

The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog

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Preface to the Fifth Edition

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I am convinced that for any of us to be fully conscious intellectually we should not only be able to detect the worldviews of others but be aware of our own—why it is ours and why, in light of so many options, we think it is true.

1 A World of Difference

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those who do not have faith in the infinite-personal Lord of the Universe must feel—alienation, loneliness, even despair.

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A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it.

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so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned;

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It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged;

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the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.

What Is a Worldview?

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everyone has a worldview.

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worldview, therefore, is situated in the self—the central operating chamber

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A worldview is not a story or a set of presuppositions, but it can be expressed in these ways.

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It is important to note that our own worldview may not be what we think it is. It is rather what we show it to be by our words and actions.

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Our worldview generally lies so deeply embedded in our subconscious that unless we have reflected long and hard, we are unaware of what it is.

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If we want clarity about our own worldview, however, we must reflect and profoundly consider how we actually behave.

Seven Basic Questions

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What is prime reality—the really real?

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What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

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What is a human being?

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What happens to a person at death?

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Why is it possible to know anything at all?

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How do we know what is right and wrong?

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What is the meaning of human history?

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What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

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So long as we live, we will live either the examined or the unexamined life. It is the assumption of this book that the examined life is better.

2 A Universe Charged with the Grandeur of God

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In the Western world up to the end of the seventeenth century, the theistic worldview was clearly dominant.

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we begin a study of worldviews with theism. It is the foundational view, the one from which all others developing between 1700 and 1900 essentially derive.

Basic Christian Theism

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Worldview Question 1: Prime reality is the infinite, personal God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. This God is triune, transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign, and good.[3]

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God is infinite. This means that he is beyond scope, beyond measure, as far as we are concerned. No other being in the universe can challenge him in his nature.

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God is personal. This means God is not mere force or energy or existent “substance.” God is personal. Personality requires two basic characteristics: self-reflection and self-determination. In other words, God is personal in that he knows himself to be (he is self-conscious) and he possesses the characteristics of self-determination (he “thinks” and “acts”).

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God is transcendent. This means God is beyond us and our world.

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God is omniscient. This means that God is all-knowing. He

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God is sovereign.

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nothing is beyond God’s ultimate interest, control and authority.

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God is good. This is the prime statement about God’s character.[6] From it flow all others.

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God's goodness is expressed in two ways, through holiness and through love.

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Worldview Question 2: External reality is the cosmos God created ex nihilo to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system.

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God created the cosmos as a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system.

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First, it signifies that the cosmos was not created to be chaotic.

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The universe is orderly, and God does not present us with confusion but with clarity.

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it is sufficient to note that there is an orderliness, a regularity, to the universe. We can expect the earth to turn so the sun will "rise" every day.

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The system is open, and that means it is not programmed. God is constantly involved in the unfolding pattern of the ongoing operation of the universe.

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Worldview Question 3: Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity.

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We are personal because God is personal. That is, we know ourselves to be (we are self-conscious), and we make decisions uncoerced (we possess self-determination). We are capable of acting on our own. We do not merely react to our environment but can act according to our own character, our own nature.

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We can summarize this conception of humankind in God's image by saying that, like God, we have personality, self-transcendence, intelligence (the capacity for reason and knowledge), morality (the capacity for recognizing and understanding good and evil), gregariousness or social capacity (our characteristic and fundamental desire and need for human companionship—community—especially represented by the "male and female" aspect) and creativity (the ability to imagine new things or to endow old things with new significance).

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Human dignity is derived from God. But though it is derived, people do possess it, even if as a gift.

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God does not love us because we are so valuable; we are valuable because God loves us.”[12]

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Worldview Question 5: Human beings can know both the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.

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The Word (in Greek Logos, from which our word logic comes) is eternal, an aspect of God himself.[13] That is, logicality, intelligence, rationality, meaning are all inherent in God.

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God reveals, or discloses, himself to us in two basic ways: by general revelation and by special revelation. In general revelation God speaks through the created order of the universe.

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As Thomas Aquinas said, we can know that God exists through general revelation, but we could never know that God is triune except for special revelation.

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Special revelation is God’s disclosure of himself in extranatural ways. Not only did he reveal himself by appearing in spectacular forms such as a bush that burns but is not consumed, but he also spoke to people in their own language.

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The main point for us is that theism declares that God can and has clearly communicated with us. Because of this we can know much about who God is and what he desires for us.

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Worldview Question 3: Human beings were created good, but through the Fall the image of God became defaced, though not so ruined as not to be capable of restoration; through the work of Christ, God redeemed humanity and began the process of restoring people to goodness, though any given person may choose to reject that redemption.

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Human “history” can be subsumed under four words—creation, Fall, redemption, glorification.

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Worldview Question 4: For each person death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the gate to eternal separation from the only thing that will ultimately fulfill human aspirations.

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Christian theism clearly teaches the last of these. At death people are transformed. Either they enter an existence with God and his people—a glorified existence—or they enter an existence forever separated from God,

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awful loneliness apart from precisely that which would fulfill them. And that is the essence of hell. G. K. Chesterton once remarked that hell is a monument to human freedom—and, we might add, human dignity. Hell is God’s tribute to the freedom he gave each of us to choose whom we would serve; it is a recognition that our decisions have a significance that extends far down into the reaches of foreverness.[

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Worldview Question 6: Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving).

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God is the source of the moral world as well as the physical world.

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Theism, however, teaches that not only is there a moral universe but there is an absolute standard by which all moral judgments are measured. God himself—his character of goodness (holiness and love)—is the standard.

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We are not the measure of morality. God is.

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Worldview Question 7: History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God’s purposes for humanity.

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“History is linear” means that the actions of people—as confusing and chaotic as they appear—are part of a meaningful sequence that has a beginning, a middle and an end. History is not reversible, not repeatable, not cyclic; history is not

meaningless. Rather, history is teleological, going somewhere, directed toward a known end.

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History is the divine purpose of God in concrete form.

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In short, the most important aspect of the theistic concept of history is that history has meaning because God—the Logos, meaning itself—is behind all events,

Core Commitment

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Worldview Question 8: Christian theists live to seek first the kingdom of God, that is, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

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The Christian worldview is unique in many ways, but not the least of which is the way in which it serves as the focus for the ultimate meaning of life, not just the meaning of human history or human existence in the abstract, but the meaning of life for each Christian.

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devoted Christians live not for themselves but for God.

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Human flourishing, then, while not being a primary goal, is a result of turning one's attention toward God and his glory.[]

The Grandeur of God

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It should by now be obvious that Christian theism is primarily dependent on its concept of God, for theism holds that everything stems from him.

3 The Clockwork Universe

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Deism developed, some say, as an attempt to bring unity out of a chaos of theological and philosophical discussion which in the seventeenth century became bogged down in interminable quarrels over what began to seem even to the disputants like trivial questions.

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factor in the development of deism was a change in the location of the authority for knowledge about the divine; it shifted from the special revelation found in Scripture to the presence of Reason, “the candle of God,” in the human mind or to intuition, “the inner light.”[

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A picture of God’s world began to emerge; it was seen to be like a huge, well-ordered mechanism, a giant clockwork, whose gears and levers meshed with perfect mechanical precision.

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there were those who distrusted the findings of the scientists. The case of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) is famous and, in a quite distorted form, is often cited today as proof of the antiscientific nature of Christian theism. In fact, Galileo as well as other renaissance scientists such as Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) held fully Christian worldviews.[

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deism denies that God can be known by revelation, by special acts of God’s self-expression in, for example, Scripture or the incarnation.

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Having cast out Aristotle as an authority in matters of science, deism began to cast out Scripture as an authority in theology and to allow only the application of “human” reason.

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As Peter Medawar says, “The 17th-century doctrine of the necessity of reason was slowly giving way to a belief in the sufficiency of reason.”[

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Deism thus sees God only in “Nature,” by which was meant the system of the universe.

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And since the system of the universe is seen as a giant clockwork, God is seen as the clockmaker.

Basic Deism

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John Locke (1632-1704), for example, did not reject the idea of revelation, but he did insist that human reason was to be used to judge it.[

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Some cold deists, like Voltaire (1694-1778), were hostile to Christianity; some warm deists, like Locke, were not.[]

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Worldview Question 1: A transcendent God, as a First Cause, created the universe but then left it to run on its own. God is thus not immanent, not triune, not fully personal, not sovereign over human affairs, not providential.

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As in theism, the most important proposition regards the existence and character of God.

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To the deist, then, God is distant, foreign, alien.

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Worldview Question 2: The cosmos God created is determined, because it is created as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system; no miracle is possible.

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Worldview Question 3: Human beings, though personal, are a part of the clockwork of the universe.

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Fénelon put his finger on a major problem within deism: human beings have lost their ability to act significantly.

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Worldview Question 4: Human beings may or may not have a life beyond their physical existence.

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Reducing God to a force or ultimate intelligence eventually had catastrophic results. In fact, as we shall see, not only naturalism but nihilism is the final result.

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Worldview Question 5: Through our innate and autonomous human reason and the methods of science, we can not only know the universe but we can infer at least something of what God is like. The cosmos, this world, is understood to be in its normal state; it is not fallen or abnormal.

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In deism human reason becomes autonomous.

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Because the universe is essentially as God created it, and because people have the intellectual capacity to understand the world around them, they can learn about God from a study of his universe.

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theists maintain, God has also revealed himself in his Son, Jesus—“ the Word became flesh” (Jn 1: 14). But for deists God does not communicate with people. No special revelation is necessary, and none has occurred.

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Worldview Question 6: Ethics is intuitive or limited to general revelation; because the universe is normal, it reveals what is right.

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Deism’s ethics in general is founded on the notion that built into human nature is the capacity to sense the difference between good and evil.

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Human reason is not “fallen” as in Christian theism;

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Some felt, in fact, that Jesus’ ethical teachings were really natural law expressed in words.

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Worldview Question 7: History is linear, for the course of the cosmos was determined at creation. Still the meaning of the events of history remains to be understood by the application of human reason to the data unearthed and made available to historians.

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Worldview Question 8: Cold deists use their own autonomous reason to determine their goal in life; warm deists may reflect on their commitment to a somewhat personal God and determine their goal in accordance with what they believe their God would be pleased with.

Modern Deism

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Antony Flew, a long-time vocal atheist and opponent of Christian theism, has declared himself a deist. His change of mind came from his growing sense that a variety of arguments, from those of Aristotle to the fine-tuning of the universe, are really compelling. As he put it, “he simply had to go where the evidence led.”[

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Popular deism. Popular deism is popular in two senses. It is both a simple, easy-going belief in the existence of an omnipotent, impersonal, transcendent being, a force or an intelligence, and it is a vague belief held by millions of Americans and, I suspect, millions more in the rest of the Western world.

An Unstable Compound

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Enlightenment deism did not prove to be a stable worldview.

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Scientists have largely abandoned thinking of the universe as a giant clock. Electrons (not to mention other even more baffling subatomic particles) do not behave like minute pieces of machinery. If the universe is a mechanism, it is far more complex than was then thought, and God must be quite different from a mere “architect” or “clockmaker.”

4 The Silence of Finite Space

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Deism is the isthmus between two great continents—theism and naturalism.

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In intellectual terms the route is this: In theism God is the infinite-personal Creator and sustainer of the cosmos. In deism God is reduced; he begins to lose his personality, though he remains Creator and (by implication) sustainer of the cosmos. In naturalism God is further reduced; he loses his very existence.

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John Locke, a Christian theist for the most part, believed in a personal God who revealed himself to us; Locke thought, however, that our God-given reason is the judge of what can be taken as true from the “revelation” in the Bible. The naturalists removed the “God-given” from this conception and made “reason” the sole criterion for truth.

Basic Naturalism

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Worldview Question 1: Prime reality is matter. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.

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in theism and deism, the prime proposition concerns the nature of basic existence. In the former two the nature of God is the key factor. In naturalism it is the nature of the cosmos that is primary, for now, with an eternal Creator God out of the picture, the cosmos itself becomes eternal—

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Worldview Question 2: The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.

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the universe is a closed system. It is not open to reordering from the outside— either by a transcendent Being

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Worldview Question 3: Human beings are complex “machines”; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.

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It might be concluded that humanity is not distinct from other objects in the universe, that it is merely one kind of object among many.

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while some naturalists are strict determinists with regard to all events in the universe, including human action, thus denying any sense of free will, many naturalists hold that we are free to fashion our own destiny, at least in part.

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Worldview Question 4: Death is extinction of personality and individuality.

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Men and women are made of matter and nothing else. When the matter that goes to make up an individual is disorganized at death, then that person disappears.

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Worldview Question 5: Through our innate and autonomous human reason, including the methods of science, we can know the universe. The cosmos, including this world, is understood to be in its normal state.

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Aristotle said, “All men desire to know,” meaning “All men desire to know the truth,

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What is important to note here is that naturalists ground human reason in human nature itself.

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Worldview Question 6: Ethics is related only to human beings.

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For a theist, God is the foundation of values. For a naturalist, values are constructed by human beings.

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If there was no consciousness prior to the existence of humans, then there was no prior sense of right and wrong. And if there were no ability to do other than what one does, any sense of right and wrong would have no practical value.

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The Humanist Manifesto II states the locus of naturalistic ethics in no uncertain terms: “We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction.

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Ethics is solely a human domain.

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Worldview Question 7: History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.

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The theory of evolution, long toyed with by naturalists, was given a “mechanism” by Darwin and has won the day. There is hardly a public school text that does not proclaim the theory as fact.

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In other words, when human beings appear, meaningful history, human history—the events of self-conscious, self-determining men and women—appears. But like evolution, which has no inherent goal, history has no inherent goal. History is what we make it to be. Human events have only the meaning people give them when they choose them or when they look back on them.

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Worldview Question 8: Naturalism itself implies no particular core commitment on the part of any given naturalist. Rather core commitments are adopted unwittingly or chosen by individuals.

Naturalism in Practice: Marxism

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Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, one of the most historically significant forms of naturalism has been Marxism.[]

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It is difficult to define or analyze Marxism briefly, for there are many different types of “Marxists.”[51] Enormous differences exist between Marxist theories of various kinds, ranging from thinkers who are humanistic and committed to democracy in some form to hard-line “Stalinists” who identify Marxism with totalitarianism. There is another huge difference between Marxist theories of all kinds and the reality of Marxist practice in the Soviet Union and other places. In theory, Marxism is supposed to benefit working people and enable them to gain economic control over their own lives. In reality, the bureaucratic rigidities of life under communism led to economic stagnation as well as loss of personal freedom.

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atheism remains a part of most forms of Marxism to this day. However,

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For Marx social classes are the dialectical antagonists of history rather than Hegel’s spiritual realities.

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History for Marx is the history of class struggle.

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This vision in many ways parallels the Christian vision of the coming of the kingdom of God, and it is therefore easy to see why some have characterized Marxism as a Christian heresy.

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Marx was certainly right to emphasize work and economic factors as crucially important in shaping human society, but there is more to human life than economics.

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many young people in the most economically advanced countries struggle with finding meaning and purpose for their lives. Marxism, like all forms of naturalism, has a difficult time providing such meaning and purpose for human beings.

5 Zero Point

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Nihilism is more a feeling than a philosophy,

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more a solitary stance before the universe than a worldview. Strictly speaking, nihilism is a denial of any philosophy or worldview—a denial of the possibility of knowledge, a denial that anything is valuable. If it proceeds to the absolute denial of everything, it even denies the reality of existence itself. In other words, nihilism is the negation of everything—knowledge, ethics, beauty, reality. In nihilism no statement has validity; nothing has meaning. Everything is gratuitous, *de trop*, that is, just there.

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Nihilism came about not because theists and deists picked away at naturalism from the outside. Nihilism is the natural child of naturalism.

The First Bridge: Necessity and Chance

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The first and most basic reason for nihilism is found in the direct, logical implications of naturalism's primary propositions. Notice what happens to the concept of human nature when one takes seriously the notions that (1) matter is all there is and it is eternal, and (2) the cosmos operates with a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system. These mean that a human being is a part of the system.

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Still many naturalists try to hold on to human freedom within the closed system. Their argument goes like this. Every event in the universe is caused by a previous state of affairs, including the genetic makeup, the environmental situation of each person and even the person's wants and desires. But each person is free to express those wants and desires. If I want a sandwich and a deli is around the corner, I can choose to have a sandwich. If I want to steal the sandwich when the owner isn't looking, I can do that. Nothing constrains my choice. My actions are self-determined.

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The issue of human freedom goes deeper than these naturalists see. To be sure I can do anything I want, but what I want is the result of past states of affairs over which ultimately I had no control. I did not freely select my particular genetic makeup or my original family environment. By the time I asked whether I was free to act freely, I was so molded by nature and nurture that the very fact that the question occurred to me was determined.

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To the ordinary person determinism does not appear to be the case. We generally perceive ourselves as free agents. But our perception is an illusion. We just do not know what "caused" us to decide. Something did, of course, but we feel it was our

free choice. Such perceived freedom—if one does not think much about its implications—is quite sufficient, at least according to some.[8]

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In a closed universe, in other words, freedom must be a determinacy unrecognized, and for those who work out its implications, this is not enough to allow for self-determinacy or moral responsibility. For if I robbed a bank, that would ultimately be due to inexorable (though unperceived) forces triggering my decisions in such a way that I could no longer consider these decisions mine. If these decisions are not mine, I cannot be held responsible. And such would be the case for every act of every person.

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The nihilists follow this argument, which can now be stated briefly: Human beings are conscious machines without the ability to affect their own destiny or do anything significant; therefore, human beings as valuable beings are dead. Their life is Beckett's "breath," not the life God "breathed" into the first person in the Garden (Gen 2: 7).

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To summarize: The first reason naturalism turns into nihilism is that naturalism does not supply a basis on which a person can act significantly. Rather, it denies the possibility of a self-determining being who can choose on the basis of an innate self-conscious character. We are machines—determined or capricious. We are not persons with self-consciousness and self-determination.

The Second Bridge: The Great Cloud of Unknowing

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The Second Bridge: The Great Cloud of Unknowing

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person has no way of knowing whether what he or she seems to know is illusion or truth.

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Charles Darwin himself once said, "The horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust the conviction of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?"[16] In other words, if my brain is no more than that of a superior monkey, I cannot even be sure that my own theory of my origin is to be trusted.

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If Darwin's naturalism is true, there is no way of even establishing its credibility, let alone proving it. Confidence in logic is ruled out. Darwin's own theory of human origins must therefore be accepted by an act of faith.

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Naturalism, born in the Age of Enlightenment, was launched on a firm acceptance of the human ability to know. Now naturalists find that they can place no confidence in their knowing.

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In the naturalistic framework, people pursue a knowledge that forever recedes before them. We can never know.

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One of the worst consequences of taking epistemological nihilism seriously is that it has led some to question the very facticity of the universe.[19] To some, nothing is real, not even themselves. People who reach this state are in deep trouble, for they can no longer function as human beings. Or, as we often say, they can't cope.

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we call it schizophrenia, hallucination, fantasizing,

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As noted above, there is just too much evidence that knowledge is possible. What we need is a way to explain why we have it. This naturalism does not do. So the one who remains a consistent naturalist must be a closet nihilist who does not know where he is.

The Third Bridge: Is and Ought

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Many naturalists—most, so far as I know—are very moral people. They are not thieves, they do not tend to be libertines. Many are faithful husbands and wives. Some are scandalized by the personal and public immorality of our day. The problem is not that moral values are not recognized but that they have no basis.

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naturalist can point only to the fact of value, never to an absolute standard.

The Loss of Meaning

Highlight(yellow) - Page 57 · Location 1889

The strands of epistemological, metaphysical and ethical nihilism weave together to make a rope long enough and strong enough to hang a whole culture.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 57 · Location 1890

The name of the rope is Loss of Meaning. We end in a total despair of ever seeing ourselves, the world and others as in any way significant. Nothing has meaning.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 57 · Location 1892

Kurt Vonnegut Jr., in a parody of Genesis 1, captures this modern dilemma: In the beginning God created the earth, and he looked upon it in His cosmic loneliness. And God said, “Let Us make creatures out of mud, so mud can see what We have done.” And God created every living creature that now moveth, and one was man. Mud as man alone could speak. God leaned close as mud as man sat up, looked around and spoke. Man blinked. “What is the purpose of all this?” he asked politely. “Everything must have a purpose?” asked God. “Certainly,” said man. “Then I leave it to you to think of one for all this,” said God. And he went away.[29]

Highlight(yellow) - Page 58 · Location 1916

Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, but for a naturalist he is wrong. For a naturalist it is the examined life that is not worth living.

6 Beyond Nihilism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 60 · Location 1995

existentialism’s most important goal is summed up in one phrase: to transcend nihilism.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 60 · Location 1996

every important worldview that has emerged since the beginning of the twentieth century has had that as a major goal. For nihilism, coming as it does directly from a culturally pervasive worldview, is the problem of our age.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 60 · Location 2001

existentialism is not a full-fledged worldview.

Basic Atheistic Existentialism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 61 · Location 2028

Worldview Question 2: The cosmos is composed solely of matter, but to human beings reality appears in two forms—subjective and objective.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 61 · Location 2029

The world, it is assumed, existed long before human beings came on the scene. It is structured or chaotic, determined by inexorable law or subject to chance. Whichever it is makes no difference. The world merely is.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 62 · Location 2063

Worldview Question 3: Human beings are complex “machines”; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand. For human beings alone existence precedes essence; people make themselves who they are.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 62 · Location 2080

Worldview Question 3, continued: Each person is totally free as regards his or her nature and destiny.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 62 · Location 2081

From proposition 2 it follows that each person is totally free. Each of us is uncoerced, radically capable of doing anything imaginable with our subjectivity. We can think, will, imagine, dream, project visions, consider, ponder, invent. Each of us is king of our own subjective world.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 62 · Location 2090

So we are free within. And thus we can create our own value by affirming worth. We are not bound by the objective world of ticking clocks and falling water and spinning electrons. Value is inner, and the inner is each person’s own.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 63 · Location 2093

Worldview Questions 2 , 3 and 4: The highly wrought and tightly organized objective world stands over against human beings and appears absurd.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 63 · Location 2099

The objective world is orderly; bodies fall if not supported. The subjective world knows no order. What is present to it, what is here and now, is.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 63 · Location 2105

Worldview Questions 5: In full recognition of and against the absurdity of the objective world, the authentic person must revolt and create value.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 63 · Location 2107

Here is how an existentialist goes beyond nihilism. Nothing is of value in the objective world in which we become conscious, but while we are conscious we create value. The person who lives an authentic existence is the one who keeps ever aware of the absurdity of the cosmos but who rebels against that absurdity and creates meaning.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 63 · Location 2122

Ethics, that is, a system of understanding what is the good, is solved simply for an existentialist. The good action is the consciously chosen action. Sartre writes, “To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good.”[

Highlight(yellow) - Page 64 · Location 2125

the good is whatever a person chooses;

Highlight(yellow) - Page 64 · Location 2153

Worldview Question 8: The core commitment of every full-blown atheistic existentialist is to himself or herself.

A Saint Without God

Highlight(yellow) - Page 65 · Location 2164

In *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) Dostoevsky has Ivan Karamazov say that if God is dead everything is permitted. In other words, if there is no transcendent standard of the good, then there can ultimately be no way to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, and there can be no saints or sinners, no good or bad people. If God is dead, ethics is impossible.

Basic Theistic Existentialism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 68 · Location 2284

Worldview Questions 3 and 5: Human beings are personal beings who, when they come to full consciousness, find themselves in an alien universe; whether or not God exists is a tough question to be solved not by reason but by faith.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 68 · Location 2310

Worldview Questions 3 and 6: The personal is the valuable.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 68 · Location 2311

As in atheistic existentialism, theistic existentialism emphasizes the disjunction between the objective and the subjective worlds.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 69 · Location 2364

Worldview Question 6: Knowledge is subjectivity; the whole truth is often paradoxical.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 71 · Location 2416

Worldview Question 7: History as a record of events is uncertain and unimportant, but history as a model or type or myth to be made present and lived is of supreme importance.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 71 · Location 2418

Theistic existentialism took two steps away from traditional theism. The first step was to begin to distrust the accuracy of recorded history. The second step was to lose interest in its facticity and to emphasize its religious implication or meaning.

7 Journey to the East

Highlight(yellow) - Page 74 · Location 2516

The swing to Eastern thought since the 1960s is, therefore, primarily a retreat from Western thought. The West ends in a maze of contradictions, acts of intellectual suicide and a specter of nihilism that haunts the dark edges of all our thought. Is there not another way?

Highlight(yellow) - Page 74 · Location 2518

Indeed, there is—a very different way. With its antirationalism, its syncretism, its quietism, till recently its lack of technology, its uncomplicated lifestyle, and most significantly, its exotic and radically different religious framework, the East is extremely attractive. Moreover, the East has an even longer tradition than the West. Sitting, as it were, next door to us for centuries have been modes of conceiving and viewing the world that are poles apart from ours. Maybe the East, that quiet land of meditating gurus and simple life, has the answer to our longing for meaning and significance.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 75 · Location 2523

Tibetan Buddhism has attracted devotees

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It appeals to Westerners' utilitarian pursuit of self-betterment because it seems, at first anyway, to set aside the necessity of faith and to ask the inquirer only to try its methods and see the results.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 75 · Location 2526

Its goal is enlightenment about a truth beyond the limits of contingent reality.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 75 · Location 2536

Knowledge of the East is now easy to obtain, and more and more its view of reality is becoming a live option in the West.[]

Basic Eastern Pantheistic Monism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 75 · Location 2542

Eastern worldview most popular in the West: pantheistic monism.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 75 · Location 2546

Pantheistic monism is distinguished from other related Eastern worldviews by its monism, the notion that only one impersonal element constitutes reality.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 75 · Location 2552

The East does not readily accept the distinctions we so readily assume between God and the cosmos (his creation); human beings and the rest of the cosmos;

good and evil and illusion and reality. We may use these terms, but we must be aware of their somewhat different meanings.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 76 · Location 2571

Worldview Questions 1, 2 and 3: Atman is Brahman; that is, the soul of each and every human being is the Soul of the cosmos (ultimate reality).

Highlight(yellow) - Page 76 · Location 2574

Instead of drawing a bold line between God and his creation, however, the Hindu text declares them to be one and the same.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 76 · Location 2577

Each person is (to put it boldly but accurately in Eastern terms) God.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 76 · Location 2578

But we must define God in pantheistic terms. God is the one, infinite-impersonal, ultimate reality. That is, God is the cosmos.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 76 · Location 2581

It is not our separateness that gives us reality, it is our oneness, the fact that we are Brahman and Brahman is One. Yes, Brahman is the One.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 77 · Location 2608

“Some things are more one than others” is another way of saying that reality is a hierarchy of appearances.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 77 · Location 2621

how does an individual, separate being get to be one with the One?

Highlight(yellow) - Page 77 · Location 2623

Getting to oneness with the One is not a matter of finding the one true path. There are many paths from maya to reality.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 77 · Location 2626

Orientation is not so much a matter of doctrine as of technique. On this the East is adamant. Ideas are not finally important. As Sri Ramakrishna said, “Do not argue about doctrines and religions. There is only one. All rivers flow to the Ocean. Flow and let others flow too!”[

Highlight(yellow) - Page 78 · Location 2646

We are not talking here about rational content but metaphysical union.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 79 · Location 2681

Worldview Questions 1, 2 and 3: To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond personality.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 79 · Location 2682

Let us go back for a moment to the first proposition and see where it leads us when we turn our attention to human beings in this world. Atman is Brahman. Brahman is one and impersonal. Therefore, Atman is impersonal. Note the conclusion again: Human beings in their essence—their truest, fullest being—are impersonal.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 79 · Location 2685

This notion in pantheistic monism is at diametrical odds with theism. In theism, personality is the chief thing about God and the chief thing about people. It means an individual has complexity at the core of his or her being. Personality demands self-consciousness and self-determinacy, and these involve duality—a thinker and a thing thought.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 79 · Location 2701

Worldview Question 5: To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond knowledge. The principle of noncontradiction does not apply where ultimate reality is concerned.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 80 · Location 2720

If there can be no true statement, neither can there be a lie. In other words, truth disappears as a category, and the only relevant distinction is usefulness.[]

Highlight(yellow) - Page 80 · Location 2723

Worldview Questions 1, 2, 3 and 6: To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond good and evil; the cosmos is perfect at every moment.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 80 · Location 2726

Karma is the notion that one's present fate, one's pleasure or pain, one's being a king or a slave or a gnat, is the result of past action, especially in a former existence.

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First, the basis for doing good is not so that the good will be done or so that you benefit another person. Karma demands that every soul suffer for its past "sins," so there is no value in alleviating suffering. The soul so helped will have to suffer later. So there is no agape love, giving love, nor would any such love benefit the recipient. One does good deeds in order to attain unity with the One. Doing good is first and foremost a self-helping way of life.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 81 · Location 2759

Worldview Question 4: Death is the end of individual, personal existence, but it changes nothing essential in an individual's nature.

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no human being in the sense of individual or person survives death. Atman survives, but Atman is impersonal. When Atman is reincarnated, it becomes another person. So does Hinduism teach the immortality of the soul? Yes, but not personal and individual immortality.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 81 · Location 2771

Worldview Question 7: To realize one's oneness with the One is to pass beyond time. Time is unreal. History is cyclical.

The Buddhist Difference

Highlight(yellow) - Page 83 · Location 2815

Hindu monism holds that final reality is Brahman, the One.

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Buddhist monism holds that final reality is the Void.[21] Final reality is nothing that can be named or grasped.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 83 · Location 2822

For a Hindu, an individual person is a soul (Atman) and thus has substantial (spiritual, not material) reality because it is an emanation of Brahman (reality itself). In death an individual soul loses its bodily residence but is reincarnated

Highlight(yellow) - Page 83 · Location 2824

in another individual—a sort of transmigration of the soul.

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For a Buddhist, an individual person is a not-soul. There is no namable nature at the core of each person. In fact, each person is an aggregate of previous persons. There is not so much the transmigration of the soul as the disappearance of a person at death and the reconstitution of another person from the five aggregates or “existence factors”: “body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness.”[

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techniques of meditation, differ too. Hindus will commonly repeat a mantra, like Om, and thus induce a trance or trancelike state that is taken to be an ascent toward godhood. Buddhists may likewise repeat a mantra, but their goal is to reach a state of realizing their root in nonbeing—the nonentity of their “face before they were born,” for example.[

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the attempt is made to empty the mind of all analytical thought, for ultimate reality is not only nonbeing, it is also “no-mind,” that is, a mind that does not analyze

Highlight(yellow) - Page 84 · Location 2858

Worldview Question 8: Core commitments among individual Eastern pantheistic monists may vary widely, but one consistent commitment is, by the elimination of desire, to achieve salvation, that is, to realize one’s union with the One (Hinduism) or the Void, pure consciousness (Buddhism).

Highlight(yellow) - Page 84 · Location 2862

Human beings live an illusory material existence in an illusory material world, desiring illusory goals. The result is suffering. To avoid suffering, one should eliminate this desire.

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Hinduism focuses on a variety of meditation practices. Buddhism presents an eightfold path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right consciousness.

East and West: A Problem in Communication

Highlight(yellow) - Page 84 · Location 2878

no wonder Western missionaries have made little headway with committed Hindus and Buddhists. They don’t speak the same language, for they hold almost nothing in common.

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the East and the West operate on two very different sets of assumptions is the place to start. To begin the dialogue, at least one party must know how different their basic assumptions may turn out to be, but for true human communication, both parties must know this before the dialogue proceeds very far.

The Radical Transformation of Human Nature

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The drug revolution, he thought, was the harbinger of a New Age, an age in which humankind—because it wisely utilizes drugs and mystical techniques—will finally achieve full health. Weil

Relationship to Other Worldviews

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The New Age worldview is highly syncretistic and eclectic. It borrows from every major worldview. Though its weirder ramifications and stranger dimensions come

from Eastern pantheism and ancient animism, its connection with naturalism gives it a better chance to win converts than purer Eastern mysticism.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 89 · Location 3074

Like naturalism the new consciousness denies the existence of a transcendent God. There is no Lord of the universe unless it be each of us.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 90 · Location 3081

borrowed from naturalism is the hope of evolutionary change for humanity. We are poised on the brink of a new being. Evolution will bring about the transformation.

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Like both theism and naturalism, and unlike Eastern pantheistic monism, the New Age places great value on the individual person.

The Basic Tenets of the New Consciousness

Highlight(yellow) - Page 94 · Location 3276

Worldview Questions 5 and 6: The core experience of the New Age is cosmic consciousness, in which ordinary categories of space, time and morality tend to disappear.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 97 · Location 3357

Worldview Question 4: Physical death is not the end of the self; under the experience of cosmic consciousness, the fear of death is removed.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 97 · Location 3360

We are not just our physical body, says the New Age. Human beings are a unity beyond the body. States of cosmic consciousness confirm this over and over, so much so that Stanislav Grof has experimented with LSD, giving it to patients before they die so that they can experience cosmic unity as they breathe their last breath.[92]

9 The Vanished Horizon

Highlight(yellow) - Page 106 · Location 3705

A culture cannot lose its philosophic center without the most serious of consequences, not just to the philosophy on which it was based but to the whole superstructure of culture and even each person's notion of who he or she is. Everything changes. When God dies, both the substance and the value of everything else die too.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 106 · Location 3707

The acknowledgment of the death of God is the beginning of postmodern wisdom. It is also the end of postmodern wisdom.

The Problem of Definition

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Lyotard defined postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”[8] No longer is there a single story, a metanarrative (in our terms a worldview), that holds Western culture together.

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there have long been many stories, each of which gives its binding power to the social group that takes it as its own. The naturalists have their story, the pantheists theirs, the Christians theirs, ad infinitum. With postmodernism no story can have any more credibility than any other. All stories are equally valid, being so validated by the community that lives by them.

The First Thing: Being to Knowing

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A Worldview Question About Worldview Questions: The first question postmodernism addresses is not what is there or how we know what is there but how language functions to construct meaning. In other words, there has been a

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shift in “first things” from being to knowing to constructing meaning.

The Death of Truth

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The Death of Truth Knowing itself comes under fire, especially the notion that there are any truths of correspondence. Conceptual relativism, discussed in the previous chapter, now serves not just religious experience but all aspects of reality.[

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Those who hang on to their metanarrative as if it really were the master story, encompassing or explaining all other stories, are under an illusion. We can have meaning, for all these stories are more or less meaningful, but we cannot have truth.

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According to postmodernism, nothing we think we know can be checked against reality as such. Now we must not think that postmodernists believe that there is no reality outside our language. We are not to abandon our ordinary perception that a bus is coming down the street and we'd better get out of the way. Our language about there being a “bus” that is “coming down” a “street” is useful. It has survival value! But apart from our linguistic systems we can know nothing. All language is a

human construct. We can't determine the "truthfulness" of the language, only the usefulness.

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Languages are made rather than found, and . . . truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences.[

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Truth is whatever we can get our colleagues (our community) to agree to.

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In short, the only kind of truth there is is pragmatic truth. There is no truth of correspondence.

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It is easy to see how this notion, when applied to religious claims, triggers a radical relativism.[

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So in postmodernism there is a movement from (1) the Christian "premodern" notion of a revealed determinate metanarrative to (2) the "modern" notion of the autonomy of human reason with access to truth of correspondence to (3) the "postmodern" notion that we create truth as we construct languages that serve our purposes, though these very languages deconstruct upon analysis.

Language as Power

Highlight(yellow) - Page 111 · Location 3897

"Knowledge is power," Francis Bacon said in a peculiarly prophetic moment. He was right; "modern" scientific knowledge has demonstrated its power for three centuries. With postmodernism, however, the situation is reversed. There is no purely objective knowledge, no truth of correspondence. Instead there are only stories, stories that, when

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they are believed, give the storyteller power over others.

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Any story but one's own is oppressive.

The Death of the Substantial Self

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There is no substantial self. Human beings make themselves who they are by the languages they construct about themselves. If this sounds like existentialism, that's because existentialism is a step in the postmodern direction.

Being Good Without God

Highlight(yellow) - Page 112 · Location 3932

Postmodernism follows the route taken by naturalism and existentialism, but with a linguistic twist.

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Worldview Question 6: Ethics, like knowledge, is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be.

Highlight(yellow) - Page 112 · Location 3941

if some future society decides that fascism is what it wants, a liberal democrat or anyone else is without appeal. So there is no appeal to a higher good outside the human family. One is left with a radical ethical relativism. The good is whatever those who wield the power in society choose to make it.

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Take Foucault, in many ways the most radical anarchist of all the major postmodern theorists. For him the greatest good is an individual's freedom to maximize pleasure.[36] Foucault is so fearful that "society constitutes a conspiracy to stifle one's own longings for self-expression" that "he agonizes profoundly over the question of whether rape should be regulated by penal justice."

The Panoramic Sweep of Postmodernism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 114 · Location 4032

Postmodernism has made little impact on science itself—either on how it is conducted or on how it is understood by most scientists. Nonetheless, postmodernism has begun to rewrite our understanding of what science is despite what scientists do or say. Most scientists, whether naturalists or Christian theists, are critical realists. They believe that there is a world external to themselves and that the findings of science describe what the world is like more or less accurately. Accuracy increases as scientific study progresses or it discovers a better paradigm to organize and interpret the data. Postmodernists are antirealists; they deny that there is any known or knowable connection between what we think and say with what is actually there.[55]

Postmodernism: A Critique

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First, postmodernism's critique of optimistic naturalism is often on target. Too much confidence has been placed in human reason and the scientific

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method.

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Second, the postmodern recognition that language is closely associated with power is also apt. We do tell "stories," believe "doctrines," hold "philosophies" because they give us or our community power over others.

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Third, attention to the social conditions under which we understand the world can alert us to our limited perspective as finite human beings.

Spirituality in a Postmodern World

Highlight(yellow) - Page 118 · Location 4168

the challenge of the death of God, the death of reason, the death of truth and the death of the self—all dominant in current postmodernism—is likely to be with us for a very long time.

Beyond Postmodernism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 118 · Location 4174

Postmodernism is, of course, not a full-blown worldview. But it is such a pervasive perspective that it has modified several worldviews, most notably naturalism.

Basic Islamic Theism

Highlight(yellow) - Page 120 · Location 4230

The fundamental reality of Islam is God (Allah), described as monotheistic, infinite, personal, transcendent, immanent, omniscient, sovereign and good. Of these attributes Islam emphasizes his oneness, transcendence and sovereignty. There has been debate as to what extent the Qur'an should be included in the category of fundamental reality.

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Worldview Question 2: God (Allah) created the universe ex nihilo, and all creatures are responsible to him. However, the world is a closed system insofar as nothing happens in the world outside of his divine decrees.

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Human beings are the pinnacle of God's creation. They have been given abilities of which other creatures, such as angels and jinn, are not capable. However, their high standing also brings with it the responsibility to live up to God's standards.

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Worldview Question 4: Death is a time of transition between this life and our eternal state, which will consist of either paradise or hell.

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Worldview Question 5: Allah has endowed human beings with the capability of knowledge by means of reason and the senses. Thereby, they can also know God's revelation. However, God's sovereign decrees limit human knowledge.

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Worldview Question 6: Right and wrong are based on the teachings of the Qur'an, as amplified by the Hadith and interpreted by the schools of law, the shari'a.

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Thus, there is nothing left for us to do than to try our best to follow all of God's commandments. There is no point in speculating on God's will. Rather than search for God's purposes, we should accept whatever he sends our way

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Worldview Question 7: Human history has significance in demonstrating the absolute sovereignty of God but, even more so, as the opportunity for people to demonstrate their submission to him.

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Worldview Question 8: A devout Muslim is grateful to Allah for providing the opportunity to serve him and will strive to follow the divine instructions in even the smallest part of life.

11 The Examined Life

Highlight(yellow) - Page 136 · Location 4811

we could say that there is one basic worldview composed of one proposition: Everyone has a worldview!

Choosing a Worldview

Highlight(yellow) - Page 138 · Location 4875

But if the data stand the test, we must be able to incorporate them into our worldview. If a ghost refuses to disappear under investigation, our worldview must provide a place for it. If a man is resurrected from the dead, our system must

explain why that could happen. To the extent that our worldview denies or fails to comprehend the data, it is falsified or at least inadequate.

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an adequate worldview should explain what it claims to explain.

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If my argument has been correct, none of them—deism, naturalism, existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism or New Age philosophy, nor the postmodern perspective—can adequately account for the possibility of genuine knowledge, the facticity of the external universe or the existence of ethical distinctions. Each in its own way ends in some form of nihilism.

Christian Theism Revisited

Highlight(yellow) - Page 139 · Location 4916

the way forward is not to go beyond nihilism. It is rather to return to an early fork in the intellectual road.

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we should be reminded that Christian theism as I have defined it was culturally abandoned not because of its inner inconsistency or its failure to explain the facts, but because it was inadequately understood, forgotten completely or not applied to the issues at hand.

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not everyone abandoned theism three centuries ago. There remain at every level in society and in every academic discipline—in science and the humanities, in technology and the business world—those who take their Christian theism with complete intellectual seriousness and honesty.[8]

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To be a Christian theist is not just to have an intellectual worldview; it is to be personally committed to the infinite-personal Lord of the universe. And it leads to an examined life that is well worth living. Lorem Ipsum