

WTHU. Class Notes

Lesson 5 10/08/13

I. What is Theism?

A. Theism is exactly the opposite of naturalism and transcendentalism that we called a "monistic" philosophy or "chain of being philosophy" that says everything is connected to and a part of one essence: everything comes from one essence of which each particular thing is simply an extension of that original thing.

B. Theism says, "No to that." Theism is a belief that

1. God is distinct from his creation and
2. Creation owes its existence originally AND continuously to him - he creates AND he sustains.

C. Deism is not the same as theism. But deism is also not atheism.

1. When liberals say our founding fathers were deists remember:

a) Only some of them were deist, but the overwhelming majority were Christian theists.

b) Deists do not deny the existence of God or a moral order to the universe; they only deny that God injects himself into his creation or directs the flow of history. Liberals want us to think that Deists are either akin to atheists or at least did not believe in a moral order governing men.

c) Not all deists were consistent in their application of their philosophy even as not all Christians live consistently with Christianity. For example, Benjamin Franklin, modern man's example of a deistic founding father, said during the constitutional convention in 1787: "Sir, a long time and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth that God governs in the affairs of men. If a sparrow cannot fall to the ground unseen by him, is it possible that an empire could arise without his aid?"

D. Theism is the religion of:

1. Judaism

2. Islam
3. Christianity

E. This idea that God is distinct from the creation is:

1. an aspect of what theists mean when they say God is "holy."
2. what we mean we say that God is transcendent. We don't just mean that he is spatially far away from us, like God is just somewhere way above us.

II. But this is where theism divides between Islam, on the one hand, and Judaism and Christianity on the other.

A. This idea of God being distinct from his creation reveals a fundamental difference between Islam, on the one hand, and covenantal theism, on the other, which are, of course, Judaism and Christianity. They are covenantal religions.

B. What does this distinctness, this set apartness, mean in Islam?

1. All contact between man and God is cut off - there's no co-mingling of spirit and matter

2. So, how does man have a relationship with this God - he has to earn his favor.

- a) How do you earn his favor? Well, if Mohammed was his prophet and earned God's favor, then the good Muslim needs to do exactly what Mohammed did. Which is why the Sunnah is so important.

- b) In the sense that you have to appease Allah or earn your way to heaven, Islam is a variation on other ancient religions where you had to please the sun god, the rain god, the god of fertility, etc. You had to earn the god's pleasure and favor.

C. What does this distinctness between God and his creation mean for Judaism and Christianity? How do these religions solve the problem of "connecting" God who is spirit with the material, earthly realm. Obviously, the chain of being concept doesn't apply or work because God is distinct from his creation.

1. The answer is "Covenant" - Man relates to God via a covenant!

2. When people hear Christians talk about covenant, that's what we're talking about: the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

3. Something to understand about this is that covenants have an "ethical" component.

a) Just think of the concept of a contract - there are conditions placed on the behaviors of the parties and consequences for the breach of those conditions.

b) Similarly, in Judaism and Christianity there are moral and ethical commands related to our relationship with God AND there are consequences - blessings if you keep the ethical stipulations and curses if you breach them. -

c) The moral stipulations of the Old Covenant are, of course, summarized in the Ten Commandments. But this is important:

(1) the ethical "stipulations" that are part of the old covenant continue on or pull through into the new covenant that goes by the name of Christianity.

(2) This is important. Those Christians who want to say we are out from under the Ten Commandments don't understand this idea of covenant.

(a) That's why the Apostle Paul says that the law is not bad, but good.

(b) That's why he says we cannot go on living a life dominated by ethical violations of the law - called living a life of sin.

4. Christianity did not wipe out the stipulations - the ethical demands of God, after all, God never changes.

a) The point of the New Covenant is that Jesus paid the consequences of the breach of those ethical stipulations, and

b) A new covenant was established with God, but this time, not with Adam, but as the new testaments says, a "second Adam," namely Jesus, who, even as Adam was the progenitor of a race of men, Jesus is the progenitor of a new race of man, a chosen people, royal priesthood, who dwells in the Believer and provides the internal power by which we can keep the law of God.

III. What a worldview explains.

A. Our worldview explains addresses the three major concepts of our existence (see p. 9 in textbook)

B. Or another way of saying it is that a worldview addresses the three major forms of relationships that define our human existence.

C. Those three are:

1. Our relationship to God - talk about this more specifically in a minute
2. Our relationship to our fellow man.
3. Our relationship to nature

D. Sounds very "academic" and impractical, but it's not. For example:

1. Consider our relationship with our fellow man. Questions our worldview answers:

- a) Who am I in relationship to others?
- b) What is my responsibility toward others?
- c) What is their responsibility to me?

2. How is that practical? Relates to question like:

- a) Is it true, for example, that is it "every man for himself?"
- b) Does what you do affect me and what I do affect you?
- c) And those things determine things like:
 - (1) How we think about abortion.

(a) Is abortion simply an individual, personal right or does a person's abortion in any way diminish me by its affect on society.

(b) Think about "For Whom the bells Toll." John Donne (1572-1631), Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation XVII: Nunc Lento Sonitu Dicunt, Morieris: "Perchance he for whom this bell tolls may be so ill, as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me, and see my state, may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.

(2) How we think about rights - ever heard the term "human rights?"

(3) How we think about civil government that regulates our rights. For example,

(a) do individual rights trump the collective rights of society and can society or the state even have any rights? Is individualism right or statism right?

(b) Or is there some balance between the two and, if so, on what basis would we say that both, not just one or the other exists or is primary?

3. Consider our relationship with nature and how we see our fellow man. How is that practical? Relates to:

a) Population control - are humans bad for the environment/nature. One quick example that, again, shows how one's view of the world shapes ones view of the world.

(1) Almost since the outset, environmentalism has been concerned about population control. Too many human beings are bad for the environment.

(a) David Garber, a biologist with the US National Park Service *"We have become a plague upon ourselves and upon Earth. Until such time as homo sapiens should desire to rejoin nature some of us can only hope for the right virus to come along."*

(b) Paul Ehrlich, in *The Population Bomb* in 1970 : *A cancer is an uncontrolled multiplication of cells; the population explosion is an uncontrolled multiplication of people. We must shift our efforts from treatment of the symptoms to the cutting out of the cancer."*

(2) The theistic worldview associated with what three religions? - Islam, Judaism, and Christianity - begin with the command by God to the first man and woman to do what? - fill the earth, to populate it. From the theistic worldview, people are not a "cancer," like Ehrlich thinks, but bear the image of God and children are a blessing from the Lord.

b) Purpose of Civil Government: Shows up in Environmentalism. Al Gore, in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace prize said: *"We must abandon the conceit that the individual, isolated, private actions are the answer. They can and do help. But they will not take us far enough without collective action."*

4. Consider how some of these things begin to merge when we see man as having only a creaturely status, like trees and animals, and not different in kind as having also been made, not just by God, but in the image of God, and we don't see God as distinct from his creation:

5. In his Nobel Peace Prize Speech, Al Gore said we needed to make "rescue of the global environment the central organizing principle of the world community...We must abandon the conceit that the individual, isolated, private actions are the answer. They can and do help. But they will not take us far enough without collective action."

IV. Relation to God.

A. Natural question is "What about Atheists? Their worldview doesn't believe in God so how can you say every worldview address our relationship to God?"

B. Don't let the fact a worldview addresses our relationship to God throw you off because some folks don't believe in God. That is okay. It is a belief about our relative to God and therefore, our relation, if any, to God and simply for the atheist, there is none.

C. Abraham Kuyper, a man who lived in the late 1800's and was the Dutch Prime Ministers, founded a couple of newspapers, founded the Free College of Amsterdam, and wrote about 90 books said of the atheist and worldviews: "If you exclude from your conception all reckoning with the Living God just as is implied in the cry, "no God no master," you certainly bring to the front a sharply defined interpretation of your own for our relation to God."

D. Mortimer Adler said "More consequences for thought and action flow the affirmation or denial of God than from answering any other basic question." (p. 10)

E. Actually, our view of man and our view of nature - the other two key relations in our human experience - are determined by our affirmation or denial of God. In our textbook, the authors say (p. 10): "A belief about God is really a belief about everything else."

F. Denying the existence of God doesn't solve all of life's problems.

V. Denial of God. All that stuff we have to think about if we affirm God, which we'll talk about, isn't necessarily made easier by denying God's existence. The atheist just has another different set of questions. Here are 3 of them:

A. Why is there anything and how did it come into existence?

1. This is where evolution comes in, by which I mean naturalistic evolution. Carl Sagan's famous statement: "The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be."

2. Evolution. "Evolution made it possible to be an intellectually satisfied atheist." Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*.

a) This determines how man views his relationship to nature.

b) NOTICE: Evolution essentially fulfills the place of God in Christianity, Judaism, and Christianity. ***Seeing this helps explain the almost religious fervor that evolutionist have in defending evolution in the science classroom.***

(1) We will also see that even as our view of God shapes the 10 disciplines we talked about, like psychology, history, law, sociology, ethics, evolution has become the basis for shaping an understanding those subject.

(2) Christian Gullibility: Many Christians don't even realize that they have accepted an understanding of many of these subjects based on a atheistic evolutionary way of thinking in much the way we said the other day that some Christians embrace communism when it based on atheism.

c) Man will have some god, some ultimate reality, some principle or value or belief that essentially serves as god.

d) For example, Al Gore might still say he is a Christian, listen to what he said in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. He said we needed to make "rescue of the global environment the central organizing principle of the world community."

(a) The organizing principle is not in the beginning God, God as the creator distinct from his creation, but "rescue of the global environment." That has become his God.

(b) And with that as his god, then collectivism becomes a necessity and the individual gets squeezed out in terms of importance.

B. Religion: The atheist must explain the universal and continuous belief in the existence of a god. Why do we even have an idea of God if no god exists?

C. Why is there a sense of right and wrong that cuts across time and cultures?

I. Affirmation of God. If we affirm the existence of God, then we have other questions we must answer about:

A. His nature - primarily whether he is a personal God or an impersonal force or spirit?

a. Theism, represented by Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, say God is person and

b. Non-theistic religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, say
god is all spirit and impersonal, more of a force.
God is the "force" of Star Wars fame.

B. His involvement - is this God involved or uninvolved in
human events?

C. His expectations - is he an ethical god that expects
anything from us and will he judge us and, if so, how do I
get a favorable judgment.