

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?

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, they 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-19th 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 agnosticism 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

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