

Overview of Deism

Deism encompasses a range of views on the nature of God, particularly on whether God intervenes in the world. The classical view is that the universe was created by a God who then makes no further intervention in its affairs (the [clockmaker hypothesis](#)). In this view, the reason God does not intervene in the world (via [miracles](#)) is *not* that God does not care, but rather that the best of all possible worlds has already been created and any intervention could not improve it. Historically, many deists adhered to this view; others hold a more [pantheist](#) or [pandeist](#) view that in creating the world, God became the world and does not exist as a separate entity from it; while some hold that God intervenes only as a subtle and pervasive force in the universe.

The classical view of an impersonal and abstract God has caused many to claim that deism is "cold" and amounts to [atheism](#). Deists maintain that the opposite is true and that this view leads to a feeling of awe and reverence based on the fact that personal growth and a constant search for knowledge is required. This knowledge can be acquired from many sources including historical and modern interpretations found in the many varied fields of science (biology, physics, etc.) and philosophy. Deism, like many religions, seeks to reconcile and unify with science and "modern views." However, both deism and other religions have differing views with science on evolution, see [Evolutionary Creationism](#).

The term *deism* was created by eighteenth century deists to draw attention to their affirmative belief in a God.^[1] The words *deism* and [theism](#) are closely related and this sometimes leads to controversy. The root of the word *deism* is from the [Latin](#) *deus*, while the root of the word *theism* comes from the [Greek](#) *theos*, both meaning *god* in [English](#). However, theism can include faith or [revelation](#) as a basis for belief, while deism includes only belief which can be substantiated through reason.

Deism can be considered as the form of theism in opposition to [fideism](#), while other schemes separate deism and theism. A helpful comparison of the common positions regarding belief in divine beings can be found in the [theism](#) article.

Deism and prayer

Many deists who do not believe in divine intervention still find value in prayer. They think of it as a form of meditation and self-cleansing, which can improve one's life and lead to one's efforts being more effective. However, many deists consider all prayer an attempt to establish a personal relationship with God, something deists do not believe is possible.

(taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deism>)

New Age Beliefs

The following are some common — though by no means universal — beliefs found among New Agers:

1. All humanity—indeed all life, everything in the universe—is spiritually interconnected, participating in the same [energy](#). “God” is one name for this energy.

2. Spiritual beings (e.g. [angels](#), [ascended masters](#), [elementals](#), [ghosts](#), and/or [space aliens](#)) exist, and will guide us, if we open ourselves to their guidance.
3. The human mind has deep levels and vast powers, which are capable even of overriding physical reality. "You create your own reality."
4. Nevertheless, this is subject to certain spiritual laws, such as the principle of cause and effect ([karma](#)).
5. The individual has a purpose here on earth, in the present surroundings, because there is a lesson to learn. The most important lesson is love.
6. Death is not the end. There is only life in different forms. What some refer to as an afterlife does not punish us but teaches us, perhaps through the mechanisms of [reincarnation](#) or [near-death experiences](#).
7. Science and spirituality are ultimately harmonious. New discoveries in science ([evolution](#), [quantum mechanics](#)), rightly understood, point to spiritual principles.
8. It shares with many major world religions the idea that [Intuition](#) or "divine guidance" is a more appropriate guide than [rationalism](#), [skepticism](#), or the [scientific method](#). Western science wrongly neglects such things as [parapsychology](#), meditation, and holistic health.
9. There exists a mystical core within all religions, Eastern and Western. Dogma and religious identity are not so important.
10. The [Bible](#) is considered by some, but not all, to be a wise and holy book. Many important truths are found in the Bible, or are referred to only very obliquely. Some say that [Jesus](#) was an [Essene](#), or that he traveled to India in his youth to study Eastern religions. Others say that Jesus was a later [avatar](#) of [Buddha](#).
11. Feminine forms of spirituality, including feminine images of the divine, such as the female [Aeon Sophia](#) in Gnosticism, are viewed as having been subordinated, masked, or obliterated by patriarchal movements that were widely practiced when sacred teachings were first committed to writing. A renaissance of the feminine is particularly appropriate at this time.
12. Ancient civilizations such as [Atlantis](#) may truly have existed, leaving behind certain relics and monuments (the [Great Pyramid](#), [Stonehenge](#)) whose true nature has not been discovered by mainstream historians.
13. There are no coincidences (see [Synchronicity](#)). Everything around you has spiritual meaning, and spiritual lessons to teach you. You are meant to be here, and are always exactly where you need to be to learn from what confronts you.
14. The mind has hidden [powers](#) and abilities, which have a spiritual significance. Dreams and psychic experiences are ways in which our souls express themselves.
15. [Meditation](#), [yoga](#), [t'ai chi](#), and other Eastern practices are valuable and worthwhile.
16. The food you eat has an effect on your mind as well as your body. It is generally preferable to eat fresh [organic vegetarian](#) food.
17. Ultimately every [interpersonal relationship](#) has the potential to be a helpful experience in terms of our own growth.
18. We learn about ourselves through our relationships with other people by getting to see what we need to work on ourselves and what strengths we bring to the other party in order to help them in their life.
19. All our relationships are [destined](#) to be repeated until they are healed, if necessary over many lifetimes.
20. As [Souls](#) seeking wholeness, our goal is eventually to learn to love everyone we come in contact with.

(taken from <http://www.answers.com/topic/new-age>)

The Worldview of Eastern Pantheism

- by R. Totten, MDiv. © 2000

The Six Basic Propositions of the Eastern Pantheistic Worldview:

1. In the Eastern Worldview, the ultimate Reality (the "One") is impersonal, infinite, non-material, and non-conceptual.

In this system, "Brahman" is the ultimate reality. Brahman "is all in all", the "Universal Soul." It is all that really exists, and nothing truly exists that is not ultimately Brahman. "God" as a "personal" being does not actually exist. Rather, Brahman does not "think" or "know" anything, "sin" does not offend it, and it cannot be said to "love" or "hate". Brahman is absolutely simple, and has no attributes (such as goodness, truthfulness or emotions) or parts or "distinctions" (such as Father or Son), and is thus called "the One". The ultimate reality of Brahman is beyond distinction, so that anything that does appear to exist as a distinct object, such as a human, a computer, or a concept, is an illusion, or "maya." Brahman is totally indefinable and non-conceptual, and nothing can be accurately thought or expressed which is "true" in relation to it ---so, in the eastern pantheistic worldview, intellectual knowledge or logic has no actual place or reality.

2. In the Eastern Worldview, the Universe flows out of Brahman (God), and Brahman is the Universe.

In eastern thought, everything is an emanation or manifestation of Brahman. Eastern thinkers say: "Brahman is all in all" ...Brahman is all, and all is Brahman. Brahman is all that really exists. Anything that seems to exist as a distinct thing or object, such as a planet, a personality or an idea, -----is an illusion, "maya". However, some distinct things are less illusory, and closer to "the One" reality of Brahman, namely: Some people, especially the enlightened "Perfect Master" (such as a Buddha or a guru) are closest to the "One" pure being of Brahman; ...then, less enlightened people are more illusory; next comes animals; and then vegetable life; and, finally, elemental matter is the most illusory of all, and has virtually no reality or being at all.

3. In the Eastern Worldview, "Atman" (the soul and essence of each human) "...is Brahman" (the Soul of the Cosmos).

Atman is the eternal principle of Brahman that is found within each individual human. Atman is "the One" within each of us. So, who is man? In essence, at the very spiritual core, man is Brahman (God). Thus, since Brahman is impersonal, man at his core nature (Atman) is also not personal. Similarly, since personality includes self-awareness and self-determinacy, man in his essential real nature is not conscious nor does he will to do anything (Atman is Brahman).

The Eastern Worldview says that the trouble for humankind is: Man does not realize that his essential being is God. The goal of human life is the "enlightenment" to pass beyond all self-awareness and existence, and to realize one's oneness with "the One," the Soul of the Cosmos (Brahman). There are many "paths" to this oneness, and one of the most common methods is chanting the word "Om", which is untranslatable because, intentionally, it is contentless as to intellectual meaning. It is said that Atman is Om. Another method is the repeated chanting of a word with no meaning (mantra), to empty the intellect. Similarly, others contemplate illogical sayings and questions, called "koan", for example: "If you have heard the sound of one hand [clapping], can you make me hear it too?" Even doing "good" is another method, but not because doing good really matters ...but is also nonsense. These sorts of methods are used as paths to enlightenment, because the goal of attaining oneness with the "One" includes the annihilation of all thought, logic, knowledge and self-awareness. Ultimately, in the eastern worldview, a person's theology or conceptual beliefs are of no importance at all... being illusory "maya."

4. In the Eastern Worldview, the death of man is the end of individual personal existence ...but Atman is eternal.

The Eastern view says the goal and destiny of man is to attain "Nirvana", which literally means "cooling off" or "going out", like the flame of a candle being extinguished. Only the impersonal spirit of

man (Atman) is real, and it needs to attain oneness with the absolute "One", Brahman. So reaching Nirvana involves the annihilation of all self-existence, thinking and desires. This extinguishing happens when enlightened people die, and the cycle of suffering and self comes to an end.

5. Ethics are not absolute; to reach enlightenment in the "One" is to go beyond good and evil. Eastern thought classifies concern over goodness and truth to be lower-level spirituality. No action is really "good" or "evil," ultimately, because Brahman is beyond such things. To be "good" or "bad" are conceptions of illusion (maya). When a person is "enlightened," he is beyond moral concerns for any actions he does. Thus, helping an old lady across the street, as opposed to pushing her down under the wheels of traffic, would (in reality) both be ethically equivalent in this eastern system of thought -- even though Hindu people are personally concerned about being good and ethical in their behavior. "Ethical" conduct is merely one of many means or "tools" to progress toward spiritual enlightenment, and is not actually good, in ultimate reality. The pantheist has no absolute, unchanging basis for what is really right or wrong ...ethics is actually unreal... "maya."

6. All distinct "things," events and time are illusion; so history is meaningless and cyclical. In eastern thought, all distinct things and events come and go in a continuous meaningless flow of illusion. Particulars aren't real, only the absolute. History basically does not really exist, so it is something for man to transcend and leave behind. Yesterday's events do not mean or prove anything significant ...nor will tomorrow's. History does not have any ultimate destiny or goal to which it is heading.

(taken from http://www.geocities.com/worldview_3/easternwv.html)

Existentialism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Existentialism is a [philosophical movement](#) that views human [existence](#) as having a set of underlying themes and characteristics, such as anxiety, dread, freedom, awareness of death, and consciousness of existing. Existentialism is also an outlook, or a perspective, on life that pursues the question of the meaning of life or the meaning of existence. It is this question that is seen as being of paramount importance, above both scientific and other philosophical pursuits.

The Danish philosopher [Søren Kierkegaard \(1813-1855\)](#), the "father of existentialism", asserted that "truth is subjectivity": human beings can be understood only from the inside, in terms of their lived and experienced reality and dilemmas, not from the outside, in terms of a biological, psychological, or other scientific theory of human nature. Existentialism emphasizes action, freedom and decision as fundamental to human existence and is fundamentally opposed to the [rationalist](#) tradition and to [positivism](#). That is, it argues against definitions of human beings either as primarily rational, knowing beings who relate to reality primarily as an object of [knowledge](#) or whose action can or ought to be regulated by rational principles, or as beings who can be defined in terms of their behavior as it looks to or is studied by others. More generally it rejects all of the Western rationalist definitions of Being in terms of a rational principle or essence or as the most general feature that all existing things share in common. Existentialism tends to view human beings as subjects in an indifferent, objective, often ambiguous, and "absurd" universe in which meaning is not provided by the natural order, but rather can be created, however provisionally and unstably, by human beings' actions and interpretations.

Human beings are exposed to or, to use the philosopher [Martin Heidegger's](#) phrase, "thrown" into, existence. Existentialists consider being thrown into existence as prior to, and the horizon or context of, any other thoughts

or ideas that humans have or definitions of themselves that they create. This is part of the meaning of the assertion of the philosopher [Jean-Paul Sartre](#), one of the founders of existentialism, "existence is prior to essence". Existentialism conceives of [Being](#) itself as something that can only be understood through and in relation to these basic characteristics of human existence.

In terms of the existence and relevance of God, there are three schools of existentialist thought: atheistic existentialism ([Sartre](#)), [Christian existentialism](#) ([Kierkegaard](#)) and a third school, agnostic existentialism, which proposes that whether God exists or not is irrelevant to the issue of human existence - God may or may not exist ([Heidegger](#)).

Although there are certain common tendencies among existentialist thinkers, there are major differences and disagreements among them, and not all of them even affiliate themselves with or accept the validity of the term "existentialism". In German the phrase *Existenzphilosophie* (philosophy of existence) is also used.

(taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Existentialism>)

Nihilism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The nonexistence of God is a quintessential nihilistic concern.

This article is about the philosophical position. For the Russian political and revolutionary movement, see [Nihilist movement](#).

Nihilism as a [philosophical](#) position argues that the world, and especially human existence, is without objective meaning, purpose, comprehensible [truth](#), or essential value. Nihilists generally believe all of the following: God doesn't exist, traditional morality is false, and secular ethics are impossible; therefore, life has no meaning, and no action is preferable to any other.

Nihilism is often more of a charge leveled against a particular idea than a position to which someone overtly subscribes. Movements such as [Dadaism](#), [Deconstructionism](#), and [punk](#) have been described by various observers as "nihilist". Usually this simply means or is meant to imply that the beliefs of the accuser are more "*substantial*" or "*truthful*", whereas the beliefs of the accused are nihilistic, and thereby comparatively amount to "*nothing*".

Nihilism is also a characteristic that has been ascribed to time periods: for example, [Baudrillard](#) has called [postmodernity](#) a nihilistic epoch, and some [Christian](#) theologians and figures of authority assert that [modernity](#) and [postmodernity](#) represent the rejection of God, and therefore are nihilist.

Prominent philosophers who have written on the subject of nihilism include [Friedrich Nietzsche](#) and [Martin Heidegger](#). Nietzsche described Christianity as a nihilistic religion because it evaded the challenge of finding meaning in earthly life, creating instead a spiritual projection where mortality and suffering were removed instead of transcended. He believed nihilism resulted from the "[death of God](#)", and insisted that it was something to be overcome, by returning meaning to a monistic reality (he sought instead a "pragmatic idealism," in contrast to the prominent influence of Schopenhauer's "cosmic idealism"). Heidegger described nihilism as the state where "there is nothing left of Being as such," and argued that nihilism rested on the reduction of Being to mere value.

(taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihilism>)

Naturalism (philosophy)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Naturalism is any of several philosophical stances, typically those descended from [materialism](#) and [pragmatism](#), that do not distinguish the [supernatural](#) from [nature](#). Naturalism does not claim that phenomena or hypotheses commonly labeled as supernatural necessarily do not exist or are wrong, but insists that they are not inherently different from natural phenomena or hypotheses, and that all phenomena and hypotheses can be studied by the same methods.

Any method of inquiry or investigation or any procedure for gaining [knowledge](#) that limits itself to natural, physical, and material approaches and explanations can be described as naturalistic.

Distinctions are sometimes made between two approaches, the first being *methodological naturalism* or *scientific naturalism*, and the second *ontological naturalism* or *metaphysical naturalism*. The first approach underlies the application of the [scientific method](#) in [science](#), which makes the [methodological](#) assumption that [observable](#) events in [nature](#) are explained only by natural causes without assuming the existence or non-existence of the supernatural, and hence does not accept supernatural explanations. The second approach refers to the metaphysical [assumption](#) that the natural world (including the universe) is all that exists.

This distinction between approaches to the philosophy of naturalism is particularly made by those supporting science and [evolution](#) in the [creation-evolution controversy](#). Some proponents of [Creationism](#) or [intelligent design](#) refer to *methodological naturalism* as *scientific materialism* or as *methodological materialism* which they conflate with *ontological naturalism* in contrast to their preferred approach of a revived [natural philosophy](#) which welcomes supernatural explanations for natural phenomena.

(taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_naturalism)

SOME DEFINITIONS

atheism: the belief that God (or gods or the supernatural) does not exist

agnosticism: the belief that we lack sufficient grounds to either affirm or deny God's existence

materialism: the belief that only physical things (i.e., matter and energy) exist (the atheistic view of ultimate reality)

theism: the belief that God exists (with God normally construed as being all-powerful, all-knowing, timeless, immaterial, uncaused, and perfectly free)

Christian theism: the belief that God exists and has revealed himself decisively in Jesus