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Worldview. A worldview is how one views or interprets reality. The German word is *Weltanschauung*, meaning a “world and life view,” or “a paradigm.” It is the framework through which or by which one makes sense of the data of life. A worldview makes a world of difference in one’s view of God, origins, evil, human nature, values, and destiny.

There are seven major worldviews. Each is unique. With one exception, *pantheism/*polytheism, no one can consistently believe in more than one worldview, because the central premises are mutually exclusive (*see* PLURALISM, RELIGIOUS; TRUTH, NATURE OF; WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY). Logically, only one worldview can be true. The seven major worldviews are *theism, *deism, *atheism, *pantheism, *panentheism, *finite godism, and *polytheism.

Looking through the Views. Theism. *An infinite, personal God exists beyond and in the universe.* Theism says that the physical universe is not all there is. There is an infinite, personal God beyond the universe who created it, sustains it, and acts within it in a supernatural way. He is transcendently “out there” and immanently “in here.” This is the view represented by traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Deism. *God is beyond the universe but not in it.* Deism is theism minus miracles. It says God is transcendent over the universe but not immanent in it, certainly not supernaturally. It holds a naturalistic view of the operation of

the world. In common with theism, it believes the originator of the world is a Creator. God made the world but does not work with it. He wound up creation and lets it run on its own. In contrast to pantheism, which negates God's transcendence in favor of his immanence, deism negates God's immanence in favor of his transcendence. Deists have included François-Marie *Voltaire, Thomas *Jefferson, and Thomas *Paine.

Atheism. No God exists beyond or in the universe. Atheism claims that the physical universe is all there is. No God exists anywhere, either in the universe or beyond it. The universe or cosmos is all there is and all there will be. All is matter. It is self-sustaining. A few of the more famous atheists were Karl *Marx, Friedrich *Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul *Sartre.

Pantheism. God is the all/universe. For a pantheist, there is no transcendent Creator beyond the universe. Creator and creation are two ways of denoting one reality. God is the universe or all, and the universe is God. There is ultimately one reality, not many different ones. All is mind. Pantheism is represented by certain forms of Hinduism, *Zen Buddhism, and Christian Science.

Panentheism. God is in the universe, as a mind is in a body. The universe is God's "body." It is his actual pole. But there is another "pole" to God other than the physical universe. He has infinite potential to become. This view is represented by Alfred North *Whitehead, Charles *Hartshorne, and Shubert Ogden.

Finite Godism. A finite god exists beyond and in the universe. Finite godism is like theism, only the god beyond the universe and active in it is limited in nature and power. Like deists, finite godists generally accept creation but deny miraculous intervention. Often God's inability to overcome evil is given as a reason for believing God is limited in power. John Stuart *Mill, William *James, and Peter Bertocci hold this worldview.

Polytheism. Many gods exist beyond the world and in it. Polytheism is the belief in many finite gods, who influence the world. They deny any infinite God stands beyond the world. They hold that the gods are active, often believing that each has its own domain. When one finite god is considered chief over others, the religion is called henotheism. Chief representatives of polytheism include the ancient Greeks, Mormons, and neopagans (for example, wiccans).

Importance of a Worldview. Worldviews influence personal meaning and values, the way people act and think. The most important question a

worldview answers is “Where did we come from?” The answer to this question is crucial to how other questions are answered. Theism declares that God created us. Creation was from nothing, *ex nihilo*. Atheism believes we evolved by chance. Atheism holds to creation out of matter, *ex materia*. Pantheism holds that we emanated from God like rays from the sun or sparks from a fire. Creation is out of God himself, *ex Deo* (see CREATION, VIEWS OF). The others play on some form of these understandings, with nuances of difference.

A particular understanding influences a person’s view of death, for example. A theist believes in personal immortality; an atheist generally does not. For the theist, death is a beginning, for the atheist, an ending of existence. For the pantheist, death is the cessation of one life and the beginning of another, leading toward ultimate merging with God.

Theists believe we were created by God with the purpose to eternally fellowship with and worship him. Pantheists believe we will eventually lose all individual identity in God. Atheists generally see *immortality only as the ongoing of the species. We live on in memories (for a while) and in the influence we have on future generations.

Obviously, what one believes about the future will influence how he or she lives now. In classical theism, “We only come this way once” (cf. Heb. 9:27), so life takes on a certain sobriety and urgency it would not have for one who believes in *reincarnation. The urgency there is to deal with bad *karma* so the next life will be a step up. But there are always more chances in future lives to try, try again. For the atheist, the old beer commercial said it well: We have to “grab the gusto, because we only go around once.”

A virtuous act is given different meanings by various worldviews. A theist views an act of compassion as an absolute obligation imposed by God (see MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF), which has intrinsic value regardless of the consequences. An atheist views virtue as a self-imposed obligation that the human race has placed upon its members. An act has no intrinsic value apart from that assigned to it by society.

There is also a gulf between worldviews with regard to the nature of values. For a theist, God has endowed certain things, human life for example, with ultimate value. It is sacred because God made it in his image. So there are divine obligations to respect life and absolute prohibitions against murder. For an atheist, life has the value the human race and its various societies have assigned to it. It is relatively valuable, as compared with other things. Usually

an atheist believes an act is good if it brings good results and evil if it does not. A Christian believes that certain acts are good, whatever their results.

Summary. Reality is either the universe only, God only, or the universe and God(s). If the universe is all that exists, then atheism is right. If God is all that exists, then pantheism is right. If God and the universe exist, then either there is one God or many gods. If there are many gods, polytheism is right. If there is only one God, then this God is either finite or infinite. If there is one finite god, then finite godism is correct. If this finite god has two poles (one beyond and one in the world), then panentheism is right. If there is one infinite God, then either there is intervention of this God in the universe or there is not. If there is intervention, then theism is true. If there is not, then deism is true.

Sources

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