

**TUTORIAL**  
**6.3**

# Worldviews 3

This tutorial builds on our worldview definition, and looks further at some weaknesses in common, non-theistic, worldviews. We will also describe some characteristics of the most common worldviews that people hold.

The notes were transcribed from a video presentation, so watch the video as you read the notes.

## Introduction

As we look at some of the common worldviews in the world today, we will be asking some of the questions that James Sire outlined in his book. Sire actually goes through each of these worldviews and applies his eight questions to each one. We are not going to take the discussion to that depth, but we will simply present an overview of each of the worldviews he lists, and allow each of you to read those books (mentioned in tutorial 6.1) at your leisure.

These issues are very significant for us, as we try to apply the study of worldview to other cultures and other places around the world. It will help us to have an understanding of the basic kinds of questions and presuppositions that they will be operating from, and what better place to begin than with our own worldviews? Lots of these worldviews that we will be discussing in the next two tutorials come from a secular perspective and a Western perspective.

In Sire's list, he describes the worldviews according to the progression of thought in philosophical development - the progression of Western societal thought. He describes a fairly clear picture of how the philosophy of life and the meaning of life moved gradually away from a description centered in the person of God, and in the reality of God. It moved toward bases that are more scientific and we see an undermining of *meaning* - the ability of human beings to feel, to sense, to describe meaning - and a consequent move away from trustworthy sources for truth. We will describe that in greater detail as we talk about these worldview systems.

## Our own worldview - Christian Theism

We will begin by mentioning our own worldview, which is Christian Theism. Christian Theism looks at these eight questions that Sire has given in a very

specific way. It goes back to the reality of God - the metaphysical fact of God's existence - the definition or reality in the person of God. Who God is, what His character is, what He has done; what His acts have been about and how His reality defines the external reality for us - the things we see around us.

His story provides a narrative framework for us. He defines our reality. He defines what human beings are. He defines what happens to a person after death. Because of human beings being made in His image, they are eternal beings, like He is. He is a Spirit, but we are eternal beings with bodies and souls, and our souls are an eternal aspect of who we are.

He defines right and wrong for us, He defines the existence of evil and the reason for the existence of evil. He defines how we have knowledge, what the category of knowledge - the epistemological category - is for us as human beings; God defines that. He defines what we believe in terms of our core commitments. In other words: as our beliefs and values are working their way out toward our behavior - what motivates our core commitments and the outworking of those commitments practically, what motivates and drives our actual behavior: He defines those things on the basis of who He is.



So, Christian Theism is a system in which all of the primary questions - all of the major questions and categories of life - are answered. And, they are answered in what we believe to be a coherent and consistent fashion. We don't leave out big pieces of life and say 'At this time we can't answer the question of meaning, or the question of truth, or the question of right and wrong, or the question of death and life'. We can, and do, answer those questions, like the nature of human beings.

So, that is a description of Christian Theism. Now, as we move forward in time, we begin to see, in the period after the Middle Ages, after the dark time of human existence for many, that a growing confidence was emerging in science and the ability of science to progress and to solve life's dilemmas. 'If we could only have scientific achievement maximised, the human dilemma and the problem of pain and suffering, those issues would be resolved' - that was some of the belief that motivated the system that emerged second, which we will talk about now, Deism.

## Deism

Deism is a belief that although God Himself was present in the creation of the system in which we live - the 'box' in which we live - that He functioned more like the metaphor of a 'clockmaker'. So that He instituted the processes that

we observe in the world around us - naturalistic processes - and as our clockmaker He 'wound up' the universe and now He is allowing that universe to proceed forward in the fashion that it does according to the natural laws that He instituted, according to a set of causality processes that He Himself instituted. But, in effect, He is not present to give oversight on a regular basis to this universe. God has removed Himself from the scene and in practical terms He does not have input into the system. The system is closed - to what exists in material terms.

For a Deist then, practically or pragmatically they function as Naturalists. So, as Deism moved forward, the reliance on or the need for God became less and less significant. So, a natural progression then from Deism then is the third worldview that Sire describes, which is Naturalism.

## Naturalism

Naturalism has stopped talking about the 'clockmaker' who initiated a process, and now is just describing what is in the 'box'. When we say what is in the box, we are talking about what we can observe and handle - what is tangible to our senses. We are talking about the material world, and any of the answers that we give as to ultimate reality and the outworking of ultimate reality, can only go back to a material universe. They can't begin any other place. That has some major implications for the answers to the other of Sire's questions - for whether or not there is a soul, or a part of a human being that survives death. Most likely the answer would be 'No', in a naturalistic system. There is no 'soul stuff' in the true sense of non-material entity. There is no rationality or there is no image-of-God humanness, there is no ultimate truth claims made by Naturalism except those which derive from natural processes and nature itself.

There are no 'rights' and 'wrongs' that are transcendent truth - that speak into the closed system - because the system is indeed closed to absolute judgements about truth and right and wrong. So, for Naturalists then, the answers to the questions are very much shaped by their presuppositional starting point which is the material world around them.

As Naturalism developed as a system, scepticism was growing about the ability of Naturalists to answer the fundamental questions about the meaning of life. Scepticism was in fact growing about the notion that meaning existed at all in a naturalistic environment. Bear in mind that Naturalists (and we are generalising here, because there are shades and varieties in all these worldviews) would conclude that the mechanistic processes by which we live and breathe are *determined* - they are not changing - they are eternal processes and laws. In the same way that a lion does not sit and contemplate whether or not it will attack a zebra today because that might be considered murder. When a lion has opportunity to kill a zebra, he kills the zebra, because that is their instinct. For a Naturalist, that process also can and often does apply to human beings

so that our outcomes are determined - we don't have true choice in the way that we think we do. For many Naturalists, we as human beings do not have a true sense, or ability to choose. That is called *determinism*. Not all Naturalists would fit into that camp, but certainly a number would. As that philosophy of life works its way out, there arose within the Naturalists a group of people that we would call Nihilists.

## Nihilism

The Nihilists basically see Naturalism as a process, where the natural outworking is indeed futility. There is no ultimate meaning to life because we are part of a determined machine, part of a mechanistic system governed by laws determined in process and determined in causality. Therefore our lives are essentially futile.

There is a large body of literature that has arisen as a result of this Nihilistic outlook - literature, poetry, movies to some extent - you can find a genre of materials that are devoted to a description of a Nihilistic outlook. Some people trace the atrocities from WW2 and other things back to a Nihilistic outlook. Some of the philosophers that would be strong proponents of Nihilism, some of them ultimately - because of their sense of futility and their lack of ability to find ultimate meaning - either committed suicide or lost their minds. Nihilism as a system was very much a response to Naturalism and determinism and the lack of any ultimate meaning in Naturalism. Nihilism as a philosophical development pushed people back to a search for meaning - but meaning was only being defined by what was 'in the box', not by something that transcended what was in the box - in other words a 'god-person'.

## Existentialism

Then the Existentialists said, 'We can't define meaning. We are Naturalists by 'calling'. We can't define meaning by someone speaking into the box from the outside.' Although there *was* a 'Christian' variety of Existentialism that did arise and was very subjective in nature in terms of God speaking to human beings - so not all Existentialists were Naturalists. But as we look at the process of philosophical development, Existentialism came out of Naturalism, because Existentialists began to describe meaning as being about 'my freedom to choose' - my subjective ability to choose.

So, in secular societies (non-religious societies) *my ability to choose* was my statement of defiance against a Naturalistic and Nihilistic system. If I wanted to have meaning, I had to define that meaning for myself, through my own choices and my own decision-making. Existentialism was an attempt to inject meaning back into a closed system.

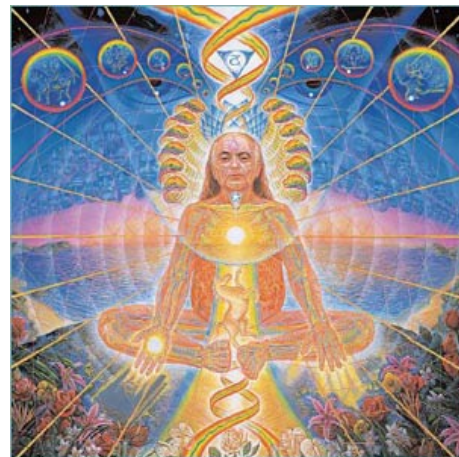
That attempt ultimately failed. There is no good or realistic way - without a source of being that stems from the character of a transcendent God - to inject meaning back into a closed system. So, the Existentialists attempted that and they were unsuccessful.

Now we will take a slight detour into looking at another worldview that Sire talks about which is not in the progression that we have been describing, but it has had influence in some Western societies. He (Sire) felt that some comparative religious views should be included, so he describes Eastern Pantheistic Monism.

## Eastern Pantheistic Monism

*Eastern*; from the East, or non-Western.

*Pantheism*; the view that essentially *all is God*, that everything that there is, is part of God. Nature is God and the substance of God is found in being around us. So, we as human beings are part of the constitution and definition of God. *Monism*; that all is one.



So, Eastern Pantheistic Monistic systems describe the nature of reality in terms of our growing toward 'oneness' with 'the one'. These systems include things like Buddhism and Hinduism. It is very simplistic for us to try to lump all of those things together because there are many, many varieties and different ways that these things are described, different ways that those who are believers in these systems would explain what they believe. But, Eastern Pantheistic Monism does tend to lump together some common categories and areas of Hinduism and Buddhism and tries to define the ways in which we as human beings are becoming more and more aware, through giving up our own individuality, that we are *one with the one* - with the pantheism that is 'god'. And that our current self-awareness or self-absorption is an illusion for us. So there is this movement toward a monism, or oneness, that is a process for us as human beings. Another area that the West did buy into, as a response to Existentialism, is New Age Thinking.

## New Age

New Age is a reaction to the extreme secularism of Naturalism, Nihilism and even Existentialism, and is a move back to trying to find spirituality, but certainly not a move back toward God. A move back toward mystical, and psychic versions of spirituality - astrological versions of spirituality. All of the bizarre (which may seem pejorative to some New Age thinkers...), occultist, peculiar ways to recapture spirituality - even going back to animism, shamanism and drug use - were a part of this attempt to encapsulate

'spirituality' with the barrenness in the life of human beings as a consequence of the deterministic, closed system of Naturalism.

New Age thinking is very eclectic, very hard to encapsulate - it was almost a fad in the 1980s, but it has continued to exist, and we still see some effects of this today. Some famous people from movies and other strong and big personalities are proponents of this sort of view, and so we hear about it and it is good for us to be aware of it. It is a secular spirituality, almost - a spirituality in the absence of God.

New Agers, when they describe human beings and the direction of history, would be describing our developing psychic or supernatural thinking ability - ESP (extra sensory perception) and these kinds of things. Many of them would be describing those things as our move toward enlightenment, and that human evolution as a process is moving toward that kind of enlightenment, that kind awareness, that kind of ability to use psychic powers and extra-sensory powers to control, harness, develop, for finding salvation. All of these systems we have mentioned have some element of salvation to them - we will talk about that later.

So, New Age thinking is a reaction to Existentialism in the West - most of these worldviews are Western focused - because that is the world we are all living in. New Age was one kind of reaction to Naturalism, Nihilism and Existentialism, and another is what we think of now as Postmodernism.

## Postmodernism

Postmodernism was a strong response to *absolute* claims - a strong response to the fact that religious absolutism, like Christian Theism or some other kinds of Theism, was not adequately solving the problems of life; that Christian claims actually led to a lot of atrocities in war and other problems in Europe and in the West in general; that 'Christians' were not describing a worldview that was detached from pain and suffering, (and we use the term Christian very broadly to include the Roman Catholic church and other institutions which were highly corrupted), but were contributing to and participating in very distasteful processes of human society. They were contributing to the problem of evil itself: warfare, slavery and other things.

So, Postmodernists are reacting on the one hand to this religiosity that seems like hypocrisy, and on the other hand they are reacting to the claims of science which said that science was the salvation methodology that we needed - that if science could solve life's problems we would all be okay. Postmodernists would say that science (and religious systems) gave us as many problems as it solved - pollution, the destruction of our environment, corruption, infighting, competition for resources, religious division, world division, division over ideology, nationalism, and the opportunity to kill each other in more efficient ways. So, Postmodernists would say that in light of the lies and distortions of

science and religion, what we are left with is a system in which clearly, objective truth and objective reference points are not possible. Therefore, truth itself is relative to societal influence, and tolerance - our ability to tolerate one another - is what we should live according to. Tolerance is law - it is the way that we should live for Postmodernists.

That is a very common view today. As you 'hear' the society around you, there are threads of Postmodernism in much of it, and Postmodernism creeps into the Church, which is something that we will continue to discuss in our next tutorial.

## **Islamic Theism**

The final worldview that Sire mentions is Islamic Theism. He describes it because he feels that Islamic Theism has a higher profile than it ever has before: with the terrorist issues, the World Trade Center bombings, and the collective effort from Australia, the US and other countries to target terrorist activity in very specific ways as it is an affront to our ways of life. So, Islam as a system is something that Sire talks about.

Sire calls it Islamic Theism - because it is Theism - but it is very important to recognise that Islamic Theism is not falling or coming from the same 'tree' as Christian Theism. Islamic Theism is a description of God's identity according to Mohammed, not according to God Himself. So, we have a description of Theism by a man who we would believe has been heavily influenced by God's enemies - Satan and his kingdom. We would not subscribe in any way to Islamic Theism and if we define the answers to those eight questions, it would be enough for us to say that Islamic Theism is very, very different to Christian Theism. It is substantially and irreconcilably different to Christian Theism.

## **Animism**

Animism is a belief that we run into around the world. It is a kind of pantheism, but it describes the actions and activity of spirit forces in the world around us that inhabit even inanimate objects, but certainly animate objects - spirits that inhabit animals and other things, and that control life around us. Many, many of the minority (people group) worldview systems, even if they have an overlay of a high religion - Christianity or Islam, etc. - there is a significant component of Animism in their daily life.

We can apply those eight questions to the mind of an Animist and we would come up with a common set of responses that Animists offer to those questions.

## **Another model of worldview**

Now we are going to move on from looking at specific worldviews and look at an adaptation of the 'orange circle model' that we already saw - the one that had worldview in the center and moved out toward behavior. We are going to describe that model with a different set of terms. In the book that was written by Wilkens and Sanford, we are pointed toward a different 'take' on the model of worldview.

This model begins with the concept of *Story*. That is important for us because in our way of working cross-culturally, we are very intent on people understanding God's Grand Story. We are very intent on describing God's Story for them so that they can evaluate God's Story and they can determine how they can connect with God's Story. That is an important thing for us.



As we have discussed, worldviews in fact do arise from stories - at the center of life is a story - for every human being. We each have a story, and the informal influences of our societies, our 'nature and nurture' - who we are and what our culture tells us - those things help to determine what our worldviews actually are. They shape our worldviews and so those are part of our story. Those stories that we each have, create an identity for us. Our identities are concepts for us that include: what it means to be successful, what it means to be fulfilled, how do we really fit in to the system of meaning around us?

So, we would consider the inner circle in this model to be 'story', the secondary circle to be our 'identity': the identity that derives from our story. The third layer is our 'convictions' - those things which are a distillation of our story and that form the framework of propositions that we operate on the basis of - very similar to 'beliefs' in the other model. Then, from our convictions we derive something we talked about before, our 'values' or our 'ethics'. Our beliefs about nature and how reality works radiate out and shape our ethics, which is what we should do, and what we prioritise in our lives to do.

Values and ethics are a more practical application of our underlying statements of conviction. Then as we live out our values and our ethics we come to the last layer which is our 'morals' and 'actions'. This is the part of the story that is the most evident to other people, and the part of the story that actually shows the outworking of our own personal story. So to summarise each area in the model:



**Story:** *The central narrative of our life*

**Identity:** *How we see ourselves and present ourselves to others*

**Convictions:** *Those beliefs that make up how reality works for us*

**Values/Ethics:** *What we believe we should do and what we take to be our highest priorities*

**Morals/Actions:** *The realm of doing that includes all of our activities*

## God's Story

Our worldviews need to be framed within the context of God's Story. That is our desire - to see people's worldviews realigned and framed in the context of God's Grand Narrative. In order for people to be able to do that, they have to see an adequate unfolding of God's Narrative - to be able to evaluate and ask questions about it so that they can see the explanatory power of God's Narrative - His Story. They can see that His Story leads to an identity for Him and they can see that His identity describes a set of values or convictions of God (even though God is the definition of Truth). Then they can see that in His actions, He is consistently working from the basis of His character - it is a defining point of His convictions and His values, and of God Himself, who He is - on the basis of His Narrative, His Story. So we want other human beings in other societies to see how their story fits in the big picture of God's Story. How their stories are threads, interwoven into God's Story and His design.

The informal, narrative nature of worldview is one of the reasons why our teaching approach is so effective. Because we take the time to very progressively present - in story form - an alternative to the worldviews that animists particularly, but many people, have bought into. We present a cohesive, a holistic, Story with much greater explanatory power, that answers the major questions of life. We present that in a narrative fashion that helps people to make a decision about the 'rebuild' of their core identity on the basis of the identity of who God is. So, we want to know what these competing worldviews are saying, and then we want to present God's Grand Narrative in a way that people can evaluate that Narrative and determine how their lives and life experiences are actually more compatible with God's Narrative than they are with the narratives that they have previously accepted.



## DISCUSSION POINTS

*Worldview 3*

1. The tutorial mentions how the idea of 'tolerance' as a cultural law has come out of *Postmodernism* - a rejection of the absolutes of science and religion. What are some ways, if any, in which you can see the 'law of tolerance' affecting:
  - the society around you
  - the church
  - your own thinking



## ACTIVITIES

### *Worldview 3*

1. Look up some videos online of people talking about their worldviews. As you watch, think about how their values, ethics and convictions are shaped by the overarching story that each has accepted as their own story - their own identity.