

TUTORIAL
6.5

Evaluating Worldviews

This tutorial begins to explore the intersection between ‘cultural values’ and ‘worldview’, and looks at some of the challenges in evaluating or making judgments about a person’s worldview simply from their behaviour.

Introduction

We are going to first take a look at some of the cultural values you hold personally, and have you link those to specific actions or activities that you engage in. Then we will look at some of the challenges in understanding or evaluating another person’s worldview.

Your own ‘culture’

In this activity, you are asked to identify your own, personal, position on the following eight continuums that describe fundamental areas of culture. The descriptions below refer to overall cultural values, but you should think about how much each pole of the value matches your own. Mark your position on the continuum to identify your personal value.

After noting your position, write an example that describes how the value being expressed has actually *outworked* itself in specific ways in your life - how it has been displayed in attitudes or actions. For example, if you hold more to a polychronic than a monochronic value of time, you probably tend not to worry so much about being ‘late’. For each area, think about whether your value is a direct result of your Christian Theistic worldview, or is a ‘cultural value’.

Self Identification

Group Identification

Primary identification is with one’s self. The self is the smallest unit of survival. Self-reliance, personal freedom and emotional distance from others are important. Protecting one’s self

Identity is the function of group membership. The smallest unit of survival is the primary group. Interdependence and looking after the group, insures the well being of

guarantees the well being of others. Identity is a function of one's own achievements.

the individual. People need close affiliation with others. Too much freedom is scary.

Egalitarian Mentality

Ingroup Mentality

An egalitarian mentality is the norm. Group membership is casual and voluntary. No strong sense of in/outgroup exists. Most people are treated the same. People are informal with friends and strangers alike. It's easy to change groups and make friends.

An ingroup mentality prevails. People are close and intimate with their ingroup, and compete with their outgroup. They're formal with all but their ingroup. People have little trust of the outgroup. Groups hardly change. It's harder to make friends.

Autonomous

Collective

Autonomous organizations prevail. Workers are more independent. Individuals receive recognition, and decision-making is by majority rule. Loyalty from/to the organization is less; results are key and people are rewarded according to their contribution to the organisation.

Collective organisations prevail. Teamwork, cooperation, group recognition and loyalty to/from the organisation are the norm. Decision-making is by consensus. Harmony is key. Rewards are distributed equally.

Universalism

Particularism

Universalism is the rule. Personal and societal obligations are of equal importance and should be balanced. Rules should be applied equally to the ingroup and society in general. What is right is always right, regardless of circumstances. Objectivity is valued and expected.

Particularism prevails. It's necessary to distinguish between ingroup and societal obligations; the former are important, the latter less so. Being fair is to treat the ingroup well and let others fend for themselves. What is right depends on the situation. Context is crucial. Subjectivity is valued and expected.

Monochronic (time focus)

Polychronic (people focus)

People’s attitude towards time is monochronic. People must adjust to the demands of time; time is limited. Sometimes people are too busy to see you. People live by the external clock.

A polychronic attitude towards time is the norm. Time is bent to meet the needs of people. They’re never too busy; there’s always more time. People live by an internal clock.

One thing at a time

Many things at once

People do things one at a time. They stand in line; they expect undivided attention. Interruptions are bad; schedules, deadlines are important. Late is bad; adherence to schedule is the goal. Plans are not easily changed.

People do many things at one time. People stand in line less. Divided attention is okay. Interruptions are life. Schedules and deadlines are considered a loose guide. Late is late. Completing the transaction is the goal. Plans can be easily changed.

Life is what I do

Life is what happens to me

There are few givens in life, few things I can’t change and must accept. I can be/do whatever I want, if I make the effort. My happiness is up to me. Unhappiness is not normal. Human beings are the locus of control.

There are some things I have to live with; there may be limits to what I can do/be; happiness and unhappiness are normal parts of life. Human beings are only sometimes the locus of control.

Progress is inevitable

Progress is not automatic

Change is usually for the better. Tradition is not always right. Optimism is best. Technology is often the answer. Every problem has a solution. New is usually better.

Change can be for the worse. Realism is best. Tradition is a good guide. Some problems can’t be solved. Technology does not have all the answers. New is not necessarily better.

Now read again each of the things you wrote as examples of how your values have played out in your real life actions or attitudes. Do you think that someone who didn't know you would be able to understand your Story (worldview) from these things alone? What would it take for someone to understand your core identity and worldview - and how easily do you think someone could misunderstand your true identity by only judging you by your actions?

Two Stories

Look at the photo to the right of a group of people protesting a supermarket development in a small Australian town. Imagine that you are visiting this town and come upon this scene. What are your initial impressions - just from observing - about these people and the values they might possibly hold, what kind of people do you think they are? What conclusions can you come to about their convictions, identity or worldview? Remember our orange circle model with Story at the center? Let's use it to trace back some different possible scenarios for the Story of two of the people in the photograph.



Caroline's Story

Morals/Actions: I attended a protest against a new supermarket development in my area.

Values/Ethics: If I don't do something, then who will? This new development will increase traffic and pollution, and lower my quality of life. We each create our own meaning, pleasure, and prosperity in life and so I have to stand up for my rights.

Convictions: Man should live by whatever values he deems best for his own happiness and the survival of the human race.

Identity: There is no god and no moral absolutes, so human life has no transcendent meaning.

Story: Naturalistic philosophy and scientific method supply all real knowledge.

John's Story

Morals/Actions: I attended a protest against a new supermarket development in my area.

Values/Ethics: I think it is important to communicate my views publicly in the right way - this new development will destroy an important wetland in our area which is the home of the birds that live there - and they are a valuable part of God's creation. Christians



should show that they care about relevant community issues.

Convictions: Man has a responsibility to look after the things on earth that God gave us and that He values. We can communicate to others who God is, by the views we publicly express and by finding common ground with them by taking part in community life.

Identity: There is a God who wants people to know Him and the way He provided through His Son, I have a responsibility to try to reach people in my community with that message.

Story: God, an infinite and personal Spirit, created the world and is intimately related to it and to human beings and He gave His Son as a sacrifice for our sin.

Discovering worldviews

So, how do we discover what someone's identity, or worldview, truly is? There is actually a lot we can discover from observation, but ultimately we must actually spend time with the person and get to know the things that they value - by listening to their thoughts and relating to them as they live life - to really understand *who they are* inside.

If we had an opportunity to talk to John and Caroline, we would probably begin to understand that they had different motivations for being there. We would know even more, if we could meet their families and take part in some life activities with them and understand their point of view on a variety of other subjects. Our tendency might be to initially categorize all of the protesters as 'left-wing greenies' or 'environmental activists' - whether we think positively or negatively about it, we still tend to assume we know a fair bit about their motivations. Why do we do that? Because we have an existing frame of reference for 'people who take part in protests' - so our initial thoughts about the protesters' values is based on our knowledge of the cultural framework that we have for this kind of protest, and what it probably means in the context of Australian culture and life. Human beings do not very often go into a situation thinking - 'I probably don't fully understand what is going on here and need to find out more to really understand', but that is how we should always approach others, especially those of another culture.

Having an understanding of a broader cultural framework and context, including commonly held cultural values, *does* help us. It provides a *starting point* - a point of intersection for us to be able to communicate with people in a culturally appropriate way, in language they understand, and about things that we can both relate to. *Then* we can begin to develop a relationship based on a real understanding of where someone is 'coming from'.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Evaluating Worldviews

1. Do you think that the Christian Theistic worldview that we hold to, guides us in all areas of culture and values, such as those mentioned in the tutorial continuums? To what extent?
2. Jesus said the first and greatest commandment was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”, and that the second is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” - Matt 22:37-39. Which area of the ‘orange circle’ do you think is Jesus talking about here, and why?



ACTIVITIES

Evaluating Worldviews

1. Submit the notes and examples from the continuum exercise in the tutorial.