

## 1 **Continuity and Monism**

- Module: Worldviews
- Lesson 23

## 2 **Some References on Continuity Worldviews**

- Neighboring Faiths, by Winfried Corduan
- The Universe Next Door, by James Sire
- The Bible Among the Myths, by John Oswalt
- The Making of the New Spirituality, by James Herrick
- The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, by Norman Geisler

## 3 **The Other Worldviews in the Bible**

- The creation account portrays a strong dualistic view of reality, with a heavy emphasis on distinctions (separation, 'after it's kind', etc.) in contradistinction to the prevailing worldviews of Israel's neighbors.
- The first temptation (Gen.3): Humans (the creature) seek equivalency with the Creator.
- Romans 1:25
  - Man worshipped and served the creature (lit. creation), rather than the creator.
  - The primary competing worldviews confronted in the bible were those involving the worship of creation. (A breakdown of the creator/creation distinction.)

## 4 **What are Continuity and Monism?**

- Continuity: The idea that all things that exist are part of each other. No fundamental distinctions between humanity, nature, and divinity.
- Continuity stands in opposition to transcendence.
  - Transcendence is the fundamental biblical view of God.
  - Transcendence is held primarily only by those religions which are derivatives of the Biblical view: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Deism.
- Monism: The idea that all is One [mono: one]. God is cosmos—cosmos is God. (Monism takes continuity to a higher level.)
- With the rise of Christianity in the West, pagan continuity/monism was eclipsed by biblical transcendence. The rest of the world retained its pagan monism/continuity.

## 5 **Revival of Pagan Continuity**

- Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677): a JewishDutch philosopher, laid groundwork for the Enlightenment, countered mind-body dualism, and advocated pantheism (monism).

- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803- 1882): popularized an essentially Hindu version of religion/spirituality.
- Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891): A Russian-born psychic and medium, emigrated to United States in 1873, and co-founded of the influential Theosophical Society, blending Western esoteric traditions with Buddhist and Hindu concepts.
- Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): an eloquent Bengali from Calcutta, India, a Hindu monk, and self-appointed emissary of Eastern monism to the west. (Parliament of World Religions, Chicago, 1893). While Hinduism was the “mother of all religions”, all religions were true.

## 6 Revival of Pagan Continuity

- Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919): German-born zoologist, naturalist, and artist. (Famous for his drawings of “Haeckel’s embryos”, now known to be fraudulent, depicting a supposed similarity of early vertebrate embryos. [“ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”]) A leading scientific voice, rejected ontological dualism and advocated for monism—the single essence of all things.
- Carl Jung (1875-1961): Profoundly influential Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. More influential in the area of worldview than even in the realm of psychiatry.
  - Jung saw myth as the search for the self, and that all the gods are found “within us.”
  - Deeply committed to the ancient Christian heresy of gnosticism, claimed to have a “spirit guide” named Philemon, and advocated the breaking down of distinctions (especially the male-female duality) and the “joining of opposites.”
  - Sought to instigate an irresistible mass movement—the liberation of sexuality.
  - “I’ve come to the conclusion, that as an individual, Jung ranks with the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate as the one who successfully undermined orthodox Christianity and restored polytheism to the Hellenistic world of Western civilization. ...Jung has succeeded where Julian failed.” -Richard Noll, Jung biographer-

## 7 Revival of Pagan Continuity

- Lynn White (1907-1987): Professor of medieval history and environmentalist.
  - 1967 article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” in the journal Science, continues to shape the environmental movement and its view of Christianity’s relationship to the environment.
    - He argued that exploitation and destruction of the environment is a consequence of the Judeo-Christian teaching re: man’s dominion over nature.

- Until the Christian anthropology of man as distinct and above nature is abandoned, the destruction of nature will continue.
- He called for a renewed animism.
- He, and his followers, wanted to put in place a new monistic worldview. (According to White, God, if he exists, is indistinguishable from nature.)
- The popularization of gnosticism in the 20th century. (e. g. Carl Jung, Elaine Pagels' The Gnostic Gospels, Dan Brown's, The Da Vinci Code).

## 8 Expressions of Continuity

- Animism (Typically tribal religion in which all things are believed to possess a spirit. e.g. rocks, trees, animals, rivers, words, buildings, etc. Typically spirits, magic, and rituals are prevalent.)
- New Ageism
  - A retreat from Western thoughts, values, etc.
  - Incorporates Eastern religious views.
  - Increasingly permeates the culture.

## 9 Expressions of Continuity

- Pantheism [pan: involving all members; theism: pertaining to God]
  - Everything is god, or part of god. (Often monistic.)
  - God is identified with the cosmos
  - Who are the pantheists?
    - Most Hindus and some Buddhists. (Hinduism is the most developed and sophisticated application of continuity.)
    - New Age, Christian Science, Unity, Scientology, etc.
    - Wicca (An updated version of pre-Christian European pantheistic spirituality.)
- Panentheism [pan: all, many; en: in; theism: pertaining to God]
  - Also known as monistic monotheism.
  - God interpenetrates or is in all parts of the material cosmos, and extends beyond the cosmos timelessly and spacelessly.

## 10 Expressions of Continuity

- Polytheism [poly: many; theism: pertaining to God.]
  - Egyptian and Indian polytheism are the most polytheistic.
  - Polytheism views the universe as eternal.
  - Features:

- Many gods account for forces and features of the world.
- Typical representations (idols) show elements of the divine, the human, and nature.
- Doing things to the idol or on behalf of the idol is doing things to the god, thus influencing the world. (See account of the idol Dagon in 1 Samuel 5:1-5)
- Polytheism is more than simply many versions of a monotheistic god. (The many are actually one.)

## 11 Expressions of Continuity

- Gnosticism
  - God is an inner directing presence.
  - Adoption of ancient gnostic writings (e. g. the gnostic “gospels”)
- Monism: The single essence of all things. (Term coined by Thomas Haeckel, 1834-1919)
  - Monism is a highly developed version of pantheism.
  - Everything, including external material, is God, and God is everything.
  - In “absolute monism” (e. g. Vedantic Hinduism) external reality is merely illusion. (Maya)

## 12 Answering The Worldview Questions

- Each of these various expressions of continuity, while possessing elements of continuity in common with other expressions, is nevertheless unique to itself. Hence our answers to the worldview questions will be general rather than specific.

## 13 What is Ultimate Reality?

- Ultimate reality is the Oneness, Nervana, Brahman, continuity, etc.
- All the apparently external and diverse reality (the world around us) is actually one with the Oneness.
  - It might be maya (an illusion)
  - It may be real, yet primarily symbolic of the unseen realm.

## 14 What is the Nature of External Reality?

- God and the universe are one.
- In Vedantic Hinduism: an illusion.
- General pantheism: created out of God. (All of the cosmos emanated from God’s being.)

## 15 What is Humanity?

- Humans are part of the One, or are the One.
- In Hinduism “atman is brahman”: atman (the personal soul) is brahman (the infinite, impersonal, ultimate reality, the cosmos).

- In Eastern pantheism, the emphasis is on brahman. "Atman is brahman." (The individual's realization of being lost or absorbed in the ultimate.)
- In Western New Ageism, the emphasis is on atman (the individual). "Atman is brahman." Ultimate reality is centered on the self.
- We are God, and God is us.

#### 16 **What Happens When We Die?**

- In Western New Age monism—
  - The person transitions to another stage of life (commonly reincarnation).
- In Eastern pantheistic monism—
  - Individual embodiment ends.
  - The soul (atman) survives.
  - Samsara: reincarnation.
  - Ultimately, absorption into brahman.

#### 17 **How Do We Know Anything?**

- Only through human enlightenment, apart from revelation, reason, or empirical evidence.
- The employment of spirit guides.
  - Gurus and others who have "gone before."
  - Dependence on unseen spiritual beings.
- It is a "seller's market."
  - caveat emptor: let the buyer beware
  - In contrast to the testability of Christianity.

#### 18 **What is the Basis of Morality and Ethics?**

- There are no distinctions. There is no duality.
- Hence, there is no good or evil, all just simply is.
- Evil, then, is an illusion. (Logically then, so is good.)

#### 19 **What is History?**

- The cosmos, all material reality, is eternal.
- History is cyclical rather than linear. It has no beginning or end, and no telos (purpose).
  - The concept of reincarnation (the cycle of life) is closely tied to the cyclical view of history.
- Two views, Eastern and Western:

- Eastern: Not concerned with history, it has no goal or end.
- Western: We are evolving until the New Age, the "Age of Aquarius."

## 20 What are the Core Commitments?

- To become enlightened—to discover one's oneness with God.
- Morality is utilitarian, not an end in itself.

## 21 A Christian Response

- Is the universe really eternal?
- What about the problem of evil and suffering?
- The self-defeating aspects of pantheism.
  - If, according to pantheism, the One is changeless, how can I, as essentially part of the One, undergo
  - If I am deceived or unenlightened, then how can I know that pantheism is true?
  - If all is an illusion, by what is illusion measured? Illusion is a misperception of reality. But if there is no reality, then there can be no illusion of reality.
- The problem of morality. Is it really just utilitarian?
- Is there any historical or other evidence for the truthfulness of continuity? (As opposed to Christianity which is historically testable.)
- The important Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo (creation out of nothing) establishes God's essential distinction from his creation.

## 22 Next Week:

- Beginning our module on Science:
- Understanding Science

## 23 Postmodernism

- More of a philosophy than a thoroughgoing worldview.
- Postmodernism denies all metanarratives (grand overarching descriptions of reality).
  - There are no universal truths (all truths are local or individual). (Embraces the coherence view of truth as opposed to the correspondence view.)
  - Hence, there are no worldviews as such that are true.

- “The idea that we live in a postmodern culture is a myth. In fact, a postmodern culture is an impossibility; it would be utterly unlivable. Nobody is a postmodernist when it comes to reading the labels on a medicine bottle versus a box of rat poison. ...People are not relativistic when it comes to matters of science, engineering, and technology, rather, they’re relativistic and pluralistic in matters of religion and ethics.”

—William Lane Craig, in Reasonable Faith—

## 24 A Christian Response

- The coherence theory of truth, as opposed to the correspondence theory of truth, is inadequate (as we saw in our lesson on truth in our philosophy module).
- People don’t always think via language.
- Self-refuting
  - In denying any over-arching narratives, it is asserting an over-arching narrative.
  - Its own authors insist on the truthfulness for all of what they write.
- Impossibility of consistently living a post-modern worldview.