

Understanding Alternative Worldviews

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Introduction

A. Definitions:

1. A **“WORLDVIEW”** is “a way of life guided by basic beliefs and priority values that are expressed in preferred behavior.”
2. A **“CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW”** is “a way of life with basic beliefs, priority values, and preferred behavior that are consciously directed by a love for God and His Word for humanity.”

B. Fundamental facts about a worldview.

1. _____ has a worldview.
2. It is initially adopted and often held _____.
3. It is a set of assumed answers to the _____.

C. BIG questions.

1. By **TOPICS** or “categories” (James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*).
 - a. **God or Prime Reality** (e.g. Is there a God or not? What *kind* of God/god is it? What is the relationship between this God/god(s) and the physical world and humanity?)
 - b. **Nature** (e.g. Is the universe eternal? self-generating? created? real or illusion? self-operating? purposeful or accidental?)
 - c. **Humanity** (e.g. Origin? purpose? value? unique?)
 - d. **Knowledge** (e.g. Can we truly know *anything*? How much? How? Is there any *revelation* from a supernatural source? What kind?)
 - e. **Ethics** (e.g. What is the *basis* for judging right/wrong, if anything? Are there any “absolutes”?)
 - f. **Death** (e.g. What happens afterward? Judgment? Reincarnation? Nothing?)
 - g. **History** (e.g. Is there any overall purpose? Endless cycle? Any miracles or providence?)
2. Using a **PROBLEM/SOLUTION** scheme (see Nancy Pearcey’s *Total Truth*).
 - a. Creation (e.g. Where did we come from?)
 - b. Fall (e.g. What’s wrong with us?)
 - c. Redemption (e.g. How can we ‘fix’ it?)

D. Various lists of different worldviews.

1. James Sire’s “catalog” of WVs (see *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed.)

Christian Theism	Deism	Naturalism
Nihilism	Existentialism	Eastern Pantheistic Monism
New Age	Postmodernism	Islamic Theism

2. Examples of other kinds of worldviews in Steve Wilkens and Mark Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews* (InterVarsity, 2009): Individualism, Consumerism, Nationalism.

Nancy Pearcey: “Like so many young people, I had learned my Bible but had not clue how to relate biblical doctrine to the realm of ideas and ideologies. When I first encountered the broader intellectual world beyond the circle of family and church, I was an easy target.... Before they leave home, they [Christian teens] should be well acquainted with all the “isms” they will encounter, from Marxism to Darwinism, to postmodernism. It is best for young believers to hear about these ideas first from trusted parents, pastors, and youth leaders, who can train them in strategies for analyzing competing ideologies” (*Total Truth*, pp. 124, 126).

E. Biblical principles for encountering other worldviews.

1. Col 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you _____ through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” (NASV)
2. 2 Cor 10:5 “We are _____ speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God”
3. Titus 1:9-11 “... able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to _____ those who contradict.”
4. Rom 1:21 “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became _____ in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”
5. Romans 1:18-32
 - a. All have a _____ of God.
 - b. Some _____ the knowledge of God.
 - c. Some _____ alternatives to God.
 - d. Some _____ something else for God.
 - e. God may _____ His influence.

I. Worldviews in the Bible

A. Adam/Eve vs. the serpent (Gen 3).

1. The serpent questioned their ETHICS (“Has God said, ‘You shall not eat ...?’”).
2. The serpent questioned their view of DEATH (“You surely will not die”).
3. The serpent questioned their view of KNOWLEDGE (“... you will become like God, knowing good and evil”).
4. The serpent questioned their view of GOD and HUMANITY (“... you will become like God ...”).

B. Biblical creation accounts vs. Egyptian, Babylonian, and Sumerian creation accounts (Genesis 1–3).

C. Moses vs. Egyptian deities (Ex. 1-4; 7-11).

1. Many gods (e.g. of sun, joy, war, air, earth, water) were worshipped, including Pharaoh.

2. The ten plagues involved God's judgment on "all the gods of Egypt" (Ex. 12:12).
- D. Elijah vs. false prophets of Baal (I Kings 18).
- E. Daniel vs. Babylonian religion (Daniel 1-4) and Persian religion (Daniel 5:30-31; 6:1-28).
- F. The apostle Paul vs. the Greek philosophies of the Epicureans and Stoics (Acts 17:16-34).
1. The Epicureans had a philosophy that denied God's existence (only "atoms" exist) and emphasized the pleasures of this physical world. They were much like today's Naturalists or Atheists (see below).
 2. The Stoics accepted a kind of impersonal "force" that permeates the universe; *everything* is God. They were much like today's Pantheists (see below).

II. Worldviews Today

A. Christian Theism (*theos* = Greek for "God")

1. Overview ideas
 - a. C _____
 - b. S _____
 - c. I _____
2. Basic theme: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."
3. Object illustration: A _____.

B. Deism (*deus* = Latin for "God")

1. Overview ideas
 - a. C _____
 - b. A _____
 - c. N _____
 - d. T _____
2. Basic theme: "God's gone. Let's reason it out ourselves."
3. Object illustration: _____
4. Cultural connections
 - a. Notable examples: Thomas Jefferson; Thomas Paine; Antony Flew, a recently converted famous atheist.
 - b. Most American teens are "moral therapeutic deists" (Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, 2005, 2009).
5. Biblical connections (2 Tim 3:5; Matt 22:29; I Cor 2:4-5)

C. Pantheism (and New Age)

(cosmos = Greek for “world” or “universe”; (pan = all) + (theism = God)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **A** _____ is God.
 - b. **I** _____ of this world.
 - c. **M** _____ awareness.
2. Basic theme: “Connect with the oneness of the universe.”
3. Object illustration: _____
4. Specific concepts and terms: *Atman* (the true self) is *Brahman* (the One); Samsara (the wheel of rebirth = reincarnation); Karma (works-produced principle that determines future incarnations).
5. Cultural connections: Hinduism; Taoism; some forms of Buddhism (e.g. Richard Gere, Steven Segal, Phil Jackson); New Age (e.g. Shirley Maclaine); Animism; Wicca; Yoda in *Star Wars*; Scientology (e.g. John Travolta, Tom Cruise); Deepak Chopra; Eckhart Tolle; *Lion King*; Oprah.
6. Biblical connections
 - a. Gen 3 (The serpent and Adam/Eve)
 - b. Acts 17:16-33 (The Stoic philosophers)

D. Secular Humanism (“Modernism”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **N** _____
 - b. **O** _____
 - c. **S** _____
 - d. **E** _____
2. Basic theme: “We can do it!”
3. Object example: _____
4. Cultural connections: Charles Darwin; Carl Sagan; Berenstain Bear’s *Nature Guide*; Richard Dawkins; Michael Shermer; Bill Maher; Spock from *Star Trek*; *The Titanic*; *Mission Impossible*; *CSI* TV series; *Numb3rs*; PBS “Cosmos” TV series; *Criminal Minds*.
5. Biblical connections (Acts 17 Epicureans; Luke 12:15-23; Luke 15:11-14; Matt 16:26; Phil 3:17-21).

E. Nihilism (nihil = Latin for “nothing”)

1. Overview ideas
 - a. **N** _____ really matters.
 - b. **A** _____ of Life (“I don’t care”; “I give up”)
 - c. **P** _____ outlook.

2. Basic theme: “We got nothing, and we’re going nowhere.”
3. Object illustration: A _____
4. Cultural connections: “Murder by Number”; “Final Destination”; “Bohemian Rhapsody”; Douglas Adams’ *Hitch Hiker* “trilogy”; John Cage; “Seinfeld”; Kurt Cobain, Columbine shootings; Samuel Beckett.
5. Biblical connections (Eccl 2:10-11).

F. Atheistic Existentialism¹

1. Background (Camus; Sartre)
2. Overview ideas
 - a. F _____
 - b. A _____
 - c. D _____
3. Basic theme: “Life is absurd. Be free and have fun.”
4. Object illustration: Mr. _____
5. Cultural connections: Friedrich Nietzsche; John Paul Sartre; Albert Camus; a lot of middle school, high school, and college youth! Ferris Bueller; the character “Jack” in the movie *Titanic*; *Groundhog Day*; *Dead Poets’ Society* (*carpe deum*); Hugh Hefner.
6. Biblical connections (Phil 3:17-21; 1 Pet 4:1-5).

G. Postmodernism²

1. Overview ideas
 - a. F _____
 - b. U _____
 - c. R _____
2. Basic theme: “Different strokes for different folks.”
3. Object illustration: A _____
4. Cultural connections: Madonna; Britney Spears; *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; *The Truman Show*; *The Matrix*; *Lost*; *Inception*; Reality TV shows; *Modern [Post?] Family*.
5. Biblical connections (Deut 12:8).

H. A worldview “test.”

¹ Existentialism can be *atheistic* (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus) or *theistic*. *Theistic* forms stress having a direct encounter and relationship with some higher power. They minimize or reject the importance of doctrine, scripture, or history in favor of personal experience and communication with God.

² “Postmodern” often refers to *cultural* characteristics. “Postmodern-ISM” is a *philosophical position* that disputes the possibility of universal truth and values. Often, this distinction is not adequately made. I suggest that the church adapt to a postmodern *culture* but be careful not to be unduly influenced by postmodernist *philosophy*.

III.A General Strategy for Responding to Other Worldviews

- A. Expose the worldview's position and its _____ implications.

- B. Contrast the worldview's logical implications with the _____ and actual _____ of its advocates.

- C. Compassionately confront with probing _____.
(See Mark 11:27-33)