

# Understanding Christian Apologetics

## Lesson 10: The Question of Meaning

### I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

- A. Everyone is confronted by the question of the meaning of life
- B. Every answer other than the biblical answer to life's meaning will have points of tension where the system of belief does not line up with human experience in God's world

### II. Biblical Christianity

- A. Says that the meaning of the universe is rooted in One who stands outside of created reality: the God of the Bible
- B. Because God is the Creator of all things, everything belongs to God
- C. God's purpose, not ours, is central to the story of the world
- D. God created the world in order to display his glory by establishing his holy rule over a people he graciously set apart to be his own
- E. Dealing with two frequent challenges to the Christian view of reality
  - 1. If everything in the world has a cause, what caused God? — fails to see that the question of God's origin does not apply to Christianity because we believe that God is eternal
  - 2. How can it be rational to believe in miracles? — fails to see that if the God of Christianity created the world in an instant, then he has the power to do all sorts of things that are out of the ordinary

### III. Materialism

- A. Says that matter is all that exists (also called physicalism or naturalism)
- B. Carl Sagan: "The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be."

---

<sup>1</sup> This lesson is drawn in part from chapters 6-10 of Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality*.

- C. Richard Dawkins: "In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, and other people are going to get lucky; and you won't find any rhyme or reason to it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at the bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good. Nothing but blind pitiless indifference."
- D. The view of most atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, and Marxists
- E. Points of tension
  - 1. If there is no ultimate purpose, then there is no such thing as right and wrong; the only purpose is self-interest; leads to nihilism
  - 2. Inconsistent with what we know about causation (a Big Bang requires a Big Banger)

#### IV. Monism

- A. Says that the only thing that really exists is one supreme mind that permeates everything
- B. Pantheism: "everything is divine"; no distinction between God and the world; everything that exists is an extension of God
- C. Panentheism: "everything is in god," or "god is in everything"; confuses the Creator-creature distinction by saying that God and the world need each other
  - 1. Some versions emphasize God's dependence on the world, so that God is realizing his own being through the flow of history (Process Theology; Open Theism; Wolfhart Pannenberg; Jurgen Moltmann)
  - 2. Other versions emphasize the world's dependence on God to such an extent that the world itself ceases to be real; creaturely actions are merely manifestations of the divine will; God needs the world in order to manifest his glory (seen in some of Jonathan Edwards' more speculative writings; Joe Rigney's recent book *The Things of Earth: Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts*; Ann Voskamp's book

*One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are)*

- a) Rigney says that “we are characters in a story that resides in the divine author’s mind with the consequence that ‘the intentions of the [divine] author and the intentions of the characters mutually indwell each other.’ Although ‘God remains God, and the creatures remain creatures...the characters and all their thoughts, intentions, and actions are the content and product of the author’s creative will... ‘Creation exists in God in the same way that an author’s story exists in his mind. The story is not to be identified with the author, but the story is, in some real sense, in the author... The divine presence really is in the created stuff — really in the pizza and the wife and the music and the sunset.’”<sup>2</sup>
- b) Voskamp says that the evils that befall us in life are really good gifts from God that only feel bad to us.<sup>3</sup>

- 3. “Panentheism faces insurmountable difficulties from a biblical perspective. Biblical theism affirms that God created the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). The world has no existence apart from God, but it is also not a part of God. Creation is just that: created. It doesn’t emanate from God’s being but exists contingently — in other words, not out of necessity but out of God’s freedom and love. Neither divine nor demonic, creation is God’s workmanship. Many other doctrines are affected by a rejection of this biblical view of the God-world relation.”<sup>4</sup>

- D. The ultimate goal is to find liberation by being immersed into the universal One-ness; takes many lifetimes to arrive at enlightenment; the self is repeatedly reincarnated to work off karma (consequences of past actions)

---

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Baugus, “Revisiting Christian Hedonism (and Edwardsian Panentheism)” *Modern Reformation*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May/June 2016), 65, 67, 68.

<sup>3</sup> *One Thousand Gifts*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Horton, “Panentheism and Jonathan Edwards” *Modern Reformation*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May/June 2016), 66.

E. Classical Hinduism and Buddhism

1. The only thing that is real is the impersonal One-ness / "god"; everything else is an illusion
2. The world and everything in it is like a dream in the mind of god

F. New Age monism

1. Instead of saying that the self is an illusion, says that the self is everything
2. One popular New Age book says, "The earth turns its orbit for You. The oceans ebb and flow for You. The birds sing for You. The sun rises and sets for You. The stars come out for You. Every beautiful thing you see, every wondrous thing you experience, is all there, for You. Take a look around. None of it can exist, without You. No matter who you thought you were, now you know the Truth of Who You Really Are. You are the master of the Universe. You are the heir to the Kingdom. You are the perfection of Life. And now you know the Secret."
3. The New Age position is sometimes couched in Christian terminology, with Jesus seen as a New Age guru; need to understand that the New Age is antithetical to biblical Christianity

G. Point of tension

1. Since you are god, any ill that befalls you is your own fault
2. Because reality is an illusion, there cannot be a problem of evil, nor can there be such things as grace, mercy, forgiveness, or love

**V. Non-Christian Forms of Theism**

- A. Belief in some kind of god, but not the God of the Bible
- B. Examples: liberal Christianity; contemporary Judaism; Islam; Deism; Mormonism; Jehovah's Witness

- C. To one degree or another, all take a moralistic view of reality, believing that those who do good (or at least have good intentions) are rewarded by god in the next world
- D. Point of tension
  - 1. God created us with an innate sense of justice
  - 2. Non-Christian religions can never truly uphold justice since they require god to overlook or make light of some evil in order to admit some people into heaven

## **VI. Apathetic Individualism**

- A. Not interested in thinking about life's ultimate meaning, largely due to the embrace of relativism
- B. Meaning is only pursued at the individual level
- C. Personal autonomy is the only absolute
- D. Focus is on pursuit of material prosperity, pleasure, entertainment, and the freedom to create one's own identity
- E. Point of tension
  - 1. God has placed eternity in the heart of man (see Eccl. 3:11), creating us with a hunger and thirst for eternal beauty and significance
  - 2. Individualism offers no way of satisfying our innate sense that life continues beyond this world; leads to sentimentalism, hedonism, or despair