

Worldview. A *worldview* is how one views or interprets reality. The German word is *Weltanschauung*, meaning a “world and life view,” or “a paradigm.” It is the framework through which or by which one makes sense of the data of life. A worldview makes a world of difference in one’s view of God, origins, evil, human nature, values, and destiny.

There are seven major worldviews. Each is unique. With one exception, [pantheism/polytheism](#), no one can consistently believe in more than one worldview, because the central premises are mutually exclusive (see [TRUTH, NATURE OF; PLURALISM, RELIGIOUS; WORLD RELIGIONS, CHRISTIANITY AND](#)). Logically, only one worldview can be true. The seven major worldviews are [theism](#), deism, atheism, [pantheism](#), [panentheism](#), finite godism, and [polytheism](#).

Looking Through the Views. Theism. *An infinite, personal God exists beyond and in the universe.* Theism says that the physical universe is not all there is. There is an infinite, personal God beyond the universe who created it, sustains it, and who acts within it in a supernatural way. He is transcendently “out there” and immanently “in here.” This is the view represented by traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Deism. *God is beyond the universe, but not in it.* Deism is [theism](#) minus miracles.

It says God is transcendent over the universe but not immanent in it, certainly not supernaturally. It holds a naturalistic view of the operation of the world. In common with [theism](#), it believes the originator of the world is a Creator. God made the world but does not work with it. He wound up creation and lets it run on its own. In contrast to [pantheism](#), which negates God’s [transcendence](#) in favor of his immanence, deism negates God’s immanence in favor of his [transcendence](#). Deists have included [Francois-Marie Voltaire](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#), and [Thomas Paine](#).

Atheism. *No God exists beyond or in the universe.* Atheism claims that the physical universe is all there is. No God exists anywhere, either in the universe or beyond it. The universe or cosmos is all there is and all there will be. All is matter. It is self-sustaining. A few of the more famous atheists were [Karl Marx](#), [Friedrich Nietzsche](#), and [Jean-Paul Sartre](#).

Pantheism. *God is the All/Universe.* For a pantheist, there is no transcendent Creator beyond the universe. Creator and creation are two ways of denoting one reality. God is the universe or All, and the universe is God. There is ultimately one reality, not many different ones. All is mind. [Pantheism](#) is represented by certain forms of [Hinduism](#), [Zen Buddhism](#),

and Christian Science.

[Panentheism](#). God is in the universe, as a mind is in a body. The universe is God's "body." It is his actual pole. But there is another "pole" to God other than the physical universe. He has infinite potential to become. This view is represented by [Alfred North Whitehead](#), [Charles Hartshorne](#), and [Shubert Ogden](#).

[Finite Godism](#). A finite God exists beyond and in the universe. Finite godism is like [theism](#), only the god beyond the universe and active in it is limited in nature and power. Like deists, finite godists generally accept creation but deny miraculous intervention. Often God's inability to overcome evil is given as a reason for believing God is limited in power. [John Stuart Mill](#), [William James](#), and [Peter Bertocci](#) hold this worldview.

[Polytheism](#). Many gods exist beyond the world and in it. Polytheism is the belief in many finite gods, who influence the world. They deny any infinite God stands beyond the world. They hold that the gods are active, often believing that each has its own domain. When one finite god is considered chief over others, the religion is called [henotheism](#). Chief representatives of [polytheism](#) include the ancient Greeks, Mormons, and neopagans (for example, wiccans).

Importance of a Worldview. Worldviews influence personal meaning and

values, the way people act and think. The most important question a worldview answers is "Where did we come from?" The answer to this question is crucial to how other questions are answered. [Theism](#) declares that God created us. Creation was from nothing, *ex nihilo*. [Atheism](#) believes we evolved by chance. [Atheism](#) holds to creation out of matter, *ex materia*. [Pantheism](#) holds that we emanated from God like rays from the sun or sparks from a fire. Creation is out of God himself, *ex Deo* (see [CREATION, VIEWS OF](#)). The others play on some form of these understandings, with nuances of difference.

That understanding would influence a person's view of death, for example. A theist believes in personal immortality; an atheist generally does not. For the theist, death is a beginning, for the atheist an ending of existence. For the pantheist, death is the cessation of one life and the beginning of another, leading toward ultimate merging with God.

Theists believe we were created by God with the purpose to eternally fellowship with and worship him. Pantheists believe we will eventually lose all individual identity in God. Atheists generally see [immortality](#) only as the ongoing of the species. We live on in memories (for awhile) and in the influence we have on future generations.

Obviously, what one believes about the future will influence how he or she lives now. In classical [theism](#), “We only come this way once” (cf. [Heb. 9:27](#)), so life takes on a certain sobriety and urgency it would not have for one who believes in [reincarnation](#). The urgency there is to deal with bad *karma* so the next life will be a step up. But there are always more chances in future lives to try, try again. For the atheist, the old beer commercial said it well: We have to “grab the gusto, because we only go around once.”

A virtuous act is given different meanings by various worldviews. A theist views an act of compassion as an absolute obligation imposed by God (see [MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF](#)), which has intrinsic value regardless of the consequences. An atheist views virtue as a self-imposed obligation that the human race has placed upon its members. An act has no intrinsic value apart from that assigned to it by society.

There is also a gulf between worldviews with regard to the nature of values. For a theist, God has endowed certain things, human life for example, with ultimate value. It is sacred because God made it in his image. So there are divine obligations to respect life and absolute prohibitions against murder. For an atheist, life has the value the human race and its various societies have assigned to it. It

is relatively valuable, as compared with other things. Usually an atheist believes an act is good if it brings good results and evil if it does not. A Christian believes that certain acts are good, whatever their results.

The differences in worldviews can be summarized in the accompanying chart. In some cases the words represent only the dominant or characteristic form of the view, not that of everyone who accepts the system. 🖋

Summary. Reality is either the universe only, God only, or the universe and God(s). If the universe is all that exists then atheism is right. If God is all that exists then [pantheism](#) is right. If God and the universe exists then either there is one God or many gods. If there are many gods, [polytheism](#) is right. If there is only one God then this God is either finite or infinite. If there is one finite god then finite godism is correct. If this finite god has two poles (one beyond and one in the world), then [panentheism](#) is right. If there is one infinite God then either there is intervention of this God in the universe or there is not. If there is intervention, then [theism](#) is true. If there is not, then [deism](#) is true. 🖋

Sources

N. L. Geisler, [Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views](#)

J. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*
D. Noebel, *Understanding the Times*

Theism

Atheism

Deism

Finite Godism

Panentheism

Pantheism

Polytheism

God

One Infinite Personal

None

One Infinite Personal

One Finite Personal

One Potentially infinite Actually finite

One Infinite Impersonal or personal

Multiple Finite Personal

World

Created *ex nihilo* Finite

Eternal (material) Created *ex materia*

Finite Created *ex nihilo*

Created *ex materia* or *ex nihilo*

Created *ex Materia* and *ex deo* Eternal

Created *ex deo* immaterial

Created *ex materia* Eternal

God and World

God beyond and in world

World only

God beyond, but not in, world

God in world and beyond world

God beyond world potentially and in it
actually

God is world (all)

Gods in world

Miracles

Possible and actual

Impossible

May be possible, but not actual

May be possible, but not actual

Impossible

Impossible

Possible and actual

Human nature

Soul and body immortal

Body Mortal

Body mortal/soul immortal

Body mortal/soul immortal

Body mortal/soul immortal (some)

Body mortal/soul immortal

Body mortal/soul immortal

Human destiny

Resurrection to reward or punishment

Annihilation

Reward or punishment of the soul

Rewards and/or punishment

In Gods memory

Reincarnation, merging with God

Divine reward and punishment

Origin of evil

Free choice

Human ignorance

Free choice and/or ignorance

God's inner struggle, or man's choice

Necessary aspect of God

An illusion

In struggles between gods

End of evil

Will be defeated by God

Can be defeated by human beings

Can be defeated by human beings or God

Can be defeated by human beings or God

Cannot be defeated by human beings or
God

Will be absorbed by God

Will not be defeated by gods

Basis of ethics

Grounded in God

Grounded in humanity

Grounded in nature

Grounded in God or in humanity

Grounded in changing God

Grounded in lower manifestations of God

Grounded if gods

Nature of ethics

Absolute

Relative

Absolute

Relative

Relative

Relative

Relative

History and goal

Linear Purposeful God-appointed end

Chaotic, Purposeless Eternal

Linear Purposeful Eternal

Linear Purposeful Eternal

Linear Purposeful Eternal

Circular Illusory Eternal

Linear or circular Purposeful Eternal