

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.

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