

MAJOR WORLDVIEWS

By Mark Paynter

We turn now to a consideration of six major worldviews.

1) The Atheistic view. Generally speaking Atheism is the refusal to recognise the one and only true God. In this sense all six worldviews we will examine can be described as atheistic. However more narrowly defined atheism breaks down into three distinct practical groups. Practical atheism does not deny God all together but people who follow this worldview simply live with an indifference to God that leads them to live as though He was not there. On the other hand dogmatic atheism openly declares there is no God. A recent example of dogmatic atheism that had and continues to have much influence upon world affairs is communism. "Virtual atheism is the kind that holds principles that are inconsistent with belief in God or that define Him in terms that do violence to the common usage of language."¹ In addition to the three types of atheism mentioned above Joseph Kapp identifies classical atheism that while not denying the existence of God altogether may reject a particular groups notion of God. Early Christianity was in this sense regarded as being atheists because the early Christians rejected the concepts of God that were then prevalent in the ancient world. Thiessen points out that atheism is a very unsatisfactory worldview because it leaves the atheist without assurance of the forgiveness of sins, without stability because atheism denies man's deepest convictions and arrogant because the only way that an atheist can successfully argue his position is to be omniscient. Kapp argues that atheism is contrary to reason, contrary to human experience and fails to provide an adequate explanation of why there appears to be intelligent design in the natural order. "Atheism is the religion of autonomous man, whose folly is the perversion of wisdom."²

2) Agnosticism. Agnosticism is the view that neither affirms the existence nor the nature of God and argues that the ultimate nature of the universe is neither known nor knowable.³ Many people regard Thomas Huxley as being the father of modern day agnosticism. "For Huxley, agnosticism was more a method than a formal belief system. He argued that one must follow reason as far as it would go, but then a point is reached beyond which it is impossible to know. Huxley questioned the truthfulness of any belief that could not be supported by factual, verifiable evidence"⁴ Thiessen identifies "positivism in science and pragmatism in philosophy and theology"⁵ as being the outstanding types of agnosticism. Positivism in science limits the assignment of truth only to those facts that can be gleaned through observed facts, Einstein dealt a death blow to positivism when he asserted that both the tangibles and intangibles must be taken into account when explaining the nature of the physical world. Pragmatism rejects the concept of special revelation and argues that reason alone is not competent to study ultimate reality. Thiessen observes that agnosticism like atheism is highly unsatisfactory as it leads to spiritual

¹ Thiessen page 33

² D Bruce Lockerbie: Article "Thinking like a Christian" in *Bibliotheca Sacra : A Quarterly Published by Dallas Theological Seminary*. (Dallas TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996, c 1955-1995). Articles 1986 Volume 143 Issue 569 page 9

³ derived from Thiessen page 33

⁴ N P Feldmeth: article "Agnosticism" in Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 1990).

⁵ Thiessen page 33

impoverishment and has no real answers to man's deepest needs, unstable in that it admits there is no way to arrive at absolute certainty. In addition agnosticism suffers from a false humility "in that it claims to know so little."⁶

3) Pantheism as defined by Thiessen is "that theory which holds all finite things as merely aspects, modifications, or parts of one eternal and self-existent being. It regards God as one with the natural universe. God is all; all is God."⁷

According to William Evans "Pantheism maintains that this universe in its ever-changing conditions is but the manifestation of the one ever-changing universal substance which is God... Thus God is identified with nature and not held to be independent of and separate from it. God is, therefore, a necessary but an unconscious force working in the world"⁸

Thiessen divides pantheism into four main types 1) Materialistic pantheism, which "holds that matter is the cause of all life and mind."⁹ This view was taught by David Strauss who believed in the eternity of matter and that matter is the cause of all life¹⁰ 2) Hylozoism as taught by Leibniz "holds that every particle of matter, has besides its physical properties, a principle of life."¹¹ A variant form of this theory is Panpsychism, which "holds that mind and matter are distinct, but intimately and inseparably united. God, in this view is the soul of the world."¹² 3) Neutralism is a belief system, who many attribute to Baruch Spinoza who taught "that life is neutral, neither mind nor matter"¹³ 4) Idealism "holds that ultimate reality is of the nature of mind and that the world is the product of the mind, either of the individual mind or the infinite mind." The fatal flaw of idealism is that everything must exist only in the mind, therefore God and people only exist in an individual's mind ultimately this must lead to the conclusion that the only person who actually exists is oneself and this is an absurdity. 5) "Philosophical mysticism is the most absolute type of monism in existence"¹⁴ in that it teaches all reality is a unit. Whereas the idealist attempts to argue that there is a distinction between the outside world and himself, this distinction disappears altogether for the mystic who argues that his inner self is identical with the outside world.

Pantheistic views appeal to modern philosophers in that they hold that the originating cause of the world is entirely within the world, Christian while holding that there was an original cause of the universe argue that this cause is both within the world while at the same time transcendent to the world. Thiessen correctly saw pantheism as being of profound religious significance and offered the following refutation of it.

⁶ Thiessen page 34

⁷ Thiessen page 34

⁸ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, page 22

⁹ Thiessen page 35

¹⁰ Enns, page 186

¹¹ Thiessen page 35

¹² Thiessen page 35

¹³ Enns page 186

¹⁴ Thiessen page 35

- 1) Pantheism denies “all freedom of second causes” instead it argues, “everything exists and acts of necessity.”¹⁵ Christianity affirms that we are free moral agents and accountable for our actions to a superior being who is Himself the primary first cause.
- 2) Pantheism destroys the moral foundation of life, since all things including error and sin are necessitated. 1) Pantheism perceives sin to be “an unavoidable weakness, a stage in human development”¹⁶. Christians on the other hand argue that sin is a violation of the will of God and incurs His wrath. 2) Pantheism argues that there is nothing to distinguish between right and wrong. 3) Pantheism lands up with the conclusion that God himself is sinful because he is the necessitater of all things.
- 3) Pantheism makes the rational worship of God impossible since it does away with the distinction between individualities. The essence of true religion is that persons retain their individuality and that in true worship created human beings worship the ultimate divine being.
- 4) Pantheism denies “personal and conscious immortality”¹⁷ In other words, after death man ceases to exist as an individual identity and is absorbed into the one great and ultimate reality. The Scriptures, on the other hand teach that humans continue to exist after death as separate individual identities who live in a personal relationship to God and who are accountable for how one has lived in this life. (2 Cor.5: 10).
- 5) Pantheism ultimately “deifies man by making him a part of God.”¹⁸ Christianity gives to man the highest position under God but does not make man a part of God.
- 6) Pantheism denies the concrete reality of the material world and fails to explain how life and intelligent thinking arose.

4) Polytheism is the belief in a multiplicity of Gods, it can be contrasted to “*Tritheism*, which teaches that there are three Gods—that is, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are, specifically, three distinct Gods; and to *Dualism*, which teaches that there are two independent divine beings or eternal principles, the one good, and the other evil, as set forth especially in Gnostic systems, such as Parseeism”¹⁹ Thiessen asserts “that monotheism was the original religion of mankind”²⁰, “This is evident not only from the teachings of the Scriptures, but also from the fact that the earliest historical form of religious belief is monotheistic”.²¹ When mankind began to fall into idolatry the first shift seems to have been to some form of nature worship. Hodge writes, “as men lost the knowledge of God as creator, they were led to reverence the physical elements with

¹⁵ Thiessen page 36

¹⁶ Thiessen page 36

¹⁷ Thiessen page 37

¹⁸ Thiessen page 37

¹⁹ Evans page 26

²⁰ Thiessen page 38

²¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, page 243

which they were in contact, whose power they witnessed, and whose beneficent influence they constantly experienced.”²²

Thus it became popular not only to worship the sun, moon and stars but also fire, water and air. Soon these elements were personified and the belief that a personal being of each of these elements arose. “Among the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans polytheism assumed a form determined by the character of the people. The Greeks rendered it bright, beautiful, and sensual; the Romans were more decorous and sedate”²³ Polytheism lies at the heart of many of the world’s religions today including Brahminism, Buddhism, Hinduism. “In the Bible the gods of the heathen are declared to be "vanity," and "nothing," mere imaginary beings, without power either to hurt or to save. (Jer.2. 28; Isa.41. 29; Isa.13: 17; Ps. 106. 28.)²⁴ These false Gods are said to be the representatives, if not the embodiments of demons. (1 Cor.10: 20)

5) Dualism is the “theory that assumes that there are two distinct and irreducible substances or principles. In epistemology these are idea and object, in metaphysics, mind and matter; in ethics, good and evil; in religion, good or God and evil or Satan. The Christian, however, does not believe that Satan is co-eternal with God, but rather a creature of God and subject to Him.”²⁵

6) Deists believe in a “God who had created the world but who had no contact with it now, and who had not revealed truth to men.”²⁶ For the Deist the universe is self-sustaining and abandoned by God. Deists believe that God exists but “He is an impersonal God, uninterested and uninvolved in the world.”²⁷ Thiessen notes “The Christian rejects deism because he believes that we have a special revelation of God in the bible; that God is present in the universe in His being as well as in His power, that God exercises a constant providential control over all His creation, that He sometimes uses miracles in the accomplishment of His purposes, that God answers prayer.”²⁸

²²Hodge page 243

²³Hodge page 243

²⁴ Hodge page 243

²⁵ Thiessen page 38

²⁶Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer : A Christian Worldview*. (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1996, c1982).Volume Five, Book Two; How then shall we live, Chapter Six, The enlightenment.

²⁷Enns, page 623

²⁸ Thiessen page 40