

# Worldviews

## Foundations - Unit 318



**Week 4 – Today’s Most Common Worldviews and Why we think the way we do?**

## C/ Eastern Pantheistic Monism

Three factors brought this interest in EPM;

- The rejection of western technology because of its ability to produce more and more extreme weapons of war
- A rejection of western economics as it created an ever increasing gulf of inequity and ever increasing oppression
- A rejection of western religions as they were perceived to have been supportive of the increase in technology and of economic ideas

Many looked to the east to replace the loss of faith in either theism or naturalism.

And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings,  
 All the sorrows, all the pleasures  
 All the good and evil, all of them together was the world...  
 The great song with thousand voices consisted of one  
 word:  
 OM - perfection<sup>1</sup>

## 1/ What is Prime Reality?

**In the Eastern Worldview, the ultimate Reality (the "One") is impersonal, infinite, non-material, and non-conceptual.**

In this system, "Brahman" is the ultimate reality. Brahman "is all in all", the "Universal Soul." It is all that really exists, and nothing truly exists that is not ultimately Brahman.

The ultimate reality of Brahman is beyond distinction, so that anything that does appear to exist as a distinct object, such as a human, a computer, or a concept, is an illusion, or "maya."

## 2/ What is the nature of external reality, that is the world around us?

**In the Eastern Worldview, the Universe flows out of Brahman (God), and Brahman is the Universe.**

In eastern thought, everything is an emanation or manifestation of Brahman. Eastern thinkers say: "Brahman is all in all" ...Brahman is all, and all is Brahman.

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Hesse in *Siddhartha* (James Sire The Universe Next Door, p118)

### **3/ What is a human being?**

**In the Eastern Worldview, "Atman" (the soul and essence of each human) "...is Brahman" (the Soul of the Cosmos).**

Atman is the eternal principle of Brahman that is found within each individual human. Atman is "the One" within each of us. So, who is man? In essence, at the very spiritual core, man is Brahman (God). Thus, since Brahman is impersonal, man at his core nature (Atman) is also not personal.

### **4/ Why is it possible to know anything at all?**

Ultimately, in the eastern worldview, a person's theology or conceptual beliefs are of no importance at all... being illusory "maya."

### **5/ How do we know what is right and wrong?**

**Ethics are not absolute; to reach enlightenment in the "One" is to go beyond good and evil.**

Eastern thought classifies concern over goodness and truth to be lower-level spirituality. No action is really "good" or "evil," ultimately, because Brahman is beyond such things. The pantheist has no absolute, unchanging basis for what is really right or wrong ...ethics is actually unreal... "maya."

### **6/ What is the meaning of human history?**

All distinct "things," events and time are illusion; so history is meaningless and cyclical.

History (with all "events," past, present or future) does not actually exist in reality, so it is something for enlightened man to transcend and leave behind.

History does not have any ultimate destiny or goal to which it is heading, and human life has no actual meaning.

The Eastern view says however, the goal and destiny of man is to attain "Nirvana". Only the impersonal spirit of man (Atman) is real, and it needs to attain oneness with the absolute "One", Brahman.

For those who die still unenlightened, they return to the wheel of life, birth, suffering, death, via reincarnation. To what level of the wheel

they return will be determined by their actions in the life they just lived. This is the idea of karma.

## Why do we think the way we do?

### *Plato 400 BC*

Influenced by Socrates, Plato was convinced that knowledge is attainable. He was also convinced of two essential characteristics of knowledge.

- First, knowledge must be certain and infallible.
- Second, knowledge must have as its object that which is genuinely real as contrasted with that which is an appearance only

### *Aristotle 384 to 322 BC*

Aristotle regarded the world as made up of individuals (substances) occurring in fixed natural kinds (species).

Aristotle clearly stated the relationship between human insight and the senses in what has become a slogan of empiricism—the view that knowledge is grounded in sense experience.

“There is nothing in the intellect,” he wrote, “that was not first in the senses.”<sup>2</sup>

### *What of their influence on western thought?*

Both Plato and Aristotle have had an ongoing influence on the way people have thought about the world.

Plato’s rejection of the material led to the development of the idea of the body and anything in creation, being evil and hence to such practices as monasticism and aestheticism. It also heavily influenced the Church’s ideas regarding the soul and the body.

Aristotle’s reliance on the particulars, that is, the material world, to supply the answers was foundational in the development of the idea of humanism.

### *Origen*

Origen delved into a project to blend Greek philosophy with the Bible and Christian faith.

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<sup>2</sup> "Aristotle," Microsoft (R) Encarta. Copyright (c) 1994 Microsoft Corporation. Copyright (c) 1994 Funk & Wagnall's Corporation.

**Augustine (354-430)**

During his young adult years Augustine became a follower of the Manichaean religion. Manichaeism was a syncretistic religion founded by Mani and based on a dualism of good and evil. Mingling elements of Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Christianity, the Manichaean religion regarded the physical world as the result of a primordial victory of evil over good, which resulted in a mixture of the two.

Augustine's approach to theology dominated Western thought in all spheres of life for the next thousand years.

**Thomas Aquinas 1225 - 1274**

It was Thomas Aquinas who engaged Aristotle creatively to make him the foundation for the Roman Church's new theology. Thomas would rely on Aristotle for its emphasis on the world of experience. Thus Thomas placed great emphasis on what reason can learn through experience.

By following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas opened the door to another way of thinking, the way of reasoning with regards to the world around us.

John Duns Scotus (c. 1265-1308), who was also an Aristotelian, placed his emphasis on the individual or the particular. The study of individual or particular cases, however, resulted in a new way of thinking about universals.

William of Occam (d. c. 1350) He argued that only individual objects exist. Universals are only mental concepts created to speak of the collective experience of individual objects.

Occam's Razor - *Among competing hypotheses, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected.* Or the simplest answer is often the correct one.

This is the beginning of the God of the Gaps – if we can discover how something works then the God explanation is no longer needed.

**Reformation:**

The philosophical framework determined how scientists thought about their observations, just as the philosophical framework determined how theologians thought about God.

The Reformers argued that tradition had distorted the truth of the Christian faith and made it unrecognizable when compared to the biblical model.

This same spirit of reform was at work among scholars concerned with examining particular phenomena in the world.

The Reformation was centred in the infinite personal God who had spoken in the Bible. The problem of meaning for the 'particulars' or the 'universals' did not exist for the Reformers because the Bible gives them unity by;

1. the Bible tells true things about God therefore we can know truth
2. the Bible tells us true things about man and nature

### ***Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)***

Galileo did not run afoul of the academic authorities for challenging the Bible. His trouble arose when he challenged Aristotle's teaching that the heavenly bodies must be perfectly smooth spheres - a principle which did not allow for craters on the moon.

### ***Francis Bacon (1561-1626).***

Bacon proposed a method for the increase of knowledge that relied upon the accumulation of data, experimentation and scrupulous interpretation that is what is now known as the *Scientific Method*.

### ***Peter Ramus (1515- 1572)***

The method of Ramus involved dividing every subject into two parts and dichotomizing each subdivision. Ramist logic simplified or reduced every question into a choice between two options.

William Perkins popularised John Calvin's theology and used Ramist logic to do so. He divided all of theology from before creation until after the last judgment into a dichotomy of the two eternal decrees of God: election and reprobation.

### ***Rene Descartes (1596-1650)***

Descartes argued that belief depends on an exercise of the will. This view of belief stood at the heart of Perkins's system.

Descartes, influenced by Perkins's way of reaching a conclusion about a person's salvation, arrived at a dichotomy between mind and body that leads to a dichotomy between the physical world and the spiritual world.

Descartes used Perkins method to arrive at what has become the most foundational change in thought, *Cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. For Descartes this was the only truth that he was absolutely sure was true.

Now, beginning with himself, humanity tried to understand the cosmos. Before this it was man, beginning with God, trying to understand the cosmos.

By the end of the eighteenth century, William Perkins's model of reducing issues to two alternatives had become the dominant way of thinking in the English-speaking world.

In the natural world observed by scientific investigation, scientists were faced by the two alternatives that their worldview allowed them:

- (1) phenomena occurred by the direct action of God, or
- (2) phenomena occurred as the result of the laws of nature.

***For Example:***

Immanuel Kant:

because we can only *know* that which is in the *phenomenal* realm, knowledge of God—who exists in the *noumenal* realm—is beyond human capacity.

Charles Darwin:

When Darwin came to realize that organisms change over time, he was placed in the jaws of the Perkins's dilemma.

1. God either created all species unchangeable by fiat or
2. God had nothing to do with the development of life at all.

This was just the beginning of the so called war between science and religion.

This is the natural consequence of the “God of the Gaps” framework that began with Occam’s Razor in the 1400s.

