

## 1 **Theism and Deism**

- Module: Worldviews
- Lesson 19

## 2 **Some Recommended Sources For Worldviews**

- Abdu Murray, Grand Central Question
- James Sire, The Universe Next Door
- Winfried Corduan, Neighboring Faiths, and In the Beginning God
- Norman Geisler, "Worldview" in The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics

## 3 **THEISM (Monotheism)**

- The Primary Theistic Religions
  - Judaism
  - Christianity
  - Islam
- Theism vs. Polytheism
  - Though polytheism believes in gods, per se, its polytheistic worldview differs considerably from that of monotheism.
  - We will consider polytheism within the category of continuity rather than theism.
- Wide Variety Among Theists: We will consider only a general description, employing Sire's Eight Worldview Questions.

## 4 **Theism: A General Description**

- What is prime reality?
  - A monotheistic God.
  - Personal knowable (not completely, but truly) (excluding Islam)
  - Infinite, transcendent/immanent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, perfectly good, loving, etc.
- What is the nature of external reality?
  - Material and real. Good.
  - Created by God.
  - Corrupted (not at it was intended to be).

## 5 **Theism: A General Description**

- What is the nature of humanness?
  - Dualistic, physical (material) and spiritual (immaterial soul).
  - Alienated from God due to sin.
- What happens at death?

- Ongoing existence (life) after death.
- Continuity with the pre-death person.
- Accountability (judgment for actions in the physical life)
- Eternal existence either w/God or separated from Him.

## 6 **Theism: A General Description**

- How can we know anything?
  - God is rational, thus his creation is rational.
  - God has made us capable of rationality and reason.
- How do we know right and wrong?
  - God is the source of objective moral duties and obligations.
  - God has given us a knowledge of objective values.
    - Through human conscience and reason.
    - Through revelation

## 7 **Theism: A General Description**

- What is the meaning of human history?
  - History is linear, not cyclical or eternal (w/o beginning).
  - History is the fulfillment of God's plan and purposes.
- What personal life-orienting commitments are implied?
  - Each person is made to obey God.
  - Each person is made to worship God

## 8 **How Did Monotheism Arise?**

- An Evolutionary (Darwinian) Model of Religion
  - Popular among ethnologists in the 19th and 20th centuries.
  - Few ethnologists openly defend this model of religious development today.
  - Regardless, it remains a common contemporary view of many.
    - The evolutionary model underlies much assessment and evaluation of religion today.
    - The model is strongly assumed by many atheists.
    - Lies behind the JEDP theory of the authorship of the Pentateuch. (More on this in our module on the bible.)

## 9 **Assumptions of the Evolutionary Model**

- Religion is fully human in its origin (naturalism).
- Religion is an aspect of human culture. (i.e. culture determines religion, not vice versa)

- Religion began on a “primitive”, childlike level, and advanced in stages in sophistication and complexity.
  - (The acceptance in the late 19th century of the idea of the evolution of religion fit very nicely with the rising popularity of Darwinian evolution.)
- Religion today in the least materially developed cultures is closest to that of the religions of the earliest primitive cultures.

**10**  **Evolutionary Model:  
Stages of Religious Development**

**11**  **Evolutionary Model:  
Stages of Religious Development**

- mana:
  - Awareness of a spiritual force in nature (mana).
  - Often contains elements of fetishism (worship of inanimate objects due to their magical powers or because they contain a spiritual force).
- animism
  - Nature spirits. (Personal spirits inhabiting nature. e.g. trees, mountains, sky, rivers.)
  - Ancestor spirit worship.

**12**  **Evolutionary Model:  
Stages of Religious Development**

- polytheism [e. g. Hinduism]
  - The spirits of animism are now elevated to status of deity.
  - Multiple deities.
- henotheism (one supreme deity over many lessor deities). [e. g. Greek pantheon]
- monotheism (one exclusive deity)

**13**  **Problems with the Evolutionary Model**

- This kind of historical development has never been observed.
  - Changes (development/evolution) do occur, but in both directions.
  - No examples from cultural history or research in existing cultures demonstrates the evolutionary model of development.
  - While material regression is never observed, there are many examples of religious “regression.”
- Some materially advanced cultures today exhibit the so-called “primitive” spirituality (e. g. Japan and the animism and polytheism of Shinto).

- There is strong ethnological and anthropological evidence of distinctive monotheism both in ancient primitive cultures as well as in contemporary “primitive” cultures not exposed to modern societies or mission influence from monotheistic religions.
- It can be argued that monotheism is, in fact, simpler, less complex, than the so-called “primitive” spiritualities.

#### 14 **The Original Monotheism Model**

- The work (early 20th century) of Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954), Austrian linguist, anthropologist, ethnologist.
  - Expanded on the work of Andrew Lang (1844-1912)
  - Revisited and developed by Winfried Corduan (b. 1949), (In the Beginning God, 2013).
- Schmidt’s method of cultural-religious research reveals elements of monotheism in early cultures uninfluenced by the major monotheistic religions or missions.
- Nearly every religious culture exhibits some vestiges of monotheism (some of the nine points observed in Genesis).

#### 15 **The Original Monotheism Model**

- Cultures that advanced materially often “regressed” religiously from monotheism to “primitive” religions. (e.g. current trends in America from monotheism to monism and eastern polytheism)
- Elements of monotheistic belief are detectable in cultures from every region of the world.
- Among the most ancient cultures (those least developed materially) were those that featured exclusive worship of God and almost no magic.
- Conclusion: The anthropological, ethnological evidence points towards monotheism as the original religious beliefs of the earliest peoples.

#### 16 **Characteristics of Early Monotheism**

- Typical characteristics of monotheism (from Genesis)
- One God (hence: mono theism) who has personhood.
- God referred to in masculine gender.
- God apparently lives in the sky or heaven (transcendence).
- God possesses great knowledge and power.
- God created the world.
- God is the source of standards of good and evil
- Human beings are God’s creatures, and are expected to abide by God’s standards.
- Human beings have become alienated from God by violating his standards.

- God has provided a method for overcoming the alienation.

## 17 DEISM

- The History of Deism
  - Arose from the strong rationalism of the 16th and 17th centuries.
  - Was a result, in part, of a decay in robust Christian theism.
  - A “transitional” worldview
    - Influential during the Enlightenment era (17th-18th centuries).
    - Lost influence due to elements of instability.

## 18 DEISM

- The History of Deism (cont.)
  - Some key deists:
    - During the French Enlightenment era—
      - Voltaire (1694-1778), writer and public activist, leading Enlightenment figure
      - Rousseau (1712-1778), Swiss philosopher, influential in Enlightenment and French Revolution
    - American founding fathers (American Enlightenment)—
      - Thomas Jefferson
      - Benjamin Franklin
      - Thomas Paine

## 19 Deism: Primary Features

- The “Clockwork” Universe (an immanent God seems unnecessary, an intrusion)
- Much variation within deism:
  - Warm—retains a limited sense of God’s personality.
  - Cold—devoid of most features of personality. God is a transcendent force or energy. Prime Mover. First Cause.
- View of God:
  - Neither sovereign or providential.
  - Transcendent, but not immanent.
  - Impersonal (cold deism), unknowable (personally)

## 20 Deism: Primary Features

- Reason replaces revelation as the ultimate authority:
  - Christianity views human reason as necessary for understanding God, but not sufficient w/o revelation.
  - Deism views human reason as sufficient for knowing God, disregarding revelation.

- The cosmos:
  - Created by God, but closed and determined.
  - No miracles or divine revelation.
- What it means to be human:
  - Life after death? Depends on the deist.
  - Value of human life is diminished (e. g. French Revolution).

## 21 **Deism: Primary Features**

- Basis for values? Human reason.
- History is linear, but determined.

## 22 **Deism's Instability**

- Reasons for Instability:
  - Autonomous human reason defines God, leading to evolving views of God.
  - Autonomous human reason defines morality, rendering values subjective and variable.
  - Rejected the idea of the Fall. Whatever is, is right. No content for ethics.
  - Universe is a closed system. Determinism. Human actions are determined, and hence human significance is diminished.
  - Concept of a "clockwork" universe doesn't fit well with contemporary science's understanding of atomic and sub-atomic matter and processes, nor does the existence of personality.
- Deism eventually gives way to atheism, nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism.

## 23 **Deism's Contemporary Expressions (James Sire)**

- Sophisticated Scientific Deism
  - Scientists who adhere to a belief in some form of higher power, but deny its active role in the cosmos. (cold deism)
- Sophisticated Philosophical Deism
  - Acceptance of the existence of a god who is personal and the source of morality, yet is ultimately unknowable and not revelatory. (warm deism)
- Popular Deism (Moralistic Therapeutic Deism)
  - A kind of warm, fuzzy feeling that there is a god who can be called upon in emergencies, but is generally uninvolved in our day-to-day lives. He's a nice, loving, forgiving, grandfather-like god, who wants us to be good, but is pretty tolerant and lenient.

## 24 **Next Week:**

- Islam