



Matter

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What options are there?

Current Views

While there is an incredible range of World Views, they can be broken down into some basic categories, though rather than distinctive views, in reality it is pretty much a continuum with branches going off in all directions. We start from one end with “there is no god” to “we do not know” to “there is only one god” to “many gods” and “everything is god”. Each will have many subcategories and variations, but for the purposes of this discussion, we will just stick with the basic categories and some very basic descriptions. The beliefs of each group are much more comprehensive than I can describe in this short overview and vary within each group.



Atheism

Atheism posits that only the natural world exists and that everything is totally explainable by “natural” processes. The “supernatural” is denied and the “Big Bang”, evolutionary theory is believed to be an indisputable fact. Even though science has determined that the universe had a

beginning and is not eternal, atheists are still trying to come up with some “natural” way to explain the origin of the material, energy, space and time required for the “Big Bang”.

Agnosticism

Agnosticism basically just says that we really cannot know anything for sure. The only “knowable” things are those which we can discern through our senses and science. Miracles are essentially denied.

Deism

Deism realizes that the universe could not have come into being without a creator. It believes though, that the creator just created the universe and is not involved in it anymore. God just instituted laws and morality that anyone could know without direct revelation, such as the Bible.

Monotheism

Monotheists believe in only one god. The three monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The one god is an eternal god that created the universe and all life and is personally involved with it. God has established the laws and regulations for people and has stated what it takes to obtain eternal life, as well as the consequences of disobedience leading to eternal damnation.

Polytheism

Polytheists believe in a plurality of gods. The ancient world was generally polytheistic. These would include the Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Canaanite, Greek and Roman societies. Generally, there was a chief god with a myriad of lesser gods.

Circular Religions

These would include the religions that include re-incarnation. Everything really is circular and without a beginning. The focus here would be on doing good. Essentially, everyone is a part of the eternal being. There is a striving to get away from the pain and suffering in this world. In some sense, it is similar to Pantheism.

Pantheism

Pantheism goes even further than polytheism. The universe as a whole is conceived of as god, and therefore, god really is not a person. In that sense then, everything in the universe is a part of what makes up this god and the distinction between the creator and the creation is eliminated.

Another thing we are seeing more and more of, is that the only thing that matters, is what will make me feel good and give me good experiences. It seems that a rational, logical and cohesive analysis is not important anymore. People have no difficulty believing contradictory ideas, they just pick one at a time and do not compare them to other beliefs they hold to see if they are compatible.

Practical Applications

Let's look at some practical aspects for these worldviews, since that is really what we are all concerned about.

Do we matter or have any value?

In the atheistic view, there is no intrinsic value to anything or anybody, since everything is just accidental, random chance and "natural selection". With Deism and Agnosticism, it is not really much different since "god" is not really involved or knowable. With Polytheism, you need to appease the gods all the time. With the circular religions, you need to be good in order to have a better life the next time, and to avoid the pain and suffering. With Pantheism, since everyone is a part of god, it would appear that everything has value. With Christianity though, everyone has worth and value because man was made in the image of God.

Right and Wrong

One of the main differences in the worldviews is "who determines what is right or wrong". If you think about it, with atheism, there is no intrinsic right or wrong since everything is just a matter of random chemical processes. Since different people have different random chemical processes, they all have different ideas. In fact, the whole idea of knowledge and rational thinking does not even fit really well into an atheistic worldview since everything is just random chemical reactions. Since there is not absolute right or wrong, everyone just decides for themselves what is right or wrong. This leads to very diverse views of right and wrong, in fact, there are likely as many views of right and wrong as there are people. Just compare the views of people like the various dictators or "left" and "right" activists and so on. The views are totally different, with no way to absolutely judge right and wrong. Deism and Agnosticism are not much different since the creator is either not involved, or not known or knowable and different people will have different ideas as to what is right or wrong.

With Monotheism, there is an absolute right and wrong because the creator is involved with his creation, and has set out his laws and regulations. The circular religions have come up with right and wrong, but on what basis? Pantheism would also have much the same issues as the atheists since there is not a personal god that has established right and wrong. Right and wrong can only be established by the eternal creator since it has to be true at all times and in all places. Everything determined by mankind is not the same for all people and at all times. Just look at the variety of opinions on what is right and wrong in our own time, as well as throughout history.

Death and Nothing, or Death and the Hereafter

This is likely the most important aspect for determining the correct worldview. If atheism is true, then it really does not matter and you need only concern yourself with this present life. About the worst thing that can happen is that you suffer a lot before you die, after that, you just decompose and there is no eternal essence that continues on. With Deism and Agnosticism, you are really just in limbo since you really do not know what will happen. Is there a god that you would be accountable to, and what would he require? Are there consequences to the way that you have lived your life? With the Monotheistic religions, there is the knowledge of an afterlife, but a difference in the process to achieve eternal life, as well as the confidence to know if you

will enter eternal life. With the circular religions, you just go on to the next life and hope that you lived good enough to come back as something better or to get out of this life of pain and suffering. The Polytheistic religions were basically based on works, so if the good works outweighed the bad, the afterlife will be good. Pantheism is an interesting one, since you are a part of god, what happens when the body dies? How can something that can die, be a part of god anyway?

It has often been claimed that there are many paths to god. Can this be true? Well, at best, it can only be true, if there is only one god that is defined the same by everyone. In reality, the descriptions of god are all mutually exclusive. For example, if the God of the Bible is the true God, as He has revealed in the Bible, then a Pantheistic god is out of the picture. If God has revealed Himself in the Bible, then Deism and Agnosticism are out, because God is involved and knowable. You cannot have a Polytheistic religion being true at the same time as a Monotheistic one. Atheism cannot be true at the same time as any of the others.

Conclusion

As we can see, all worldviews seem to advocate doing good. The definition and authority of good is different for the various views though. Other than the atheistic view, all seem to have a belief in our being eternal in some sense. While we typically focus just on our present circumstance, problems and pleasure, our eternal destiny is much more important. For this reason, it would be very prudent to determine the correct worldview to the best of our ability. Some basic ideas here:

- Atheism can be ruled out because science has already established that this universe is not eternal, but had a beginning. Scientists have not been able to “create” life from chemicals, even in a lab setting, never mind it happening by accident in a setting that did not even have the right atmospheric conditions for this first life to start. Since this universe had a beginning, there has to be a creator that is not a part of this “natural” realm and that is eternal. The normal description of this creator is God.
- Deism and Agnosticism are, in a sense, somewhat illogical. If we have an eternal god that has created the universe, would it not make sense that he would be involved, knowable and that he would reveal himself and his regulations for life? Since Agnosticism says that you cannot know, then you also cannot know if someone does know, so it is a somewhat self-defeating statement, much the same as saying there are no absolutes. If there are no absolutes, then how can you make an absolute statement. If that statement includes itself, then that means that it is not always true, so there can be absolute truth.
- The Polytheistic religions can be proven to be scientifically wrong. The sky being a god arched over the earth, the sun god moving across the sky and going through the underworld at night, a god holding up the sky and other such things are all known to be false.
- The circular, mystic and Pantheistic religions are also shown to be false by science, since science tells us that the universe had a beginning and will have an end when the usable energy runs out. Logically, we cannot be a part of the creator that has created us. There needs to be a distinction between the creator and the creation. The one truth that these

religions do have is that we are more than just a physical being. While we have a beginning, there is an eternal being (spirit, soul) that has been created by God.

➤ That really leaves Monotheism as the only possible option. Science tells us that the universe had a beginning, so an eternal being had to create it. Monotheism teaches that God created the universe and all life, so it matches what we know from science. The three Monotheistic worldviews are Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All hold to the first five books of the Bible and the Psalms of David. Islam also considers Jesus to be a prophet and accepts the Gospel of Jesus. While Islam accepts these, it also says that they have been corrupted by Jews and Christians and that the Qur'an is God's final word to mankind which supersedes all previous writings. So, what evidence do we have to determine which one is true? While I am not going to get into a great deal of detail on this, since it would take a much greater study than I am doing here, I will just go into the basics again.

- ❖ The evidence that we have on the accurate copying of the Scriptures is quite incredible. With the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, we can see how meticulous the scribes were in copying the Scriptures based on the comparison with much later copies that we have.
- ❖ The historicity and accuracy of the New Testament have been established through both internal and external evidence. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus have been established with more credibility than other historical events.
- ❖ The description of creation and the universe matches what we see in our natural world much more than any of the other world views.

God has revealed Himself to be the author of the universe and all life. He has provided us with His Word, so that we can know Him and obey Him. He is a just and merciful God. He made everything good and gave man the freedom to choose obedience or disobedience. Man disobeyed God's commands, and the result was death, disease and suffering. While God could have just left mankind to experience the consequence of sin, He chose instead to pay the penalty for the disobedience so that the relationship with His creation could be restored. Mankind is free to accept this payment, but if the payment is rejected, those who reject it will still face the consequences of their disobedience. God desires that all would come to Him and not perish. We have the assurance that if we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, then we know that our sins are forgiven and that we will have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Jn. 3:16-18)

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people... there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:8-12)

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)