

Apologetics and the Christian World View

Part I

World View Apologetics

A number of years ago I wrote and published a book which I thought at the time covered all of the important basic topics relating to Christian Evidence for those trying to build up the faith of young Christians and non-believers. The book is titled, *Reasons for Belief: A Handbook of Christian Evidence*. It brings together evidence in support of Christian belief from the claims of Jesus, miracles, the resurrection, messianic and other prophecies, archaeology, history and the Bible, support for the documentary reliability of the Bible, science and the Bible, and it discusses supposed inconsistencies in the Bible. In the past three years I have come to the conclusion that there is one major topic which is essential in any basic but comprehensive Christian evidences discussion which is not included in my book. This is the subject of world view.

What is a world view and why is a discussion of world view essential to even the most basic attempts to create and sustain Christian belief? Quite simply, one's world view is the perspective one uses to process and interpret information received about the world. James W. Sire put it this way,^[1] "A world view is a set of presuppositions (ie. assumptions) which we hold about the basic makeup of our world." We live in a world in which the Christian world view is not only not the norm, to the vast majority—even to many who attend church regularly—it seems about as strange as belief in lepruchans or the tooth fairy. Our intellectual institutions are dominated by postmodern philosophy and scientific materialism. Many believe that all religions are more or less the same. The very existence of truth is denied, both in the halls of our universities and in popular media. It will be very difficult to plant the seed of rational evidence in such unfertile ground. We must explore and explain the major world views and demonstrate carefully why that proposed by the Bible is superior, because it is logically most consistent with the world as it really is, because it answers most successfully the fundamental questions all human beings ask, and because it comports best with what the human conscience knows is good and right.

It is our intent to offer a series of articles through the newsletter for the next few months analyzing the most influential world views in modern culture. We will be contrasting these to the Christian world view, explaining why we feel that the Bible offers a view of the world which is superior, both in its consistency with the world as it is and in the way it solves the fundamental human questions. For those who want to dig a little deeper into the topic, let me suggest a good primer on the subject. It is *The Universe Next Door*, by James W. Sire (several copies available as I write at Amazon for less than 1\$!). For those who want to dig really deep, there is the tome produced by J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. A note of caution, this book is not easy reading and it is not cheap to buy!

In the interest of full disclosure, let me say from the start that I am not an expert in philosophy and world view. I have paid much-increased attention to philosophy and theology in general the past several years. Besides, for a number of years I have taught a class in the philosophy of science which has much overlap with

ideas about world view. Nevertheless, I remain a neophyte in this area. I am eagerly awaiting the course sponsored by ARS to be taught by Dr. Robert Kurka of Lincoln College this coming March 6-8, 2009 in San Diego. I am sure I will learn a lot from this course.

In this, the first essay of a series, I will be describing the Christian world view. It is tempting to assume that a Christian, almost by definition, understands the Christian world view, and of course there is a grain of truth in this. However, it is my own experience that many believers in Jesus Christ have an insufficient understanding of how Jesus Christ viewed the world in which humans exist. For this reason, this essay will be used both to more carefully define the world view to which Christians ought to hold, and as a point of comparison when we discuss the world view of postmodernism, naturalism, new ageism and the major world religions.

First, let us ask what a "good" world view ought to look like? Is a "good" world view, by definition, one that we like-that we find ourselves naturally agreeing with? Is it one which creates good physical or emotional health? Is it the one which creates the greatest amount of human happiness? Perhaps it is the one which results in the creation of the greatest amount of economic growth and movement away from poverty and political upheaval. In fact, according to one world view, that of naturalism, there is no such thing as a "good" world view, as all such value judgments are meaningless. There is a sense in which this question of what constitutes a good world view is a personal decision for all of us. Each of us reading this article must, in the end, decide what constitutes a good and legitimate world view. Let us put this out there as a starting thesis. It is not possible to have no world view at all (please forgive the double negative). We will have one by default if we do not choose to think about it. Given that our world view in large measure defines who we are and determines how we live our lives, surely it is worth the time and intellectual effort to examine, evaluate and perhaps even change our world view toward one which more accurately reflects reality and makes us a better citizen of the universe in which we live and move and have our being.

A "Good" World View

What makes for a good world view? It has already been said that this has to be a personal decision, but let me propose a few qualities for us to consider when looking at the major world views.

The first quality which one might want to consider that makes a world view "good" is that it is true. To hold to an idea which is false is surely not to be preferred to holding to an idea which is true. There is no virtue and there is very rarely an advantage in being wrong. What makes something true? This is a question for philosophy, but let us try to keep this relatively simple. Something is "true" if it is consistent with reality. This is sometimes called the Correspondence Theory of Truth. If a belief is in clear contradiction with well-established facts about the world, then it is not true. This may seem a truism, but we will see that the Postmodern does not accept the Correspondence Theory of Truth. If one holds to the belief that gravity does not operate to attract masses toward one another, that view will be disproved by letting go of a heavy object. If one holds to the idea that refusal to communicate leads to peace, that too will be shown by reality not to be true. The sticking point, of course, comes with defining how one decides what is reality and what is true. One perspective, that of the empiricist, is that truth is determined

solely by what we can observe with our senses and what we can measure with our instruments. Another perspective, that of rationalists such as DesCartes, is that which is true is that which my mind and clear reasoning tells me is true. What is true must be logical. The one who said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident" was speaking as a rationalist. Most of us who do not occupy the rarified regions of philosophy can be more practical in our definition. We can combine the two ideas. Those things we hold to be true must be consistent with what we can observe-with our own "history" and hopefully that of others, and they must be rational-logically consistent. It must not be supported by circular or patently poor reasoning or require us to believe what we know not to be true.

The second quality which makes for a "good" world view is that it successfully answers the important questions humans ask. What these important questions are and how one is to define success in answering them is, of course, subjective to some extent. However, there are a number of questions for which people everywhere seek the answers. Below is the list of such questions from *The Universe Next Door*, slightly reworded:

1. What is prime reality? (or What is the ultimate cause? or What is the nature of God?)
2. What is the nature of external reality-the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible for us to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?

To these let me add:

8. What is my purpose?
9. What is the nature of my relationship, with the "prime reality?"

The third quality which makes for a "good" world view is that those who ascribe to it are better human beings for having taken this as their world view. Again, of course, "better" is going to be subjective, but there are a few measures to which nearly all people can agree. If one's world view results on balance in an increased likelihood of genocide, racial or any other kind of hatred, poverty, anarchy, physical and emotional suffering or war, then such a world view is easily identified as deficient. We will be subjecting the important world views to scrutiny based on these three definitions of what make for a good world view. Is it true? Does it successfully answer the important questions? and Does it make those who hold to it "better" people?

The Christian World View

Clearly, a lot of things can be included under the heading of the Christian world view. My intent here is to keep it very simple and not necessarily provide a lot of scriptural support at this point. We will add to these ideas as we go along, as well as giving them flesh. In order to provide a useful basis as we proceed to analyze, compare and contrast other world views with that of Jesus, the points will be outlined and numbered.

1. The physical world is:

- a. real
- b. created and
- c. essentially good.

These points are established before we get out of the first chapter in the Bible. The reader should be aware that these presuppositions are definitely NOT held to by many of the influential world views. Many believe that the physical world is an illusion. Many believe that the universe(s) have existed forever. Even more hold to the belief as part of their view of the world that physical reality is corrupted and evil. To summarize, consider Genesis 1:31 (NIV) "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-the sixth day."

2. There exists a parallel unseen spiritual reality which is not limited to or defined by the physical reality.

A scripture which supports both this presupposition and the first is Hebrews 11:3 (HCSB), "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen has been made from things that are not visible. This verse also can be used to support our third point of the Christian world view.

3. The creator of both the physical and spiritual realm is the God who is revealed and who reveals himself in the Bible.

4. Although the physical world is good, evil does exist. Such evil is the result of freedom of will given to created beings and their subsequent decision to use that freedom to "sin" (defined as transgressing the will of God).

5. Human beings have both a physical and a spiritual nature, but the spiritual nature is more essential as it is eternal.

6. There is a definite right and wrong for human behavior which is determined by God.

It is interesting to note that all of these are stated or implied in the first three chapters of Genesis. It is apparent that God wanted to establish right up front how he wants his people to view the world.

My intention here is to analyze how "good" (good being defined above) the Christian world view is principally by comparing and contrasting it with other world views. In other words, point 1. above will be supported when I contrast it with the

Hindu idea that the physical world is an illusion or the Greek idea that it is essentially evil, or the naturalist view that it is not created. In the last essay in the series, I will come back to the Christian world view, explaining why I believe it is that Jesus Christ provided us with what is far and away the "best" view of the world which has even been presented to mankind. It is my hope that in the process some of my readers will have had their view of the world changed-that it will more perfectly reflect the perspective of Jesus of Nazareth.

John Oakes, PhD

[\[1\]](#) James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (InterVarsity Press, 1997)

Apologetics and the Christian World View Part II

Scientific Materialism/Naturalism

In the previous essay we looked at why people ought to think carefully about their view of the world, and at the importance of forming and holding to a consistent world view. We have considered a reasonable set of criteria for what might make for a "good" view of the world. In addition, we have given a bare bones description of the Christian world view. The first alternative world view we will contrast with that of Christianity is Naturalism; also known as Scientific Materialism. This is probably the simplest to understand of all the world views we will cover in this series. Let us consider several statements defining Naturalism:

The only reliable or valid instrument to deciding the truth or even the value of any proposition is the scientific method.

The only reality is that which is observable by physical means. There is no spiritual reality, no moral truth, no God, no life after death, no soul, no spirit, no consciousness, except perhaps as an epiphenomenon.

Consider that of Richard Lewontin:

"We exist as material beings in a material world, all of whose phenomena are the consequences of material relations among material entities." In a word, the public needs to accept materialism, which means that they must put God in the trash can of history where such myths belong."

The following are not definitions of Scientific Materialism, but represent obvious implications of this philosophy.

A statement of Naturalism from Richard Dawkins; world-famous atheist and evolutionist:

In the universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt and other people are going to get lucky: and you won't find any

rhyme or reason to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is, and we dance to its music.

From Thomas Huxley, known as "Darwin's bulldog":

We are as much the product of blind forces as is the falling of a stone to earth, or the ebb and flow of the tides. We have just happened, and man was made flesh by a long series of singularly beneficial accidents.

Consider for a moment the implications of this rather depressing world view. If it is true then my personal concept of "I" is a delusion. My perception of consciousness is simply the accidental result of neurons firing and chemicals moving around in my brain (ie consciousness is an epiphenomenon). When I say to my wife or my children "I love you," what this means in reality is that when I think about them my neural pathways light up in a particular way and certain neurotransmitters change their level of activity. Love is not a thing in itself (and of course the biblical statement that God is love is sheer nonsense). If the naturalist is correct then there is no purpose to life whatsoever, except perhaps the evolutionary "purpose" to procreate and create as many copies of my particular genetic material as possible. If the naturalist is right then my personal belief that murder, lying and stealing are wrong has no basis whatever in absolute truth, but is simply one person's particular opinion—one dictated not by truth but, if anything, by a genetic predisposition toward thinking that way, created by a kind of cultural natural selection.

My personal experience tells me that virtually no one can accept this world view with all its implications. Despite this fact, in many intellectual circles it is the publically accepted world view and those who do not hold to it are laughed at. Educated people who believe that there is a spiritual reality which supersedes the physical reality are treated derisively as holding to an immature, outmoded and silly idea about the world. In fact, materialists such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens publicly declare religionists to be the enemy human progress and directly or indirectly the cause of all evil in the world (this despite the fact that they do not believe that evil exists).

What is the genesis of this world view? To discover the source of Naturalism, one must turn the clock back to the Scientific Revolution. The fact is that the creators of the Scientific Revolution—Roger Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo and others—were all believers in the Christian world view. In fact, their belief in science followed directly from the Christian world view. Belief in the God of the Bible led Bacon and others to conclude that there must be a single, unchanging set of laws governing the physical universe. These theologians also concluded from their biblical world view that a personal God of love must have made the physical universe to be intelligible to human reason and analyzable by mathematical analysis. All of these "Christian" assumptions turned out to be true (as far as we can tell) and thus science was invented.

However, in the process of discovering how nature worked, scientists such as Isaac Newton discovered that the universe works according to what seem to be entirely mechanical laws—laws which are so regular and predictable that it seemed God could be removed from the equation. In fact, French mathematician and

physicist Pierre-Simone La Place, when asked by Napoleon, "Where is God?" in his theory of mechanics replied, "I have no need of that hypothesis." Scottish philosopher David Hume questioned whether we can know anything absolutely and especially whether belief in God had any empirical validity. The rise of deism in the late eighteenth century led to scientific materialism/naturalism by the nineteenth century. Although Darwin himself was not a strict materialist, his work certainly provided fodder for scientism. Only in the twentieth century did we begin to see aggressive scientific materialists such as Bertrand Russel and Carl Sagan beginning to publicly attack all other world views as infantile and foolish.

A Response to Scientific Materialism

Any claim that Scientific Materialism is a superior world view to that of Christianity ought to be analyzed according to specific criteria. Let me begin by quoting a comment on materialism as a world view. (I apologize that I can no longer find the source of this quote.) "The theorist who maintains that science is the be-all and the end-all-that what is not in science textbooks is not worth knowing-is an ideologist with a peculiar and distorted doctrine of his own. For him, science is no longer a sector of the cognitive enterprise, but an all-inclusive world view. This is the doctrine not of science but of scientism. To take this stance is not to celebrate science but to distort it." In the first part of this series I proposed a set of criteria for a "good" world view we can use for consideration. A superior world view will be one which:

1. Is true (in other words consistent with reality on various levels)
2. Answers the questions and solves the problems human beings really care about.

and

3. Causes the person who holds to this world view to be a "better" person.

I reject Naturalism because it is patently false, it does not answer any of the problems and questions human beings as a whole care about and it does not tend to help its believers to be better people than they would have been if holding to alternative world views.

Naturalism is self-defeating. It is based on circular reasoning and for many reasons it produces assumptions which are simply not in agreement with common human experience. Therefore it is not "true" (criterion #1 above). The scientific world-view presupposes that the universe is ordered and essentially unchanging. It assumes that the laws which govern the universe are inviolable and that the universe is observable and understandable to human beings-that the human mind has a one-to-one correspondence with the way reality is. The naturalist then proceeds to apply these assumptions to rule out all other world views. The spiritual or supernatural are, by definition, not real. This is circular reasoning. None of the assumptions made as the foundation of science can be proved by experiment or by observation. In this sense, at its most foundational level, science itself is not scientific. It is not that the discoveries of science are wrong. Not at all. Clearly science has given us access to reliable knowledge about how the physical world works. If limited to its proper sphere, science works. It is the belief that science is the only valid view of the world and the only legitimate means to acquire knowledge about reality which is

based on circular reasoning. At a recent forum held in the UK a famous chemist/naturalist was asked how he knows that ALL phenomena can be explained by physical laws. After being re-asked a number of times and attempting to get around the question, in the end, this naturalist was forced to confess; to quote "I simply believe it is true." In other words, the reason the scientific materialist knows that "We exist as material beings in a material world, all of whose phenomena are the consequences of material relations among material entities." is because he or she assumes the conclusion before the investigation. This is a very slim basis on which to build a world view.

There are a number of reasons I simply have to reject naturalism as patently false. I will supply a brief list here without taking the time to provide my evidence for such reasons. I will leave to reader to decide the truth of these claims-each of which, if true, make naturalism patently and demonstrably false.

1. Morality is real. Some activities are inherently wrong.
2. The existence of good and evil is not just an epiphenomenon. Evil is real.
3. Justice is not just a concept. Some behaviors are just and some are not just.
4. A human life is inherently more valuable than that of a cockroach.
5. God exists.
6. The universe was created.
7. Life was created.
8. Beauty is real and not discoverable by any scientific means.
9. The Bible is inspired by God.
10. Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead.

This list can be made much longer. In the final analysis the concepts of right and wrong are not just a human invention. I have found that even those who claim that there is no right or wrong-no evil or good-are not consistent with their own belief. It is ironic to me that I have witnessed atheists expressing moral outrage over the things done by "religionists." The naturalist may protest it is not true, but I say that "I" exist. I am not just a sack of chemicals moving around, with nerve synapses firing off according to patterns guided by my genetic makeup; determined by my environment. I am a person with a reality apart from my chemicals. Naturalism is just plain not true.

Point number two of the argument for why naturalism is not a "good" world view: It does not answer any of the questions or solve any of the problems human beings really care about. Science is good at answering questions such as When? How much? Where? How long? It can answer provisional questions of why, such as why does it rain or why do stars form, but it cannot answer any of the fundamental/ontological/teleological why questions-even about the natural world.

For example, science is not helpful at all for answering such basic questions as "Why is gravity as strong as it is," or "Why does the electromagnetic force exist,?" or "Why does the universe exist?" If science cannot answer these questions, it certainly cannot even hint at an answer to a single one of the questions people really care about (as listed above) such as: "Why am I here?" "What is my purpose?" "Does God exist?" "What happens to me when I die?" "How should I act?" "How should I treat other people?" "Why is it possible for humans to understand how the universe works?" "Why is there evil in the world?" Bottom line, scientific materialism does not even give wrong answers, it gives no answer at all to these questions (There is one exception. Science provides offers an answer to the question What happens when I die? The "scientific" answer is that life simply ends and entropy takes over.) It says that these are nonsense questions. My experience tells me that ignoring important questions and pretending that difficult problems do not exist is a bad way of dealing with such questions and problems. I do not mean to imply that Naturalists do not ask these questions or that they do not on an individual basis try to help solve some of the important human problems. It is just that their world view is not at all helpful for these things.

The third criterion from my personal list of qualities which make for a "good" world view is that holding to this view of the world must cause a person to be "better" than he or she would otherwise have been if not holding to this world view or if holding to alternative world views. Admittedly, this criterion is fairly subjective, but there are a number of measurements of goodness to which virtually all humans would subscribe. I believe that Naturalism is not a good world view if judged by this criterion. Let me state before entering this area that I have a number of friends who are Naturalists. This is only "natural" because I am a scientist by profession. Some of my scientific materialist acquaintances are rather arrogant and hold to ethical and moral ideas with which I cannot agree. However, others have strong ethics and are some of the nicest people I know. No world view has a corner on the goodness market, including the one I hold to.

With this qualification in mind (and please do not forget it!), let us consider the motivation for doing "good" under the Naturalist world view. In theory, the Naturalist believes that there is no purpose to life and no inherently correct morality. Even ethics is extremely difficult or impossible to derive from this world view. Like I already said, some materialists do good deeds. If so, it is probably not because they are motivated out of their world view. Something else must be operating here.

At the risk of offending some, I will make a bold statement here. I believe that scientific materialism is potentially a dangerous world view. According to this view, human beings have no definable value, except as a source of genetic material for subsequent generations. Of course, the vast majority of atheists are not violent people and value human life, but there is no moral imperative against murder or rape or robbery or any other of activities that the Christian and other world views hold to be morally wrong. Where does one find the moral compass? Any category of sexual behavior is acceptable as long as no one is hurt. Lying may be advantageous to survival and therefore "good."

A lot of evil has been done in the name of religion. Anyone who denies this is not looking at history or is altogether denying the existence of evil. The difference with the Christian world view compared to that of Naturalism, however, is that a

Christian who is prejudiced or who lies or who wages war on another for reasons of greed or power is violating his or her world view and is subject to being shown to be doing wrong. There is accountability and justice under the Christian world view. To the Christian there is an imperative to help our fellow mankind. Jesus commanded that those who follow him must "Do to others what you would want them to do to you." Such altruism flies in the face of Naturalism as a philosophy. In the Christian world view, as exemplified by its creator Jesus Christ and as taught by its scriptures, there is a strong imperative to love others, to be honest, to serve others, to shun violence, greed, arrogance and so forth. Many Naturalists follow a strong and admirable personal ethic, but what is the imperative toward these "good" behaviors under the Scientific Materialist world view? If there is one, I have not yet seen one, although some materialists have made the attempt.

Having admitted that much evil has been done by believers, let us consider the small but significant number of societies which have publicly avowed an atheist or an anti-God world view. Examples of this sort which come to mind are France immediately after the French Revolution, Communist Russia, Communist China, Cambodia under Pol Pot and North Korea.[\[1\]](#) Inspection of this list of regimes speaks for itself. In each of these societies individual souls were treated as if they had little value, with tragic results. The empirical fact that a societal commitment to belief in no God has such a poor record in producing human good is not proof that it will never do so. However, the track record is something we should not ignore.

What about justice and human rights? In the United States, many subscribe to the idea that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal." Does this idea come from scientific inquiry? Based on their DNA, some are more fit than others. The Christian ought to believe that all humans are infinitely valuable as they are created in the image of God. I am happy to report that almost none of the Naturalists I have met are racially prejudiced. Hopefully the scientifically-inspired Eugenics movement in the early twentieth century will remain an anomaly, but what is the inherent source of human dignity and value if, as Huxley said, "man was made flesh by a long series of singularly beneficial accidents."?

To summarize, the committed Naturalist believes that the only truth in the universe is that which can be discovered by the scientific method—through experiment and rational analysis of the information derived from empirical evidence. This world view fails miserably at the three criteria proposed in this paper for deciding what world view is best. Its support is circular and its conclusions are patently false. It cannot answer the most important questions or solve the fundamental problems that human beings care about. It does not, in and of itself, tend to cause those who hold to it to be "good." I believe that the Christian world view is vastly superior to Materialism on all these counts and, for that matter, on any other reasonable measure I have seen of what makes for a good world view.

John Oakes

[1] There has been considerable debate about whether the Nazi regime was atheist or Pagan or agnostic. Some have even tried to place it in the Christian camp. Because this is debatable, I have left Nazi Germany from the list.

Apologetics and the Christian World View

Part III

New Age and Eastern Religion/Philosophy

In the previous essays we considered the definition of world view and why the consideration of world view is important for the believer, and for the non-believer for that matter. I proposed a reasonable basis for considering a world view to be a "good" one. I then gave a very brief introduction to the Christian world view. In the second essay, we considered the world view of Naturalism or Scientific Materialism, the implications for humanity and whether it is a "good" world view. In this article we will look at the view of the world which is held more or less in common by peoples in the East (generally cultures in Asia) and their close cousin, the New Age Movement.

It may seem presumptuous to describe in fairly simple terms the world view of nearly half the world's people. If we include the population of India and China alone, this accounts for about 2.4 billion of the roughly 6.5 billion people in the world. Obviously, we will be painting the world view held to by the world's Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jainas, Taoists and Confucianists with a broad brush. To include the modern-day New Age movement in this group is to make the brush stroke even broader. Yet, the world view held by the followers of these religious ideas is so radically different from that of the Christian, that even such a broad description will tell us a lot about how people from the East think about the world.

The Eastern world view is essentially pantheistic. This is a gross simplification and the nuances will be discussed below. Nevertheless, this description will be very helpful. The pantheist sees God as being coextensive with the universe. Pan means all and pantheists believe that God is all and everywhere. This is not a personal god at all. If the pantheist is right, then we human beings are part of God. We cannot have a relationship with God because we are God. The goal of the pantheist is to be swallowed up into the ineffable, all-pervading god-essence of the universe. The pantheist believes that the physical world around us is an illusion. The word used for this concept in both Hinduism and Buddhism is *maya*. The physical reality is a shell to contain the cosmic oneness. Buddhists, Jainas, Sikhs and Hindus have a rather complicated cosmology. They believe that reality exists on many levels or planes, and we are on one of the lower of these planes. This is the common Eastern cosmology. Our goal is to get to a higher level of reality where the spiritual is more real and the physical reality is less pervasive. Ultimately, the goal is to lose self and to be swallowed up into the all-pervading goodness.

If the Eastern idea is right, then our goal is not to know and have a personal relationship with God outside of us, but to discover the God-nature inside of us. The search for God is essentially a search within ourselves. It is literally a selfish

journey. We find Brahman, the ineffable expression of god, and a state of bliss known to the Hindu as nirvana by finding atman (soul) within ourselves. I have been using the Hindu way of describing things as this is the most common of the Eastern religions, and because it is the essence of New Age religion.

The Buddhist idea has much in common with Hinduism, but of course much is different as well. The Buddha gave his followers a philosophy-the eight fold path for right living. The four "noble truths" of Buddha were; 1. Suffering is not getting what one wants. 2. The cause of suffering is desire which leads to rebirth. 3. The way to end suffering is to end desire, and 4. The way to the end of desire and of suffering is the eight-fold path. Buddha taught dispassion rather than compassion.

Gautama refused to address the God question with his believers because he felt this was not particularly relevant. One gets the sense that the Buddha was not an atheist and that his concept of God was pantheistic. His religion included the concepts of maya and reincarnation.

The Jain and Sikh religions can be thought of as flavors of Hinduism. In fact, Sikhs tended to consider themselves a sect of Hinduism until fairly recent persecution and British tendency to define things from a Western perspective defined them as a separate religion. Both religions retain the multiple level cosmology, but reject the highly structured priestly caste system. Jainism is thoroughly pantheistic. Sikhism and Jaina include the belief that physical reality is an illusion (maya), reincarnation and a karmic thinking about "sin."

As for Taoism, this Chinese-born Eastern religion, founded by Lao Tzu, retains a strong pantheistic view of the world. Enlightenment is gained by contemplating self and nature. Like Buddhism, we come into contact with our cosmic nature through non involvement in the world. Dispassion rather than compassion is the key to enlightenment.

So, what is New Age religion? Is it palm reading? Channeling? Seances? Meditation? Reincarnation? Occultism? Gurus? Paganism? Gnosticism? Mother Goddess worship? Yes, all the above, but in its essence, it is Western pantheism. The common thread in the rather eclectic beliefs of New Agers is that you are God, I am God, we all are God! It is monism. God is everything and we are God. To quote a well-known New Age author, "Once we begin to see that we are all God, then I think the whole purpose of life is to re-own the God-likeness within us."

Let us analyze this world view. Is it a "good" world view? In part one of this series, I proposed three questions we can use to ask whether a world view is a "good" one. The three questions were; 1. Is it true? 2. Does it successfully answer the important human questions? and 3. Are those who ascribe to this world made better people for having accepted it?

Is the Eastern/New Age world view true? It will be very hard to give a fully satisfactory answer to this question in a short essay. Put it this way, the cosmology of the Eastern religions, with its endless repeating cycle of creations and destructions, and with its multiple levels of reality is not true. Material evidence for the big bang seems to preclude this cosmology. The second law of thermodynamics does not allow for a cyclical repeat of cosmic history. The eastern mind believes that this universe is not real. Some have tried to tie the twentieth century discovery of

quantum mechanics, with its probabilistic view of physical reality and its discovery of the uncertainty principle as evidence that the Buddhist cosmology is valid. The problem is that science definitely assumes that the universe is real. In fact, the scientific materialist believes that the physical universe is the ONLY reality. Unlike the situation between science and Christian theology, there is an inherent and unresolvable conflict between science and Eastern cosmology. The physical world is very real. We will not help solve the problems in this world by pretending that it is not real (and that the problems themselves are therefore not real).

It is debatable whether science can help settle the question of whether "God" is pantheistic and impersonal or theistic and personal. Nevertheless, we can ask what is the evidence supporting the central claims of Christianity and those of various Eastern religions. Christian belief has the advantage of scripture with fulfilled prophecy, verifiable historical accuracy and much more. The scripture of Eastern religions is entirely lacking in such logical/rational evidential support. In fact, one cannot even find apologists for these religions as a rule. Rational "evidence" seems to be nearly immaterial to these beliefs.

Does Eastern religion answer the important human questions? The answer is yes and no. It certainly does better here than scientific materialism. Eastern religion provides possible answers (whether right or wrong) to questions such as "What is ultimate reality?" "How did I get here and where am I going?" With other questions it is less successful. What is the nature of external reality-the world around us? The eastern believer says that it is not real. This is not helpful. What is the solution to the problem of evil? How do I become righteous? Eastern religion provides unhelpful answers. Suffering is not real, Sin does not exist (unless one allows for the idea of karma which has as much or more to do with the actions from supposed past lives as with our own life).

Are the practitioners of Eastern religion or philosophy better people for holding to these beliefs? If we compare to atheism or agnosticism, the answer surely is yes. With their idea of karma and ideal of becoming one with the pantheistic universal soul, surely the devoted Buddhist or Hindu is more likely to be peaceful, patient and possessed of a sense of responsibility for the consequences of his or her actions than the average non-believer. However, there are some weaknesses here. Like the New Age philosophy tells its believers, sin, if it exists at all, is the lack of personal understanding that you are God. Hindu thought does include a measure of personal responsibility for sinful acts, but it also includes the possibility of "atoning" for sin in this life in some still future life. It also carries the responsibility for unknown past lives into the current incarnation. Surely this weakens the sense of personal responsibility for our own actions in this life, at least for the average believer.

The Eastern world view has one looking inward, not outward. It inspires dispassion rather than compassion and disinvolvement in the world rather than involvement. I am not saying that Sikhs are completely unloving. Obviously there are many loving and giving Taoists. However, these religions teach that suffering is not real. I have traveled to India as well as Buddhist countries such as Cambodia and Thailand. It is not an accident that a majority of the organized benevolent programs in Hindu and Buddhist countries is done by Christian groups. This is not just an accident and it cannot be fully explained by the wealth in Western countries. The pattern of "Christian" benevolence is repeated in the small Christian

communities in these countries. The native Christian groups do more than their share of meeting the needs and creating social justice in these countries. Julian "the Apostate," the pagan grandson of Constantine noted of the Christian in the Roman Empire, "Atheism (i.e. Christian faith) has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them." This criticism of Julian's own pagan religion and compliment of the Christians of his day apply quite well to the situation in countries where Eastern religion predominates. Why? Because these are bad people? No. To a great extent it is because of their world view.

On a personal note, when I came to a belief in God while in college, I was initially strongly attracted to Eastern religion. I became involved in a Western-style eastern mysticism, read Hindu scripture, became a vegetarian and tried to find God in this way. In the end, I was attracted to Christianity because of the love I saw in devoted Christian lives and because of the evidence which so strongly supported Jesus being the one and only Son of God.

To summarize, the essence of the Eastern world view, and that of its many Western incarnations such as New Age believers is pantheism. It is a belief that the universe is filled up with an impersonal god-force, a spark of which is in us. The physical world is an illusion, sin is not real, and the human problem is to escape from the passions which trap us in these physical bodies. The reader will have to decide whether this world view is attractive, but from my perspective, this is a defective world view. It is defective, first of all, because it is not true. The evidential support for this view is not strong. In addition, I am not attracted to this world view because its essence is selfish. I am attracted to a view of the world which is passionate and which calls one to seek social justice and to show compassion for those less fortunate than us.

John Oakes 4/16/09

Apologetics and the Christian World View

Part IV

In the previous three essays, I have attempted to define the idea of a world view and shown why it is an extremely important thing for all of us to think about—in fact arguably THE most important thing for us to think about. In addition, I have proposed a tentative means by which we can determine what is a "good" world view. I proposed three criteria we can use. First, this world view must be true. In other words it must be consistent with what we know. Second it must give satisfactory answers to the big questions people really care about. Third, it must tend to cause those who accept it to be "better" people than they would have been if they had

accepted other competing world views. Having done this, I have attempted to describe some of the most common competing world views to that of Christianity. Specifically, we have looked at Naturalism, Postmodernism, and Eastern religion/philosophy and its cousin, the New Age philosophy/religion. Having defined these world views, I attempted to evaluate them with respect to the proposed criteria for a "good" world view. Obviously, this treatment is not comprehensive. We have not evaluated the world view of the Nihilist (which is somewhat closely related to that of the naturalist), or the Existentialist, the Stoic, dualist, neo-Platonist or of the Muslim. All of these, with the exception of the world view of Islam, can be seen as more or less closely related to the ones we have considered. Time and space are not sufficient for us to cover all of these in detail.

In this, the final essay in the series, I want return to Christianity. We will consider in much more careful detail what the Christian world view really is. We will also analyze this world view with respect to the three criteria I have been using throughout. Many Christian believers may think that the Christian world view is fairly obvious and for the seasoned follower of Jesus relatively little need be said about it. By way of response, let me say that one point of this series of essays is that it is essential for those of us who seek to influence our neighbors to have a solid and deep understanding of both our own and of competing world views. I will make the claim that many Christians do NOT have a sufficiently deep understanding of the world view which they ought to have if they accept, by faith, the biblical view of the world. I make this statement because as I travel around the world to visit more than one hundred churches in dozens of countries, when I ask some rather basic questions about things such as predestination, natural and special revelation, salvation, the cause of suffering and so forth, the answers show a rather disturbing lack of understanding of who the God of the Bible is.

Of course, some will ask "Which biblical world view?" In other words, some claim that there is more than one world view found in the Bible—that one has to choose which of these competing views one will take to be the actual biblical/Christian world view. This is another question which deserves careful and systematic response. Let me say for the sake of this essay that I personally completely reject this view. Although I will not take the time to support the claim at this point, it is my conviction from careful study of the biblical scriptures over thirty years that there is a single, consistent, non-contradictory world view and picture of who God is. The God of Genesis is the God of Isaiah is the God of John and of James and Paul.

So, what is the Christian world view? I will attempt to describe it by a series of propositions, each of which will be expanded somewhat, using biblical passages by way of support.

1. The physical world is: (Genesis 1)

a. real b. created out of nothing (ex nihilo) and c. essentially good.

2. There exists a parallel unseen spiritual reality which is not limited to or defined by the physical reality.

3. The creator of both the physical and spiritual realm is the God who is revealed and who reveals himself in the Bible.

4. God cannot be easily defined but he can be characterized by certain qualities. God is love, God is just, God is holy, God is omni....

5. Human beings have both a physical and a spiritual nature, but the spiritual nature is more essential as it is eternal.

6. Although all God's creation, including the physical world is good, evil does exist. Such evil is the result of freedom of will given to created beings and their subsequent decision to use that freedom to "sin" (defined as transgressing the will of God).

7. Because of God's justice and his holiness, those who choose to rebel against him will ultimately be judged and separated from God for eternity.

8. The solution to evil and its eternal consequences is provided by God through the atoning substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

God created us so that he could love us and that we could love, honor and glorify him. Because he wants us to know him, he makes himself know both through his creation (general revelation) and more importantly through the Bible (special revelation) (as well as in various other ways such as personal experience, fellowship with other believers and so forth)

- ◆ How did I get here?
- ◆ Why am I here?
- ◆ Where am I going?
- ◆ Why are human beings able to comprehend the universe?
- ◆ Why is there pain and suffering and evil in the world?
- ◆ The Problem of Sin (the substitutionary death of Jesus)
 - Romans 7:24,25
- ◆ The Problem of Suffering (compassion)
 - Matthew 9:35-36
- ◆ The Problem of Death
 - 1 Corinthians 15:54-56
- ◆ Science
- ◆ Abolition of Slavery (Wilberforce)
- ◆ Civil Rights

- ◆ Women's Rights
- ◆ Christian groups do a majority of all benevolent work in the world (James 1:27, Micah 6:8)

Note to students in APLA: This essay is only about 90% finished. We will talk about the Christian world view in more detail in the class.

John Oakes 12/28/09