

CWV-101 Topic 1 Overview

Understanding Worldview

Introduction

Welcome to Grand Canyon University's Christian Worldview course; a study that will not only familiarize you with the Christian worldview, but will do so in the context of other, very different worldviews. It is common for students to feel somewhat apprehensive about taking this course for various reasons.

Some students may feel that such a course is really not necessary for their major and object to having to take it. Grand Canyon University has a long-standing Christian heritage, meaning that our Christian faith is fundamental to all that we do. We want all students to feel welcome here, regardless of their religion or beliefs, but we also want all students to at least understand the Christian worldview and be challenged to think carefully about the deeper questions of life.

Some students may be unsure what their worldview is or have a worldview that is very different from Christianity, and wonder how they will fit into such a class. Everybody has a mixture of beliefs that make him or her unique. Please be assured that the instructor's goal is to help each student feel comfortable interacting with other students and to have a positive experience. The College of Theology and instructors hope to encourage critical thinking about one's worldview and purpose in life. This is an opportunity to think about what you believe, challenge your assumptions, learn from others, and move forward on your unique life journey.

"Finding your purpose" is a motto that extends well beyond merely discovering one's gifts and talents and recognizing what career is the best fit. This course is designed to help students explore the underlying purposes of life and how these may enrich their career, family, and personal life.

Another fear many students have is unfamiliarity with the Bible. Our Christian Worldview course is designed to help every student learn how to access and understand the Bible at a basic level. Students will not be studying heavy theological issues or denominational differences. You will need to use one of the modern translations of the Bible listed in the Course Materials.

Throughout this course, you will be seeking wisdom. And from the Christian worldview, all wisdom comes from God. This is why James, the brother of Jesus, wrote in his letter, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5 NIV).

What Is a Worldview?

The following definitions are helpful:

- "A set of assumptions or beliefs about reality that affect how we think and how we

live" (Cosgrove, 2006, p. 19).

- "The comprehensive perspective from which we interpret all of reality" (Keller, 2012, p. 157).

As mentioned in the textbook, worldview is often described as a set of lenses through which we view the world. As a descriptive lens, our worldview influences our perception of the world. What is true? What is reality? As a prescriptive lens, our worldview influences our evaluation of what is true. What does it mean? How should we live?

One may readily see that if one views the nature of the universe as consisting of only physical matter and energy, then that person's understanding of the meaning of life and how we should live will likely be far different from one whose perception of the universe includes a spiritual realm where life continues after death and goodness is rewarded.

While it is true that all people have their own private worldviews with values and beliefs that have been shaped by culture, education, experiences, and relationships, it is also valuable to speak of shared worldviews, those foundational assumptions or beliefs that many people hold in common. For the sake of this course, the course content will be reduced from the many-shared worldviews to three basic worldview families.

What Are the Three Basic Worldview Families?

Though there are many different worldviews, for the purpose of this course they have been simplified into three basic worldview families. There are many variations within these families.

Atheism

Atheism is the worldview of those who believe only in what their senses can detect—only what may be analyzed and understood in a scientific laboratory. This view believes in no God or spiritual realm. The cosmos consists of only the natural or physical realm of matter and energy. Other names often associated with this worldview family are naturalism and secular humanism. Most whose worldview values and behavior are aligned with atheism prefer to be considered agnostics. These are uncertain of the existence of God, skeptical for the most part, yet open to the possibility.

Pantheism

Pantheism is the worldview of spiritualism, the belief that "all is God" as the word implies. Pantheists believe in a spiritual realm, but no relational God who has revealed himself to humanity and is actively involved in the lives of those who believe in him. This worldview family consists of the Eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as the more eclectic Western belief known as New Age. Pantheists typically embrace an impersonal oneness of which all humans may become a part, becoming godlike themselves as they reach higher levels of spirituality.

Theism

Theism, or monotheism, is the worldview of the three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Though these three have huge differences rendering them incompatible with each other, they do nonetheless have some similarities. Theists all believe in a single, personal, and relational God who is the creator and sustainer of all that exists. They all likewise believe in absolute truth and morality, and an afterlife. The focus of this course is Christianity, so the course will be comparing these three worldviews: Atheism, Pantheism, and Christianity.

Another common worldview name, deism, is somewhat of an enigma—having a basic belief in God, but a God who is not relational or involved in human life. So although falling under the broad category of theism, deists may effectively live as atheists. Many people have complex worldviews that are a mix of various beliefs from the major worldview families.

How Do We Determine Our Worldview?

In Chapter 2 of the textbook, you learn that there are six components that help to determine worldview. In your worksheet assignment for this first topic, you will answer each of these six questions for yourself:

1. What Is Ultimate Reality?

Does reality consist basically of physical matter and energy, as the atheists believe? Is reality an impersonal spiritual entity that dominates the universe and to which all humans must endeavor to attain unity with, as the pantheists assert, or is there a personal and relational, all-powerful, and sovereign God who exists everywhere, but is separate from the physical world he created, as believed by Christians and other theists?

2. What Is the Nature of the Universe?

This is similar to the question above, but focuses strictly on what one believes about the natural world. Is the universe strictly physical and yet eternal in one form or another? Is it merely an illusion intended as a battleground for us to work toward enlightenment, or was the universe created by God, and far more complex than can be detected by scientists, consisting of both a physical and a spiritual realm?

3. What Is Human Nature?

Is a human basically a biological machine, just a higher level of animal? Is a human a type of god with powers to reach perfection or is a human an off-the-charts creature, designed in the image of God with an eternal spirit like his, and similar abilities to reason, seek moral purity, communicate on a high level, create for beauty, and love even those who cannot love in return? Is death the end of existence or is there a soul that lives on? Does that soul return in another life or does it return to God and await judgment?

4. What Is Knowledge?

Is there such a thing as absolute truth or is truth relative? Is true knowledge only that which may be acquired and understood through scientific means or is there also knowledge that only may be acquired by revelation from God? Should you only trust your senses, or should you explore the spiritual realm and seek knowledge from God?

5. *What Is Your Basis of Ethics?*

How do you know right from wrong? Is morality learned or is it designed into our conscience? Is there a set of absolute moral standards given by God or is morality relative, a matter of culture, and what is acceptable to a society?

6. *What Is Your Purpose?*

Is human life as you know it merely the result of some amazing cosmic accident or is there an underlying meaning to history, a purpose toward which time will culminate? Does life have meaning and purpose for individuals, or is it simply whatever one makes it? Did the Creator design his children with a purpose? If so, what might that be?

How Do We Test Our Worldview?

As pointed out in Chapter 1 of the textbook, everybody forms their worldview on the basis of faith (assumptions and presuppositions) and reason. So now we must address the first worldview component "how reasonable or consistent is our worldview?" Are there any contradictions that are apparent? We are going to consider only three basic tests summarized here, but expanded in Chapter 2 of the textbook.

1. **The Coherence Test** checks the internal consistency of a worldview to see if one's specific values and beliefs contradict any other beliefs within the worldview.
2. **The Correspondence Test** examines how well a worldview corresponds to reality. It evaluates evidences and experiences to see if the worldview matches with what one perceives in the real world.
3. **The Practical Test** evaluates a worldview's livability. Does the worldview bring satisfaction as one faces life's challenges, or is it found to be lacking?

References

- Cosgrove, M. P. (2006). *Foundations of Christian thought: Faith, learning, and the Christian worldview*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel.
- Keller, T. (2012). *Every good endeavor: Connecting your work to God's work*. New York, NY: Dutton.