

Who are we?



In the play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Luigi Pirandello presents a humanistic worldview. The assertion is made repeatedly that we, as humans, can define who we are, that our actions dictate our character. This view is presented in two contexts. First of all, it is illustrated in the lives of the characters. The characters' lives and actions are predetermined by an author; therefore, who they are cannot change, although their identity is still defined by these constant actions. The second context that the humanistic worldview is presented in is through the lives of the actors. They are, just like the characters, defined by what they do. However, their reality, or who they are, can change. As the Father says to the Manager, "This you as you feel it today all this present reality of yours is fated to seem a mere illusion to you tomorrow" (44). No matter which context the humanistic worldview is illustrated in, the premise that our humanity is defined by our actions is wrong from a Christian perspective. What we do does not determine who we are; rather, who we are determines what we do. All of the actions that Christians take should stem from their identity as children of God. When we accept Christ as Savior, we acknowledge who we are and what we were created to be. That is, we recognize that our purpose is to glorify God and to serve Him, and once we concede this, all of our actions will follow naturally. Our actions, whether good or bad, can never alter our fundamental identity as a child of God. Those still living in sin, however, remain in the illusion presented in Pirandello's work. They define themselves by what they do, whether that be in the form of a job, a relationship, or "good works." They are forced to uphold the idea that these things determine who they are because the only other option is to face the uncomfortable reality of their sinful conditions and future in hell. Pirandello alludes to this truth while

discussing the necessity of the transitory reality of the actors. “ Illusions of reality represented in this fatuous comedy of life that never ends, nor can ever end! Because if tomorrow it were to end...then why, all would be finished” (44). They must retain the pretense of reality. Salvation, then, frees us from the necessity to uphold a pretense of reality through our actions because we understand and accept the true reality of who we are meant to be. We are no longer slaves to sin, works, and their definition of our identity in the present or our course for the future. Our identity and future are set, and from this our actions proceed. The preceding statements show that the manner in which both the characters and the actors define their humanness is wrong. They also help us understand the conflict of Pirandello’s characters. They cannot see beyond the illusion of their own actions to understand the source of their tragedy. For example, the Father constantly complains how the other characters do not understand him as he really is; they see him only as he appears in one action. The Step-daughter only views him through the scene where he solicits her as a prostitute. “ She now seeks to attach to me a reality such as I could never suppose I should have to assume for her in a shameful and fleeting moment of my life” (16). His statements are invalid, however, in light of the previous discussion. His problem lies not in the fact that others incorrectly define him by one action, but rather in the fact that he is defined by his actions at all. The “ reality” of him in the Step-daughter’s eyes is not the true reality of who he should be but only an illusion of sin, which leaves him incapable of seeing his true identity. He is forced to focus on himself and his actions. The character of the Father illustrates most clearly the humanistic worldview presented by Pirandello; however, at times he also presents the opposing Christian view. Pirandello, through his work,

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seems to suggest that the way the actors and the characters live is not right. For as the Father says in critique of his own existence, “ Thus, sir, you see when faith is lacking, it becomes impossible to create certain states of happiness, for we lack the necessary humility. Vaingloriously, we try to substitute ourselves for this faith, creating thus for the rest of the world a reality which we believe after their fashion, while, actually, it doesn’t exist” (18). This statement sums up the irony of the worldview presented in the play, that someone could so clearly state the true reality and yet be too absorbed in pretense to actualize it in life. Work Cited Pirandello, Luigi. *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Trans. Edward Storer. Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998.