Existentialism

*Search For Answers*

November 15, 2015

John Babich, Presenter
The Universe Next Door:
A Basic Worldview Catalog (5th Ed.), by James W. Sire
Worldviews Revisited Series

• Introduction to Worldviews (10/25/15)
• Christian Theism, Deism, Islamic Theism (11/01/15)
• Naturalism, Nihilism (11/08/15)
• Existentialism (11/15/15)
• Eastern Pantheistic Monism (11/22/15)
• The New Age, Postmodernism (11/29/15)
• How Shall We Then Live? (12/06/15)
What is a Worldview?

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”

“Seven” Basic Questions

“If a worldview can be expressed by propositions, what might they be? Essentially, they are our basic, rock-bottom answers to the following seven questions:”

Eight Basic Questions

1. What is the prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person after death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

In **theism** God is the infinite-personal Creator and sustainer of the cosmos. In **deism** God is reduced; he begins to lose his personality, though he remains Creator and (by implication) sustainer of the cosmos. In **naturalism** God is further reduced; he loses his very existence.

“Nihilism is more a feeling than a philosophy, more a solitary stance before the universe than a worldview. Strictly speaking, nihilism is a denial of any philosophy or worldview — a denial of the possibility of knowledge, a denial that anything is valuable. If it proceeds to the absolute denial of everything, it even denies the reality of existence itself. In other words, nihilism is the negation of everything — knowledge, ethics, beauty, reality. In nihilism no statement has validity; nothing has meaning. Everything is gratuitous, de trop, that is, just there.”

"The Slide...and the Leap"
Existentialism

Beyond Nihilism
Two Varieties of Existentialism

“From the outset it is important to recognize that existentialism takes two basic forms, depending on its relation to previous worldviews, because existentialism is not a full-fledged worldview. Atheistic naturalism is a parasite on naturalism; theistic naturalism is a parasite on theism.”

Atheistic Existentialism

*Sartre and Camus*
Question #1

What is the prime reality – the really real?

(AE) Prime reality is matter. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.

[Accepts presupposition from Naturalism.]

Source: James Sire, p. 69, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
Question #2

What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

(N,AE) The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.

(+AE) The highly wrought and tightly organized objective world stands over against human beings and appears absurd.

Question #3

What is a human being?

(N,AE) Human beings are complex "machines"; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.

(+AE) Each person is totally free as regards his or her nature and destiny.

Source: James Sire, p. 72, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
What happens to a person after death?

\( \text{(N,AE)} \) Death is extinction of personality and individuality.

\( \text{(+AE)} \) The highly wrought and tightly organized objective world stands over against human beings and appears absurd.

Question #5

Why is it possible to know anything at all?

(N,AE) Through our innate and autonomous human reason, including the methods of science, we can know the universe. The cosmos, including this world, is understood to be in its normal state.

(+AE) In full recognition of and against the absurdity of the objective world, the authentic person must revolt and create value.

Question #6

How do we know what is right and wrong?

(N,AE) Ethics is related only to human beings.

What is the meaning of human history?

(N,AE) History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.

Question #8

What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

(N,AE) Naturalism itself implies no particular core commitment on the part of any given naturalist. Rather core commitments are adopted unwittingly or chosen by individuals.

(+AE) The core commitment of every full-blown atheistic existentialist is to himself or herself.

Source: James Sire, p. 84, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
“If I've discarded God the Father, there has to be someone to invent values. You've got to take things as they are. Moreover, to say that we invent values means nothing else than this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it's up to you to give it meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning you choose. In that way, you see, there is a possibility of creating human community.”

- Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism is a Humanism (1946)

The Myth of Sisyphus

"There is only one really serious philosophical question, and that is suicide. Deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy. All other questions follow from that."


Theistic Existentialism

*Søren Kierkegaard*
Question #1

What is the prime reality – the really real?

*(CT,TE)* Prime reality is the infinite, personal God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. This God is triune, transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign, and good.

*Source: James Sire, p. 28, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)*
Question #2

What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

*(CT,TE)* External reality is the cosmos God created *ex nihilo* to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system.

*Source: James Sire, p. 31, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)*
What is a human being?

*(CT,TE)* Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity.

*(+TE)* Human beings are personal beings who, when they come to full consciousness, find themselves in an alien universe; whether or not God exists is a tough question to be solved not by reason but by faith.

What is a human being?

*(CT,TE)* Human beings were created good, but through the Fall the image of God became defaced, though not so ruined as not to be capable of restoration; through the work of Christ, God redeemed humanity and began the process of restoring people to goodness, though any given person may choose to reject that redemption.

*(+TE)* The personal is the valuable.

Question #4

What happens to a person after death?

(CT, TE) For each person death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the gate to eternal separation from the only thing that will ultimately fulfill human aspirations.

Question #5

Why is it possible to know anything at all?

(CT,TE) Human beings can know both the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.

(+TE) Human beings are personal beings who, when they come to full consciousness, find themselves in an alien universe; whether or not God exists is a tough question to be solved not by reason but by faith.

Question #6

How do we know what is right and wrong?

*(CT,TE)* Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving).

*(+TE)* The personal is the valuable.

*(+TE)* Knowledge is subjectivity; the whole truth is often paradoxical.

What is the meaning of human history?

(CT,TE) History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity.

(+TE) History as a record of events is uncertain and unimportant, but history as a model or type or myth to be made present and lived is of supreme importance.

Question #8

What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

(CT,TE) Christian theists live to seek first the kingdom of God, that is, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Two-Story Dichotomy

FAITH (NONREASON—OPTIMISM)

THE RATIONAL (PESSIMISM)

Two-Story Dichotomy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE NONRATIONAL AND NONLOGICAL</th>
<th>Existential experience; the final experience; the first-order experience.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE RATIONAL AND LOGICAL</td>
<td>Only particulars, no purpose; no meaning. Man is a machine.</td>
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Two-Story Dichotomy in Neo-Orthodoxy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE NONRATIONAL AND NONLOGICAL</th>
<th>A crisis first-order experience. Faith as an optimistic leap without verification or communicable content.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE RATIONAL AND LOGICAL</td>
<td>The Scripture full of mistakes – pessimism.</td>
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Appendix
Soli Deo Gloria

http://searchforanswers.org