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"World Views":- from Warburton: Voltaire & Leibnitz, Hegel, Schopenhauer

"World Views" would seem to involve rational thought plus something else. Up until the age of reason, the extra factor was god, a given part of belief who was always there to complete the picture. Leibnitz was a great mathematician as well as a philosopher, and as a rationalist he conceived a system whereby it should be possible to know everything through reason, but the human mind was limited, so we have to fall back on empirical knowledge. God of course knows all. Voltaire shows a healthy scepticism, rejecting certainly authority and also even looking for flaws in scientific reasoning. The problem of evil and disasters in the world led him to attack Leibnitz's suggestion that we live in the best of all possible worlds, caricaturing him as Dr Pangloss in "Candide".

Kant's philosophy making it impossible to appeal to God to complete the picture may be looked at as an example of Hegel's dialectic process. The debate whether reality is mind (thesis) or matter (antithesis) goes back at least as far as Plato and Aristotle. Kant's synthesis is that there is a real world out there (nuomena), but we can comprehend the world only as phenomena through our senses and conditioned by our mind's inherent concepts of not only colours, say, but space, time and cause and effect too. His corollary is that concepts such as God and morality are nuomena, and therefore cannot be comprehended through reason. As Hegel suggested, this apparent solution itself became a new thesis, and could be seen as the starting point of the great schism in philosophy between the "Analytical Philosophy" of the English speaking world, focusing on reason and logic, and "Continental Philosophy" looking to refute or go beyond Kant to continue metaphysics through interpretation of the world.

Hegel was an idealist and refuted Kant's theory that our way of seeing the world was fixed and given. Hegel gave philosophy a dynamic and the dialectic was a way of working through understanding everything to reach the unifying "Spirit" he also believed history followed the dialectic (an idea taken up by Marx) – culminating in his ideas and the ideal of the Prussian state! If Hegel was an optimist, Schopenhauer was a pessimist. Instead of the unifying spirit, he could see just a blind will – which struck a chord with the scientifically disposed amongst us as sounding very like energy. Influenced by eastern philosophy, Schopenhauer the Buddhist concept of asceticism leading to Nirvana, but seems to have missed the compassion and content. He did promote the arts and particularly music as a consolation.