foreign accent, suspending the the use of one’s own mental filters will be constantly resisted by the nervous system itself, falling forever back into what one has learned over a lifetime. Mel Gibson, a fine actor, is exceptionally brilliant in his uncanny ability to imitate a midwest American accent, but in spite of the years of training and in spite of the fact that he notly practices the accent on the job but during his everyday interactions within a culture which embraces the midwest American dialect as a native language, he has never been able to make a single movie where his native born Australian “twang” doesn’t show through, and it is only by his constant vigilance and training that he is still by far the best in the business in the area of accent.<sup>95</sup> So, it is with replacing the “accent filters” of worldview; one’s history and background will always show through, perhaps ever lessening with time, but always as the result of persistent vigilance.

One’s background may be impossible to change or erase completely and such a total erasure may not actually be desirable; it is difficult to see or feel (hence the term, *background*), but it is possible to bring consciously it to the fore so that it can be dissected, questioned, and explored. This is only possible, however, if certain conditions are met:

1. One must have a desire (intention) to engage in self-exploration. Although is obvious; the reader is forewarned that the experience may not always be pleasant or comfortable so that such a desire can be lost.
2. One must be honest during the exploration process. Again, although this should be obvious, it is here that many begin to fail. Claiming *good* or *nice* pieces of one’s worldview is simple and pleasurable, but the grim aspects must be honestly claimed as well.

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<sup>95</sup>The author is a licensed and certified speech-language pathologist with a special interest area in accent identification.

3. There must be a developed or inherent ability to suspend one's worldview temporarily so that the logic of another can be fully explored. The schizophrenic-like split is a skill which can be learned and like virtually all skills, success demands practice and some will be far more skilled than others.
4. Be aware of the natural impediments resulting from one's having (normally) a mono-cultural personal history. One should become well acquainted with the vast amount of information regarding cultural misunderstanding, understanding foreign culture, culture-clash, etc. Most of the best material in this area will be found under cultural anthropology. Authors like Marvin Harris, Edward T. Hall, and Raymonde Carroll are excellent resources for a starting point.
5. Lastly, time is a factor. Practice can be measured in terms of quality *and* quantity. One can have the best training in the world, but it is persistence over time which divides the journeyman from the master.

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