

TUTORIAL
6.2

Worldviews 2

This is the second tutorial on the area of worldview. We will look at a model that helps us to understand the nature of a person's worldview, and at eight questions that help us to investigate and understand other worldviews around us.

The notes were transcribed from a video presentation, so watch the video as you read the notes.

Last Time

In our first tutorial on worldview:

- we tried to begin to describe and define what worldviews are and where they come from
- we gave a definition of worldview - from James Sire
- we also mentioned another resource from Wilkens and Sanford
- we talked about meta-narratives, the overarching stories that tie reality together for us
- we described God's meta-narrative - in the sense that God has a major Story, and that He wants us to understand what that Story is and He wants us to be a part of that
- we talked about the human heart and the fact that humans are motivated to be 'worldviewish' - we are motivated to live according to a set of presuppositions that ultimately drives our behaviour
- we described the informality of worldview formation and the fact that our worldview is changing, growing and expanding - that our own personal stories have worldview issues attached to them - our experience accumulates and is added to our worldview as part of an informal process of worldview formation. This happens in Western societies and also in minority societies around the world where worldview is also an underpinning of society and of culture.

Identifying worldviews

We are going to move on to a series of questions by James Sire, that are based on the definition of worldview, and that Sire describes as being able to help us to identify the formal worldview that is in place in a given situation.

We are not saying that we would go into a setting and ask these worldview questions and therefore discern people's worldviews, by going in to a situation and saying, 'I have eight questions for you. Can you answer these questions then I'll know everything about you, I'll have you nicely pigeon-holed and we can move on, so I'll know how to approach you from here on out'. No, that's not the point. But the point is that as we get to know the stories of others, these questions provide an underlying framework for us to identify and evaluate life commitments.

A worldview model

So, we want to know what the answers to these questions are, but before that we will look at a model of worldview that you may have seen before which is a diagram with concentric circles that move toward a centre (see diagram below). We want to know how to identify someone's worldview (and we are going to talk about those questions from Sire) so, what kind of a conceptual model helps us to do that?



If you look at the diagram, it starts on the outermost circle with *behavior*. Why behavior? The simple answer is, why not behavior?

When we see a person we see behavior, first and foremost. Even if we don't know the language that a person is speaking, we can begin to see and understand them through their behavior. When I go to a society overseas and go through the 'meet and greet' process (before I know the local language),

it helps me to understand hospitality in that setting. Very quickly, through observing behavior, we get an idea of the system of belief that underpins that society.

To understand how to interpret behavior, we have to go further than that, we need to actually understand the *values* that are motivating behavior. Sometimes the outcomes of behavior are very different, but there is a set of values - in certain cases that surprises us - that underpins behavior. In most cases we see the consistent threads there. So values are those things that we are committed to living out through our behavior that we would describe by saying, 'Yes, I highly value this, therefore I act in a certain way'.

So, in our set of concentric circles, we are moving toward commitments that are more and more key to us. That is the idea in this model. So we start with the observable - the behavior. Then we describe values in the second circle, then we move to the things that we would call *beliefs*. These move back away from practical outworking towards core commitments or presuppositions that underpin what we do in this world or how we think in this world.

Human beings seek to make sense of reality

Human beings are 'hard wired' to make sense of their reality - of the world around them - in some way or other - even if they conclude that there is no way to make sense of it. They are still making a statement that 'You can't make sense of it, it doesn't have any sense, it is chaos.' That in itself is a description of the nonsense of the attempt to make sense. So *everyone* is working in this direction - they have behavior, they have values, they have beliefs about things. Those beliefs direct and steer their values - the lower level of the set of assumptions that they are operating from - and then in this model, at the center is *worldview* itself.

Worldview is at the center because it is the most firmly held commitments that I make - the things that I will not give up, that I will not compromise on in my intellectual being. Those are the things that I hold very tightly to and that I will be very strong in defending. Sometimes, as Sire points out, those things are not *consciously* held, so it is a bit difficult to defend something that you have not tangibly pinned down. But, for those of us who adhere to religious worldviews that are fairly well defined - like Christian Theism - most of those commitments we can articulate in some way or other and we understand why we are committed to those things.

As we said, human beings are hard wired to make this kind of sense of reality, even those who reject the notion that we are trying to make sense... are trying to make sense. So, it is very difficult to get away from making sense of reality, from trying to define and describe the *Why* of what is in the 'box' of our reality. It is very, very difficult - and I would say *impossible* - for rational human beings to disconnect themselves from trying to make meaning of this reality that we deal with all the time. This is a God-given ability; a deliberate statement about what God has done in creating human beings.

A problem with the model

There is a problem with this particular worldview model that we should mention. We define *worldview* at the core or at the center of the diagram (and although this isn't Sire's model, he would have a similar perspective to this also). If you describe worldview as a set of *intellectual* commitments and not *heart* commitments, then a disconnect can be allowed between what we say is our worldview, and what we see in our behavior.

We can think of an example of religiously oriented people, such as the idea of a 'non-practicing Jew', or a 'non-practicing Muslim' or a 'non-practicing Hindu'. When I hear someone describe someone else as a 'non-practicing Christian', that, to me, is an oxymoron (it is self-contradictory) and you would probably say the same thing. Christians, by definition, are *practicing*. Why? Because the hub of our worldview as a Christian Theist will motivate our beliefs, values and behaviors in such a way that it is not possible to be a non-practicing adherent of true Christianity. We would say that.

Now, there are lots of stages of people growing as Christians, who don't understand the whole picture of what our identity with Christ is all about - I don't - but I am growing in my understanding of what my identity in Christ is about and what that implies for me as God sees me in Christ, what that means for the outworking of my beliefs, values and behaviors. So, as I grow in understanding, internalizing and applying that, then the worldview commitments that I have made become sharper. The presuppositions themselves, I believe, become sharper, but also my life on a worldview level cannot disengage from my behavior. It necessarily connects outward toward my behavior.

So, one of the problems with this model is the allowance of a disconnect between core commitments and behavior - so somebody can act like a pagan behaviorally and still claim to hold to a set of intellectual commitments that they would define as 'Christian'. Obviously the argument can be made that they don't really hold to those commitments.

So, when we separate out worldview and put it at the center as if it doesn't also encapsulate our behavior - that the whole configuration isn't in itself worldview - when we describe worldview in the center as a set of commitments and then describe beliefs, values and behaviours as *other* things, that aren't worldview itself - it creates an unhelpful separation between all the areas and facets of our life. Human beings are whole beings - God made them that way - and that's why Sire made adjustments to his definition about commitments being *heart* commitments that are *lived*.

Eight Questions

There are eight questions that Sire lists to help us to identify worldview commitments:

1. *What defines reality?*
2. *What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?*
3. *What is a human being?*
4. *What happens to a person at death?*
5. *Why is it possible to know anything at all?*
6. *How do we know what is right and wrong?*

7. *What is the meaning of human history?*
8. *What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?*

1. What defines reality?

His first question has to do with an area of philosophy called 'metaphysics'. Metaphysics is 'the nature of reality', or what *defines* reality for us. What is the starting point of reality - what is *really real* in our lives?

There are a lot of answers that are given to this question, depending on the worldview that the person ascribes to. For us as Christian Theists, we say our origin point for reality is God Himself: that God exists, He is a certain kind of being, He has a certain kind of identity, He is described, explained, in a certain Story, and that Story and His identity provide the basis for our understanding of reality. God Himself is reality. God Himself defines what reality means. God Himself defines the fact that we as human beings look for meaning, because He is a meaning-maker, He builds meaning, He is the One who creates, He is the One who is creative, therefore we are creative, He is rational, therefore we are rational, etc. etc.

The definition of reality is a critical issue in describing worldview because a Naturalist, for example, describes reality in terms of the material world. For them the material world *is* reality - the origin point for reality is the eternality of matter. What we are going to be moving toward in the next tutorials is the idea that defining reality *without* a transcendent being involved - someone speaking into the 'box' from outside - doesn't allow us to reasonably live life in a consistent way.

For our purpose now, the range of answers we get when asking that question, allows us to get a sense of where a worldview is headed. Our origin point for reality is God Himself, the origin point of reality for a Naturalist is matter, or the material world. We call this the person's metaphysical position - what do they believe about the nature of reality? What is really real?

2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

As you can imagine, these dots all connect - our origin point for reality points us toward an explanation of the nature of external reality. If reality originates with God, then *external* reality originated with God, and has a certain kind of order (or lack thereof) based on who God Himself is. That is what we as Christians describe.

So, when we talk about reality, we talk about God: His character. One of His character traits is that He is all-powerful, another that He is all-knowing, another that He is Omnipresent: that He is everywhere. So, as we apply His character traits: His goodness, His love, His transcendence, His Truth-giving nature, His communicative nature, to external reality, we begin to see His

character traits and apply them to the world. We talk about the world as a description of who His Being is - His *ontological* nature. God, as the reference point for the nature of being, helps to give us an explanation of external reality.

Those who are Naturalists would say that external reality is just chaos. It follows 'natural laws', but ultimately it is chaos, it is matter moving forward, but not particularly in any direction (which is a topic we will delve into later), there is no 'end goal' process for nature for a naturalist. It is just moving according to a set of natural laws that themselves have somehow evolved, because of certain kinds of characteristics. There is no overarching causality to that system and that creates a dilemma for the Naturalist.

3. What is a human being?

This is a complicated question, and has to do with *ontology* (the nature of being). It is a complicated question for those who don't have a transcendent voice speaking into our matter - our 'box' - because that view requires that human beings are highly complicated, evolved machines (for a Naturalist for example).

For us as believers, we have started with the origin point of reality as God Himself - His nature and His character, His work - therefore a human being for us is a person made in God's image and bearing the stamp of God Himself in a number of ways. That helps us to explain the very person that is 'human'. That helps us, when we look at the picture of 'the Thinker' and the monkey, to know that the line of division has to do with the image of God. For a Naturalist, that line of division is not in place, because (to them) there is no person made in the image of God, as something separate from an ape.

There are a lot of worldview definitions of human beings - in the New Age philosophy they extend evolution to go into psychic ability and other kinds of evolution that are still ongoing for us as human beings, that when we fully realize those we will just be astonished at how little we know today, intellectually, psychically, spiritually, etc. There are all kinds of definitions, but we need to know what people think about what constitutes human nature and human make-up.

4. What happens to a person at death?

This is a question very much asked these days around the world, and in every era, really. What is it that happens to a person at death? Do persons simply cease to exist - are their beings extinguished? If you are a Naturalist, you have to conclude that the complex machine that existed, when it dies, it stops existing and becomes part of the material universe in the same way it was a part of the material universe before it lived. So there is no transformation to a higher state, there is no reincarnation or departure to the 'other side'.

For Christian Theists, of course, we see this natural world as leading us to a place of God's Kingdom, God's Heaven (either that, or the reality of Hell). So, we give answers to the question in very different ways than many worldviews do. People around the world are asking this question and they do have complex answers that they are giving for that question. It is not that the category exists just for Christians and selected others; it is remarkable that concepts of eternal reward or eternal punishment come into play all over the world. Before the Yanamamo people ever heard about a transcendent God, they had a concept of eternal reward and eternal punishment. We also hear this about some of the Indians who lived in the Americas in the early years before European involvement - they believed in eternal places and destinies. People around the world also believe that spiritual beings from the dead also exist and that they affect others. The idea of 'spiritual life' and 'spirituality' after death is certainly not a new concept and it is a very common concept that we grapple with as we investigate people's worldviews.

5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?

This question is based on the other questions we have asked, and it has to do with an area of philosophy called *epistemology*. Epistemology is about knowledge - being able to know. Why is it possible to know anything at all? Why are we aware, why are we knowledgeable at all?

We as believers say we have self-awareness, or are rational and able to communicate because we have been created in the image of an all-knowing God who has those characteristics, who has that nature. That is a fairly simple answer for us, as we connect the dots back to the question that we started with, which is God defining reality. But, for a Naturalist - a person who doesn't believe in any transcendent being, and that matter is all that there is, and who describes the developmental process of life in terms of causality and chance with no end goal in mind - it is a very complex question. It is a very difficult question - at what point does the transition occur from the monkey to the man? When does a man develop consciousness? There is obvious instinctive action from the monkey, there is apparent conscious action from the man (although some Naturalists believe that action is somehow *determined* and is not a conscious choice).



Pathways to knowledge -
Aboriginal artist Denise Proud, 2011

Worldviews have to have some sort of an explanation for epistemology - the fact that we can know anything at all. Worldviews around the world that are folk worldviews think less formally about this issue than we do, but it is still an important question to ask nonetheless, because it points us back to the

question of; “Who is telling the Truth - who can give access to knowledge - who provides knowledge to mankind?” That is a very important question that goes back step-by-step to the definition of reality - for us, defined by God Himself as the provider of truth and knowledge.

6. How do we know what is right and wrong?

As a logical outcome of us concluding that God created, and that He created man in His image, He gave man a concept of right and wrong¹. We say that because it is a logical outcome of who God is - what His character is about - His goodness to give man an understanding of the knowledge of right and wrong. He is the Truth-giver.

For those who work in other kinds of systems, this question is complicated - how do we know what is right and wrong? Is it just about our human choices, making a consistent set of choices or about what is defined as right and wrong in our particular culture or social environments? Are there universal rights and wrongs? It is very hard for someone who doesn't start with Theism to actually believe that there are defined and absolute rights and wrongs - and in fact we see that in our world all around us today, that Postmodernists are very sceptical about the notion of right and wrong.

Other societies around the world have obvious things that are ‘right’ and things that are ‘wrong’, and we desire to know why that is the case. How do you as a society know what things are right and what things are wrong? And we want to know if those views that are expressed are consistently acted upon. Are people consistently making those choices according to what they say their presupposition is about how we know what is right and what is wrong? That is an important question to ask in understanding worldviews.

7. What is the meaning of human history?

This is important because in a Naturalistic system, for example, the meaning of human history is that there is no meaning to human history. There is no ultimate goal or purpose to the run of history in Naturalism - it is just evolving and happening, there is causation through natural laws and processes, but there is no ultimate goal to human history. That is very depressing to us.

We believe that God Himself originated history - it is His Story - and He has some plans and goals in mind for that. We can trust in His goals and His plans in relation to human history, and we spend a lot of our time explaining God's purposes for this world and for life and for history. He is the One who is the origin point for time and issues related to history.

¹ God wanted (and still wants) man to come to Him for answers in every area of life, but in the beginning Adam and Eve ate of the Tree Of The Knowledge Of Good And Evil so they could be the ones to provide the answers to the moral dilemmas of life. Their personal knowledge of right and wrong came *after* they turned from relying on God as their Answer and the One who Answers. God has always defined right and wrong, in the sense that He is right and anything apart from Him is wrong.

Those are two very different outcomes for the question about human history. In other societies around the world, human history is often defined cyclically - it happens in cycles of time or history - that history is not as linear as it is for us in the Western world or as Christian Theists view history. So, there are a lot of different answers to that question.

8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

This is a question that Sire added to his original set of seven questions, because of the problem we noted earlier. When we look at the worldview-centred model, working outward toward behaviour, we can, if we are not careful, see a disconnect.

When we evaluate the answers to the first seven questions, do we see that the personal life-orienting core commitments are derived from those answers or not? A Christian Theist has no difficulty - if they live in accordance with the core commitments described in God's Story - in explaining how those core commitments are an outworking of the answers to those seven questions. However, for many of the worldviews around us, it is quite difficult to answer those questions, for example from a Naturalistic point of view (cause-free, transcendent-free, only matter in the box) and to describe how and why they live a certain kind of way as a result of the answers to those questions. There are no 'connect-the-dots' links, and you close the box off to how and why you live a certain way as a result. That is a very complicated issue for many of these worldviews, as we will continue to see as we move forward.

So, this set of questions can help us to think about worldviews, and help us to describe the worldviews that we encounter as we look around the world and look inside of our own societies today.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Worldview 2

1. Australia was once, but is no longer considered a Christian country. What behaviors in our society point to the fact that values, beliefs and worldview in general have changed from being based on a Christian Theist worldview?

2. Do you notice any ways in which the prevailing worldview comes into direct conflict with your own Biblical worldview - in terms of making your behavior different from those in the wider community?



ACTIVITIES

Worldview 2

1. Over the course of the next weeks, find one or more people you know well, and have a discussion with them based on the first seven of Sire's questions. Try to talk to people with a perspective other than a Christian Theist worldview if you can. During your discussion think about how their worldview ties together, if they have thought about these questions very much before (and why or why not) and if they seem convinced and sure of their position or not.