

Our Daily Bread Christian University
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All people, even small children, instinctively ask questions like: Who made everything? Why are people so different from animals? Why are we here? What happens to us when we die? In a home where children are comfortable talking with their parents, they are apt to bring up these questions. They deserve honest answers.

At some point, our children may want to know not only what various religious answers are but also how they compare with the naturalistic and evolutionary theories of science. Although secularism is not usually thought of as a world religion, it does compete with religious answers to explain the origin, meaning, and destiny of human existence.

The Naturalistic View of God and Creation

The view that dominates the public educational institutions is called naturalistic evolution. It denies or ignores the existence of a personal God and of the spirit world. It leads to the conclusion that we are the accidental products of a random evolutionary process. To be consistent, many who hold this view reject the concept of purpose or meaning, and see our innermost feelings and thoughts as the products of chemical processes in the physical brain. They believe that at death we go out of existence and that the time will come when all life will be snuffed out into eternal nothingness.

Interestingly, few parents try to convince their children that naturalistic evolution is true. Relatively few even believe it. From 1982 to the present, Gallup polls have consistently shown that only about 10 percent of Americans really believe that life evolved strictly by chance and natural forces. This is in spite of the fact that the naturalistic evolutionary view has dominated our educational institutions and news media for more than 50 years! It just doesn't make sense to most of us. We intuitively



know that we are more than the accidental products of a long series of chance happenings. We cannot accept that all our thoughts, desires, and feelings are merely a matter of chemistry. We sense that inherent in our very makeup are rules for conduct, a purpose for living, and an eternal significance.

Indeed, it is neither natural nor easy to take a completely religionless view of life. You don't need to be acquainted with the classical arguments for God's existence to wonder why there is something instead of nothing, and to ask very down-to-earth questions like these:

- What accounts for the fact that we can think about life's meaning and communicate our thoughts?
- Why do people everywhere realize that certain things are morally right and others wrong, and that these distinctions are quite similar all over the world?
- Although all of us sometimes act against our own conscience, why is it that we all have a deep inner awareness that we ought to be better than we are?
- Why is it so hard to erase from our inner being the feeling that we are in some way accountable to our Maker?

Even among leading scientists, it is becoming increasingly difficult to be an atheist. The ever-increasing awareness of the astounding complexities in the areas of physics and biology is leading many avowed naturalists to make startling admissions.

Fred Heeren, in his book *Show Me God*, quotes the brilliant physicist Freeman Dyson: "The universe in some sense must have known we were coming" (p. 70). And in the footnote of that quote he says that the well-known British astrophysicist Sir Fred Hoyle, an avowed skeptic, repeatedly speaks of an "overriding intelligence," and admits that this intelligence does indeed "correspond closely with the Judeo-Christian idea of a deity outside the universe."

It's important to see that theists and pantheists are together in their opposition to a materialistic worldview that denies the existence of the human spirit. In this regard at least, we share some important basic beliefs.

Having said that, there are within each of the major religions individuals and groups that live and think like practical atheists.



Even though they identify with the religion of their culture, they give so little consideration to the existence of a personal God that they have more in common with naturalistic materialism.

The Hindu View of God and Creation

Hinduism sees God and the universe as one eternal essence. It is a diverse and complex religious system that includes everything from atheists to theists. But even Hindu theists, although sometimes speaking of the god Shiva as the sole creator and sustainer of the universe, do not believe in a transcendent, infinite, eternal, and personal God who relates to the universe as Creator and Sustainer.

To some degree, all Hindus speak of an eternal, infinite, neutral, all-embracing ultimate reality they call Brahman. He (or it) is described as without personal attributes or qualities.

On the practical level, it is good to keep in mind that Brahman plays only a small role among the less philosophical Hindus. They worship Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, and a host of lesser deities. They tend to ascribe personality to some of these gods. Yet they are taught to see them as the products of an eternal, impersonal, pervasive force.

To sum it up: Hinduism sees God and the universe as one eternal entity. It does not speak of God as a personal being distinct from the material world.

The Buddhist View of God and Creation



Like Hinduism, Buddhism views God and the universe as one. It therefore does not affirm a creation event. Neither God nor the universe can exist without the other.

Buddhism, like Hinduism, includes atheists at one end of the spectrum and theists at the other. The Theravada Buddhists, for example, openly reject the existence of a personal God. The Pure Land Buddhists, on the other hand, seem to have mingled some Christian ideas into their faith system and speak of God as a personal being. But they still seem to identify God with the universe.

Jainism, Shintoism, and Taoism all have elements of pantheism



and polytheism, and in some ways resemble certain Hindu sects. Sikhism is an attempt to blend the theism of Islam with the pantheism of Hinduism, and has many noble elements. Bahaim espouses no specific doctrine of God, preferring to emphasize the essential oneness of all religions and equality of all peoples. Both have noble precepts, but neither affirms an infinite, eternal, personal God who relates to the universe as Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler.

The Islamic View of God and Creation

Muslims, like orthodox Jews and Christians, believe in an eternal, all-powerful, personal God and see Him as the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists.

Like the other two monotheistic faiths, Islam holds that God created moral beings with the capacity to worship and serve Him. Unlike Jews and Christians, it speaks of moral beings called jinn as existing somewhere between angels and humans in power and intelligence. Islam holds that angels were created sinless, but without the capacity or opportunity to choose between obedience and disobedience. The jinn are normally invisible, but like us they can choose between obedience and disobedience. Satan is a jinn, the leader of a group who followed him in his rebellion against God.

The creation story in the Muslim holy book, the Koran, is quite different from the Genesis account. Yet there are similarities, because Muhammad, the founder of Islam, taught his followers to affirm all of the Old and New Testament prophets, while claiming that he had superseded Christ as God's messenger.

Muslims believe that God is so great that humans cannot presume to know Him. On the basis of His own will, He exercises His right to be merciful to some and unmerciful to others. Nothing in His nature demands that He be loving, kind, and righteous in every situation. According to the Koran (Sura 37:94): "If God wishes to draw someone close to Himself, then He will give him the grace which will make that person do good works. If He wishes to reject someone and put that person to shame, then He will create sin in him. God creates all things, good and evil. God creates people as well as their actions: He created you as well as what you do."



The Judeo-Christian View of God and Creation

The Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation is that an all-powerful, personal Spirit spoke everything into existence, while remaining distinct from His creation. After forming the earth, God created mankind in His own image.

According to the Bible, this God is one in His essence. Although the Old Testament suggests a plurality in this oneness, the New Testament clearly teaches that the one true God exists in three distinct co-equal, co-eternal persons. Jews and Muslims regard this belief in the triunity of God as a denial of His unity and as incipient polytheism.

The Judeo-Christian view of God sees Him not only as personal but also as knowable. While the Bible acknowledges that finite beings can never fully comprehend Him, both Old and New Testament Scriptures say that God's plan was to reveal Himself not only through the Scriptures but also through a promised Messiah.

People of the Old Testament are still waiting for this Messiah to come and reveal "God with us," but the New Testament maintains that the promised Messiah has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Bible describes God as a God who speaks to us, makes promises to us, tells us what we must do, and assures us that if we accept His ways He will forgive us, receive us, and meet our deepest needs through all of time and eternity.