

# What's Your Personal Worldview?

## Lesson #5 What Are Other Prominent Worldviews? Part II

### I. Introduction

In Lesson #2 we defined the Christian Theistic Worldview. In Lesson #4 we defined three other prominent worldviews, namely Deism, Naturalism, and Nihilism which were a sequential derivative from Christian Theism.

In this lesson we will describe three separate worldviews that are not sequential derivatives from Christian Theism but that currently substantially dominate western cultural thought. These are Eastern Pantheistic Monism, New Age, and Postmodernism.

### II. Eastern Pantheistic Monism as a Worldview

#### A. Definitions:

Pantheistic – identifying deity as the various forces and workings of nature.

Monism – the notion that only one impersonal element constitutes reality.

Karma – the notion that all things in your present reincarnated condition is a result of the character of your previous life and those who would help are undoing the perfect balance of the universe.

#### B. History of the Growth of Influence on the West

In the late 1940s into the 1950s there was a movement of the belief of secular scientists to move towards Oriental (Eastern) worldviews. The secular scientists all wanted an eternally existent universe in which infinite time was available to evolve our universe into what is clearly highly tuned for human habitation throughout.

The problem was that since the mid 1920s, scientists had done the calculations necessary for the concept of an expansionary universe that could not have been eternal, but appeared out of nothing (ex-nihilo) in the recent past (cosmologically – 15bya).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Big\\_Bang\\_theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Big_Bang_theory)

Most secular scientists fought against this idea because it implied a beginning of the Universe that was not static and eternal. This universe with a beginning strongly implied a universe starting with a Beginner (God) which they hated.

For the secular scientists, one solution to this philosophical assumption (a priori) to conclude that the Eastern religious worldviews believed in a cyclic history, even to include in some cases a cyclic cosmology. E.g. The universe expands and then collapses and then again expands infinitely.

This view today is largely rejected but this early 20<sup>th</sup> century influence provided weight for accepting Eastern Worldview principles. Such a view of cosmology is now entirely rejected because the physics doesn't work and the evidence for a static-eternal universe is completely disproven with hard evidence that the universe had a beginning.

#### C. Basic Principles of Eastern Pantheistic Monism

The eight basic principles of Eastern Pantheistic Monism are:

**Note:** At the end, discuss each underlined phrase for its meaning in our culture today.

1. Atman is Brahman; the essence of every man's soul is the essence of the soul of the universe.

Each person is god, is one with the whole universe, which is god.

2. Some things are more than others. Although all things are one in essence with the universe, not all things are equally so. There is a hierarchy that generally starts with the lowest level - 4<sup>th</sup> matter; then - 3<sup>rd</sup> vegetation; 2<sup>nd</sup> animal life; 1<sup>st</sup> human life. Within each of these categories there exists a hierarchy also.

# What's Your Personal Worldview?

## Lesson #5 What Are Other Prominent Worldviews? Part II

3. Many roads lead to the One ultimate reality. There are many paths that lead a searcher to the One ultimate reality which we cannot fully conceive of.

This was another aspect that appealed to Western culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century because it allowed people to give up the exclusiveness of the Christian message, which is the greatest offense to a lost and dying world.

4. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond personality. Since Atman (soul of the person) is Brahman (the essence of/soul of the universe) and Brahman is impersonal, therefore humans are impersonal and what we see of personhood, (personality, gender, age, profession, education, knowledge, intelligence, wholeness, etc.) is all void of ultimate meaning.
5. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond knowledge. Rational thought and logic are irrelevant when discussing these matters. Human beings in their essence are beyond knowledge.
6. To realize one's oneness with the cosmos is to pass beyond good and evil; the cosmos is perfect at every moment.
7. Death is the end of individual, personal existence, but it changes nothing essential in an individual's nature.
8. To realize one's oneness with the One is to pass beyond time. Time is unreal. History is cyclical.

If you want to understand more of any of these principles, please read chapter 7 of *The Universe Next Door* by **James Sire**. (\$2 to \$4 range for used)

### III. New Age as a Worldview

Although the New Age has ancient origins dating before Christ in various mystical ideas such as Gnosticism, as a modern western cultural movement had its origins in the west in the 1960s and 1970s continuing to this day. It was largely a result of the failure of rational "naturalism" and consequent "nihilism" which we studied in the previous lesson #4.

The "New Age" is narrowly defined by its central idea that man is not fallen into sin, but rather is fallen into ignorance. Man's redemption is based on his becoming conscious of his own divine nature, and in doing so, accesses great mystical powers for good and fulfillment. This is a modern form of ancient Gnosticism.

New Age\* is a term for the broad application of a set of propositions to life. These ideas are mystical, theological, psychiatric, sociological, anthropological, health and healing, political, practical regarding everyday life, and even intrude into the natural sciences.

**\*New Age** – "According to the Mayan Calendar a Harmonic Convergence was scheduled to take place in August of 1987. The date came with much touting in the media, but no evidence ever surfaced that the Age of Aquarius, a time of great peace, had arrived." **James Sire**; *The Universe Next Door*; p. 138

The ideas of New Age are not monolithic, but are almost as varied as the number of practitioners. There are versions that claim to be Christian, Jewish, Atheistic, Spiritual, Far Eastern, Occult, Secular, etc.

Generally, there are 7 propositions which define the "New Age" movement/worldview. They are:

1. Three distinct attitudes are taken to the metaphysical question of the nature of reality under the general framework of the New Age: (Metaphysics - What is ultimate reality?)

# What's Your Personal Worldview?

## Lesson #5 What Are Other Prominent Worldviews? Part II

- (1) The occult version, in which the beings and things perceived in states of altered consciousness exist apart from the self that is conscious,
  - (2) The psychedelic version, in which these things and beings are projections of the conscious self,
  - (3) The conceptual relativist version, in which the cosmic consciousness is the conscious activity of a mind using one of many non-ordinary models for reality, none of which is any truer than any other.
2. The cosmos, while unified in the self, is manifested in two more dimensions: (Metaphysics)
    - (1) the visible universe, accessible through ordinary consciousness, and
    - (2) the invisible (or Mind at Large), accessible through altered states of consciousness.
  3. The core experience of the New Age is cosmic consciousness, in which ordinary categories of space, time and morality tend to disappear. (Epistemology - How do we know what is true?)
  4. Whatever the nature of being (idea or matter, energy or particle), the self is the kingpin – the prime reality. As human beings grow in their awareness and grasp of this fact, the human race is on the verge of a radical change in human nature; even now we see harbingers of transformed humanity and prototypes of the New Age. (Anthropology - What is the nature of human beings?)
  5. Physical death is not the end of the self; under the experience of cosmic consciousness, the fear of death is removed. (Thanatology - What happens to humans at death?)
  6. Ethics is not a set standard, but is considered a human construct and is thus mostly relativistic and individually determined. Humans, once they understand their own divinity are capable of determining “right and wrong”. Man’s problem is not Sin, but rather awareness of who he/she is. (Ethics - How do we know what’s right and wrong?)
  7. Human history is linear, driven by physical and spiritual evolutionary processes where mankind is moving towards a utopian age of existence of peace and plenty and spiritual fulfillment. (Age of Aquarius or New Age) (History - What is the meaning of human history?)

If you want to understand more of any of these principles, please read chapter 8 of *The Universe Next Door* by **James Sire**. (\$2 to \$4 range for used)

### IV. Postmodernism as a Worldview

#### A. Definitions

Metanarrative – An overarching story/concept that transcends individual stories. An example is the former metanarrative referred to as “manifest destiny”, a broad concept of American exceptionalism that was constituted by many individual stories and facts about American greatness in the 1800s through the 1900s.

Literary Theory - in addition to, or even instead of literary theory in the strict sense, postmodernism means “considerations of intellectual history, moral philosophy, social prophecy, and other interdisciplinary themes which are of relevance to the way humans interpret meaning.”

#### B. What is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism reflects a move away from rationalism towards a skepticism of “metanarratives”.

Truth is essentially unknowable because propositional language is corrupted by man’s drive towards power in all of its forms. Any rationally derived metanarratives are compromised by the very language that expresses it.

# What's Your Personal Worldview?

## Lesson #5 What Are Other Prominent Worldviews? Part II

### C. Time Frame and Relative Influence of Postmodernism:

Postmodernism became dominant in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is becoming more widespread in Western culture today. Europe has largely already gone “postmodern”.

In the United States postmodernism is routinely taught in our elementary schools, our high schools, and our colleges. It is part of the fabric of our media culture.

To declare authority, to declare the certainty of truth, to declare the observance of ethics is to be “old fashioned”, “narrow minded”, “intolerant”, “bigoted”, and “hateful” in addition to being wrong!

The “Emergent Church” is a type of evangelical church that follows postmodern ideas. These are a theological type of Church, (not a denomination) that emphasizes the importance of being open to other faith traditions and to not be authoritative or arrogant in theological or practical certainty. i.e. a denial of the exclusiveness of the Scriptures, Christ and His teaching, and the certainty of theological truth.

### D. Propositions of Postmodernism:

1. Language functions to construct a meaning, to make a claim, not to derive truth.
2. Truth about reality itself is forever hidden from us. All we can do is tell stories about truth claims. Truth claims are only an expression of power to rule or to dominate.
3. All narratives mask a play for power. Any one “**metanarrative**” declared as true is oppressive, corrupt, and self-serving except to the particular group who is making the claim.
4. Human beings make themselves who they are by the language they construct about themselves.
5. Ethics like knowledge is a linguistic construct. Social good is whatever society takes it to be. We don't actually know of any absolute truth in claims regarding ethics.
6. The cutting edge of culture is “**literary theory**”.

Postmodernism is technically not a philosophical system of thought because it does not try to attempt to define all of the critical questions of philosophy. It is though, a worldview. It certainly is not monolithic, but it does permeate much of our modern culture at this time.

**Jn 18:37-38a** *Therefore Pilate said to Him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”*

Man says, “What is truth?” And man has no answer accessible by man apart from God's revelation.

But God says, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*”  
**Jn 14:6**

### V. Concluding Remarks:

In lessons #4 & #5 we have catalogued 6 significant worldviews, some of their origins and history, related definitions, and propositional statements of their beliefs.

I hope that you will seriously consider these belief systems with the tools that we suggested in order to determine where the truth lies. I hope that you will consider with discernment, whether or not your own personal worldview has any of these incorrect ideas within it and that you will adjust your worldview accordingly.

## **What's Your Personal Worldview?**

### **Lesson #5 What Are Other Prominent Worldviews? Part II**

If you are a Christian, that you will turn your own personal worldview into a consistent Christian worldview. That your worldview will be in obedience to the only One who is omniscient, the Creator God, who is Truth, very Truth in all that He has graciously revealed to His people through His Son and through His prophets and apostles.

#### **Important Quotations**

"The Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not on a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words, it was based upon doctrine." **J. Gresham Machen** from *Christless Christianity* by Michael Horton

"Whatever churches say they believe, the incoherent answers offered by those entrusted to their ministry substantiate my argument that a moralistic religion of self-salvation is our default setting as fallen creatures. If we are not explicitly and regularly taught out of it, we will always turn the message of God's rescue operation into a message of self-help." **Michael Horton**; *Christless Christianity*; p. 42

The only reason any one should believe Christianity is that it is true. Its truth rests on historical facts which do not change, truths which are open to tests normally applied to other events or claims. It is not a matter of whether it sells or whether it works or whether it feels good or provides meaningful experiences. What Christianity teaches is the correct explanation of reality. **Dick Halverson**