

Why Worldviews Matter

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As Christians we are called to be apologists, defenders of the faith (1 Pet. 3:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). This spiritual war has occurred ever since our Lord's resurrection. Paul constantly addressed this in many of his letters, when his churches deviated from what may be coined his "gospel in miniature," Eph. 2:8-9.

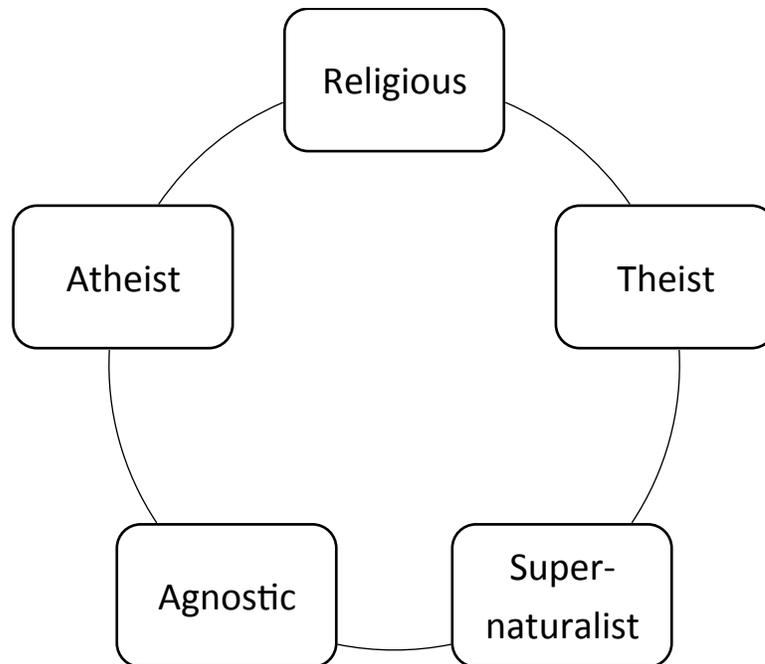
The term *worldview* is a useful concept in helping us understand another's viewpoint, outlook, and perception of the world. It is our image and idea of reality. As we strive to learn truth, we create and maintain belief systems, and worldviews. All of this becomes most complicated, as we shall see.

Credo, ergo sum, "I believe, therefore, I am" is a variation of Descartes' dictum that speaks to the force driving our humanness: our belief system. Everyone is a "believer!" To believe is to hold something as true. Beliefs are individual convictions that ground worldviews. As we shall soon see, people may combine elements from one or more worldviews. Moreover, worldviews tend to evolve from one to another over a lifetime. The fundamental question is, which one is true? Truth? All? Some? None? Depends on perspective, right?

Moreover, on what authority do we base what we believe? That is, which one(s) are held to be truth based upon empirical or logical proof, evidence, and verification? Science has one answer, faith another. Or, some combine both.

We cherish, trust and give our heart to our core beliefs about ourselves, others, nature, and the universe, and God. Hence, many beliefs have deep emotional roots—which is why it is so difficult to change primary worldviews. As a result, we have emotional and often passionate attachment to our cherished beliefs. What are more sacred than our beliefs? Any belief is as absolute as our stake in it. "Jesus is Lord!"

Given that whatever we believe is our truth and our reality, *Credo, ergo sum*, what are the main worldviews? These five are characterized as Religious, Theist, Super-naturalist, Agnostic, and Religious. The graphic illustrates them accordingly.



The **Religious** worldview is shaped by peoples’ cultural, religious backgrounds, and entails both historical and current religious beliefs and practices. The *atman* is a basic belief in Hinduism, and equates the universal self with the eternal core of the person. In other words, “I am God; I am divine.” (Try that at a revival!) Furthermore, some Eastern religions have traditions of pantheism: they believe that God is the universe and the universe is God. Thus, the universe is alive and divine (remember Einstein’s “the universe is the mind of God?”). God is in all and all is in God. Polytheism, belief in multiple gods, is also a feature of Hinduism. Let us not forget that core belief of reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls from one body to another, is fundamental in Eastern religions and ironically becoming more acceptable in Western worldviews.

Western religions are monotheistic. However, like Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, they have hierarchies of spiritual beings, both angels and demons. Within their hierarchies, spiritual entities are either good or evil and vie in earthly and cosmic battle (Eph. 6:12+). Christianity is unique, of course, regarding the trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The second worldview is **Theism**. Theists or monotheists believe in one ultimate supreme god, usually “God,” a Being infinite, immortal and indivisible—omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve-Step Programs, for

instance, refer to *God as we understood him* in Step Three, normally attributing that God is at least “greater and caring.” Thus, AA and their offshoots are theistic. Some theistic scientists remain religiously devoted to scientific discipline. Einstein spoke of an “illimitable superior spirit” and Wernher von Braun a “superior rationality.” Some theists may believe in and even pray to their deity, but do not profess or practice any religion. Some blend both. Hence, many people are theists in their worldviews with a spectrum of piety.

Super-naturalism (spiritualism or necromancy refers to practitioners who claim they can conjure up dead spirits) refers to a broad category of individuals, who believe in spiritual forces or beings that they can invoke, commune or placate, and even cast spells or curses through ritual, ceremony or prayer. Some examples include Masonry, Ouija boards, séances, channeling, astrology, occult, magic, “New Age,” Satanism, psychics, Christian Science, Scientology, Gnosticism, necromancy (contacting the dead), Theosophy, shamanism, Voodoo, paganism, and hosts of others. All of these can fit under this category dubbed the Occult. Some supernaturalists may also adhere to a vague form of pantheism. Blending is not uncommon.

Some Super-naturalists may believe in a form of theism; they might have a hazy conviction of a universal “god,” but their belief may be marginal and largely irrelevant in their lives. For pagans, *Terra* may be viewed as the Mother Spirit with accompanying goddesses. “Many paths, one journey” is a familiar mantra for those following these worldviews.

Agnosticism: agnostics believe that God’s existence cannot be proven or disproved scientifically (they are correct.) Agnostics tend to be religious skeptics and demand pragmatic or empirical evidence—verifiable by their five senses—before they would validate any experience. (It was not until the 17th century Enlightenment that many began to minimize or dismiss the role of a Supreme Being.) Alternately, Deism evolved—a belief that there is a Creator God who set the universe in motion (sounds suspiciously like Argument by Design), but ever since creation, “God” has no involvement in human affairs. Hence, He is a spectator or a “rocking chair God.” Some contemporary atheist or even agnostic scientists lean toward Intelligent Design, but have no personal views about the attributes or qualities of that Intelligent Designer, much less any personal relationship. They may range from leaning in the direction of atheism or tipping toward theism. And, some may be religious believers.

Atheism: atheists believe (and indeed, they are believers—like everyone else!) God does not (and never did) exist. God is a human projection. It is intriguing that atheism bookshelves

are next to religious sections. Some are so vitriolic that one might wonder if for them if “Nothing is sacred.” In any case, religion is solely Marx’s “opium of the people.” Freud summed his position: “At bottom God is nothing more than an exalted father.” Atheists are materialists or naturalists, believing that fundamentally only matter, energy, and the laws of thermodynamics, motion, attraction, entropy etc. exists. Like agnostics, their whole viewpoint is based on whatever they deem is certifiable and provable by experimental methods and observation. Therefore, atheists believe our eventual destiny is to decompose into fertilizer.

We can broadly differentiate worldviews into two camps: natural or supernatural believers..

What is most interesting is that these perspectives are permeable: some world viewers embrace whatever fits within their schema and some are worldview hybrids. A person raised in a church may cease attending but retain a belief that God exists, yet deny Christ (like this writer once did). A person solely raised Hindu, Moslem or Buddhist will have their backgrounds coloring their worldviews—whether they adhere toward a secular or sacred worldview and can merge beliefs together. Some Christians entertain reincarnation, having a former life on earth.

In addition, people evolve over time. Stanch Christians often lapse into agnosticism while attending college. Others may change from one religion to another. Atheists can become theists or vice versa. Consequently, it helps to understand some incorporate more than one worldview.

Lastly, there are a spectrum of beliefs about worldviews: all are equally valid and true; one is more valid and truer than others; or one is valid and true and all others are invalid and false.

In conclusion, it is critical to discern the person’s belief system and worldview and someone tends to adhere to one of the five. As we share our faith in Christ, it is essential to realize that when anyone seriously questions the validity of their worldview, it takes great courage. Such a paradigm shift is extremely threatening, because we are what we believe. In our era, sharing and living Christ by example may be the most effective approach. 1 Pet.3:15-16 is the guide: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”