

Worldview Comparison Table

© Richard A. Knopp, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Philosophy & Apologetics, Lincoln Christian University
Executive Director, Room For Doubt and Strengthen Faith, Inc.

www.RoomForDoubt.com and www.RichKnopp.com

	God / Prime Reality	Cosmos	Humans	Knowledge/Revelation	Ethics	Death	History
Christian Theism	Begins with Being—God—as infinite, personal (trune), rational, creator, transcendent and immanent, sovereign, and good.	Created <i>ex nihilo</i> ; operates with uniformity in an <i>open</i> system (miracles are possible). “Fallen” in sin and in need of redemption.	Created in the image of God. Rational, personal, self-transcendent, sociable, and morally aware. Originally good, now fallen, but capable of restoration.	Can have adequate knowledge of the world and God because God endowed this capacity. Accepts both general & special revelation.	Transcendent & based on the character of God as good. Some ethical principles are universal (not relative) and given by general and/or special revelation.	Gateway to eternal life with God or eternal separation, determined by one’s relationship to Christ. Individuality is retained after a one-time physical death.	Linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God’s purposes. History is guided by God’s providence and miraculous intervention.
Deism	God was creator of the cosmos and humans but is now only transcendent (not immanent). God often seen as not fully personal.	Divinely created—a uniformity of cause/effect in a <i>closed</i> system. Miracles not possible/actual. The cosmos is not “fallen” or abnormal.	Though viewed as personal, humans are still part of the clockwork universe. The capacity for morality & reason is “built in.”	The cosmos and God are knowable via human reason. Natural (General) Revelation is accepted; Special Revelation is rejected.	Though moral principles may be based on God’s transcendent nature, they are knowable only through natural revelation. Thus, what “is” must be “right.”	Some accept divine judgment with rewards & punishments based on one’s actions. Others view death as the end of personal existence.	History is linear; its destination is determined at creation. God does not act “in history” by providence or miracle.
Secular Humanism (Optimistic Naturalism or Modernism)	No God. Prime reality is matter/energy and either eternal or self-generated. Begins with the knowing self (e.g. Descartes).	Uncreated; operates with uniformity of cause/effect in a <i>closed</i> system.	“Complex machines”—a mere interaction of physical & chemical properties—whose personality is not yet understandable.	Begins with knowing (not Being). Knowledge is possible to effect progress. It is humanly developed, not divinely revealed.	Ethical values are created by human consensus; they are autonomous (not dependent on any God) and situational.	Physical death means the extinction of consciousness, personality, and individuality.	A linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without any overarching purpose, except perhaps for general human progress.
Nihilism (Pessimistic Naturalism)	No God, only a cosmos that appears not to care, to value goodness, or be rational. Prime reality is thus “absurd.”	The cosmos operates either by necessity or mere chance and has no inherent value or meaning. It is <i>absurd</i> and provides no answers to ultimate questions.	Despairing machines without value or meaning. No “self” exists apart from the cosmic machine. Freedom and consciousness are thus undermined.	No real foundation for knowledge. No reason to think that the brain—as pure matter—would give “truth.” Truth and illusion seem indistinguishable.	No basis for moral values. One cannot legitimately produce any “oughts” from what “is” the case. Values are relative, often defined by the strongest.	Although it has the same view of death as “optimistic” naturalism, Nihilism stresses death as the “final absurdity.”	History has no direction or purpose. An <i>individual’s</i> history and the <i>world’s</i> history are meaningless.
Atheistic Existentialism	No God. Reality appears in two disconnected forms: objective (matter) and subjective (my experience of freedom).	The world consists of objective “essences” that are governed by nature’s laws and logic. It conveys no meaning and is <i>absurd</i> .	For humans alone, existence precedes essence. Man is totally free to define himself. Humans are alienated from the world.	The objective world may be knowable by logic and science, but the “self” is beyond any such analysis.	The authentic human must “revolt” against absurdity and create value. “Good” actions are those consciously & freely chosen.	Though death is an undeniable absurdity, one should face it boldly, as a final exercise of human revolt.	The <i>world’s</i> history is meaningless. For an <i>individual</i> , temporary meaning may arise through choices and personal encounters.
Theistic Existentialism	God is accepted on a leap of faith without proof. Some emphasize God as personal, but others not so much.	The cosmos is alien and <i>paradoxical</i> . By itself, it gives no meaning, nor does it offer any evidence for God.	The “personal” (I-Thou) is the valuable. Humans are finite and fallen and will not be fully satisfied apart from surrender to God (or Spirit).	Knowledge is paradoxical. God is believed without reason or proof. Revelation is personal encounter, not revealed propositions.	Ethics is not a set of moral rules, but a commitment to a personal relationship.	One’s personal encounter with God can prompt hope that conquers the absurdity of death; but a literal continued life is uncertain.	History is uncertain and unimportant. But it can offer a model or myth that generates a sense of renewed existence.
Eastern Pantheistic Monism	Reality is characterized as “divine Oneness” (Brahman). “God” ultimately supersedes all rational and moral distinctions.	The cosmos is One, in spite of the appearance that it is many different things. It is not perceived as it actually is; it is <i>Maya</i> (illusion).	The “real self” is not the psycho-physical self (<i>jiva</i>) but <i>Atman</i> . <i>Atman</i> is <i>Brahman</i> .	Knowledge transcends logic, language, and the senses. It is a direct, experienced knowledge of one’s oneness with the universe.	Though some advocate high morals, the very distinction between good and evil is ultimately undermined due to the Oneness of all reality.	The cycle of rebirth (<i>samsara</i>) will be stopped only when cosmic oneness is experienced. Reincarnation is determined by <i>karma</i> .	Individual as well as cosmic history are cyclical. Time itself is ultimately unreal, as one passes beyond it in the experience of the One.
New Age	Prime Reality is the “self” which is linked to a “force” that permeates the universe. No transcendent God, only the god “within.”	Manifested in two dimensions: the visible universe (accessible by normal CSS) and the invisible universe (accessible only by altered states of consciousness).	The individual is stressed more (<i>Atman</i> is Brahman). A growing cosmic CSS will lead human evolution toward a superior race, empowered by the force.	Experiencing “true” reality in its unity is the goal. This is done through altered states of CSS helped by meditation, mantras, yoga, mediums, etc.	The Good is whatever facilitates cosmic CSS of oneness. Often pursues ecological concerns. Everything is part of “mother earth.”	Physical death is not the end of the self, although what lies beyond is not clear. Many accept repeated reincarnations based on <i>karma</i> .	The cosmos and man have entered a New Age of unity and power awareness. Some stress a one-world government and a coming one-world leader.
Post-Modernism	As a <i>method</i> , it begins with <i>Meaning</i> (not Being or Knowing). It stresses that language structures reality and constructs human meaning.	While an external world might objectively exist, we can only access it through the filters of different language contexts. Thus, no single “reality” is experienced by all.	Human meaning and identity are created via language and different perspectives. The “Self” is not an abiding reality but an ongoing construction created by language.	No “meta-narrative” truly describes reality. Skepticism reigns. No universal Truth; just “stories” within one’s language or cultural context. Meta-narrative attempts are “power plays.”	Ethical “truths” are not universal but determined by linguistic and cultural contexts. Such contexts determine what is “right” and “wrong.” Relativism is emphasized.	As a <i>philosophy</i> , PM offers little distinctive about death. <i>Theistic</i> PM and <i>Atheistic</i> PM would have vastly different speculations about any post-mortem state.	History can have no overarching purpose; it is in constant “flux.” The “reality” of history cannot be told. Descriptive <i>diversity</i> is a key virtue, esp. in overcoming oppressive meta-narratives.

NOTE: This table incorporates seven basic worldview “categories” from James Sire’s book, *The Universe Next Door*. These descriptions are idealizations: they express what a person would typically believe if they were consistent with the worldview. They are also generalizations. However, individuals are often inconsistent and syncretistic, adopting various beliefs consciously or subconsciously without much concern about whether, or how, they are consistent. In addition, these descriptions focus only on different beliefs. It’s better to think of one’s actual “worldview” as much more than mere beliefs. One’s “worldview” is the “composite core” of who a person is—beliefs, emotions, actions, speech, and will (Mark 12:30). A worldview reflects one’s basic orientation to the universal questions of human existence, and it shapes one’s way of life.