How you view the world you live in has profound effects on the way you live your life in the world. This following is a short summary of the major worldviews that exist today. Each worldview summary is also accompanied by a diagram which visually represents each of the worldviews and the relationship it sees existing between us, the world and God (if any). The legend for the three main elements of each worldview diagram is as follows:

God = World = You

AGNOSTICISM

This is a term generally used for the belief that we cannot know whether God exists or not. The term, which comes from the Greek words ‘agnosia’ meaning knowledge (‘agnostic’ meaning without knowledge), was first coined by T. H. Huxley in the 19th century to signify religious agnosticism. On a continuum of belief in God, agnostics generally fall in the mid-point between atheism and theism. Today, agnosticism usually means suspending judgement on all matters divine. But even if God does exist, He is regarded as irrelevant to modern life. Agnosticism is considered a more reasonable anti-theistic position than atheism since it comes less of the social stigma that atheism carries. In addition, agnosticism, which neither affirms or denies the existence of God, is said to carry the burden of atheism and therefore doesn’t need to give reasons for it’s profession of ignorance.

ATHIEISM

The term ‘atheism’ comes from the Greek words ‘at’ meaning ‘without’ and ‘theios’ meaning God. The term has been used from as early as ancient Greece times to refer to godless people. There are various degrees of atheistic belief but the most extreme form of Atheism is a denial of the existence of God (e.g. 18th Century French atheists and 21st Century New Atheists like Dawkins and Hitchens). Generally, there is no special place above the rest of the natural world as in all theistic beliefs (where the human figure is put above God on top of it). Without the existence of God to give meaning, Atheists often look to other sources for meaning and purpose, in the mechanics of the natural world (Naturalists), in humanity (Humanists) our subjective experience of life (Existentialists), or in our own personal beliefs (Relativists).

CHRISTIAN THEISM

Christian Theism, further defines theism as the belief in God who is eternal, personal and all-powerful creator and sustainer of the universe who shall judge the dead and the world at a future time, both of which are necessary for a belief in the resurrection and ascension as king of the universe that humanity, who is made in the image of God, is to worship Him and not idols. The Christian faith is a belief in the personal and historical events recorded in the Bible and their inspiration and authority for us today. Christian Theism is further defined as being Christian Legalists.

DEISM

Originating during the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries, Deism (from the Latin ‘deismus’ meaning God) denies that God can be involved in the provision of the scriptures but only by human reason. God became viewed as the divine watchmaker, the first cause of the universe whose existence is only evident in the mechanisms of his creation. This God is transcendent and omnipotent, not fully personal and not fully sovereign over human affairs and not providential. God therefore does not care or love the world because he has no personal relationship to the world. This view in the world is determined by the cause and effect of its closed mechanism allowing no intervention by God. Humanity are part of this clockwork universe with no relation to God and are in charge of their own destiny but with no way to transcend the mechanism.

EXISTENTIALISM

Atheistic Existentialism which arose in the first half of the 19th century is an attempt to ‘transcend nihilism’. This view does not look for meaning in the objective world. The Naturalism does but rather in the individual subjective self-consciousness. The reason for this is that the objective world is viewed as absurd especially in light of the suffering and death that is part of life. Since there is no God it is people who are in total control of their lives and who make themselves who they are. Existentialists say that in order to transcend the absurdity of the world and create meaning we must learn to love life. Any good that a person does is merely what a person chooses to do. Evil is therefore not choosing but simply doing what others do. That is, evil is a failure to recognise the absurdity of the world.

NATURALISM

In Naturalism the God of Thiem is even further reduced out of existence and completely replaced by natural laws. Human beings are beings that exist eternally is that there is. The cosmos as a closed system of cause and effect governed by natural laws are the only systems in the universe who are unique among the animals because of our ability for conceptual thought, sense of self-awareness and our unified consciousness. It is this uniqueness that gives humanity it’s value not a supernatural being who creates with an overarching purpose.

Naturalists are motivated by the desire to find meaning in the universe and personal (see Christian Theism).

AHUMANISM

Humans, a form of naturalism that originated in Ancient Greece as summed up in (Propertius’) famous statement that man is the measure of all things. Humanism emphasises the special value of human beings and their aspirations and values. During the Renaissance period many Christians were regarded as Humanists because they emphasised the dignity of man. However they emphasised this not in opposition to God but because they believed we were uniquely made in God’s image. Humanists who reject the existence of God while upholding the value of humanity have become known as Secular Humanists. One significant example of Secular Humanism is Learning Marxism of the early 20th century which says that ‘man is the supreme being for man’.

Pantheism

This view which literally means ‘transcending a God’ was first coined in the 18th century. It is formed as a result of a meditiation between Theism and Atheism. This view is common in Eastern monotheistic religions. There are many forms of Pantheism but they generally view God not as transcendent but rather as immanent in the world. Since God is viewed as being immanent in all of the substances of the world, God is therefore not omnipotent (i.e., doesn’t exist in totally anywhere). existing as an impersonal force animating the world. The existence of the eternal God in all the parts of the world means that the sense of time in the world is blurry. Also, since the world is God, then everything in the world is in some sense divine leaving man without any real freedom in the world.

POLYTHEISM

The term ‘polytheism’ literally means ‘many Gods’. Polytheism as understood in the ancient world particularly in the Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian and Roman Empires. Polytheism the supernatural forces believed to exist in the world are regarded as a cosmic family. Each member of the family is used to explain natural phenomena that occur in the world and to establish a cultural order and at the same time to unbelievably and unchangeable. Polytheistic belief continues today in India through Hinduism, Asia and the tribal religions of Africa and America. Each believer in polytheistic religion is free to worship the god of their choice in the way they see fit. However such flexibility and lack of accountability often leaves followers living their life at the whim of these gods without a sense of purpose or eternal hope.

RELATIVISM

Relativism has become popular as a result of post-modern philosophical thinking of the 20th Century. Post- Modern philosophy rejected all modern notions of an absolute truth because such expressions of truth were viewed as an abuse of power for the suppression other individuals. In order to avoid exercising such power over others the response was not to deny all truth but rather to say that truth is relative to each individual. In other words the truth of something is not absolute but is relative to the truth of someone else who has their own truth. Religious Relativism otherwise known as Religious Relativism states that all religions are true, that each religion is a valid expression of faith in God.

The term ‘theism’ comes from the Greek word ‘theos’ meaning ‘God’ and as its literal word means ‘belief in God’. While the view has been held for 1000’s of years the term is only recent (17th century). The term is often used as the opposite to Atheism. Broadly defined, Theism is the belief that God himself personally intervenes in the world and that God is infinitely more than the mere relationship of cause to effect. The view of God is known to be omniscient, the ultimate reference point that gives meaning to the world. This view is often known as Monotheism. Theism is also known as ‘Christian Theism’.