

# **A Wild Stab in the Dark: Exposing Eminem's Existentialism**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to apply the principles of covenantal apologetics to today's cultural milieu by using the latest music album by American rapper, Eminem, as a gateway into today's postmodern thinking. The worldview of Eminem developed in his latest album, *The Marshall Mathers LP2 (2013)*, will be shown to have deep affinity with the atheistic existentialism of Friedrich Nietzsche, the father of postmodernism. This allows the philosophical thought of Nietzsche to penetrate today's culture without anyone actually reading his books, but simply listening to its application in the lyrics of Eminem and other influential artists that espouse a fundamentally similar philosophy. After establishing Eminem's worldview, there will be provided an internal critique of it in terms of its metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, as well as its inability to account for the one and the many. It will become evident that Eminem's worldview is far from a coherent system and must either borrow capital from the Christian worldview or spiral into total absurdity.*

## **Introduction**

The average person today is not reading thick volumes of philosophy to establish his worldview, but he does have headphones on. Within the first two weeks of its release, Eminem's latest album—*The Marshall Mathers LP2 (2013)*<sup>1</sup>—went platinum with over one million people purchasing it.<sup>2</sup> The album is an amalgam of raw anger, unwavering resolve, and deep-felt despair masterfully merged into unprecedented lyrical brilliance.

The devilish fantasies of *MMLP2* survey a wide spectrum of depraved thinking. From the internal deliberations of one cynically bent on murder to the utter despair of one

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<sup>1</sup> From now on it will be referred to as *MMLP2*.

<sup>2</sup> "Eminem Covers Rolling Stone As 'MMLP2' Hits Platinum." Vibe. N.p., 20 Nov. 2013. Web. 27 Nov. 2013.

hopelessly groping in the dark, the album strikes a cord that resonates with millions of people today. But more than just putting words to shared feelings, the average person finds his thinking altered as he traverses the dark lands this album invites him into. As the crude and pithy verses of Eminem flow through the headphones, so does a *worldview*.

This paper will include an analysis of modern culture's resonance with the album, a setting forth of Eminem's worldview, an internal critique of Eminem's worldview and, finally, an advancement of the Christian's hope in the face of the despair of our postmodern culture. The significance of this paper is twofold: first, it exposes the reader to larger worldview concerns that are present today using Eminem as a gateway into them; second, it provides an attempt to concretely bring covenantal apologetics to bear on everyday cultural encounters.

### **Modern Culture's Points of Resonation: Total Depravity**

Most of the millions of fans that flock to Eminem know nothing of surviving the slums of Detroit or the art of rap-battling. They know nothing of growing up fatherless or having a loved one be unfaithful. They have never "cleaned out their closet."<sup>3</sup> They have never been the underdog with the whole world against them, nor have they come so close to the edge that they thought of taking another's life or even their own. Yet, they feel a deep resonance with Eminem's lyrics that touch upon all of this—why?

Eminem's lyrics transcend the mere external circumstances of life by honestly expressing the *total depravity* of the human heart; the consequences of the first sin committed by Adam as the federal head of the human race (Rom. 5:12ff.), resulting in the

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<sup>3</sup> Eminem. "Cleanin' Out My Closet." *Curtain Call: The Hits*. Aftermath Records, 2005. CD.

negative loss of original righteousness, so that we are no longer upright and holy, and the positive corruption of the human nature, so that we now have an evil disposition. Upon placing Adam and Eve in the garden, God gave them this probationary command: “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:16-17). Thus, when Eve plunged her teeth into the forbidden fruit and shared it with her husband, Adam, who ate in approval, the entire human race was plunged away from holiness and love into wickedness and hatred.

As a result of this fall all men are born with an “innate sinful depravity of the heart,”<sup>4</sup> making it so that he is *non posse non peccare*. Man, from his conception, has the natural tendency to hate God and his neighbor (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 5). Jonathan Edwards writes, “It is manifest, that this tendency ... don’t [sic] consist in any particular external circumstances, that some or many are in, peculiarly tempting and influencing their minds; but is inherent, and is seated in that nature which is *common to all mankind*.”<sup>5</sup> It is this common nature in all men that creates resonance with Eminem despite differing external circumstances.

Original sin flies hidden under man’s radar. It is not until a 9/11 or senseless shooting at a school or movie theater takes place that it pokes its hideous and deformed face up for all to see. These events shake the masses and raise the question: how are these people capable of such atrocities? The deceptiveness of sin is so great that even when it becomes visible in these situations man sees it only in others and remains blind to it in himself. But the grave truth is that apart from the common grace of God that restrains

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin* (New Haven: Yale University, 1970), 65-66.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 124.

man's sin all men are capable of such dark deeds, if not worse.<sup>6</sup> The same evil that resides in the heart of a mass murderer resides in the heart of all men. These events are not outliers or glitches in the system, but mirrors into which we see the sinful depths of our own hearts.

Jonathan Edwards observes, "That state of man's nature, that disposition of the mind, is to be looked upon as evil and pernicious, which, as it is in itself, tends to extremely pernicious consequences, and would certainly end therein, were it not that the free mercy and kindness of God *interposes* to prevent that issue."<sup>7</sup> The crass and vulgar language of Eminem is comfortable in fallen man's heart. Eminem puts into words what man is often too afraid to say because of cultural expectations and norms.

The gospel message (apart from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) does not penetrate stone hearts, but Eminem's lyrics have a V.I.P. pass. *MMLP2* is nearly devoid of common grace, portraying a world with minimal restraints on sin. In short, people resonate with Eminem because he expresses the depths of their own hearts and the devilish feelings that are repressed and restrained by God's common grace. He brings sin to its natural consequence that may seem foreign to us, but we are nevertheless capable of were it not for the common grace of God restraining our sin ridden hands. In the album there is no God to restrain Eminem's anger, so he commits acts of murder and there is no God to restrain his desire for autonomy, so he declares himself a god.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Van Til, "Common grace is the means by which God keeps man from expressing the principle of hostility to its full extent" (*Common Grace*, 174). For more on common grace or "universal mercy" see Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 130-36; Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1998), 424ff.

<sup>7</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 109.

First, *MMLP2* removes, as much as it can, the aid of common grace, which leads to his anger manifesting itself as murder. The album opens with the song *Bad Guy*, which Eminem speaks of as the introduction to the whole album and a bridge that connects it with *MMLP*.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, this song picks up themes from his previous song *Stan*. Stan was an overtly obsessed fan of Eminem who wrote to him, but never received a reply (ironically, Eminem never actually received his letters). This caused him to commit suicide. *Bad Guy* begins with Matthew, Stan's younger brother, seeking revenge on Eminem for causing his brother's death and untold anguish in his own life. In Matthew's mind there is no release or healing of this deep hatred other than murder. He says, "Can't think of a better way to define poetic justice/ Can I hold grudges, mind saying: 'let it go, f\*\*\* this'/ Heart saying: 'I will once I bury this b\*\*\*\* alive/ Hide the shovel and then drive off in the sunset.'"<sup>9</sup> The third verse shows the eerie unfolding of Matthew's plan and ends with Eminem in the trunk of his car as they both go tumbling off a bridge to their deaths—the same way Stan took his own life.

Tracks three and four continue this theme of hatred. *Rhyme or Reason* is an expression of the bitter hatred Eminem has for his father who abandoned him and his mother. He says, "So yeah dad let's walk / Let's have us a father and son talk / But I bet we probably wouldn't get one block / Without me knocking your block off."<sup>10</sup> The song *So Much Better...* is a *hate* ballad to a girlfriend who cheated on him. Unapologetically, he states, "My life will be so much better/ If you just dropped dead" and "I got 99 problems and a b\*\*\*\* ain't one / She's all 99 of 'em; I need a machine gun / I take 'em all out; I hope

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<sup>8</sup> Danielle Harling, "Eminem Says 'Bad Guy' Is A Continuation Of 'The Marshall Mathers LP'" HipHopDX RSS. N.p., 15 Nov. 2013. Web. 27 Nov. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Eminem. "Bad Guy." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>10</sup> Eminem. "Rhyme or Reason." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

you hear this song and go into a cardiac arrest / Have a heart attack and just drop dead / And I'mma throw a f\*\*\*ing party after this, cause Yes!"<sup>11</sup> Also, in the song *Rap God* Eminem refers to himself as a "killaholic."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment..." (Matt. 5:21-22). Jesus equates murder with anger by declaring them both to be liable to the same thing: judgment. His point is that murder is the necessary consequence of anger. When we are angry with someone we also, at the bottom of our heart, want to murder them as well. What, then, is keeping us from carrying this out every time we are angry? Murder does not always follow anger because of God's common grace, which restrains our sinful hearts. Nevertheless, what flows out of the heart of someone who murders and what flows out of the heart of someone who is angry *is the same thing*. The apostle John plainly states this truth, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). *MMLP2* loosens the shackles of God's common grace so that nothing prevents anger from becoming murder. This allows sinful man to live vicariously through the crude depictions in Eminem's album. They are able to resonate with it because ultimately it is the desire of their own hearts when they are angry.

Just as anger leads to murder, a desire for autonomy leads to declaring oneself a god. The motive behind Adam and Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit and the motive behind every sin man commits against God is the same: "you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). This is the desire of every fallen man, namely, to be completely free from God's sovereign

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<sup>11</sup> Eminem. "So Much Better..." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>12</sup> Eminem. "Rap God." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

rule and be only under self-rule, autonomy. In his rebellion, every man, if given the opportunity, would kill God so that he may prop *himself* up on the divine throne. This is fallen man's true desire, which is fueled and kindled throughout *MMLP2*. Eminem's song *Rap God* ends with the question, "Why be a king when you can be a god?"<sup>13</sup> The theme of autonomy undergirds the album as it manifests itself in the destruction of all absolute morals and meaning and the call for the listener to establish one's own values. The desire for autonomy is the air that fallen man breathes and *MMLP2* supplies a pure and heavy dosage of it, which explains the deep connectedness that people feel with it.

It has been shown that *MMLP2* finds deep resonance with many people who know nothing of Eminem's external circumstances because of the fundamental issues exposed in the album, namely, man's nature as being totally depraved. Eminem expresses the desire for murder and autonomy, which are inherent in all people, but restrained by God's common grace. *MMLP2* unleashes man from this chain and allows the darkness of his heart to think it has escaped the light.

### **Eminem's Worldview: Nietzsche's Superman Meets Eminem's Rap God**

Eminem poetically captures the spirit of the postmodern age with these words that act as a gateway into *MMLP2*: "a wild stab in the dark."<sup>14</sup> With this small phrase Eminem encapsulates an entire worldview that very closely aligns itself with Friedrich Nietzsche's atheistic existentialism,<sup>15</sup> which was a fundamental development in philosophy that gave

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<sup>13</sup> Eminem. "Rap God." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>14</sup> Eminem. "Bad Guy." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche's philosophy is labeled "atheistic existentialism" by R.C. Sproul in his book *The Consequence of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped Our World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 159.



rise to postmodernism.<sup>16</sup> Now an explicit link between Eminem and Nietzsche is unknown, but I will argue for an affinity of thought between the two. “The dark,” for Eminem, is the nihilism that pervades the album and the “wild stab” is Nietzsche’s will to power supremely manifested in his mythological “Superman.” This section will examine the epistemological, metaphysical and ethical components that make up the expressed worldview in *MMLP2*.

At the most fundamental level worldviews clash with regard to its *principium cognoscendi*, which addresses questions of epistemology and authority.<sup>17</sup> How do we know anything? And what are the boundaries, rules, and laws of our knowing? This is initially difficult to answer in Eminem’s worldview, for he says in *Berzerk*, “At least I know that I don't know / Question is are you bozos smart enough to feel stupid?”<sup>18</sup> His answer comports with postmodern skepticism, namely, we ultimately cannot know the truth; therefore, man is autonomous and able to determine what is true for himself—man is his own authority. Eminem takes this notion to the point of nihilism, that is, “there is nothing that gives meaning to life.”<sup>19</sup>

“Do we not now wander through an endless nothingness?” screams a character in one of Nietzsche’s books.<sup>20</sup> “Let me take you by the hand, to promise land, and threaten everyone / Cause there’s no rhyme or no reason for nothing,” raps Eminem in *Rhyme or Reason*. According to him, there is no objective truth or meaning to life; everything is subject to each individual to determine for himself or herself. Everyone is self-contained, autonomous and independent of all others. There is nothing outside of a person—no God—

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<sup>16</sup> cf. David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God's Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 190.

<sup>17</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 25.

<sup>18</sup> Eminem. "Berzerk." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>19</sup> Henderson, *Culture Shift*, 216.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

that dictates meaning or hinders one's pursuit to do whatever and be whoever he or she desires. Everyone can create their own "legacy" and "conquest" to be "iconic."<sup>21</sup> Eminem's individualism even recognizes that the legacy one leaves does not depend on whether or not others acknowledge it: "You don't respect the legacy I leave behind y'all can / Suck a d\*\*\*, the day you beat me pigs'll fly out my a\*\*."<sup>22</sup> Yet, his legacy is his professed savior.<sup>23</sup>

Eminem's *principium cognoscendi* leads him down a path of existentialism. He lucidly reasons along the lines that "existence precedes essence."<sup>24</sup> This presupposition allows him to say in *Survival* in regard to one's individually-determined goal in life, "This is it, it's what you eat, sleep, p\*\*\* and s\*\*\* / Live, breathe, your whole existence just consists of this."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, what is *real* is contingent on whatever the individual determines reality to be.

Eminem's *principium cognoscendi* molds his ethics to Nietzsche's will to power. His song *Survival* appears to promote a form of Social Darwinism: "This is survival of the fittest / This is do or die / This is the winner takes it all / So take it all."<sup>26</sup> However, the meaningless of everything does not lead to passivity in life whereby one is shaped by his external environment. Rather, it sets up the atmosphere for one to exercise courage—to take a wild stab in the dark.

Survival of the fittest does not come down to *external* circumstances, but *internal* circumstances. This internal drive was labeled the *will to power* by Nietzsche and is essentially: *might makes right*. Eminem, in compliance with postmodern thinking,

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<sup>21</sup> Eminem. "Legacy." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Mario Bunge, *Philosophical Dictionary* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2003), 100.

<sup>25</sup> Eminem. "Survival." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>26</sup> Eminem. "Survival." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

expresses the idea that you can shape your own destiny, achieve self-fulfillment, and establish personal meaning as long as you have the *will to power*, or better termed, "*will to overpower*."<sup>27</sup> As Eminem boldly claims, "It ain't over 'til I say it's over / enough when I say enough."<sup>28</sup> The results ultimately rest with the individual's superior internal drive to achieve.

The will to power makes morals relative. So, as Eminem says, "What's bad is good"<sup>29</sup> and "With great power comes absolutely no responsibility."<sup>30</sup> Whose to say bad is bad or that those in power must assume responsibility? Nobody has any reason to "feel remorse for [their] sin"<sup>31</sup> because there is no such thing as sin.

The heart of Eminem's ethics is that man is to have courage to act any way he wants in order to achieve his goals. This philosophy is played out in his uncontrolled hatred<sup>32</sup> (whose to say I have to love?), revenge<sup>33</sup> (whose to say I have to forgive?), self-centeredness<sup>34</sup> (whose to say I have to care about others?), crude insults<sup>35</sup> (whose to say I have to be kind?), irresponsibility<sup>36</sup> (whose to say I have to be responsible?), and

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<sup>27</sup> Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas*, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Eminem. "Survival." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>29</sup> Eminem. "Rhyme or Reason." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Eminem. "Bad Guy." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>32</sup> "But I hate you cause you drained me, I gave you all, you gave me none" (Eminem. "Rhyme or Reason." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.)

<sup>33</sup> "But ain't here for ya empathy, I don't need your apology / Or your friendship or sympathy, it's revenge that I seek" (Eminem. "Bad Guy." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.)

<sup>34</sup> "Self esteem must be f\*\*\*ing shooting through-the-roof cause trust me / My skin is too thick and bullet proof to touch me" (Eminem. "Survival." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.)

<sup>35</sup> "Tell me what in the f\*\*\* are you thinking? / Little gay looking boy / So gay I can barely say it with a straight face looking boy" (Eminem. "Rap God." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.)

<sup>36</sup> We're gonna rock this house until we knock it down / So turn the volume loud, cause it's mayhem 'til the a.m. / So baby make just like K-Fed and let yourself go, let yourself go / Say f\*\*\* it before we kick the bucket / Life's too short to not go for broke (Eminem. "Berzek." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.)

rebellion<sup>37</sup> (whose to say I have to listen?). We must have the courage to not succumb to anyone or anything else, but pursue our self-determined goals any way we see fit.

The apparent problem with this ethic is that if there is “no reason for nothing,”<sup>38</sup> as Eminem says and Nietzsche affirms, then there is no reason for courage as well. “For this reason Nietzsche calls his own idea of courage ‘dialectical,’ for it operates in the realm of contradiction.”<sup>39</sup> The same can be said of the courage endorsed by Eminem. “The obvious question is, Why be courageous if courage is meaningless? Nietzsche would reply, ‘Be courageous anyway!’ Nietzsche’s superman, who is supremely courageous, is the man who, knowing that there are no values, creates his own.”<sup>40</sup>

Eminem, in a sense, sees himself as Nietzsche’s Superman and encourages others to see themselves as such as well. This is most evident in his song *Rap God*, in which he refers to himself as having divine attributes such as immortality and omnipotence, even saying, “It’s curtains, I’m inadvertently hurtin’ you / How many verses I gotta murder to / Prove that if you’re half as nice at songs / You can sacrifice virgins too.” The song ends with these words, “Don’t be a retard, be a king? / Think not / Why be a king when you can be a god?”<sup>41</sup>

In Eminem’s worldview you can be Nietzsche’s Superman or a (Rap) god: you are the determiner of truth (epistemology); you form your own essence and reality (metaphysics); you can act however you like to achieve your goals (ethics). But can this worldview stand?

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<sup>37</sup> “Rebel without a cause” (Eminem. “Rhyme or Reason.” *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.)

<sup>38</sup> Eminem. “Rhyme or Reason.” *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>39</sup> Sproul, *The Consequences of Ideas*, 167.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Eminem. “Rap God.” *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

## **Answer a Fool According to His Folly: An Internal Critique of Eminem’s Worldview**

“Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Prov. 26:5). This section will consist of an internal critique of Eminem’s worldview, particularly his epistemology. Is Eminem’s worldview able to stand, *based on its own principles*, or is it “sinking sand and cannot stand on its own?”<sup>42</sup>

First, Eminem’s rejection of objective truth is self-refuting. His claim, “There’s no rhyme or no reason for nothing,” if consistently applied, would have to be appropriated to the claim itself. This would mean that the statement actually serves no reason and he is really stating nothing. Yet, this is not the intention behind the phrase, nor the intention behind any of the phrases employed by him. In *MMLP2*, Eminem carefully crafted his words and the order in which he used them. It is by words that we transmit knowledge and think. If words themselves have no meaning then transmission of knowledge is impossible since it requires words. This would also make the obtainment of knowledge impossible since we think in words. Eminem’s worldview, therefore, destroys the possibility of language and knowledge.

Also, in denying objective truth Eminem proposes an objective truth. He uses that which he denies to deny that which he denies. It cannot be objectively stated that there is no objective truth without degrading into irrationalism or borrowing principles from another worldview.

The absurdity of Eminem’s epistemology overturns his entire worldview, including his metaphysics and ethics. The notion that existence precedes essence is meaningless

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<sup>42</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles and Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 76-77.

since essence is meaningless. Reality cannot be given meaning by the meaningless; you cannot get something out of nothing. Therefore, Eminem's worldview cannot account for any reality. It cannot make sense of the physical or metaphysical, which destroys the possibility of science and logic.

Eminem's ethics operate in the realm of contradiction. He asserts that all things are void of meaning, and value, while encouraging his listeners to assert their "autonomous values in the face of a valueless universe—to act as though they really amounted to something worthwhile."<sup>43</sup> This is essentially to embrace irrationalism and absurdity.

Also, Eminem's ethics are filled with value judgments. For example, his hatred is aroused against his father because he transgressed his value judgment that a father should not abandon his family. This is problematic for his worldview. Is not his father the determiner of his own morals? Can he not say it is perfectly moral for him to abandon his family? How does one consistently make a value judgment against another in a world void of all value? It is impossible; such a claim is absurd. Therefore, Eminem has no right, according to his worldview, to ever be angry with his father. His worldview excludes the possibility of hatred and revenge and makes rebellion irrelevant since there are no values to rebel against.

Eminem's worldview cannot account for the One and the Many. If all people are autonomous then all people are particular.<sup>44</sup> They each have their own truth, their own essence, and their own moral values. "But if everything is particular, why do we think in

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<sup>43</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*. Ed. Robert R. Booth. (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, 2011), 154-55.

<sup>44</sup> Alan D. Strange, "Why We Believe in God." *New Horizons*. N.p., Apr. 2000. Web. 28 Nov. 2013.

terms of universals as well?"<sup>45</sup> The presupposition of human autonomy, as an epistemological basis, excludes all universals. It allows for "the Many," but not "the One." This is fatal to the rationality of any worldview because even a simple statement, like "Rappers better stay clear of me,"<sup>46</sup> makes use of universals. In this instance, the universal designation of "rappers," which Eminem uses to group a class of people, namely, those who speak or chant lyrics that rhyme, cannot be accounted for. Exclusive particularity destroys the notion of grouping, but without grouping there would be no connection or basis for unity and, therefore, no understanding, science, or communication.<sup>47</sup> Eminem's worldview prohibits "the One," but utilizes it nonetheless; therefore, his worldview cannot stand on its own principles.

It has been sufficiently shown that Eminem's worldview, which declares man to be autonomous, refutes itself as a theory of knowledge, for it destroys the possibility of language; it degrades into irrationalism by denying objectivity; and it cannot account for the One and the Many. His worldview stands "as long as principles and positions remain in the abstract. But once they are supposed to support matters relating to 'themselves, self-preservation, and manners,' a commitment to the rational and evidential begins quickly to sink."<sup>48</sup> Therefore, to continue to adhere to this worldview would be sheer folly (cf. Psa. 14:1), irrational, and overt defiance against the epistemic Lordship of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 19:14b).

### **Answer Not a Fool According to His Folly: The Christian Worldview**

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Eminem. "Rhyme or Reason." *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>47</sup> Alan D. Strange, *AS 112 Class Syllabus*.

<sup>48</sup> Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 76-77.

“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself” (Prov. 26:4). In accordance with this proverbial wisdom, this section will expound the Christian worldview as the *only* rational worldview that does not destroy the possibility of knowledge and can account for the One and the Many.

Where Eminem’s worldview presupposes human autonomy as its *principium essendi* the Christian worldview presupposes the Ontological Trinity. “The fact[s] of God’s self-contained existence,... creation in general and of man as made in God’s image in particular,... the comprehensive plan and providence of God with respect to all that takes place in the universe,... [and] the fall of man and his subsequent sins”<sup>49</sup> must be presupposed

God alone is necessary (for he alone has aseity), while all creation is contingent. It then follows that all truth is God’s truth. From all eternity all truth was in God and perfectly known by God. Truth is not a self-contained entity outside of God or something that God conforms to or obtains. “This knowledge is not a posteriori, obtained by observation, but a priori, present from eternity... His knowledge is not susceptible of increase... it is certain and specific... so that God’s revelations are all true.”<sup>50</sup>

The truth is eternal and unchanging because God is eternal and unchanging. As Jesus, the Son of God, makes plain, “I am... the truth” (John 14:6). Isaiah records the words of the LORD, “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done (Isaiah 46:9c-10a). By way of God’s special

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<sup>49</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*. Ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*. Trans. John Bolt and John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 192.



revelation we learn that He is omniscient; meaning, God has never needed to learn, for he knows all things exhaustively and eternally.

Resultantly, if we are to have any true knowledge, God, in whom is all truth, must reveal it to us. Therefore, the *principium cognoscendi* of the Christian worldview is revelation. When this epistemological basis and authority is denied everything degrades into skepticism and nihilism, which have already been shown to be contradictory and self-refuting. This must be the case because if the One in whom all truth resides is not taken into account then all truth becomes inaccessible. But the general revelation of God's creation and the special revelation of the Christian Scriptures makes it clear that God has indeed revealed the truth to his creatures.

Furthermore, special revelation is necessary because of the fall of man, which has caused us to suppress the truth in unrighteousness (cf. Rom. 1:18b). It is by special revelation that man, created in the image of God, is able to see rightly and think God's thoughts after him. Nevertheless, our thoughts are not equal with God's thoughts, though we think them after him. God's knowledge is archetypal, while ours is ectypal. Because God's relation to his creatures is covenantal, we are able to have analogical and true knowledge of him and his creation. "It is this fact of the priority of the positive relation of God to the world in the way of creation and providence, in the way of man's creation in the image of God, that saves from skepticism. The Christian idea of human knowledge as analogical of God's knowledge is therefore the only position in which man, who cannot control or know anything in the ultimate comprehensive sense of the term, can nevertheless be assured that his knowledge is true."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 224.

The Son of God emptied himself by taking on human nature (cf. Phil. 2:7-8) in order that he may reveal the Father to us and that he may truly be known (cf. John 7:28-29). It is only by divine condescension that we may know the truth. Scott Oliphint writes, “The true, triune God, who is the Lord, has come from the infinite to the finite. He has condescended, covenantally, so that we might have ‘fruition’ of him. Apart from that condescension, there is no hope of knowing him... But since he has condescended, and since the One who condescended is the cosmic and redemptive Lord, we are guaranteed, for eternity, to have true and certain knowledge of him.”<sup>52</sup>

Scripture is the only reasonable epistemological basis that allows for the possibility of knowledge. It is fitting then that all metaphysical claims be derived from it. The Christian God is self-existent, the “only simple and spiritual Being” (Belgic Confession Article 1). He created all things for his glory, “for from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36), and that his glory may be communicated. “It is fit, since there is an infinite fountain of light and knowledge,” writes Jonathan Edwards, “that this light should shine forth in beams of communicated knowledge, and understanding.”<sup>53</sup>

The essence of creation is not preceded by existence. Revelation shows us that God is personal and purposeful. The purpose for creation was known by God before he gave existence to anything. Specifically, God created man in his own image (see Gen. 1:27). This implies that man’s purpose is to faithfully bear God’s holy image. Thus, man’s essence is established before his existence, namely, “to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (WSC Q/A 1). The Christian gospel exposes Eminem’s existentialism as folly.

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<sup>52</sup> Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards, with the Complete Text of The End for Which God Created the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 152.

The postmodern man relentlessly pursues purpose in life, since he is created in the image of God, but in vain. He remains in rebellion against the only one who can satisfy him, namely, the Bread of Life,<sup>54</sup> Jesus Christ. This is the result of original sin. When man fell in the garden he did not cease to continue in the image of God, nor was the image of God utterly destroyed. Man retains awareness and conscience of God, though he suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (cf. Romans 1). This leads him to long for something greater, God himself, but pursue something infinitely lesser, finite things, which only ends in emptiness and despair.

Eminem recognizes the emptiness of life in *MMLP2*. He articulates this in the song *So Far*, saying, “I own a mansion, but live in a house / A king-size bed, but I sleep on the couch / I'm Mr. Brightside, glass is half full / But my tank is half empty, gasket just blew”<sup>55</sup> and “Maybe that's why I feel so strange / Got it all, but I still won't change.”<sup>56</sup> He brilliantly connects the emptiness that he felt at the beginning of his career with the emptiness that he still feels as he approaches the end of his career. The same emptiness that he had growing up when he had nothing is still with him today when he has everything. Whether living in a mansion or house, sleeping on a king-size bed or couch, nothing other than the glory of God will satisfy him. As Augustine confesses to the Triune God, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”<sup>57</sup> The answer to our emptiness is not to tighten our bootstraps and take a wild stab in the dark by asserting our own autonomy—as Eminem presumes—but to relinquish all fantasies of independence and kneel before Jesus

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<sup>54</sup> “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (John 6:35).

<sup>55</sup> Eminem. “So Far.” *The Marshall Mathers LP 2*. Aftermath Records, 2013. CD.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 3.

Christ as Lord. He alone makes known “the path of life,” in his “presence there is fullness of joy,” and at his “right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psa. 16:11).

Revelation is also the only means by which we may establish consistent ethics. Morals are objective since they are a reflection of God’s objective character, which has been revealed to us in Scripture. God’s moral attributes are revealed to be good (e.g., Mark 10:8), holy (e.g., Isa. 6:3), and righteous or just (e.g., Deut. 32:4). Man is to reflect the character of God in his ethics for he was created in the image of God. Therefore, contrary to Eminem’s proposed ethics of hatred, irresponsibility, and rebellion, we are to pursue goodness, holiness, and righteousness.

*MMLP2* has a strong overtone and demand for justice whether in regard to a revengeful fan, neglectful father, or unfaithful girlfriend. Eminem is right to desire this, and the fact that he does further proves that he knows God, though he suppresses it in unrighteousness.

This notion of justice is another point of resonance that people have with Eminem’s album. We all have been unduly hurt by the injustices of others, and because we have been created in the image of God, our hearts cry out for justice. This is good. But the administration of justice is not put into the hands of man, as Eminem encourages. Special revelation shows that “God is a righteous judge” (Psa. 7:11a) and “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19); therefore, he alone is able and commissioned to carry out justice on the earth (though he may carry forth his justice through appointed human institutions such as the government who may bear the sword).

Yet, injustices flood the streets. So as Abraham asked thousands of years ago, we ask today, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25; cf. 1 Pet. 3:4). It

seems as if God has ignored his responsibility as Judge, but the truth of Scripture is that God's judgment is impending and it will come swiftly, like a thief in the night. "Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (1 Pet. 3:8). God has every right to carry forth his justice today, but he mercifully endures with great patience, so that the full number of God's elect may come to repentance (cf. 1 Pet. 3:9).

The fall of man into sin has placed everyone under the righteous judgment of God. *Eminem* (and the world) thinks that he wants justice, but he does not want God's justice. His own desires condemn him. Before God's eyes the whole world stands guilty without any possibility of salvation in and of themselves—no amount of finite good works can mend an infinitely deep wound or pay an infinitely expensive penalty.

But God, being rich in mercy, sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners. He lived the perfect life that we could not and died the death that we deserved. Upon him was laid the full weight of the sins of those who will believe in him and "it was the will of the LORD to crush him" as he hung utterly forsaken on the cross (Isa. 53:5). We then receive the righteous reward that Christ deserved and Christ the righteous judgment that we deserved. Therefore, whoever believes upon Jesus Christ shall be saved! "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). This is amazing grace!

The cross of Jesus Christ stands at the center of the entire Christian life. It is here that we see the reasonableness of the ethics purported in Scripture. We find that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Jesus instructs, "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44) because that is what God has done: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still

sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). And “we love because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). It is only when we look to our Savior pulverized on the cross, crushed by the very justice of God that we deserved, that we are able to live in a way that is both pleasing to God and satisfying to ourselves.

As God waits in patience, so we too must wait in patience for the justice of God to be revealed. We await the day when every wrong will be righted. But until then “we entrust [our] souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Pet. 4:19; cf. Psa. 77).

Finally, where Eminem’s worldview collapses upon meeting the problem of the One and the Many, the Christian worldview remains strong. In fact, it is only the Christian worldview that can account for the One and the Many because only the Christian worldview asserts the Ontological Trinity. God is one (one substance), yet at the same time many (three persons). Van Til writes, “In God the one and the many are equally ultimate. Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity, and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity.”<sup>58</sup> The three persons are distinct (*the many*): the Father is not the Son or the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Spirit; and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. Yet, the Father, Son, and Spirit are ontologically equal (*the one*)—there is no hierarchy or subordination in God. “In God’s being there are no particulars not related to the universal, and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.”<sup>59</sup>

Van Til distinguishes between the “eternal one and many” as it exists in God and the “temporal one and many” as it relates to everything created by God.<sup>60</sup> The creation

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<sup>58</sup> Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 48.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

replicates the pattern found in the Creator.<sup>61</sup> This is the only presupposition that allows for distinguishing between being and becoming, ultimate unity and real diversity, universals and particulars. It is from borrowing the capital of the Christian worldview that Eminem is able to distinguish individuals as “rappers,” for his autonomous reasoning does not permit this based on its own principles.

Only the Christian worldview is able to stand based on its own principles; all other worldviews are sinking sand. It is by God’s revelation that we come to know the truth (epistemology), which has been eternally present in him. God is a self-contained being who created all things in distinction from himself (metaphysics). Existence, therefore, does not precede essence since God purposely created all things for his own glory. Morals are a reflection of the unchanging character of God and are to be replicated by those created in his image (ethics). And only the Christian worldview can account for the One and the Many. It, therefore, suffices to say that the Christian worldview is the only rational worldview one can hold. Behind the heavy bass drops and clever hooks in *MMLP2* is irrationalism. Throughout the album Eminem continually borrows capital from the Christian worldview to keep it from spiraling into utter absurdity. Therefore, it can never be a matter of reasonableness that the Christian worldview is rejected, but whether or not someone is humbled before the majesty of God and brought to repentance by the kindness of God<sup>62</sup> to bow the knee before Jesus Christ as Lord.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>61</sup>Alan D. Strange, *AS 112 Class Syllabus*.

<sup>62</sup>“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:4).

It has been shown that the worldview that flows through the headphones of someone listening to *MMLP2* resonates deeply with fallen, postmodern man. This explains the uncontested success Eminem has achieved in the music industry. This album provides great insight for the Christian of the modern world's mindset and those whom he is commissioned to reach with the gospel of Jesus Christ. "Rap... is the mainstream now" and Christian's need to know how to handle it.<sup>63</sup>

Eminem insightfully captures the despair and emptiness that is present in those outside of Jesus Christ—even if on the surface they refuse to show it. This should both motivate us to deliver the good news of God's love and to better tailor the unchanging truth of the gospel to the culture so that it may cut to the heart. It even shows the Christian the depths of his or her own heart apart from the grace of God, which we are so prone to forget and take for granted. So rather than writing Eminem off let us take a few lessons from him and pray that the light of the gospel would shine in his heart, so that his God-given talents would be commandeered for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>63</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Slesman. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 81.