THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Engagement Topic: Rival Worldviews, Part 4 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 Eastern monism and Islamic theism. Worldview Analysis: Eastern Monism Monism is the belief that everything that exists is made of the same substance. It rejects all forms of dualism, so there is no distinction between the material and the immaterial, or the spiritual and the physical, or the sacred and the secular. Everything that exists is connected. While there are materialistic monists, Eastern monism is the underlying belief behind Buddhism, Taoism, and some of the indigenous Southeast Asian religions that Westerners collectively call "Hinduism." For Eastern monists, all substance is in some sense divine. Philosophically, we call this idea pantheism ("everything-god-ism"). Eastern Monism has become more prevalent in America and other parts of the West since the mid-twentieth century. (1) Is there truth and can we know it? All reality is unified and interconnected. Any apparent distinctions and separations between individual beings are actually illusions, and the true nature of reality is beyond language and can only be experienced through spiritual realization. This is the only ultimate truth, and to know it is to understand you are one with the rest of the universe. (2) Is there some higher power? There is only one ultimate reality which permeates all of existence, meaning everything is part of this single, unified divine force, with no ultimate distinction between the individual self and the universal whole. We might



interpret this reality as one God or as many gods or as no gods, but that is really our finite perception. There are no personal gods, at least in the ultimate sense, because all

of existence is divine.

(3) Where do we come from?	
There was no special creation, nor was there a Creator. All existence is eternal, even if reality as we know it had a starting point at some moment in the past. Different Eastern religions articulate this big idea in different ways. Many opt for some sort of cyclical understanding of existence, which might include the reincarnation of individuals.	
(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
The world has always been messed up, and humans have always been messed up. But this is more our perception than ultimate reality. Humans are good by nature, and what we call sin is really an illusion. Humanity's real problem is ignorance, particularly our ignorance about the oneness of the universe. This ignorance leads to alienation, conflict, and suffering.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
We need to embrace the truth that all is one, and that we are part of that unified whole. We should resist the illusions of individual identity and personal autonomy. How a person achieves this state of personal enlightenment or self-realization varies, but it normally involves some combination of meditation, self-denial, and virtuous deeds. Buddhists call this personal enlightenment Nirvana, Taoists call it the Tao, and many Hindus call it Moksha. The result is being freed from the cycle of reincarnation and reabsorbed into the universe.	
(6) What is the good life?	
This varies according to different Eastern religions, though it is normally tied to the pursuit of personal enlightenment and living in harmony with yourself, other people, and the natural world.	
(7) Where is the world headed?	
It depends. Some believe history will always be cyclical, though individuals may experience personal enlightenment and be freed from the cycle. Others have a quasi-evolutionary understanding of the world and believe that at some point there will be some sort of universal unity and enlightenment, which will result in some new	

state of existence.

(8) How do we live in light of what we believe to be true? Be a good person who lives at peace and harmony with all people and with nature. Meditate, do good works, and reject all the illusions. You are one with the universe, and one day, hopefully, you will be reabsorbed into it. There are some Americans who embrace Eastern monism completely because they are Buddhists or Taoists or are part of a smaller cult that shares this general worldview. More frequently, aspects of Eastern monism have influenced aspects of Western culture. The Dalai Lama is widely respected in the West for his advocacy of the nonviolent pursuit of world peace, human rights, and environmentalism. The Taoist yin and yang symbol is everywhere. Star Wars talks about the "The Force" that is really at the heart of all that exists. Self-help and pop psychology techniques such as Transcendental Meditation and mindfulness and yoga have their roots in Eastern monism. Ideas like chi, feng shui, and karma have become part of popular culture and everyday lingo. **Excursus: New Ageism** New Ageism came of age alongside the religious pluralism and postmodernism of the 1970s. It is an eclectic movement that is hard to define. Sometimes, it sounds like Eastern monism. But New Ageism is also a hodgepodge of influences including various quasi-Christian cults that have arisen since the Enlightenment, the beliefs and practices of various pagan religious traditions (both ancient and indigenous), alternative or holistic medicinal theories, modern psychology, occultism, and even science fiction. There isn't really a coherent New Age worldview, and few people are card-carrying New Agers. But it still has some elements of a worldview. New Ageism is concerned with personal self-realization, meditation, and harmony like Eastern monism. But there are several key differences. New Ageism tends to be postmodern in its assumptions about truth. New Ageism often affirms a non-Christian form of theistic (or at least non-naturalistic) evolution in its view of origins and the future. New Ageism tends to believe the world is filled with supernatural beings of greater and lesser power, some of which control us and others of which we can

control. New Ageism rejects pantheism in favor of

panentheism ("god-in-everything-ism"). So, if the goal of Eastern monistic enlightenment is to be reabsorbed into

the one, the goal is New Age enlightenment is to realize	
that the divine is already within you, and to live in light of	
that reality. Some Christian apologists argue that "Neo-	
paganism" might be a better term than "New Ageism" to	
describe this eclectic group of beliefs and practices.	
Worldview Analysis: Islamic Theism	
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The history of Islam is intricately connected to the history	
of Christianity. However, in the modern post-	
Enlightenment West, few Christians had much awareness	
of Muslim beliefs unless they were engaged in mission	
work or they lived in international and/or pluralistic	
contexts. But since the mid-twentieth century, the entire	
West has become more pluralistic. Since the Iranian	
Revolution in 1978-1979, and especially since 9/11,	
everyone is now more aware of at least some Muslim	
beliefs because of the role that "Islamic fundamentalism"	
plays in global affairs.	
plays in global allairs.	
(1) Is there truth and can we know it?	
(1) is there truth and can we know it:	
There is truth and it can be known. One of Allah's divine	
names is Truth, and that name reflects his perfect	
character. He is the source of all truth. Allah has spoken	
through prophets (including Jesus) and sacred Scriptures	
(including the Bible), but his final prophet is Muhammed	
and his fullest revelation is the Koran.	
(2) la thora como higher nouver?	
(2) Is there some higher power?	
Allah is the one true God. He is not an eternal Trinity of	
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divine persons, but rather he is one eternal divine person.	
Muslims are unitarian monotheists. In most other respects,	
Allah has the same attributes as Yahweh, since Muslims	
believe Allah is supposed to be the real identity of	
Yahweh.	
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(3) Where do we come from?	
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Muslims agree with a basically Judeo-Christian	
understanding of creation because they affirm the	
inspiration of Genesis.	
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(4) Why is the world so messed up?	
Islam teaches that man is universally sinful, and sin is	
disphedience to Allah's commands. However, Muslims	1

deny original sin. All people are born good, but all people

sin from a very young age because Satan tempts us all and, like Adam and Eve, we always fail. Muslim views about sin are similar to the Christian heresy of Pelagianism.	
(5) Can things ever get better?	
Muslims believe that humans are saved by a combination of faith and works. You must believe that Allah is the one true God. You must submit to his will, which is revealed in the Koran. You must do good deeds and repent of bad deeds. Many Muslims believe that those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will be saved, while others believe that Allah is merciful to those who have	
done the best they can.	
(6) What is the good life?	
Islam is Arabic for "submission" or "surrender." The good life is faithfully submitting to Allah's will. Societies can only flourish when they are ordered around Sharia law, which is	
revealed in the Koran and interpreted by later Muslim tradition. Sharia law is intended to protect human life, true religion, individual persons, the family, and both personal and communal wealth.	
(7) Where is the world headed?	·
The Muslim view of end times is sort of like Revelation 21-22, but without Jesus. Ultimately, Allah will judge all people, paradise will come down to earth, and Allah will remake all things into a new heavens and new earth.	
(8) How should we live in light of what we believe to be true?	
We should live according to the teachings of the Koran.	
This results in a life of faith and good works. We should try and persuade non-Muslims to embrace Islam. If we are	
fundamentalist Muslims, we might do this initially by force, trusting that Allah would eventually change individual hearts because he is merciful. We should live out Sharia	
law in our individual lives and families. If given the opportunity, we should try and advocate for societies to	
embrace Sharia law (fundamentalists), or at least adopt basically just laws that enable us to freely practice Sharia	
law (moderates).	

Islam is the second largest religion in the world and is fastgrowing in the West, including in America. Fundamentalist versions of Islam have gained numbers and influence over the past century, dating to the collapse of the old Ottoman Empire during World War I. But not all Muslims are fundamentalists, and not all fundamentalists support religious violence. Millions of Muslims are moderates who have made peace with religious pluralism and religious freedom, though they take their faith seriously in their personal lives and families. Millions of Muslims also practice what has been called "folk Islam," where elements of Islam are integrated with elements of indigenous paganism and superstitions. Practitioners of folk Islam might take their identity as Muslims seriously, but their religion might be nominal. This is similar to the nominal Catholics that one finds in much of the West, where religious identity might not be an indication of religious commitment.

Recommended Resources

Winfried Corduan, Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions, 3rd ed. (IVP Academic, 2024).

David S. Dockery and Trevin Wax, eds., *Christian Worldview Handbook* (Holman Reference, 2019).

James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 6th ed. (IVP Academic, 2020).

Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (IVP Academic, 2009).
