

NON-CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEWS

Presenting the Christian worldview in a thorough and attractive way is, in itself, a powerful apologetic for the Christian faith. The coherency and explanatory power and scope of the Christian worldview speaks for itself, because it explains everything we see and experience in this world.

When we compare the Christian worldview to other competing worldviews, its strength is evident. We see that the Christian worldview is more consistent and coherent than these other worldviews. It is also more existentially viable—more livable—than these other worldviews.

DEISM

The first non-Christian worldview we will examine is deism. This may not seem like a current worldview, although I would contend it is, even if it is not called deism by name.

Deism became more prevalent in the Age of Enlightenment, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It seems to have arisen, at least in part, because of two trends: endless disputes over arcane theological points and increased scientific inquiry.

The premodern era came before the Age of Enlightenment. Premoderns believed objective truth was found in God and his divine revelation. They were neither unintelligent nor ignorant of all science and mathematics. Very intelligent and educated people lived in this era. But they had a humility with regard to how much human beings could know apart from God. The Age of Enlightenment, by contrast, was the birth of the modern era. Moderns believed (and still believe) that objective truth can be acquired through human reasoning and scientific inquiry.

Ironically, Christians were the ones who helped advance science and reason. They believed (rightly so) that God made an organized and rational universe. They believed that by studying the universe, they could know more of the grandeur of God. After all, the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1). According to James Sire, “A picture of God’s world began to emerge; it was seen to be like a huge, well-ordered mechanism, a giant clockwork, whose gears and levers meshed with perfect mechanical precision.”¹

However, humans, in their pride, started to believe that they could know everything through reasoning and science. For many people, they believed that God (whoever he may be) could only be known through rational thought and empirical study. In other words, they denied that God had revealed himself in a special way. They also denied that God was continually involved with his creation. Thus, deism was born. “Deism is the historical result of the decay of robust Christian theism. That is, specific commitments and beliefs of traditional Christianity are gradually abandoned.”²

¹ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 49.

² *Ibid.*, 53.

John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher, was a confessed Christian, yet his ideas certainly reflect deism. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he writes the following:

Whatever God hath revealed is certainly true: no doubt can be made of it. This is the proper object of faith: but whether it be a divine revelation or no, reason must judge; which can never permit the mind to reject a greater evidence to embrace what is less evident, nor allow it to entertain probability in opposition to knowledge and certainty. There can be no evidence that any traditional revelation is of divine original, in the words we receive it, and in the sense we understand it, so clear and so certain as that of the principles of reason: and therefore Nothing that is contrary to, and inconsistent with, the clear and self-evident dictates of reason, has a right to be urged or assented to as a matter of faith, wherein reason hath nothing to do.³

That passage shows that Locke placed human reasoning above divine revelation. His philosophy allows human beings to judge what is and what is not a word from God.

Before we look at the worldview of deists, it should be noted that not all deists thought (and think) in the same way. This statement could be said of all worldviews. There are actually two forms of deism: “warm” deism, which was more sympathetic to Christianity, and “cold” deism, which rejected Christianity. The French philosopher and writer Voltaire (1690-1778), was a cold deist, opposed to Christianity. Locke was probably a warm deist in reality, as was Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). They believed in the immortality of the soul, for example, even though they believed in the primacy of human thinking. Warm deists are like people today who claim to be Christians but don’t believe that all of the Bible is true.

Other famous deists include David Hume (1711-1776), the Scottish philosopher; Thomas Paine (1737-1809), the author of *Common Sense*, which defended the Revolutionary War, and *The Age of Reason*, which advocated for deism; and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who made his own version of the Gospels (*The Life and Morals of Jesus*) by cutting out all supernatural events, including all miracles and the resurrection.

In order to understand the worldview of deism, I will use James Sire’s eight worldview questions as well as his definitions. These definitions reflect cold deism, though there is some overlap with warm deism.

Worldview question 1: What is prime reality—the really real?

“A transcendent God, as a First Cause, created the universe but then left it to run on its own. God is thus not immanent, not triune, not fully personal, not sovereign over human affairs, not providential.”⁴ The God of the deism is not the God of the Bible. Deists reject the triune, personal, living God who sustains his creation and interacts with it. Instead, they believe in a vaguely defined God who created the universe and then walked away from it.

³ John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 4.18, quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 50.

⁴ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 51.

Worldview question 2: What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

“The cosmos God created is determined, because it is created as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system; no miracle is possible.”⁵ The universe is closed—God does not interfere with it. Therefore, every event is the result of a previous cause, which is the result of a previous cause, and so on. God, the First Cause of all things, does not interfere with the process of causes and events. “Any tampering or apparent tampering with the machinery of the universe would suggest that God had made a mistake in the original plan, and that would be beneath the dignity of an all-competent deity.”⁶

Worldview question 3: What is a human being?

“Human beings, though personal, are a part of the clockwork of the universe.”⁷ Deists believe that they have intelligence and will, but they have a sense that they, too, are cogs in the machine of the universe. This idea should lead deists to believe they can’t act in significant ways, that all of life is predetermined. However, deists don’t believe that. They are usually quite moral, and the deists in the Age of Enlightenment were very interested in ethics.

Consider what D. A. Carson writes, rather sarcastically, about the views of deism.

God is spectacularly great. Think of the unmeasured eons necessary to travel from galaxy to galaxy at the speed of light. And how many galaxies are there? Where is the end? And God made it all! He is bigger than all of it, incalculably huge, transcendently glorious. So of course you cannot expect him to concern himself with your two-bit existence down here. You have as much significance to him as a nanoparticle has to us. . . . Why should God give a snap about you? He may have wound the entire universe up like a big old-fashioned watch, but now it is running down without any input from him, doing its own thing.⁸

Worldview question 4: What happens to a person at death?

“Human beings may or may not have a life beyond their physical existence.”⁹ Warm deists would believe in eternal life, but cold deists would not. However, since deism generally rejects revelation from God, there would be no way of knowing with certainty what comes after death. (For, as we saw in our section on knowledge, that is information that is beyond our ability to know directly.) Since deism was born out of Christianity, deists often retained elements of the Christian worldview, particularly if those elements suited their liking. Therefore, many retained the idea of an afterlife.

⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 44.

⁹ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 53.

Worldview question 5: Why is it possible to know anything at all?

“Through our innate and autonomous human reason and the methods of science, we can not only know the universe but we can infer at least something of what God is like. The cosmos, this world, is understood to be in its normal state; it is not fallen or abnormal.”¹⁰ This answer reveals something quite telling about deists: they do not believe in the Fall. At least, they do not believe that sin has affected the way people think and act. Rather, they believe that the mental equipment of human beings is intact, able to function without any problems. Deists believed they could know God by examining his works. “The God who was discovered by the deists was an architect, but not a lover or a judge or personal in any way. He was not one who acted in history. He simply had left the world alone.”¹¹

Worldview question 6: How do we know what is right and wrong?

“Ethics is intuitive or limited to general revelation; because the universe is normal, it reveals what is right.”¹² Once again, we see how deists reject the notion of total depravity. They think that humans naturally have the capacity to do good and know right from wrong. Consider this stunning passage from Alexander Pope (1688-1744) in his philosophical poem, *Essay on Man*:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All change, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And, spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.¹³

It hardly takes any reflection to know that whatever is is not always right. There are many choices and many actions that are evil. As Sire rightly observes, “This position ends in destroying ethics. If whatever is is right, then there is no evil. Good becomes indistinguishable from evil.”¹⁴ This thought reveals the inconsistency of deistic thought.

Worldview question 7: What is the meaning of human history?

“History is linear, for the course of the cosmos was determined at creation. Still the meaning of the events of history remains to be understood by the application of human reason to the data unearthed and made available to historians.”¹⁵ Christian theism acknowledges that history is linear—it is moving in a line towards a goal. However, Christians know that one day Jesus will return to judge all humanity and make everything new. The deist, however, believes that continued study, evidence, and reason will lead humanity toward the proper goal of history. Given enough time, the deist believes, humans will figure everything out and make everything

¹⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹¹ Ibid., 55.

¹² Ibid., 56.

¹³ Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* 1.289-94, quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 56.

¹⁴ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 56-57.

¹⁵ Ibid., 57.

right. All we need is more time, more education, and scientific and technological progress and all will be well.

Worldview question 8: What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

“Cold deists use their autonomous reason to determine their goal in life; warm deists may reflect on their commitment to a somewhat personal God and determine their goal in accordance with what they believe their God would be pleased with.”¹⁶ Many of the deists mentioned above were committed to social welfare. They were interested in the public good, as well individual liberty.

This quest for liberty was both a blessing and a curse. The very thing that gives us the freedom to worship as we choose also allows human beings to believe they are free from any authority, even God’s. It can lead people to fool themselves into thinking they are autonomous. It is no surprise that the Age of Enlightenment gave birth to the French Revolution. (And it is no surprise that Thomas Paine supported this revolution.) The French Revolution started in 1789, a few years after the American Revolution. American revolted against England. France revolted against the monarchy and the Catholic Church. The difference between the revolutions is that France also rebelled against God.

The rebels produced the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which stated, in part, that “the source of all sovereignty is located in essence in the nation; no body, no individual can exercise authority which does not emanate from it expressly.” It doesn’t take long to think about the implications of this statement. Nothing outside of France—even God—has authority over France.

The French Revolution led to the execution of King Louis XVI in 1793. In that same year, there came the “Reign of Terror,” a time of violence and a weakened government. At the end of this period, Napoleon Bonaparte came to power and eventually declared himself to be emperor.¹⁷

Deism today

Deism might appear to be a thing of the past, but it is not. It is alive and well, even though it doesn’t go by the name of deism. Remember that over 90 percent of Americans believe in God. But who is this God? Is he the God of the Bible or a god of one’s own creation? Most Americans, and surely most people who claim to Christian, are deists. Their God is a kind old man, a benevolent grandfather, who is not particularly concerned with the day-to-day operations of the world. But he created everything and he is available to answer our prayers when we get into a bind.

Many people today subscribe to a worldview that can be termed “moralistic therapeutic deism.” This phrase was coined by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, who

¹⁶ Ibid., 59.

¹⁷ See Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 200), 246-51.

produced a study on the religious beliefs of American teenagers. They summarized these beliefs in the following way:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.¹⁸

The God of that view places no demands on his creation. There is no demand to be holy or righteous or even good, except for the goal of entering heaven. In this view, the purpose of life is to be happy and feel good, whereas the purpose of life, in the Christian worldview, is to glorify God.

Of course, the Christian worldview also says that God is a personal God who has demands of us. All of us have failed to live up to those demands. We have all sinned. And sin is why things are wrong in the universe. Sin affects our reasoning and our morality. This problem of sin won't go away by being nice and seeking personal happiness.

A critique of deism

Deism substitutes human reason for the Bible as the supreme authority. It assumes that we can think rightly. It also assumes that we can be moral. However, our experience as human beings shows that even though we can reason, we still have great problems. People do not agree on what is right and what is wrong. When Christianity was still more prevalent, people tended to behave in ways that were generally Christian. In other words, the influence of Christianity helped deists live lives that were moral and upright (in general). But as deism drifted further from Christianity, people became more and more immoral. Deism does not address the problem of sin. It doesn't tell us why we can do good and do evil. It doesn't tell us why we die and how we can resolve that problem.

Deism does not tell us what is right and wrong. However, most people would disagree with Alexander Pope when he said that whatever is is right. Though we don't agree on what is right and what is wrong, every person would claim that certain things are wrong. On March 2 of this year, Piers Morgan interviewed Kirk Cameron on *Piers Morgan Tonight*, the talk show on CNN. Morgan, as he so often does, asked Cameron his views on gay marriage and abortion. Here is a portion of their conversation.

MORGAN: Do you think homosexuality is a sin?

¹⁸ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religions and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-63.

CAMERON: I think that it's -- it's unnatural. I think that it's -- it's detrimental and ultimately destructive to so many of the foundations of civilization.

MORGAN: What do you do if one of your six kids says, "Dad, bad news, I'm gay."

CAMERON: I'd sit down and have a heart to heart with them just like you would with your kids.

MORGAN: If one of my sons said that, I'd say, "That's great, son. As long as you're happy." What would you say?

CAMERON: Well, I wouldn't say, "That's great, son, as long as you're happy." I'm going to say, you know, "There's all sorts of issues that we need to wrestle through in our life. Just because you feel one way doesn't mean we should act on everything that we feel."

MORGAN: And yet some people would say that telling kids that being gay is a sin or getting married is a sin or whatever, that in itself is incredibly destructive and damaging in a country where seven states now have legalized it.

CAMERON: Yes, but you have to also understand that you yourself are using a standard of morality to say that telling people such and such of a behavior is sinful. You're using a standard of morality to make that statement and say that that is terribly destructive. So everyone is going to have a standard against which they—

MORGAN: No, no, no, listen, listen. I'm not an American. I'm making the point that seven states in America have now legalized gay marriage.

CAMERON: Well, Piers, you're speaking to a man who's a Christian and I believe that all of us are sinful. I could stand at the top of the list and say that I need a savior and I need an overhaul of the heart more than anyone.

And so that's what I teach my kids. I teach them the values that I hold dear. I treasure the God that loves me and forgives me of my sin. I would teach that to my children, as well as having a wonderful relationship with them that my wife and I work on every single day.

So your value system, my value system, we're all going to pick a standard against which we judge behavior morally. All of our laws ultimately, at their core, are going to be based on a moral evaluation.

MORGAN: So what's your view of abortion?

CAMERON: I think that it's wrong.

MORGAN: Under any circumstances?

CAMERON: Under any circumstances.

MORGAN: Even rape and incest?

CAMERON: I think someone who is ultimately willing to murder a child, even to fix another tragic end, a devastating situation like rape or incest or things like that, is not taking the moral high road. I think that we're compounding the problem by also murdering a little child.

MORGAN: Could you honestly look a daughter in the eye if she was raped and say you have got to have that child?

CAMERON: Yes, and I will help you.

MORGAN: You would do that?

CAMERON: Yes, of course.

MORGAN: I find that amazing that people would say that.

CAMERON: Because I love my daughter. I love that little child. This is a little creature made in God's image. Perhaps—imagine if you were the result of that and you had been aborted. We wouldn't be here having this conversation. So I value life above all things.

After talking about Cameron's recent documentary, *Monumental*, which discusses the roots of freedom in America, the conversation turned to that very issue.

MORGAN: When you talk about freedom, a lot of what we talked about before is about stopping people having freedom, isn't it? About stopping them getting married, if they're gay. It's about stopping them having an abortion, if they get raped. That's not freedom. That is stopping people have the right to do things they want to do.

CAMERON: Well, it's a bit of a double standard because you have to understand that there are those of us who hold values very dear and precious to us—

MORGAN: Freedom is fine as long as we subscribe to your values.

CAMERON: Or your values.

MORGAN: It can't be both, because we have different values.

CAMERON: That's right, precisely.

MORGAN: Whose do you take?

CAMERON: I take my values. You take your values. What I'm interested in, with my documentary, is to reveal the fact that the things that we have come to love in

our country were ultimately produced by a certain root. And I want to know what that is.¹⁹

Morgan has said that he grew up a Catholic and that he believes in God. I suspect that he is a deist. He seems to suggest that whatever is popular is right. This is an ethics of the polls. Since gay marriage has been approved by several states, it must be right. That is his thinking. Any attempt to stop gay marriage or abortion is an attack on freedom. You'll not notice that he assumes that purpose of life is to be happy. He would tell his son, "Whatever makes you happy," even if that happiness infringed on the happiness of another. That's exactly what happens in the case of abortion. No one asks the baby in the womb if an abortion will infringe upon his or her happiness.

Piers Morgan cannot say why human beings should have freedom, why they should have rights. His worldview cannot accurately account for what is right and wrong. Therefore, his worldview and Cameron's Christian worldview are at odds. Cameron, though, can point to the root of his morality, because it is found in God and his commands. He believes that human life is valuable because humans are made in the image of God. This would also be the foundation for believing that humans have fundamental rights. Morgan wants to borrow those rights from the Christian worldview, while not adhering to other parts of that same worldview, such as objective morality, which states that homosexuality and murder of any human life is wrong.

As we have now seen, one of the great problems of deism is inconsistency. This inconsistency is witnessed in the deist approach to the meaning of life. If God wound up the universe like a giant clock, then all that is left is for the universe to unwind. There is no significance to human life. Yet deists continue to believe that life has meaning.

A second problem also involves inconsistency. Deists believe that humans have personality (intelligence, will, emotions, etc.). If human beings have personality, wouldn't their Creator have a personality? Wouldn't he also be relational and couldn't we know him?

Thirdly, if God is powerful enough to create the universe, isn't he powerful enough to interact with it? A God who can create everything can heal people and raise them from the dead. He has the power to govern his universe as he pleases.

A fourth problem involves the purpose of life and morals. Assuming that the purpose of life is happiness or feeling good creates innumerable problems. What happens when the happiness of one infringes upon the happiness of another? Who decides what is right and wrong in that case? Freedom and happiness are not sufficient bases for morality.

If we know any "moralistic therapeutic deists," we should ask them, "How do you know your idea of God is right? How do you know that happiness is our goal? What happens if the happiness of others interferes with our happiness? How do we know if we are ever good enough to go to heaven?"

¹⁹ The full transcript is available at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1203/02/pmt.01.html> (accessed April 29, 2012).

NATURALISM

Perhaps the greatest rival to the Christian worldview today is naturalism. This is the worldview that believes that the only thing that exists is matter. This worldview maintains that there is no God. It is the worldview of atheistic evolutionists. Sadly, moralistic therapeutic deists, agnostics, and even some who claim to be Christians have adapted many elements of this worldview.

When deists gave up on the God of the Bible, the natural step was to give up on God altogether. After all, if everything can be discovered, understood, and solved through human reasoning, science, and technology, who needs God at all? As Sire explains, “In theism God is the infinite-personal Creator and sustainer of the cosmos. In deism God is reduced; he begins to lose his personality, though he remains Creator and (by implication) sustainer of the cosmos. In naturalism God is further reduced; he loses his very existence.”²⁰

Let us turn once again to Sire’s eight worldview questions in order to understand what naturalism is.

Worldview question 1: What is the prime reality—the really real?

“Prime reality is matter. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.”²¹ As the astrophysicist and popular science writer Carl Sagan once said, “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”²² The cosmos, or universe, is the only thing that matters. It is interesting how “the universe” becomes a God-substitute, one that elicits religious awe from naturalists. One need only hear Richard Dawkins marvel at natural selection in order to know what the naturalist’s religion is.

Naturalists believe the universe always existed in some form. We will look scientific issues later, but for now it is enough to know that naturalists believe the universe created itself, was born of another universe, or came about through some other natural process.

Worldview question 2: What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

“The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.”²³ Once again, a closed system is not open to adjustments or reordering from the outside. Within this closed system, everything works in a regular, uniform way. One cause leads to the next effect, which becomes the next cause that leads to another effect, which itself becomes a cause of still another effect, and so on.

Some naturalists are reductive naturalists. They believe that absolutely everything in the universe is physical and material in nature. Nonreductive naturalists, on the other hand, believe that everything is physical in nature, but allow for some nonmaterial realities such as consciousness, intentionality, and values.

²⁰ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

²² Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4; quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 68.

²³ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 70.

Worldview question 3: What is a human being?

“Human beings are complex ‘machines’; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.”²⁴ If the only thing that exists is matter, then all we are is matter. Our thoughts are simply the result of matter, of biological and chemical processes that have evolved over the millennia.

Yet naturalists continue to believe that humans are valuable and unique, even though we have simply evolved from lesser species. “By stressing our humanness (our distinctness from the rest of the cosmos), a naturalist finds a basis for value, for, it is held, intelligence, cultural sophistication, a sense of right and wrong not only are human distinctives but are what make us valuable.”²⁵

Worldview question 4: What happens to a person at death?

“Death is extinction of personality and individuality.”²⁶ The naturalist does not believe in heaven or hell. There is no afterlife.

Consider what Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British philosopher, writes about humankind and death:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only with the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.²⁷

A cheery thought, isn’t it?

Worldview question 5: Why is it possible to know anything at all?

“Through our innate and autonomous human reason, including the methods of science, we can know the universe. The cosmos, including this world, is understood to be in its normal state.”²⁸ Though naturalists reject God, they still believe in truth. Postmodern naturalists would say that we cannot know the truth. Some naturalists would say we can know certain truths but perhaps not ultimate truths.

²⁴ Ibid., 71.

²⁵ Ibid., 73.

²⁶ Ibid., 74.

²⁷ Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship,” in *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957, 107; quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 74.

²⁸ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 75.

Worldview question 6: How do we know what is right and wrong?

“Ethics is related only to human beings.”²⁹ Though naturalists are often ethical, they have no ultimate basis for their ethics. They may believe that ethics is based on what is practical and useful. This is the pragmatic view of ethics. They may believe that ethics should be based on what provides the greatest good to the greatest amount of people. That is the utilitarian view of ethics. Or they may believe that whatever is popular is right. That, as mentioned above, is the ethics of the polls.

However, in order for there to be rights and wrongs, humans must have a higher consciousness, one that animals do not possess. Otherwise, there would be no right and wrong. It would only be what we do. After all, we don’t look at the animal kingdom and judge the various species’ actions as right and wrong. So, for ethics to be possible in the naturalistic worldview, humans must have a sense of right and wrong and an ability to choose between the two.

This presents a great problem for naturalism. In naturalism, there is only the *is*. That is what has evolved. But a naturalist must account for the *ought*. Where does this come from? Everyone has a sense of duty, a sense of what is right and wrong. Everyone uses *ought* or *should* or *must* (or their negations). Why should *ought* come from *is*? As Sire observes, “The major question is this: How does *ought* derive from *is*? Traditional ethics, that is, the ethics of Christian theism, affirms the transcendent origin of ethics and locates in the infinite-personal God the measure of the good.”³⁰ But how does the atheist account for objective morality?

Worldview question 7: What is the meaning of human history?

“History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.”³¹ History is moving in a line to somewhere. It is evolving. But apparently it is evolving without any goal in mind, without any purpose. Long ago, something happened—a singularity—that accounts for the origin of this universe. Exactly how this came about is a matter of speculation. There are no shortage of answers. But exactly *why* this came about, no one can say. Or, to be more precise, no naturalist can say.

There are Christians who believe in evolution. They are called theistic evolutionists. They believe that God ordained and directed evolution toward his purposes, towards a certain goal. The atheistic evolutionist, the naturalist, does not believe in any type of divinity, much less a divine goal.

Worldview question 8: What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

“Naturalism itself implies no particular core commitment on the part of any given naturalist. Rather core commitments are adopted unwillingly or chosen by individuals.”³² Without a God who tells us what the purpose of life is, and without purpose and meaning in

²⁹ Ibid., 76.

³⁰ Ibid., 78.

³¹ Ibid., 80.

³² Ibid., 84.

history, human beings are left to choose whatever they want. We might even say they have become their own gods.

The absurdity of life without God

I do not think that a consistent naturalist can live a meaningful life. In the naturalist worldview (assuming it is held in a consistent fashion), there is no ultimate or greater meaning to life. This is what William Lane Craig writes about the atheistic worldview:

The atheistic worldview is insufficient to maintain a happy and consistent life. Man cannot live consistently and happily as though life were ultimately without meaning, value, or purpose. If we try to live consistently within the framework of the atheistic worldview, we shall find ourselves profoundly unhappy. If instead we manage to live happily, it is only by giving the lie to our worldview.³³

You are not likely to meet a consistent atheist. If you did, you would find a miserable and frightened human being. You would find a person who acknowledges that life is without meaning, without purpose, and without hope. I don't think that person, if he or she fully embraced this worldview, would maintain his or her sanity, or life, very long. In other words, this worldview is not existentially viable.

Consider all the results of there being no God: There would be no purpose to life, no greater goal than surviving for as long as possible. There would be objective right and wrong. Little would separate us from animals. No final punishment would await evil people who escape this life without retribution.

Randy Alcorn illustrates the absurdity of the naturalist worldview, particularly when contrasted with the Christian worldview. This is how Dinesh D'Souza describes Alcorn's presentation:

The Reverend Randy Alcorn, founder of Eternal Perspective Ministries in Oregon, sometimes presents his audiences with two creation stories and asks them whether it matters which one is true. In the secular account, "You are the descendant of a tiny cell of primordial protoplasm washed up on an empty beach three and a half billion years ago. You are the blind and arbitrary product of time, chance, and natural forces. You are a mere grab bag of atomic particles, a conglomeration of genetic substance. You exist on a tiny planet in a minute solar system in an empty corner of a meaningless universe. You are a purely biological entity, different only in degree but not in kind from a microbe, virus, or amoeba. You have no essence beyond your body, and at death you will cease to exist entirely. In short, you came from nothing and are going nowhere."

In the Christian view, by contrast, "You are the special creation of a good and all-powerful God. You are created in His image, with capacities to think, feel, and worship that set you above all other life forms. You differ from the

³³ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 84.

animals not simply in degree but in kind. Not only is your kind unique, but you are unique among your kind. Your Creator loves you so much and so intensely desires your companionship and affection that He has a perfect plan for your life. In addition, God gave the life of His only Son that you might spend eternity with Him. If you are willing to accept the gift of salvation, you can become a child of God.”

Now imagine two groups of people—let’s call them the secular tribe and the religious tribe—who subscribe to these two worldviews. Which of the two tribes is more likely to survive, prosper, and multiply? The religious tribe is made up of people who have an animating sense of purpose. The secular tribe is made up of people who are not sure why they exist. The religious tribe is composed of individuals who view their every thought and action as consequential. The secular tribe is made up of matter that cannot explain why it is able to think at all.³⁴

It seems to me that this approach would be an extremely effective way of exposing the absurdity—and the utter despair—of a naturalistic worldview. We need to help people see how a consistent atheistic, naturalistic worldview not only leads to despair, but gives us no ultimate and objective foundation for truth or morality.

The Christian worldview presents a better story. It is certainly a more compelling and attractive story. This does not, of course, prove that the Christian story is true. A bleak story could very well be more true. Some atheists act as though they are more noble and brave because they face their meaningless existence unflinchingly. In the end, coherence, consistency, and explanatory power are greater criteria for a worldview. But it helps to know that our worldview is more compelling. We should use this to our advantage.

Kenneth Richard Samples juxtaposes the Christian worldview with the naturalist worldview in a helpful chart table found in his worldview book, *A World of Difference*. Once again, this table shows us how the Christian worldview is superior in every way.³⁵

³⁴ Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s So Great About Christianity?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007), 17-18.

³⁵ The following table is from Kenneth Richard Samples, *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth-Claims to the Worldview Test* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 214.

Naturalist Worldview	Christian Worldview
<p>Origin of the Universe The physical universe emerged from nothing, by no one, and without a specific plan or purpose.</p>	<p>Origin of the Universe The universe was created <i>ex nihilo</i> by an infinite, eternal, and tripersonal God for his own glory.</p>
<p>Design in the Universe Order, regularity, and fine-tuning in the universe emerged coincidentally (possibly with other worlds).</p>	<p>Design in the Universe Order, regularity, and fine-tuning in the universe came from God’s creative plan and purpose.</p>
<p>First Life Life somehow emerged accidentally from nonliving matter through purely natural processes.</p>	<p>First Life God, who possesses life in himself (as an eternal and everlasting being), created the various life-forms.</p>
<p>Personhood Persons emerged from the impersonal and unintelligent natural processes and forces.</p>	<p>Personhood As a superpersonal (Triune) being, god made human beings personal and intelligent creatures.</p>
<p>Minds Mindless and/or nonconscious natural processes produced beings with minds that are self-conscious.</p>	<p>Minds God’s infinite, eternal, and self-conscious mind is the cause of the finite self-conscious minds of his creatures.</p>
<p>Rationality Human rational faculties and sensory organs came from a blind, nonrational survival mechanism.</p>	<p>Rationality Human rational faculties and sensory organs were created in the image of the all-wise God.</p>
<p>Morality Blind, impersonal, and nonmoral natural forces stand behind purely human moral conventions.</p>	<p>Morality God is a perfect moral being, and his holy character is the source and foundation of all moral goodness.</p>
<p>Epistemological Content Information, knowledge, and truth came from a blind, impersonal, and unintelligent natural source.</p>	<p>Epistemological Content Information, knowledge, and truth came from an infinitely wise and rational God who is Truth.</p>
<p>Aesthetics Beauty and elegant theories came from blind, purposeless, and valueless natural processes.</p>	<p>Aesthetics Beauty and elegant theories came directly from God’s creative power and infinitely wise mind.</p>
<p>Human Value Humans are the product of valueless, purposeless, and accidental natural processes and forces.</p>	<p>Human Values Humans have inherent dignity, moral worth, and absolute rights because they bear God’s image.</p>
<p>Human Volition People emerged from mechanistic natural forces beyond their personal volitional control.</p>	<p>Human volition People were created with free agency by a God who has supreme freedom of choice and action.</p>
<p>Human Meaning While there is no ultimate meaning to human life, there may be subjective meaning in life by choice.</p>	<p>Human Meaning Human beings find their ultimate meaning, purpose, and significance in their Creator and Redeemer.</p>

A critique of naturalism

Naturalism is appealing because it claims science and empirical data as its foundational basis. In a world that trusts science more than God—indeed, in a world that doesn’t want there to be a God—naturalism provides an attractive alternative. As Sire concludes, “What makes

naturalism so persistent? There are two basic answers. First, it gives the impression of being honest and objective. One is asked to accept only what appears to be based on facts and on the assured results of scientific investigation or scholarship. Second, to a vast number of people it appears to be coherent.”³⁶ I would also add that this worldview has been widely accepted in academic circles. Those who do not adhere to this view of the universe are often bullied and accused of being ignorant, naïve, and stupid.

If this worldview were the true one, we would have to consider what it would mean for our existence. Without God, we would not have the benefits of God. We would not have a sense of purpose. We would have no hope after death. We would have no objective basis for truth or ethics. In fact, we wouldn’t even have a good basis for knowledge.

There is one fatal flaw in naturalism that will not go away. Naturalism states that everything has evolved. Natural selection maintains that the main goal in evolution is survival of the species. If evolution is real, everything is fitted for survival, including our brains. This is what atheistic evolutionist Richard Dawkins writes:

I now want to pursue the point mentioned above, that the way we see the world, and the reason why we find some things intuitively easy to grasp and others hard is that *our brains are themselves evolved organs*: on-board computers evolved to help us survive in the world.³⁷

Even Dawkins understands that the brain has not evolved to know things as they are, but only in ways that help us navigate this world. In other words, our brains are not evolved to help us know absolute truth. Rather, they are evolved primarily to help us to survive. (Also, notice that he refers to our brains as computers, which are not inherently intelligent, only programmable. That’s a frightening conclusion.) Absolute truth may, in some cases, help us to survive, but evolution certainly would not guarantee our ability to ascertain what is true. Think about this: if it were true that life has no overarching purpose or meaning, it would be advantageous not to know this, because it could lead to depression and despair, and this would be a hindrance to our survival.

Since all non-spiritual knowledge comes to us through our five senses to our brains, if our brains are not evolved to understand absolute truth, how can we know that we are seeing the world and the universe as they actually are? Perhaps we are only observing what helps us survive.

Tim Keller captures the evolutionist’s dilemma in a concise fashion.

Evolutionists say that if God makes sense to us, it is not because he is really there, it’s only because that belief helped us survive and so we are hardwired for it. However, if we can’t trust our belief-forming faculties to tell us the truth about God, why should we trust them to tell us the truth about anything,

³⁶ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 92.

³⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 367.

including evolutionary science? If our cognitive faculties only tell us what we need to survive, not what is true, why trust them about anything at all?³⁸

Keller points out that the theory of evolution is a product of human brains. If, as the evolutionists would have it, that religion is simply an invention of human brains, then what makes the theory of evolution any different?

Please do not think that only Christians have come to this conclusion. Charles Darwin himself acknowledged this possibility towards the end of his life. In a letter written the year before he died, he wrote, “The horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust the conviction of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”³⁹

Samples uses this idea to critique the naturalist worldview.

According to the naturalist worldview, the source or foundation of man’s reasoning was not itself rational (endowed with reason), nor was it personal (self-aware, intelligent), and it was not teleological (purposive) in nature. Rather it was a nonrational and impersonal process without purpose consisting of a combination of genetic mutation, variation, and environmental factors (natural selection).⁴⁰

We must remember that the Christian worldview maintains that a personal, immaterial, and rational God created everything. Because he is rational, we are rational and intelligence is evident in the design of the universe, including our bodies and all of nature around us. Because God is immaterial, yet capable of creating matter, we have immaterial realities such as logic, emotions, thoughts, values, consciences, and so forth. Because God is personal, we are personal, not mere machines housing on-board computers. Science requires that an effect requires a cause, and the effect cannot be greater than the cause. It makes no sense for nonrational matter to evolve somehow into rational creatures.

Naturalism has a difficult time not only with regards to consistency, but also with respect to explanatory power and scope. As the table above shows, naturalism seems to explain very little, particularly when compared to Christianity. Naturalism cannot explain values, aesthetics, and meaning. It cannot explain morality, particularly why we all feel a sense of right and wrong inside ourselves. We all know when we do things that disagree with our conscience. The is (what we do) sometimes violates the ought (our conscience, what we know we should do). Evolution cannot account for this.

Interestingly, atheistic evolutionists have to borrow from other worldviews (particularly the Christian one) in order to make the claim that religion is immoral. The late Christopher Hitchens made such a claim. His book, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*,

³⁸ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 142.

³⁹ From a letter to W. Graham (July 3, 1881), in *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin and Selected Letters* (1892; repr., New York: Dover, 1958), quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 103-104.

⁴⁰ Samples, *A World of Difference*, 210-11

makes such a claim.⁴¹ However, this claim needs an objective moral basis, something that naturalism cannot provide.

A quote by Hitchens reveals something else about naturalism. “And here is the point, about myself and my co-thinkers. Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because they are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason.”⁴² First of all, as we have already seen, all knowledge requires faith. There is no way around this. For an atheist to say his belief is not a belief is special pleading. Secondly, we should ask Hitchens, “Where does reason come from? If our minds have evolved, can we trust them to be rational?” Thirdly, science itself does not rest on science.

I’ll explain that last point. You may recall that accepted definitions of science rest on presuppositions, assumptions about how the world works.⁴³ Any definition of science cannot actually be proved through empirical testing or observation. Rather, the definition of science is actually a philosophical one. It rules out the supernatural (i.e., God) from the very beginning. Such a definition favors naturalism.

I have already said much about naturalism. We shall return to the problems of evolution as well as the claims of atheists. For now, it will suffice for us to consider the problems of the naturalistic worldview. Should we encounter people who hold such a worldview, we must point out the inconsistencies within it and show them how the Christian worldview is superior.

NIHILISM

Historically, the Christian worldview was abandoned in favor of deism. Once reason and science supplanted God as the authority, it was easier to deny God. The denial of God led to naturalism. However, once naturalism was established, some people grasped the consequences of this worldview. Naturalism, if consistently held as a worldview, meant that life had no meaning, no purpose. Those who embraced this inevitable conclusion were nihilists. According to Sire,

Strictly speaking, nihilism is a denial of any philosophy or worldview—a denial of the possibility of knowledge, a denial that anything is valuable. If it proceeds to the absolute denial of everything, it even denies the reality of existence itself. In other words, nihilism is the negation of everything—knowledge, ethics, beauty, reality. In nihilism no statement has validity; nothing has meaning.⁴⁴

According to Douglas Groothuis, “Nihilism has many dimensions, but its core is the denial of objective value of any kind: moral, aesthetic, intellectual and so on.”⁴⁵ As with any worldview, there are many particular flavors of nihilism. Some nihilists believe that there is absolutely no

⁴¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³ See page 140 above for a definition of science.

⁴⁴ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 94.

⁴⁵ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 342.

meaning. Other nihilists believe that there is no absolute meaning or value. (The difference between the two is that the latter group of nihilists believe in subjective, or manmade, meaning.)

Nihilism developed in the early nineteenth century, though it is most famously associated with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). “For Nietzsche, there is no objective order or structure in the world except what we give it.”⁴⁶ According to Nietzsche, “Nihilism is . . . not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one’s shoulder to the plough; *one destroys.*”⁴⁷ He believed that this denial of meaning not only destroyed everything, but would one push all of civilization into a type of catastrophe.

One can most easily see nihilism’s influence by examining its affect on the arts. In the twentieth century, art devolved from something concerned with beauty and truth into harshness, ugliness, chaos, and meaninglessness. Consider the composer John Cage (1912-1992), who wrote a piece of “music” called *4’33”*. The piece requires the “performer” to do nothing for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. The only sounds, if any, are the sounds of the audience. Cage’s message seems to be, “I have nothing to say and I’m saying it.”

Playwrights like Samuel Becket; novelists like Franz Kafka; and countless other painters and musicians also embraced nihilism. They considered what a life without God and meaning meant. They pondered the absurdity of such a life. They acknowledged that if there is no God, we have simply evolved. We are the effects of earlier causes, and while it may seem as though we are free, it is only an appearance. The reality is that we are the products of genetic mutation, time, and chance. In a closed system, everything is caused by something else.

Naturalism held that humans can know things through science and reason. But the nihilist realizes that if naturalism is true, we cannot trust our minds. We cannot know that we know. For us to know that we know, someone outside the system, outside the “box” of our existence, would have to tell us. But since there is no god, there is no one who can tell us we know. There is no one who can tell us life has meaning. There is no one who can tell us what is right and what is wrong.

Nietzsche embraced this view. He did not believe in God or objective, moral facts, or objective truth. However, to embrace fully this view is to have no purpose for living, no moral compass, not truth to live by. The sad thing is that the nihilist can never be sure of his own nihilism. It is an inherently unstable and self-defeating worldview. According to Norman Geisler, “The negation of all being is self-defeating, since one has to exist in order to deny all existence. Those who do not exist do not deny anything. Likewise, the denial of all value is self-refuting, since the very denial involves the belief that there is value in making this denial.”⁴⁸

That is why we rarely meet nihilists. Most naturalists simply cannot be consistent in their worldview. They pretend that there is meaning in life. They pretend that there are morals we can know, truths we can live by. They do this because it is more existentially viable to pretend that life has meaning than to embrace the consequences of their own worldview.

⁴⁶ Alan Pratt, “Nihilism,” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nihilism/> (accessed May 17, 2012).

⁴⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*; quoted in Pratt, “Nihilism.”

⁴⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 540.

James Sire sees a major problem with nihilism. “At every step, at every moment, nihilists think, and think their thinking has substance, and thus they cheat on their philosophy.”⁴⁹ He identifies five reasons for why nihilism is unlivable. One, if there is truly no meaning and morality, all actions are equally valid. One can commit suicide or go see a movie—it is all the same. Two, nihilists trust their own thinking, thus cheating on their worldview. After all, if the universe is meaningless and our minds cannot be trusted, their thinking is meaningless, too. Three, practical nihilism has limits. Nihilism is essentially a parasite on meaning. But when everything is denied, what is left? Four, nihilism is the death of art. One need only trace the history of art music in the twentieth century to know this is true. Five, nihilism creates serious psychological problems for the nihilist. “People cannot live with it because it denies what every fiber of their waking being calls for—meaning, value, significance, dignity, worth.”⁵⁰

Understandably, nihilism is not a popular or common worldview. It defeats itself from the start. It is easy to see why nihilism led to existentialism.

EXISTENTIALISM

Naturalism logically needs to nihilism, which is not viable for life. Therefore, some philosophers created a possible solution: existentialism. Existentialism can be defined in this manner: “A loose title for various philosophies that emphasize certain common themes: the individual, the experience of choice, and the absence of rational understanding of the universe with a consequent dread or sense of absurdity in human life.”⁵¹ The point of existentialism is to transcend naturalism and nihilism, to find a way to live in the midst of a universe with no purpose.

Existentialism thrived in the middle of the twentieth century. It has two forms, atheistic existentialism and theistic existentialism. The difference between the two, naturally, is that the former denies the existence of God while the latter embraces him.

Atheistic existentialism is associated with the French authors Albert Camus (1913-1960) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). These authors wrestled with the absurdity of human existence in a meaningless world. They wondered how humans can live meaningful lives in such a predicament.

Sire’s worldview questions 1 (about reality), 4 (regarding death), 5 (knowledge), 6 (ethics), and 7 (meaning of history) can be answered this way, according to atheistic existentialism:

Matter exists eternally; God does not exist. Death is extinction of personality and individuality. Through our innate and autonomous human reason, including the methods of science, we can know the universe. The cosmos, including this world, is understood to be in its normal state. Ethics is related only to human beings.

⁴⁹ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁵¹ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 125.

History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.”⁵²

The second worldview question, regarding the nature of the universe, receives this answer: “The cosmos is composed solely of matter, but to human beings reality appears in two forms—subjective and objective.”⁵³ The world simply is. The objective world is the world of the material, the physical, which can be measured by science. The subjective world is the world of the mind, of consciousness and awareness. When one contemplates the objective world in a naturalistic fashion (assumes there is no God, that all things are matter, including us), the result is nihilism, which is unlivable. Therefore, the existentialist favors the subjective world. The existentialist chooses to believe that his or her subjective experience is meaningful and valuable.

Before we continue to examine existentialism, we should observe something very important about this subjective-objective paradigm. The Christian worldview maintains that there is one view of reality. The subjective experience of the individual matches the objective world. Christians should not separate their faith from science or facts or reason. A relationship with God should not be separated our experience and knowledge of reality. However, beginning with the Enlightenment, reality was divided into two stories, to borrow the term that Nancy Pearcey uses.⁵⁴ The lower story was the realm of facts, reasoning, and science. The upper story was the realm of faith, values, and subjective experience. A diagram of this two-story view of life may look like this:

UPPER STORY: FAITH, VALUES, SUBJECTIVE EXISTENCE

LOWER STORY: FACTS, REASON, SCIENCE

Existentialists looked at the lower story, which supposedly represents the world as it really is, and found no hope. The lower story was the same as naturalism and nihilism: there is no purpose to life, no god, no heaven and hell, no objective moral law. Since the lower story is so unlivable, they cheat on their own worldview and leap to an upper story that ignores the reality of the lower story. In the upper story, the existentialist is able to focus on his or her existence. There may be no point to life, but existence is all we have.

The third worldview question, regarding the nature of human beings, finds this answer: “Human beings are complex ‘machines’; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand. For human beings alone existence precedes essence; people make themselves who they are.”⁵⁵ In other words, humans create their own essence. As Sartre writes in his essay, “Existentialism,” “If God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined in any concept,

⁵² Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 119.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Pearcey uses the upper story-lower story dichotomy, which she learned from Francis Schaeffer, in *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

⁵⁵ Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 121.

and . . . this being is man.” He then writes, “First of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, existentialists believe that each person is free to choose his or her own destiny. Each person is king of his or her subjective world.

Another part of the atheistic existentialist worldview, which touches on questions 2, 3, and 4 (the nature of the universe, of humanity, and of death), is that the objective world appears to be absurd. The objective world of facts is cold. We cannot change it. And we must face the greatest absurdity of all: death.

With regards to knowledge and ethics, the existentialist believes that humans can create value and meaning. According to Sartre,

If I’ve discarded God the Father, there has to be someone to invent values. You’ve got to take things as they are. Moreover, to say that we invent values means nothing else than this: life has no meaning *a priori*. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it’s up to you to give it meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning you choose. In that way, you see, there is a possibility of creating human community.⁵⁷

Of course, we all know that we cannot create reality. We also know that ethics cannot be created. We all have a sense of what is right and wrong, and we know that certain choices are morally abhorrent. We cannot say a person is creating his or her value or meaning if he or she is committing genocide. We know better. But if God were truly nonexistent—if God were dead, as it were—then anything would be permissible. In fact, that is the very thing Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky observed.⁵⁸

The problem with existentialism is that it does not solve the problems of nihilism. Rather, it simply shifts to solipsism, an extreme concern for the self or a belief that the only existent thing is the self. In other words, my existence is the only thing that matters. Not only is there no hope in such a worldview, but it can easily lead to immorality and a destruction of society.

In contrast to atheistic existentialism, theistic existentialism is very similar to Christian theism. It is associated with Christian philosophers and theologians like Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Karl Barth (1886-1968), and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). The difference between theistic existentialism and orthodox Christianity is that it does not start with God. It starts with human existence. This approach to Christianity makes it very subjective. It moves away from objective truth to the experience of God. It often devalues truth and places a greater emphasis on unsolvable paradoxes.

⁵⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism,” reprinted in *A Casebook on Existentialism*, ed. William V. Spanos (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1966), 278; quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 121.

⁵⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*; quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 124.

⁵⁸ “If there is no immortality, then all things are permitted.” Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. C. Garnett (New York: Signet Classics, 57); quoted in Gregory Alan Thornbury, “Prolegomena: Introduction to the Task of Theology,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 15.

This view is often associated with a liberal view of the Bible. The facts recorded in the Bible are of little importance. What is important is the story. So, the existentialist would say that whether or not Jesus actually rose from the grave is unimportant. What matters is that he has risen in my heart. The Jesus of history (the objective Jesus) is not important. What matters is believing in Jesus (the subjective Jesus).

It doesn't take long to see how dangerous such thoughts are. The Bible claims that the events it records are true. The birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus are historical facts. They belong to the objective world. If they were merely subjective, they could stand alongside many other subjective faiths. This would be pluralism of the highest order.

If what the Bible states is not true, there is no use in believing in it. It would be wish fulfillment. Believing in a mythical Jesus does nothing. Only if he actually died on the cross, satisfying the actual wrath of an actual God, and actually rising from the dead, can that actual God forgive us our actual sin. Without these historical events, there is no gospel.

Like nihilism, existentialism is ultimately a dead end. It is a poorly defined worldview with no foundations.

POSTMODERNISM

We have already discussed the postmodern view of truth.⁵⁹ Because postmodernism was critiqued there, and because the postmodern view is ultimately self-defeating, I won't spend much time discussing it here.

Postmodernism, like naturalism, nihilism, and existentialism, is not a well-defined worldview. In fact, postmodernists would deny that their views form a worldview. That is because they deny any metanarratives, or all-encompassing stories that explain the world. According to French sociologist Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism is defined by "incredulity toward metanarratives."⁶⁰ Postmodernists do not believe that one single story or worldview can be affirmed.

As stated above, postmodernists do not all believe the same things. They are generally skeptical about absolute truth claims. Some want to deconstruct the meaning of language while others think our use of language creates reality. Some believe that all truth claims are power plays, while others say the best we can do is tell our stories, even if they do not reflect absolute truth.

However, many postmodernists believe in science. A postmodernist could believe in Darwinian evolution, all the while stating that humans can create their own meaning and realities. Of course, if evolution is true, human beings are the products of blind forces operating within a closed system. That means there is no way we can escape being the effects of previous causes. If we are the products of evolution, so are our brains and our use of language. There is truly no way to create our own realities.

⁵⁹ See pp. 122-25 above.

⁶⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 24; quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 216.

The postmodern worldview is marked by such inconsistencies. A postmodernist might have not two stories (science in the lower story and language in the upper story, perhaps), but multiple stories, all containing beliefs that contradict the contents of the other stories. As long as these stories are kept separate, there is problem for the postmodernist. Postmodernism is therefore truly incoherent, because the various elements of a postmodernist's worldview do not cohere into a consistent whole.

Perhaps the best way to understand postmodernism is to compare it to Christian theism (the Christian worldview). The table below synthesizes Kenneth Richard Samples's summaries of both worldviews.⁶¹

	Christian Theism	Postmodernism (secular)
God	God is an infinite, eternal, immutable, morally perfect, and tripersonal spiritual being (Triune)—the transcendent Creator and sovereign Sustainer of all things.	No supernatural God or gods exist (atheism) and even if a deity did exist it could not be known objectively (all religions are on equal subjective grounds).
World	The time-space-matter universe was created by God <i>ex nihilo</i> [out of nothing] and thus has a real existence, yet is dependent upon God's providential power, control, and guidance.	Unlike other worldviews, this perspective is not centered upon questions of ultimate reality and being (but secular postmodernists embrace naturalism).
Knowledge	Authentic knowledge (of God, the self, and the world) is available to man through God's general and special revelation (via the created order and redemptive actions).	There is no objective, universal, and unbiased knowledge and truth (truth is solely a matter of context or perspective that is invented or socially constructed).
Ethics	Objective, universal, unchanging, and prescriptive moral values exist (absolutes) and find their source and ground in God's perfect and immutable moral character.	Moral values are relative to their cultural context so moral absolutes are rejected (though pluralism, tolerance, relativism, and inclusivism are virtual absolutes).
Human beings	Human beings were created in the image of God (as rational, moral, and spiritual beings) but have misused their freedom in order to sin and thus need redemption in Christ.	This perspective is suspicious of the very concept of an objective "human nature," but secular postmodernists generally embrace naturalistic evolutionary theory.
History	The linear direction of historical events is ordained by God and unfolds according to his sovereign will (including creation, Fall, redemption, glorification, new creation).	The concept of "historical progress" is viewed as concealing an oppressive agenda on the part [of] the modernists who embrace a failed metanarrative encapsulating history.

There are many problems with the postmodern worldview. One, claiming that there are no metanarratives is itself a metanarrative. Two, claiming we cannot know absolute truth

⁶¹ Samples, *A World of Difference*, 277-78.

becomes an absolute truth, and is therefore “self-referentially incoherent.”⁶² Three, any postmodernist who claims that language has no inherent meaning (this would be the deconstructionist’s view) must acknowledge that his or her own language has no meaning (thus, the universal acid of deconstruction deconstructs itself). But, of course, a deconstructionist never does this. Four, all relativists (in truth or ethics) do not make all things relative. In the realm of ethics, it is assumed that the only absolute ethic is tolerance. But the “tolerant” are intolerant of the intolerant. To be completely indiscriminating would require not discriminating against those who discriminate. But no one really does this.

HOW TO CRITIQUE A WORLDVIEW

In order to critique a worldview, we must first examine it. When sharing the gospel with our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors, we must first understand their worldview. What do they believe about truth, the purpose of life, death, ethics, and human history? What is the nature of the world and human beings? What is the problem of our existence and how do we fix it? These questions will help you try to understand the other person’s worldview.

Once the worldview is analyzed, try to identify it. Is it deism, naturalism, or postmodernism? More than likely, it is a mix of various worldviews.

When you have taken these steps, think about elements of that person’s worldview. Is the worldview incoherent or self-contradictory? Does it reflect human experience and human history? Can a person hold that worldview consistently and still live a productive life?

The chances are great that any non-Christian worldview contradicts itself and does not fully reflect human history and human experience. A person who holds a non-Christian worldview probably cheats on their professed worldview. (This is what happens when the naturalist assumes that his or her brain is unaffected by evolution, or when the truth-denying postmodernist insists that certain things are true.)

We need to graciously and gently point out the inconsistencies of these false worldviews. The best way of doing this is running a *reductio ad absurdum* on it. That means we assume their worldview is true, then we take that worldview and push it to its ultimate and inevitable conclusions. If evolution is true, then we are products of our evolution, and so are our brains, which are fitted for survival, not to know absolute truth, including the truth of evolution. Or, if religious belief is merely a product of evolution, adopted to help us survive, then so is the belief in evolution. In other words, we take their worldview and reduce it to absurd statements, simply by saying, if A (evolution is true), then B (our minds are the products of evolution), which leads to C (our brains don’t necessarily know absolute truth, only that which helps us survive), which is absurd.

⁶² Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 239.