

“Christianity and Other Worldviews”
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Resource Webpage: www.worldvieweyes.org/CCU.html¹

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Room For Doubt is a grant-funded program that provides learning experiences and resources to strengthen the faith of committed Christians, address the questions of those who have doubts about their Christian heritage, and represent the Christian message to those who are skeptical about its claims.

Introduction

- A. Three Strategies for Christian Apologetics
1. “Negative” Apologetics: Replying to criticisms to show that Christianity is NOT FALSE.
 2. “Positive” Apologetics: Attempting to show that Christianity is TRUE.
 3. “Neutralizing” Apologetics: Attempting to show that other worldviews are PROBLEMATIC or UNLIVABLE.
- B. Biblical principles for encountering other worldviews.
1. 2 Cor 10:5 “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God”
 2. Titus 1:9-11 “... able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”
 3. Rom 1:21 “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”
 4. Romans 1:18-32
 - a. All have a _____ **SENSE** of God.
 - b. Some _____ **SUPPRESS** the knowledge of God.
 - c. Some _____ **SPECULATE** alternatives to God.
 - d. Some _____ **SUBSTITUTE** something else for God.
 - e. God may _____ **SEVER** His influence.
 5. Col 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” (NASV)

¹ The resource webpage provides access to outlines (including answers for blanks), presentation slides, and more.

I. Other Worldviews

A. Definitions:

1. A **“WORLDVIEW”** is “a way of life guided by basic beliefs and priority values that are expressed in preferred behavior.”
2. A **“CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW”** is “a way of life with basic beliefs, priority values, and preferred behavior that are consciously directed by a love for God and His Word for humanity.”
 - a. Connection to the “greatest commandment” (Mk 12:28-31; Mt 22:34-40; Lk 10:25-28) and to the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9).
 - b. Emphasis on love, not mere professed belief.

B. Some fundamental facts about a worldview.

1. _____ **EVERYONE** has a worldview.
2. It is initially adopted and often held _____ **SUBCONSCIOUSLY**.
3. It is a set of assumed answers to the _____ **BIG** _____ **QUESTIONS**.
4. It's possible to _____ **CHANGE** one's worldview.

C. The BIG QUESTIONS

1. By key **TOPICS** or “categories” (James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*).
 - a. **God or Prime Reality** (e.g. Is there a God or not? What *kind* of God/god is it? What is the relationship between this God/god(s) and the physical world and humanity?)
 - b. **Nature** (e.g. Is the universe eternal? self-generating? created? real or illusion? self-operating? purposeful or accidental?)
 - c. **Humanity** (e.g. Origin? purpose? value? unique?)
 - d. **Knowledge** (e.g. Can we truly know *anything*? How much? How? Is there any *revelation* from a supernatural source? What kind?)
 - e. **Ethics** (e.g. What is the *basis* for judging right/wrong, if anything? Are there any “absolutes”?)
 - f. **Death** (e.g. What happens afterward? Judgment? Reincarnation? Nothing?)
 - g. **History** (e.g. Is there any overall purpose? Endless cycle? Any miracles or providence?)
2. By a **PROBLEM/SOLUTION** scheme (see Nancy Pearcey's *Total Truth*).
 - a. Creation (e.g. Where did we come from?)
 - b. Fall (e.g. What's wrong with us?)
 - c. Redemption (e.g. How can we 'fix' it?)
3. Our conscious, and even subconscious, answers to these questions can be organized into identifiable worldviews.

B. Various lists of alternative worldviews

1. James Sire's “catalog” of WVs (see *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed.)

Christian Theism	Deism	Naturalism
Nihilism	Existentialism	Eastern Pantheistic Monism
New Age	Postmodernism	Islamic Theism

2. Examples of other kinds of worldviews in Steve Wilkens and Mark Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews* (InterVarsity, 2009): Individualism, Consumerism, Nationalism.

Nancy Pearcey: “Like so many young people, I had learned my Bible but had not clue how to relate biblical doctrine to the realm of ideas and ideologies. When I first encountered the broader intellectual world beyond the circle of family and church, I was an easy target.... Before they leave home, they [Christian teens] should be well acquainted with all the “isms” they will encounter, from Marxism to Darwinism, to postmodernism. It is best for young believers to hear about these ideas first from trusted parents, pastors, and youth leaders, who can train them in strategies for analyzing competing ideologies” (*Total Truth*, pp. 124, 126).

II. Worldviews in the Bible

- A. Adam/Eve vs. the serpent (Gen 3).
 - 1. The serpent questioned their ETHICS (“Has God said, ‘You shall not eat ...?’”).
 - 2. The serpent questioned their view of DEATH (“You surely will not die”).
 - 3. The serpent questioned their view of KNOWLEDGE (“... you will become like God, knowing good and evil”).
 - 4. The serpent questioned their view of GOD and HUMANITY (“... you will become like God ...”).
- B. Biblical creation accounts vs. Egyptian, Babylonian, and Sumerian creation accounts (Genesis 1-3).
- C. Moses vs. Egyptian deities (Ex. 1-4; 7-11).
 - 1. Many gods (e.g. of sun, joy, war, air, earth, water) were worshipped, including Pharaoh.
 - 2. The ten plagues involved God’s judgment on “all the gods of Egypt” (Ex. 12:12).
- D. Elijah vs. false prophets of Baal (I Kings 18).
- E. Daniel vs. Babylonian religion (Daniel 1-4) and Persian religion (Daniel 5:30-31; 6:1-28).
- F. The apostle Paul vs. the Greek philosophies of the Epicureans and Stoics (Acts 17:16-34).
 - 1. The Epicureans had a philosophy that denied God’s existence (only “atoms” exist) and emphasized the pleasures of this physical world. They were much like today’s Atheists (see below).
 - 2. The Stoics accepted a kind of impersonal “force” that permeates the universe; *everything* is God. They were much like today’s Pantheists (see below).

III. Worldviews Today

- A. **Christian Theism** (*theos* = Greek for “God”)
 - 1. Overview ideas
 - a. C _____ CREATOR GOD
 - b. S _____ SAVING GOD
 - c. I _____ INCARNATE GOD
 - 2. Basic theme: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”
 - 3. Object illustration: A _____ CROSS.

B. Deism (*deus* = Latin for “God”)

I. Overview ideas

- a. **C** _____ CREATOR
- b. **A** _____ ABSENT GOD
- c. **N** _____ NATURAL REVELATION ONLY.
- d. **T** _____ TRANSCENDENT _____ ONLY

2. Basic theme: “God’s gone. Let’s reason it out ourselves.”

3. Object illustration: _____
GRANDFATHER CLOCK

4. Cultural connections

- a. Notable examples: Thomas Jefferson; Thomas Paine; Antony Flew, a recently converted famous atheist.
- b. Most American teens are “moral therapeutic deists” (Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 2005, 2009).

5. Biblical connections (2 Tim 3:5; Matt 22:29; 1 Cor 2:4-5)

C. Pantheism (and **New Age**)

(cosmos = Greek for “world” or “universe”; (pan = all) + (theism = God)

I. Overview ideas

- a. **A** _____ ALL is God.
- b. **I** _____ ILLUSION of this world.
- c. **M** _____ MYSTICAL awareness.

2. Basic theme: “Connect with the oneness of the universe.”

3. Object illustration: _____ **YIN YANG**

4. Specific concepts and terms: *Atman* (the true self) is *Brahman* (the One); Samsara (the wheel of rebirth = reincarnation); Karma (works-produced principle that determines future incarnations).

5. Cultural connections: Hinduism; Taoism; some forms of Buddhism (e.g. Richard Gere, Steven Segal, Phil Jackson); New Age (e.g. Shirley Maclaine); Animism; Wicca; Yoda in *Star Wars*; Scientology (e.g. John Travolta, Tom Cruise); Deepak Chopra; Eckhart Tolle; *Lion King*; Oprah.

6. Biblical connections

- a. Gen 3 (The serpent and Adam/Eve)
- b. Acts 17:16-33 (The Stoic philosophers)

D. Secular Humanism (“Modernism”)

I. Overview ideas

- a. **N** _____ NATURE ONLY
- b. **O** _____ OPTIMISTIC
- c. **S** _____ SCIENCE/REASON
- d. **E** _____ EVOLUTION

2. Basic theme: "We can do it!"
3. Object example: _____ **LEGOS**
4. Cultural connections: Charles Darwin; Carl Sagan; Berenstain Bear's *Nature Guide*; Richard Dawkins; Michael Shermer; Bill Maher; Spock from *Star Trek*; *The Titanic*; *Mission Impossible*; *CSI* TV series; *Numb3rs*; PBS "Cosmos" TV series; *Criminal Minds*
5. Biblical connections (Acts 17 Epicureans; Luke 12:15-23; Luke 15:11-14; Matt 16:26; Phil 3:17-21).

E. **Nihilism** (nihil = Latin for "nothing")

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **N** _____ really matters. **NOTHING**
 - b. **A** _____ **ABSURDITY** of Life ("I don't care"; "I give up")
 - c. **P** _____ **PESSIMISTIC** outlook.
2. Basic theme: "We got nothing, and we're going nowhere."
3. Object illustration: A _____ **TOILET**
4. Cultural connections: "Murder by Number"; "Final Destination"; "Bohemian Rhapsody"; Douglas Adams' *Hitch Hiker* "trilogy"; John Cage; "Seinfeld"; Kurt Cobain, Columbine shootings; Samuel Beckett.
5. Biblical connections (Eccl 2:10-11).

F. **Atheistic Existentialism²**

1. Background (Camus; Sartre)
2. Overview ideas
 - a. **F** _____ **FEELINGS**
 - b. **A** _____ **ABSURDITY OF LIFE**
 - c. **D** _____ **DEFINE YOURSELF TODAY**
3. Basic theme: "Life is absurd. Be free and have fun."
4. Object illustration: Mr. _____ **POTATO HEAD**
5. Cultural connections: Friedrich Nietzsche; John Paul Sartre; Albert Camus; a lot of middle school, high school, and college youth! Ferris Bueller; the character "Jack" in the movie *Titanic*; *Groundhog Day*; *Dead Poets' Society* (*carpe deum*); Hugh Hefner.
6. Biblical connections (Phil 3:17-21; 1 Pet 4:1-5).

² Existentialism can be *atheistic* (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus) or *theistic*. *Theistic* forms stress having a direct encounter and relationship with some higher power. They minimize or reject the importance of doctrine, scripture, or history in favor of personal experience and communication with God.

G. Postmodernism³

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **F** _____ FRAGMENTATION
 - b. **U** _____ UNCERTAINTY
 - c. **R** _____ RELATIVISM
2. Basic theme: “Different strokes for different folks.”
3. Object illustration: A _____
REMOTE CONTROL
4. Cultural connections: Madonna; Britney Spears; *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; *The Truman Show*; *The Matrix*; *Lost*; *Inception*; Reality TV shows; *Modern [Post?] Family*.
5. Biblical connections (Deut 12:8).

H. A worldview “test.”

IV. A General Strategy for Responding to Other Worldviews

- A. Expose the worldview’s position and its _____ **LOGICAL** implications.
- B. Contrast the worldview’s logical implications with the _____ **CLAIMS** and actual _____ **BEHAVIOR** of its advocates.
- C. Compassionately confront with probing _____ **QUESTIONS**.
(See Mark 11:27-33)

V. Applying the General Strategy to Pantheistic Monism (and New Age).

- A. Consider the worldview content and its **logical implications**.
 1. Everything is ultimate “ONE” (Monism).
 2. The physical world is “illusory.”
 3. Language and logic are deceptive.
- B. The **claims** and **behavior** of Pantheists and New Ager.
 1. Follow the “right” duties (including moral duties) as prescribed by *dharma*, the principle of order in the universe.
 2. Eliminate all desire (Buddhism) by following the “right” 8-fold path (Buddhism) or “fulfill one’s duties in the “right way” for good karma and to fulfill one’s desires” (Hinduism).
 3. Improve the human condition (e.g. peace, well-being).

³ “Postmodern” often refers to *cultural* characteristics. “Postmodern-ISM” is a *philosophical position* that disputes the possibility of universal truth and values. Often, this distinction is not adequately made. I suggest that the church adapt to a postmodern *culture* but be careful not to be unduly influenced by postmodernist *philosophy*.

C. Key questions

1. If everything is “ONE,” how can there be an ultimate “right” or “good”?
2. If everything is “ONE,” then “evil” itself cannot be justified or explained.
3. If our senses and logic so deceive us, how can we account for the progress of science?
4. How can we even avoid the use of language and logic?
5. If Pantheists consistently applied karma and reincarnation, human status and value would be properly determined by a previous life. Why help anyone if they deserve to be where they are?
6. How does monism avoid an ultimate “fragmented” existence? It creates a giant gap between the “outer” physical world accessed by senses and logic and the “internal” world of one’s presumed spiritual experience of oneness.
7. Only something that is both “transcendent” AND “immanent,” powerful AND personal, can provide an adequate and coherent worldview that makes sense of everything. (The Christian worldview offers this.)

VI. Applying the General Strategy to Naturalistic Worldviews (e.g. Secular Humanism, Existentialism, Nihilism).

A. The naturalistic worldview and its **logical implications**.

1. Everything is reducible to materialistic and impersonal causes with no cosmic intelligence.
2. There is no ultimate meaning or universal basis for morality.
3. Non-intelligent evolution precludes having any truly “special” specie.

B. **Claims** and **behavior** of many Secular Humanists (vs. worldview implications)

1. Humans have freedom, value, and uniqueness.
2. Human reason and science give us truth.
3. Loving, giving, gracious, etc.
4. Condemn unjust, even immoral, actions (e.g. racism, slavery, rape, child abuse).

C. A Naturalistic worldview is _____ **INCONSISTENT** with the actual claims and behavior of Secular Humanists.

D. A Naturalistic worldview is _____ **UNLIVEABLE** if it were consistently applied.

E. Key questions:

1. How can **reason** itself be justified in a purely random or law-determined universe? Why should we believe that it gives us “truth,” especially if the “truth” has no Darwinian survival advantage?
2. How can this view consistently justify **moral criticism** or explain acts of **love** or **altruism**?
3. If consistently applied, what would Naturalism lead to?

F. Naturalistic worldview implications exposed.

1. There is no “Self.”
2. There is no human “freedom.”

Alex Rosenberg (philosopher, Duke University): “The notion of free will helps itself to a self to do the willing. Now that we see that the self is an illusion, it should be easier to give up the notion that the self is free.... This notion of free will or freedom as autonomy—self-rule—has a long pedigree in

European philosophy that runs back through Kant, the philosopher who could not see Darwin coming. It's not going to take scientism any longer to dispose of this theory than the others." Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (New York: Norton, 2011), Kindle Edition, 238.

Will Provine (Professor, Evolutionary Biology, Cornell University): "There's no human free will. If you believe in evolution, you can't hope for there being any free will. There's no hope whatsoever of there being any deep meaning in human life. We live; we die; and we're gone." (Cited from video interview, "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed" with Ben Stein)

3. Speculations about **origins**. (See the presentation on "Doubts because of Science")
 - a. The origin of the universe.
 - b. The origin of life.
 - c. The origin of species.
 - d. The origin of humanity.