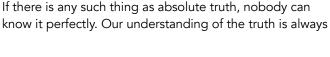
THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Engagement Topic: Rival Worldviews, Part 2 4th Semester / Spring 2025 Introduction The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topics this week are nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism. Review: Assessing Rival Worldviews Some rival worldviews are competitive rivals that challenge a biblical worldview outright, while others are invasive rivals that can infiltrate and alter other worldviews. 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. Some worldviews offer grand narratives that can influence entire cultures or communities, while others are derivative worldviews that borrow elements from one of more other worldviews. Worldview Analysis: Nihilism Naturalism is a grand narrative sort of worldview that arose out of the more skeptical stream of the Enlightenment. Naturalism has given birth to a number of derivative worldviews, one of which is arguably its most logical development: nihilism (Lat. nihil = nothing). Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is the father of nihilism. Nietzche is often considered an atheist, but it would be more accurate to say he was a hostile agnostic. Nietzche is best known for three ideas: (1) belief in God is now unbelievable (the "death of God"); (2) the primary motivation for human actions is the "will to power"; (3) the destination humanity should be striving for is becoming superior Übermensch (German = "over man"). The latter two ideas influenced the development of Nazism. The first idea became a key assumption of nihilism.



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



continue to our individual perspectives. The elegant we can	
captive to our individual perspectives. The closest we can get to the truth is understanding all the different perspectives and determining which ones seem most	
plausible.	
(2) Is there some higher power?	
It doesn't matter if there is a God or gods. The modern world is really too advanced scientifically and	
philosophically to spend too much effort thinking about the supernatural.	
(3) Where do we come from?	
Nihilism is a form of naturalism, so in general the answers to this question are the same as naturalists (the Big Bang	
and evolution). However, it really doesn't matter. We are	
here, and the fact that we are here has no higher or ultimate meaning. This is just how it happened.	
(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
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The world has always been messed up. Humans have always been messed up. Any attempt to find some	
meaning in the brokenness of the world is not worth the	
effort. It's better to just accept reality and not try to invent myths to give some higher meaning to it all.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
Nihilists are pessimistic naturalists. As such, they believe	
that humans are prone to make the world worse because our species is selfish, prone to self-destruction, etc. There	
is no such thing as redemption in the spiritual sense.	
Myths are intellectual crutches to help us make sense of the meaninglessness of life.	
(6) What is the good life?	
You should just embrace reality rather than fantasy. Be a	
good person who does good things. Of course, goodness is really a matter of one's perspective. Try not to despair,	
though it is perfectly natural to look at the meaninglessness of the world and want to despair. Life	
has no meaning.	
(7) Where is the world headed?	

As pessimistic naturalists, nihilists think that humans will eventually destroy the world. As for the wider universe, it will eventually experience heat death and cease to exist. There is no higher purpose for the world. (8) How do we live in light of what we believe to be true? Nihilists don't have a coherent answer to this question. The logical conclusion of nihilism is suicide, or at least despair. Fortunately, many nihilists live inconsistent with their beliefs. In those cases, like other naturalists, nihilists import their ethics from other worldviews. There aren't many individuals in the world today who are card-carrying nihilists. Nihilism is more important for how some of its views were picked up in the late-20th century by postmodernism. Because of the influence of postmodernism, there are many people today have a broadly nihilistic outlook on life. There is no higher power, noble purpose, or transcendent meaning. Worldview Analysis: Existentialism Nihilism proved too pessimistic a worldview for many people, even many naturalists. Existentialism became a major rival to nihilism. The father of existentialism was Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish Christian philosopher who was concerned that the state-church Protestants of Central Europe were too captive to dead orthodoxy. Kierkegaard valued the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, an individualistic experience that cannot fully be captured by abstract doctrines. Theology is abstract and theoretical, while religious experience is practical and real. Kierkegaard's existentialism significantly influenced European Protestant theology into the mid-20th century. Existentialism fully developed around the turn of the twentieth century, and most existentialists were naturalists. This included the philosophers Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), and Albert Camus (1913-1960). Whether religious or secular, existentialists reject the nihilist belief

that it is foolish to ascribe meaning to life. Instead, part of what it means to be human is to try and find meaning in life, despite the fact the world often seems absurd and meaningless. Existentialists value authenticity, freedom,

and individual experience.

(1) Is there truth and can we know it?	
Christian existentialists believe in absolute truth, even if we cannot fully know it, while naturalist existentialists reject absolute truth in principle. All existentialists emphasize subjective truth rooted in personal experience.	
(2) Is there some higher power?	
Christian existentialists believe in God, while naturalistic existentialists reject supernaturalism.	
(3) Where do we come from?	
Christian existentialists believe in some sort of theistic creation, while naturalistic existentialists affirm naturalistic views of origins.	
(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
Christian existentialists believe in the fall, while naturalistic existentialists do not. But all existentialists emphasize that a lack of authenticity and the limitation of reasonable freedom for individuals is at the root of many, and perhaps most, human problems.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
Christian existentialists affirm doctrines like the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection, though theological liberals might redefine them in various ways. Naturalistic existentialists tend to focus on personal morality rooted in their notions of personal authenticity and freedom.	
(6) What is the good life?	
For Christian existentialists, the answer is to love God and neighbor, pursue spiritual maturity, reach the lost and serve those in need, etc. For naturalistic existentialists, 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 that actually means is highly subjective.	
(7) Where is the world headed?	

Christian existentialists affirm a biblical eschatology, while naturalistic existentialists affirm naturalistic views of the future.	
(8) How should we live in light of what we believe to be true?	
We should pursue individual and public morality. We should seek to be our true and authentic selves and help others to do the same. Flourishing means promoting as much freedom as possible to help people live authentic lives.	
Existentialism is far more common than nihilism in the 21 st century. A little bit of "everyday existentialism" is baked into the default worldviews of most people in the West, including conservative Christians. Existentialism goes naturally with a Western emphasis on individualism, personal autonomy, and political freedom. However, existentialism in its stronger forms directly influenced the rise of postmodernism.	
Worldview Analysis: Postmodernism	
Postmodernism developed in the 1970s, originally as an academic movement within the arts and humanities. By the 1990s, postmodernism was beginning to influence popular culture in Europe and North America. The most famous academic proponents of postmodernism include Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Academic postmodernism became associated with a number of controversial views. Many were further developments of nihilism or existentialism.	
Postfoundationalism : there is no ultimate or transcendent authority for beliefs or actions	
Relativism : truth, morality, and other standards vary across cultures and individuals, and all standards are ultimately about the exercise of power	
Deconstruction : analyzing texts to determine the hidden assumptions of the authors, especially how the authors are using power	
Multiculturalism: the acknowledgement of different cultures in a society and the rejection of efforts to create	

common culture

(1) Is there truth and can we know it?	
There is either no such thing as absolute truth, or if there is, it cannot be known. What matters is individual perspectives rooted in personal experiences. It is really a power play to argue for any absolute truth that is binding on all people.	
(2) Is there some higher power?	
If there is, we cannot be sure what that power is. For all practical purposes, the only power that matters is the power wielded by humans as individuals or in community.	
(3) Where do we come from?	
Most postmodernists are naturalists and default to a combination of the Big Bang and evolution to explain origins.	
(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
Primarily because of the misuse of power. Humans have evolved in such a way that individuals compete with each other, communities compete with one another, majorities oppress minorities, etc. Instead of embracing relativism and multiculturalism, humans are always trying to impose their own values on other humans.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
The only way things will get better is if everyone concedes that truth is relative, if we eliminate all misuse of power, and if we come to some provisional moral consensus. There is no spiritual redemption. Something like an earthly redemption can be experienced when we let go of our own preferences and prejudices and privileges, which are really all about power. This is especially true of individuals	
who are part of majority communities.	
(6) What is the good life?	
For the most part, postmodernists follow existentialists in this area. 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 that actually means is highly subjective	

(7) Where is the world headed?	-	
Postmodernists tend toward naturalistic views of the history and destiny of the world.	-	
(8) How should we live in light of what we believe to be true?	-	
We should live consistent with our personal beliefs and values, though we should never impose them on others, which would be an abusive use of power. We should actively oppose the efforts of others to impose their values, with the exception of postmodern assumptions about multiculturalism and relativism. Postmodernism is an activist worldview: we should show solidarity with everyone who is oppressed, marginalized, or silenced because they are part of a minority.		
Recommended Resources	-	
David S. Dockery and Trevin Wax, eds., <i>Christian</i> Worldview Handbook (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, Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives (IVP Academic, 2009).	-	
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