

Worldviews in Contrast

I. Introduction

- A. Remember what the basic elements of a worldview are:
 1. The view on God, or ultimate reality. Where did everything come from?
 2. The view on Man. What is the nature of man?
 3. The view on Nature. What is man's relationship to nature? What is it?
 4. Seeking to answer basic questions from the perspective of worldview:
 - a. Where did everything come from?
 - b. What has gone wrong?
 - c. What will it take to make it right?
- B. Basic classifications of worldviews. Most worldviews will fall under one of these:
 1. Naturalism
 2. Transcendentalism
 3. Theism
 4. Biblical Theism
- C. This will help you to categorize and critique elements of a worldview rather than accepting it uncritically

II. Naturalism

- A. Description: Ultimate reality is completely material
 1. Everything consists of matter and energy
 2. There is no such thing as spiritual realities
 3. Thoughts, emotions, plans, language, are all just chemical impulses

4. The mind and the brain are one and the same

B. Elements of Naturalism

1. God

- a. Ultimate reality is physical
- b. God was created in man's image out of emotional necessity
- c. Truth and scientific fact are synonymous
- d. The way we gain knowledge is through science
- e. Explanation for the universe is without God
 - 1) Atheism a recent development
 - 2) 1859 Darwin explained the design of the universe as being the result of mechanistic laws
 - 3) Did not prove God does not exist, just made the notion of God unnecessary

2. Humanity

- a. Man is completely a biological, physical being, nothing more
- b. Ethics, emotions, etc. are nothing more than brain chemistry
- c. Like a trained dog, humans are trained by society with a system of rewards and punishment (we are stimulus-response mechanisms)
- d. Ethics are utilitarian and individualistic
- e. Ultimately, life is without meaning
 - 1) There is no overarching plan or meaning
 - 2) Life is absurd
 - 3) Only choice is to try to create your own meaning
 - a) Existentialism
 - 1] To overcome hopelessness, you create your own meaning
 - 2] Pursue whatever gives meaning to your life
 - 3] No overarching truths or rules other than what you choose
 - b) Hedonism
 - 1] Goal of life is pleasure
 - 2] Make the most of life and enjoy
 - 3] What brings pleasure is good, what brings pain is bad
 - c) Humanism
 - 1] Goal is the improve life for humans
 - 2] Goals include overcoming poverty, disease & pursuing peace and harmony for all mankind.
 - f. Since life is without meaning, what determines what is "right?"
 - 1) There is not universal, higher ethic or morality

- 2) All that is left is power - Whoever is in power and in control determines what is right
- 3) However, naturalists usually assume humans are basically "good" and build their institutions around that assumption

3. Nature

- a. There is no such thing as "super-natural"
- b. Up to mankind to figure out how nature works so he can harness it

C. Seeking answers to basic questions

1. Where did everything come from?
 - a. Not any sort of god
 - b. Came from natural causes, Big Bang, Evolutionary theory
2. What has gone wrong?
 - a. Common assumptions about humanity
 - 1) Humans are basically good
 - 2) Humans are physical beings only
 - 3) Humans are products of environment, experience, or genetics
 - 4) Humans can evolve and progress into something better through their own efforts (social engineering)
 - 5) Sin, morality, etc. is an illusion created by humans at a primitive state of development
 - b. Humans have been corrupted by something, such as...
 - 1) Something in society or society itself
 - 2) Private ownership of property, class distinctions, poverty
 - 3) Religious dogmatism and its morality
 - 4) Repressed sexual drives and urges
 - 5) Oppression by a class of people
 - 6) Etc. etc. etc.
3. What will it take to make it right?
 - a. Right the social ills, poverty, oppression, so that humans can flourish
 - b. Rise up against the sources of oppression
 - 1) In some cases it is high society
 - 2) In some cases, it is religious belief and dogmatism
 - 3) It typically involves reindoctrination concerning human nature and the nature of reality
 - c. Utopian vision
 - 1) Through human effort, humans will create a perfect society

- 2) Some versions involve revolution, though not always
- 3) Involves reeducation
- 4) Elimination of class distinctions
- 5) Etc. etc. etc.

D. Assessment

1. It seems appealing at first blush
 - a. Seems to contribute to progress
 - b. Leaves humans free to choose their own goals and morality
 - c. Naturalistic truths can be known with certainty
2. Problems:
 - a. Limitations of science
 - 1) Science is limited to observable and repeated events in the physical realm
 - 2) It begins with the presupposition that there is nothing beyond this realm
 - 3) May explain a lot of the "how" in the universe, but it cannot explain the "why"
 - 4) Naturalism does not have a corner in the scientific enterprise.
Many theistic scientists have made significant contributions
 - 5) Science can only give a one-dimensional view of reality
 - b. Human factor
 - 1) Science cannot explain human thought, meaning, creativity, consciousness, morality, etc....
 - 2) Humans are more than stimulus-response mechanisms
 - a) If not, then naturalistic attempts to right what is wrongs should have worked
 - b) Placing responsibility for crime on society, circumstances or something outside the perpetrator is actually demeaning
 - 1] It makes humans pawns of outside forces with no personal responsibility
 - 2] It places people on the level of animals
 - 3) If humans were basically good, communist attempts should not have failed so fantastically
 - 4) Denial of the reality of sin makes one most susceptible to it
 - 5) Denial of the reality of guilt does not rid guilt

- c. Other problems
 - 1) If the universe is meaningless, then you cannot make that statement. It is absurd. By what standard do you judge something as meaningless?
 - 2) Naturalism gives us the tools to understand a lot about our physical world, but falls woefully short as a comprehensive worldview
 - 3) Naturalism has been at the root of the ideologies of some of the world's worst tyrants
- 3. The choice is not a choice between science and faith
 - a. Much of what naturalist scientist pass off as science is in reality philosophy, not science.
 - 1) Whether they admit it or not, naturalistic scientists have a prior commitment to materialism or naturalism
 - 2) As a result, naturalistic science stubbornly refuses to draw the conclusion that design demands a designer, no matter how compelling the evidence is
 - b. The debate is one of philosophies, or worldviews.
 - c. We should not oppose science with religion, but bad science with good science.

III. Transcendentalism

A. Definition

- 1. There is wide variation in this worldview, therefore this discussion of this will stick only to broad generalizations
- 2. Nature is a living organism
- 3. Each individual is a fragmented part of the whole

B. Elements of Transcendentalism

- 1. God
 - a. Monism - All is god
 - b. Ultimate reality is spiritual or psychic
 - c. God and the universe are inseparable
 - d. God is not a personal being, but a force or principle
 - e. Ultimate reality is beyond thinking and consciousness

2. Humanity

- a. An extension of the divine oneness - humans are divine
- b. Causes of man's problems (suffering and injustice):
 - 1) Fragmented vision of the oneness of all things
 - a) Man "forgot" he was divine, muddled through the ego
 - b) Human thought and reason contribute to this fragmented vision
 - c) Human cravings contribute to this fragmentation
 - d) Anything focused on self, the "ego illusion" contributes to the fragmentation
 - e) As long as man sees himself as a separate entity, he will never escape the prison of reincarnation
 - 2) Ignorance of one's own divine nature
 - a) Solution to the problem is not found outside of one's self
 - b) The solution to the problem is found within
 - c) The goal is enlightenment - to move beyond individualism to become one with ultimate reality
 - d) Good and evil are illusions, pain is an illusion - the goal is to overcome the illusion - to become one with ultimate reality, for all to become one
 - e) Morality is not the product of a moral lawgiver, but is a byproduct of physical limitations
 - 1] Ethics are not the same in transcendental thought
 - 2] Hedonism is immoral not because it breaks laws of a moral lawgiver, but because it is a quest for individual fulfillment
 - 3) Basically, the solution to man's problems is to overcome the illusion of individuality and see the oneness of all things and to actualize divinity within himself.

3. Nature

- a. There is a lot of disagreement of the exact nature of the physical world around us
 - 1) In general most see the physical world as either only a part of reality, or nothing but an illusion, or somewhere in between
 - 2) Some see the physical world as only a reflection of divine reality
 - 3) Some see the physical world as an emanation from god
 - 4) And there are many more theories, etc. etc. etc.

- b. Transcendentalists accuse both theism and naturalism of putting too much emphasis on the physical realm, which contributes to fragmentation since it reinforces the illusion
- c. There is no subject and object in the universe, all is subject
- d. As a result, everything has the same value. Animals and humans alike have the same value.

C. Assessment

- 1. A difficulty is the inability to evaluate it as a system, because according to transcendentalism, ultimate reality goes beyond thinking and beyond consciousness
- 2. It does not adequately explain how we came to be where we are
- 3. The problem of evil - If it is only an illusion, why is it so pervasive?
- 4. Reincarnation, in spite of the western view of it, is a curse.

IV. Theism

A. Definition

- 1. Theism is not the same as Biblical Theism
- 2. Theism means the belief in a personal God

B. Elements of Theism

- 1. God
 - a. God is a personal being
 - b. Some believe that God is involved intimately in the universe
 - c. Others believe that God is not involved at all
 - d. Some believe that God is knowable, others that he is not knowable
- 2. Humanity
 - a. Humanity is a creation of God
 - b. Some believe humans are created in the image of God
 - c. The source of man's problems is sin or disobedience
 - d. The solution to man's problem is found in God
 - 1) Some believe that one must appease God in order to receive some sort of forgiveness from God
 - 2) Some believe man must make up for his disobedience,

or simply do enough good deeds, and that they will atone for their sins

3) Others believe that man's solution is not to be found in himself, but in God and his mercy

3. Nature

- a. Nature is a creation of God
- b. Some believe that nature, along with man, is a subject of redemption

C. Assessment

1. The evidence in the world around us points to the existence of a personal creator God
2. A worldview that begins with the existence of a personal creator God is only a step in the right direction
3. There is a wide variation in beliefs in theism

D. Variations:

1. Deism

- a. Claims God is beyond the world and not involved in it
- b. God created the world and ordered it with natural laws and does not intrude into it
- c. Only means to know God is through his creation
- d. Flourished during the Renaissance into early part of 19th century
- e. Well known American deists were Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine

2. Finitism

- a. Belief that God is limited in certain aspects of his nature and power
- b. Attempts to solve the problem of evil - God is not fully capable of destroying evil
- c. Popularized by Rabbi Harold Kushner in *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

3. Judaism

- a. Belief in one God as the single, supreme creator and ruler
- b. Specific beliefs are based on the Torah and Talmud, which is considered the authoritative interpretation of Torah
- c. God specifically chose Israel and covenanted with them
- d. Looking forward to a Messiah

4. Islam

- a. Belief in one God that exacts justice according to a strict code
- b. God does not have any partners, he is sovereign, and does not condescend. God is powerfully glorious and supreme
- c. Even though God's rules are given, God himself is not knowable, which means no one was a "relationship" with God
- d. It is a mix of Jewish, Christian, and Arabic religious concepts
- e. Belief is based on concepts found in the Torah, Psalms, the Gospel, and most importantly, the Quran and even the Hadith, which are the sayings and activities of Mohamed.

5. Biblical Christian Theism - See next section