Non-Christian Religions and Worldviews

This page provides a brief definition of both ancient and modern non-Christian worldviews and religions. Most of the worldviews considered below either pre-existed Christianity or arose recently in the post-Christian era. Heresies and sects that arose within Christian civilization (2nd through 18th centuries) are covered on the ***Christian Heresies*** *page.*

Pre Christian Worldviews

These are basic terms used to describe fundamental belief systems and forms of religion and worldview.

- **Theism** — belief in the existence of a god or gods, especially belief in one god as creator of the universe, intervening in it and sustaining a personal relation to his creatures.
- **Polytheism** — worship of or belief in multiple deities, which are usually assembled into a pantheon of gods and goddesses, along with their own religions and rituals.
- **Monotheism** — belief in the existence of only one god that created the world, is all-powerful and intervenes in the world.
- **Atheism** — absence of belief in the existence of God or deities.
- **Agnosticism** — is the view that the existence of God, of the divine or the supernatural is unknown or unknowable.
- **Monism** — belief that God and the Universe are one and the same, and that there is not creator God separate from his creation. Pantheism and Materialism are Monist philosophies.
- **Dualism** (in religion) — belief that there are two opposing Gods or forces of nature which contend for control of the Universe. Manichaeism, Gnosticism, and Star Wars cosmology (dark and light sides of the 'Force') are essentially dualist philosophies.
- **Creed** — from the Latin, meaning 'I believe', a Creed is a statement of the shared beliefs of a religious community.
- **Orthodoxy** — from the Greek, meaning "right opinion". Describes the adherence to accepted beliefs of creed based religions.
- **Orthopraxy** — from the Greek, meaning "right action". Describes the adherence to accepted customs, ceremonies, rites, and conduct, especially in a religious context.
- **Rationalism** — views reason as the chief means of obtaining truth and knowledge, as opposed to intuitive, authoritative, or sensory based knowledge.
- **Fideism** — can refer either to the belief that Faith is completely independent of Reason, or to the idea that all knowledge of God must come through supernatural revelation rather than natural reason.

Many of the alternate religions and worldviews listed below differ from Christianity in fundamental ways. The Christian view of God is very particular and has been explicitly defined in a series of creeds and dogmas. Christian heresies usually involve a minor corruption of the Christian understanding of specific attributes of God. Alternate worldviews, in contrast promote fundamentally different concepts of God, reality, and creation. The theology of most world religions is relatively simple compared to Christianity, since many are based mainly on ceremonies, customs, and folklore rather doctrine. Most modern worldviews, on the other hand, are quite logical and self-consistent in a narrow sense but fail to explain or address fundamental questions about existence.

Pre Christian Worldviews

- **Paganism** — The term Paganism has several meanings and is used as a general term to describe idolatry or worship of false gods. It also has the following, more specific meanings. 1) Reference to Roman and Greek Polytheistic religions, cults, and mythology (Zeus, Jupiter, Apollo, etc.) 2) Any form of religion that worships multiple deities, especially pre-Christian religions such as Celtic paganism, Nordic paganism (Thor, Odin, Freya, etc.), Egyptian paganism (Isis, Horus, etc.) 3) Any non-Christian religion or form of heathen worship.
- **Pantheism** — Refers to a range of religious beliefs wherein the universe itself is identical with an all-encompassing deity. In pantheist religions, such as Animism, and Buddhism, there is no separation between God and creation. Many eastern religions are based on pantheist concepts.
- **Animism** — is the belief that all objects, both animate and inanimate, possess a spiritual essence. Animism is common among primitive peoples (such as Amerindians and indigenous Africans), and is related in many ways to pantheism.
- **Mystery Cults** — Religious Schools in the Greco-Roman world that involved secret initiation and worship rituals. Mystery cults usually focused primarily on a single or closely related group of deities. Most were related to Greco-Roman, Babylonian, or Egyptian polytheism, but involved exclusive instead of public rites and practices.
- **Zoroastrianism** — Pre-Christian religion based on a Persian prophet, that bears some similarities to Abrahamic Faith, including Monotheistic creator God, afterlife, and Good/Evil cosmology.
- **Gnosticism** — Gnosticism refers to secret knowledge that adapted itself to a variety of different sects. A form of Gnosticism, promoted by Marcion of Sinope was considered a Christian heresy, but there were pagan Gnostic sects as well. Gnostics generally promoted the idea of a "good" spirit world, and a "bad" material world and offered secret knowledge as a path to salvation. The Albigensian heresy of the 12th century was similar to the Gnostic heresy of the 2nd century.
- **Manicheism** — Second century religion founded in Persia, with beliefs similar to both Gnosticism and Zoroastrianism. Dualistic cosmology emphasizing a struggle between a good spiritual world and an evil material world. Widely practiced in the Middle East during early Christian era.
- **Canaanite Religion** — Semitic Polytheistic religion involving worship of a number of deities, some associated with Lucifer and child sacrifice, such as Baal Hammon, Melcart, Moloch, Tanit, etc.

Post Christian Worldviews

- **Modernism** (philosophical) — In regards to Christianity, Modernism is a group of related "liberal" theological ideas that developed during the 19th and 20th century, that generally justify breaking with the past, or reinterpreting settled dogmas. St. Pius X wrote an encyclical "Pascendi dominici" that condemned Modernism and called it the "synthesis of all heresies".
- **Materialism** — Materialism is similar to pantheism, in that it sees the idea of God and the Universe as one (Monism). It is different however, it that it sees matter as the fundamental substance, and consciousness as a collection of material states. Materialism denies the existence of a soul, or of any purely or partially spiritual being.
- **Naturalism** — is a philosophy that denies the possibility of miracles or of any supernatural event. All actions can be attributed to natural or material forces. It does not

deny the possibility of soul, spirit, or consciousness, or the existence of a God, but like Deism, denies any divine intervention between spiritual and material forces.

- **Deism** — is a philosophy that acknowledges the existence of a creator God, or "Architect of the Universe", but denies the possibility of revelation, miracles, or divine intervention in the universe. Deists recognize certain attributes of God and some aspects of natural moral law, but deny all interaction between God and his creation and the efficacy of prayers. Deism reverts to naturalist explanations for all events post creation.
- **Unitarianism** — is a simplified, monotheistic version of Christianity, in that it denies the trinity and the divinity of Jesus. Unitarians tend to accept the historical facts of the life of Jesus as a prophet and recognize the possibility of miracles and divine inspiration, but tend to deny doctrines such as original sin, the infallibility of the Bible, or the existence of hell.
- **Indifferentism** — Indifferentism is the belief that all religions and world views have come truths associated with them, and no one faith is superior to all others. It is an agnostic, anti-dogmatic philosophy, that rejects the idea that theological truth can be arrived at through reason or revelation, or that individuals have a moral obligation to seek or recognize such truths.

The following philosophies are also associated with Modernism, but they have more to do with ethical and moral philosophy than **theology** (ideas about God) or **cosmology** (ideas about the nature of the universe). They are philosophical systems that are generally based on the denial of a personal God and natural law, so they are compatible with any atheistic worldview.

- **Utilitarianism** — is an ethical theory that states that the best action is the one that maximizes utility, which is usually defined as that which produces the greatest well-being of the greatest number of people. In contrast to Catholic morality, in which the "the end doesn't justify the means", utilitarianism considers only consequences, and has been used by political movements, to justify crimes committed in the process of building of a utopian society.
- **Pragmatism** — is similar to utilitarianism in that it considers only consequences and rejects a priori ideas of morality and objective truth. Unlike utilitarianism, however, which seeks methods of maximizing the "well-being" of the most people, pragmatism rejects over-arching ideals and considers only "success" in achieving short term goals. Pragmatism de-emphasizes objective truth and natural law, and specifically permits "experimentation" by changing methods or goals depending on circumstances and results. One area pragmatism has been particularly influential in, is in experimental education movements of the 20th century.
- **Scientism** — is an ideology that promotes science as the purportedly objective means by which society should determine moral truths as well as natural truths. It tends to recognized the "social sciences" such as psychology, sociology, and political economy as objective truth-seeking fields, and believes that religious and traditional norms and morality should give way to new truths ascertained by scientific experiment and "objective" observations.
- **Relativism** — is an ideology that explicitly denies the existence of Objective Truth. All three of the above philosophies are transitional, meaning they seek to expand the framework of ethical behavior beyond the limits imposed by natural law and revealed religion. However, instead of throwing away all pretense of objectivity, they devise alternate systems, but all tend towards relativism and the denial of the existence of objective truth.

Non-Christian Abrahamic Religions

Like Christianity, **Rabbinic Judaism**, **Mohammedism**, and **Mormonism** are founded on belief in the God of the Old Testament, as revealed to the descendants of Abraham, and the Ancient nation of Israel. The Abraham religions differ in which books, beyond the Old Testament that they recognize as prophetic. For Christianity, this is obviously the **New Testament**. Rabbinic Judaism is based on the **Talmud** (3rd-5th century), as well as the Old Testament; Islam is based on the **Koran** (7th century); And Mormonism is the **Book of Mormon** (19th century).

Theologically speaking Mormonism and Mohammedism share many traits, although they arose in within very different cultures. Both recognize Jesus as an important prophet but don't consider him the highest prophet or source of primary revelation. Both are essentially monotheistic and don't recognize a triune God. Both are based on a fully human prophet who received and recorded a revelation communicated to them by an angel, developed a cult following, and have similar ideas regarding afterlife.

Talmudic Judaism arose in the 2nd and 3rd centuries after the destruction of Jerusalem and the failure of several later Jewish rebellions against the Roman government. While pre-Christian Judaism was Messianic and based primarily on the Torah and Old Testament, Rabbinic Judaism is based primarily on the Talmud, a book of writings that includes interpretations of scriptures by Hebrew scholars, Jewish customs, laws, and 'Oral' traditions presumably dating back to Mosaic times. The Talmud is explicitly anti-Christian, and reaffirms Jewish belief that they are the "chosen" people, set apart from greater humanity.

Eastern Religions

Many of the most important Eastern religious differ from Christianity in that they are ethical systems based on "Orthopraxy", that is rituals, ceremonies, and traditions, rather than "Orthodoxy", that is specific ideas about God and the Universe. Eastern religions certainly regulate morals and behavior, but by emphasizing tradition and ritual rather than discerning God's will by reason or supernatural revelation. Eastern religions don't tend to recognize heaven and hell to motivate good conduct, but some emphasize Karma or Reincarnation. More atheistic societies, such as Japan and China, however, employ very high degrees of social pressure to ensure right behavior.

- **Hinduism** — is considered one of the world's great religions, and is practiced widely in the Indian subcontinent. It can be considered a polytheistic religion, but is better described as a collection of traditions, ceremonies, rites, and social norms than a particular belief system. Two distinguishing characteristic of Hinduism are its belief in "reincarnation" and its "caste" system. The two are related in that, one who lives a good/bad life will return as a higher/lower life form. Many Hindu practices are related to its caste system, and are fundamentally at odds with the Christian idea of universal human dignity.
- **Buddhism** — Buddhism as a pantheistic religion based on the teachings of a 5th century B.C. Indian prophet. It sees life as an endless circle of birth and death, and like Hinduism, believes in reincarnation. Buddhism emphasizes meditation, study, asceticism, and cultivation of wisdom and virtue as ways to reduce suffering.
- **Shintoism** — is the Japanese practice of Ancestor worship. It does not recognize or deny any particular deity but honors the spirits of ones ancestors, and is closely related to the Japanese traditions of obeying parents, honoring family, and showing respect for authority.

- **Confucianism** — is a traditional Chinese philosophical and educational system based on the study of Ancient philosophers and wise men, of whom Confucius (~500 B.C.) is the most prominent. For over a millennium, traditional Chinese education and government was based on Confucian principles, and government offices at all levels were given to those who passed exams. Confucianism is a fundamentally humanist and rationalist religious system that does not emphasize the influence of a deity