

Worldviews

What is the nature of reality? What is a human being? What happens when we die? What is the significance of time and history? These are important questions involved in the study of apologetics and worldviews. The conclusion a person draws concerning these foundational issues affects every facet of life. The following is a brief consideration of seven prevalent worldviews and the general Christian response to them. The order in which each worldview is presented depicts the natural progression of Western thought from the seventeenth century to modern day.

Deism: A product of seventeenth century "Enlightenment," Deism emphasizes the transcendence of God. God is not personal. He does not interact with his creation. He does not intercede in the affairs of man or anything else in the universe. Therefore, the deist rejects miracles and the possibility of a relationship with God. The gospel of a deist is stripped down to ethical teachings, nothing more.

Christian theism (belief in a creative, life-sustaining God) is in conflict with much of Deism. Because we believe that the universe is an open system—that God can and does interact with his creation—we acknowledge God's sustaining and guiding hand in history and present time. We believe in miracles. Since Deism does not accept miracles, it also cannot accept the Incarnation, Resurrection, or Ascension. This puts Deism outside the pale of Christian orthodoxy.

Naturalism: Naturalism is a natural by-product of Deism. After all, if God never visits perhaps there is no God at all. The denial of the existence of God is the prime assumption of Naturalism. Naturalism teaches that all that is real is matter. Human beings are also matter, nothing more or less. When a person dies the matter breaks down and ceases to be. There is no resurrection or condemnation according to the manner of life lived.

Naturalism relies heavily upon scientific enterprise. Biological evolution could rightly be called the "religion" of Naturalism. As such, time is seen in the traditional Western linear sense, but time itself has no underlying meaning or purpose other than the progress of species.

The only tenet Christianity has in common with Naturalism is the understanding of time as being linear, inexorably moving forward. But toward what? Naturalism offers nothing of merit: no afterlife, no grand purpose, and no overarching theme. Naturalism robs mankind of inherent dignity, of our "image of God" (Gen. 1: 27). For thousands of years the Bible has correctly diagnosed the devotee of Naturalism: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 53: 1a).

Nihilism: Nihilism is brutally honest Naturalism. There is no afterlife. There is no God. There is no outside source for verification of truth. Therefore, there is no knowledge, free will, or worth. In short, everything is nothing. There is no meaning to anything.

If every naturalist took seriously his worldview it would be a traumatic thing. For no one can be a nihilist for long without going insane or committing suicide (which some have done). Such is the outcome of rejecting God's guidance. The Bible teaches that Satan's to-do list consists of stealing, killing, and destroying (John 10: 10). Nihilism steals a person's hope, kills their God-yearning spirit, and destroys the mind. It is a ruthless "doctrine of demons" (1 Timothy 4: 1). In contrast, the Christian knows no such despair. For our Lord has come that we "may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10: 10b). Thus, the penetrating light of Jesus Christ conquers the darkness of Nihilism.

Existentialism: As a response to Nihilism, Existentialism seeks to preserve the person. The person is reality, though all other things may be a farce and meaningless. It is solely up to each individual to make his/her life of value. The external world with all of its intellectual absurdities must be revolted against. Meaning is created by each person. Only mankind is able to accomplish such a feat. Thus, mankind is of prime importance.

While Existentialism provided an answer to the dread of Nihilism and brought worth back to the individual person, historic Christian theism still has ought with most of its tenets. We believe that faith and reason are complimentary. In fact, the apostle Peter stated, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (I Peter 3: 15b). The historic Christian faith has also held that truth is objective while Existentialism teaches it to be subjective. This makes Existentialism shifty and pliable. It is for this very reason that Existentialism has been utilized as the philosophical construct for atheist and theist alike. Lastly, Existentialism downgrades the importance of history. They tend to see history as metaphor or myth. This is an unacceptable view to the Christian who stakes his eternal soul on the veracity of a historical fact—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth!

Eastern Pantheistic Monism (EPM): So much for the evolution of traditional Western thought; EPM has crossed the seas and has arrived to the philosophical table. With its non-dualistic dogma, EPM brings entirely new angles to metaphysical questions. God is all and all is God. Indeed, God can be found as the smile of a little girl or the snarl of a murderer. Seeing ideological distinctions between the two is deemed as ignorance of the true nature of the divine.

Death is not an end, but it doesn't usually lead to a final heavenly rest either. For the vast majority, not reaching a high level of spiritual acumen, are doomed to reincarnation—the form of the rebirth being determined by karmic principles.

Time is cyclical, forever turning like a wheel. Escaping this cycle of birth and rebirth is the goal. When this happens prime reality is realized and all individualities cease to be. Enlightenment has been achieved!

While most EPM ideologies are quite tolerant and accepting (in theory at least) of other views, Christianity cannot be so gregarious. The vast and deep differences between Christian theism and EPM are of such significance that reconciliation seems impossible. Christianity is dualistic in the sense that it maintains a distinction between good and evil, God and man, life and death, redemption and rebellion, etc. Christianity also affirms the value of the individual. Each person remains that same person even after death; without such an identity divine judgment would not be possible. Also, Christianity's God is transcendent from his creation. He is completely other. We would further break sharply at the point of what happens when a person dies. The Bible states, "...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9: 27). Apart from doctrinal differences, another key weakness of EPM is its glaring social ramifications. Most countries that embrace EPM are poor and oppressed. Starvation, shabby housing, and unsanitary living conditions are the norm. A Hindu farmer may not be able feed his own children, but he does own one very well fed cow that is pampered and worshipped daily.

New Age: Even though the New Age movement is far from a solidified worldview, it has provided many with a more user friendly pantheistic/mystic package than that of Eastern Pantheistic Monism. One of the major appeals of the New Age is their adventurous view of mankind. It is one of unbridled power, cosmic travel, spirit guides, and personal divinity. Mankind, through altered states of consciousness, can transcend earthly reality and enter

into cosmic oneness. Many methods are used in order to achieve this experience, from meditation and alternative medicine to illegal hallucinogens and projections of the psyche. The New Age teaches that mankind is powerful and has a progressively bright future. Its emphasis is more on the self as God rather than the traditional Eastern Pantheistic emphasis on God as self. This may seem a minor difference, but to one's ego it's quite the boost. Down through the ages, there have been great examples of the potential future of humanity. To the new ager this would include Buddha, various yogis, and even Christ himself.

In light of the New Age's burgeoning popularity, the Christian must respond to its claims. Of course, we would reject its Eastern Pantheistic principles as previously delineated, but attention must also be called to its rose-colored outlook concerning the nature and potential of man. The Bible declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer. 17: 9). Painful as it may be to accept, this maxim is obviously correct. Violence, hatred, murder, theft, and greed are all around us—and they always have been since the dawn of humanity. The progress the New Age offers is not coming to pass. This blatant inconsistency between New Age theory and practice should raise an eyebrow of any impartial thinker. Thus, the New Age worldview suffers from a lack of healthy pragmatism. In short, it doesn't work because it's not true.

Postmodernism: This most recent worldview presents a paramount shift in metaphysics. Instead of the time-enduring ontological construct of being to knowing, Postmodernism usurps knowing for meaning. In fact, it maintains that "knowing" is not possible, and any worldview that claims to know is out of line. Therefore, Postmodernism rejects all claims to true accounts of anything. Nothing said or written, or otherwise expressed encapsulates reality. Nothing communicates things as they actually are. Hence, all that is left is meaning. If something is meaningful then embrace it. Once something loses its meaning, go and find new meaning. In the arena of Postmodernism, philosophy is reduced to storytelling, not an examined search for truth.

As a result of doubting God's self-evident truths decade after decade and century after century, the ultimate loss of confidence in knowing has occurred. We have gone from knowing what is real, what we are, what we are to do, and where we are going—to knowing absolutely nothing other than the fact that we can know nothing (This, by the way, is one of the inherent inconsistencies in Postmodernism: the claim that nothing can be known, yet, somehow, this very maxim can be known.). How pathetic intellectualism is when God is not invited to the party! We end up shooting ourselves in the foot, and then think we're all the wiser for it. While Postmodernism has been useful in disarming arrogant confidence in naturalistic science and human reason, it has robbed more than it has given. Mankind has no intrinsic worth, but must create worth through subjectivism and relativism. This is at odds with the clear biblical statement, "...what is man that you [God] are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8: 4, 5). Yes, the glory of the gospel is that we derive our worth not from our own intricacies and handiwork, but from the One who declares us valuable. Valuable enough, in fact, for us to be rescued by His Son!

In the crowded maze of philosophies and worldviews, only one has stood the test of time as personally fulfilling and logically coherent. Only one adequately explains our origins of knowledge with a confidence to trust that knowledge. Only one preserves the inherent dignity of man. Only one sees time, past and present and future, as meaningful. And only one can speak assuredly of a person's final state after death. Christian theism is that one. How desperately our world needs this "ol' time religion!"