THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Engagement Topic: Rival Worldviews, Part 1 4th Semester / Spring 2025 Introduction The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topic this week is Deism and naturalism. An Introduction to Rival Worldviews The next few weeks will focus mostly on communal worldviews that influence the individual worldviews of particular people. These rival worldviews include some of the key "isms" that we each encounter, including religions and philosophical systems. Some of these rival worldviews are competitive rivals that challenge a biblical worldview outright, while others are invasive rivals that can infiltrate and alter other worldviews, including a biblical worldview. Some key reminders as we consider rival worldviews: (1) Worldviews are not so much systems as they are stories, so every worldview is telling us a different story about the world and our place in the world. (2) Some worldviews have fairly fixed assumptions, while others include more variety or allow for a spectrum of beliefs. (3) Some worldviews are really derivative stories that draw upon elements from a variety of other worldviews. (4) While communal worldviews might be tightly defined, individual worldviews are normally shaped by ideas from more than one communal worldview. (5) Some rival worldviews have roots in a biblical worldview historically, while others are more alien to Judeo-Christian ways of thinking about the world. **Worldview Analysis Questions**



(1) Is there truth and can we know it?(2) Is there some higher power?(3) Where do we come from?(4) Why is the world so messed up?

- (5) Can things ever get better?
- (6) What is the good life?
- (7) Where is the world headed?
- (8) How do we live in light of what we believe to be true?

Worldview Analysis: Deism

The Enlightenment began in Europe in the mid-1600s. Though it was never a uniform movement, the Enlightenment was concerned with the role of human reason to understand the world and promote human flourishing. Some Enlightenment thinkers were fairly orthodox Christians, including John Locke, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and Rene Descartes. In popular imagination, the Enlightenment is more known for the way it made religious skepticism more acceptable, at least among the more educated classes, and anticipated the later rise of naturalism. Famous skeptics included David Hume, Voltaire, Thomas Hobbes, Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson. We sometimes think of these men as atheists or agnostics, but these thinkers were deists.

Deism was more of a spectrum than a tight philosophical system. Some Deists considered themselves practicing Christians, while others did not. The most famous Deists were Unitarians who denied the full deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. However, Deists still affirmed much of the Judeo-Christian tradition, including some elements of a biblical worldview.

(1) Is there truth and can we know it?

There is absolute truth, which is accessible to all and can be determined by rational objective inquiry. The most valid form of rational objective inquiry is scientific investigation of the natural world, which is governed by laws that can be observed, tested, and proven. The Bible is a trustworthy guide for morals and personal religious experience, but we should look to nature if we want objective truth.

(2) Is there some higher power?

There is a God. The only truly reliable information about him comes from natural revelation, especially the natural laws that reflect his design. Special revelation is a

secondary testimony to God's existence, but it is less reliable than natural revelation.	
(3) Where do we come from?	
God created all things, including the first humans. However, God rules more through natural laws than divine providence. Some Deists denied all miracles, while others allowed for a handful of really important miracles related to the life and ministry of Jesus.	
(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
Many Deists had a fairly biblical view of human sin. However, they tended not to think of the natural world as being fallen. It is the way God intended it to be, for reasons known only to him.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
The world can absolutely get better in an everyday sort of way when humans live virtuously, guided by the natural law written on everyone hearts and the ethical teachings of the Bible. Many of the Deists wrote about ethics, and orthodox Christians would agree with much of what they said. However, few Deists believed that individuals should repent of their sin and trust Jesus as King and Savior. Instead, the focused on following Jesus's ethical example and living by the Golden Rule.	
(6) What is the good life?	-
The good life is characterized by personal and public virtue. Many of the Deists were interested in political philosophy, especially individual freedom, free markets, and public justice. Most were republicans who championed representative democracies that were grounded in virtue and committed to liberty.	
(7) Where is the world headed?	
Some Deists simply believed the world would get better and better as virtue and liberty spread. A few Deists were limited supernaturalists who believed that God would intervene again at the end of the age when Jesus returns. All believed in the spread of Western Civilization, including Judeo-Christian values, to more "primitive"	
people. This was the Age of Empires.	

(8) How do we live in light of what we believe to be true?	
Believe in God and pursue personal and public virtue.	
Today, many people are cultural Deists . They affirm the existence of God, but they live as if he is uninvolved in our daily lives. They tend toward Unitarianism, or at least have	
undeveloped views about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They believe Jesus is a good teacher, they have generally positive views about church (even if they don't attend a	
church), and they tend to believe the afterlife is based more on good deeds than salvation. Cultural Deists tend to be religious pluralists who believe that all religions are pointing in some way to God.	
Worldview Analysis: Naturalism	
By the mid-19 th century, Deism was beginning to give way to naturalism. While there have always been people who	
denied the existence of God, in the West the Enlightenment created an intellectual world where	
agnosticm or even atheism seemed more plausible. While it was not their intention, the Deists ended up being the	
transition from Judeo-Christian supernaturalism to non-religious naturalism.	
Three key intellectual trends influenced the growing popularity of naturalism in the years between about 1825	
and 1875. First, a growing number of modernist theologians argued that the Bible was not an infallible	
revelation from God, but rather was a fallible record of mankind's spiritual longings. Second, the rise of	
Darwinism led to those spiritual longings being explained as a product of the biological evolution of our species.	
Finally, in an age of growing economic inequality and commercial exploitation, Marxism provided an appealing	
anti-supernaturalist alternative to the political economy that became popular in the West during the	
Enlightenment.	
(1) Is there truth and can we know it?	
Many naturalists still believe there is absolute truth, which is accessible to all and can be determined by rational	
objective inquiry. The most valid form of rational objective inquiry is scientific investigation of the natural world,	
which is governed by laws that can be observed, tested,	
and proven. Others are either skeptical that there is absolute truth, or they doubt we can determine whatever	

absolute truth does exist. The Bible has at least some good moral teachings, but it also has immoral teachings. Either way, the Bible is the product of religious men and not a deity.	
(2) Is there some higher power?	
Either there is no higher power, or we are unable to know with certainty that there is a higher power.	
(3) Where do we come from?	·
A few naturalists believe that the universe has always existed, but most believe it began about 14 billion years ago with the Big Bang. The universe is still expanding. Prehistoric humans evolved from lower species about 6 million years ago. What we think of as humans have been around for around 200,000 years, evolving from prehistoric humans.	
(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
Because the world is characterized by chaos, competition, violence, and gradual evolution. Humans are simply the most evolved animals on our planet.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
Optimistic naturalists believe that as humans continue to evolve the world will get better and better. Pessimist naturalists believe that humans are prone to make the world worse because our species is selfish, prone to self-	
destruction, etc. In neither case do naturalists emphasize any sort of personal redemption. We should just try to be good people who do good things, though naturalism itself doesn't provide much guidance about what is good.	
A growing number of naturalists are transhumanists who believe that the next step in evolution is the integration of advanced technology into human biology.	
(6) What is the good life?	
The good life is characterized by being a good person, experiencing personal fulfillment, and doing what you can to make the world a better place. Of course, what all that actually means is highly subjective. Whatever it means, a major part of the story is human advancement, especially	
in technologies that improve our quality of life	

(7) Where is the world headed?	1
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In the relatively short term, our planet could go either way. Optimistic naturalists hope we can get our act together and harness technological advancements to make the world a better place and improve our quality of life. Environmentalism and transhumanism are an important part of this story. Pessimistic naturalists think that humans will eventually destroy the world. As for the wider universe, it will eventually experience heat death and cease to exist.	
(8) How do we live in light of what we believe to be true?	
Logically, naturalism ought to lead to despair. Fortunately, few naturalists live in a manner consistent with their worldview commitments. Most naturalists import their answers to this question from other worldviews.	
Naturalism remains very common in the 21st century. In most cases, it is combined with other worldviews. Typically, many people are naturalist in their worldview assumptions about God, creation, and the destiny of creation, but their understanding of the good life and ethics comes from other worldviews that have evolved out of naturalism. The best way to think about this is that naturalism is the biggest rival to all forms of theism (whether Christian or non-Christian) and their implications	
for an open universe guided by a higher power or powers.	-
Recommended Resources	
David S. Dockery and Trevin Wax, eds., <i>Christian Worldview Handbook</i> (Holman Reference, 2019).	
James W. Sire, <i>The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog</i> , 6 th ed. (IVP Academic, 2020).	
Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, <i>Hidden Worldviews:</i> Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives (IVP Academic, 2009).	