

Worldviews

Foundations - Unit 318



Week 3 – Today's Most Common Worldviews

Introduction:

While a worldview has implications for religion the two things are not the same. Religion can be defined as;

A set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

While worldviews do seek to answer these questions they go beyond, or perhaps before, these questions asking about what ideas and views exist *a priori* upon which a person's religion might be based.

A/ Christian Theism

1/ *What is prime reality?*

Reality consists not only of the natural material realm, but also non-material things like thoughts and emotions. Reality also consists of a supernatural realm in which dwell beings that are physical but of a different physicality than us. Reality also consist of God. God is real, and he's more than matter, he is spiritual. God is infinite, personal (Triune), transcendent and immanent, sovereign and good.

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

God created the cosmos *ex nihilo* to operate with a uniformity of natural causes in an open system. This may be examined even further;

- God did not create the universe out of himself, he brought it into existence out of nothing – *ex nihilo*. Genesis 1:1
- The cosmos was created to operate in an orderly fashion (Isa. 45:18-19). The creation story of Genesis 1 is strongly orientated towards this idea of order.
- The idea of the cosmos being an open system means that it is not programmed. Sire puts it this way; "God is constantly involved in the ongoing operation of the universe."¹

3/ *What is a human being?*

Human beings are created in the image of God and therefore possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity.

¹ Sire, 27

- The key scriptural reference here is Genesis 1:26-27. *Let us make man in our image.* There is much more in these texts that we will look at under another question.
- Poe and Davis make the point, Humans have the freedom to respond as they please, but the existence of the imagination provides God with access to humans without any violation of the laws of nature.²

4/ ***Why is it possible to know anything at all?***

Humans can know both the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.

John 1:1-4 The Word, or *logos* in Greek, is eternal, an aspect of God. That is, logicity, intelligence, rationality and meaning are all inherent in God. Because God is like this the universe has order and meaning and humans have the ability to discover this order and meaning.

Gen 1:28 “Fill the earth and govern it.” And Gen 2:15 “The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.” In order to accomplish the purpose God gave to humanity it is necessary for humanity to know how the creation works.

5/ ***How do we know what is right and wrong?***

Ultimate right and wrong, moral decision, lies in the hand of God. God is good and therefore defines what goodness acts like.

For Christian theism the discovering of right and wrong actions is based upon the example set and the teachings of, Jesus.

His over-arching requirements are;

- Love God with all you have
- Love your neighbour as you love yourself

Implicit in this idea of right and wrong is the observation that something is indeed wrong with the world.

When Genesis describes the creation of the world it has God declaring the created world very good. What does this really mean?

² Harry Lee Poe; Jimmy H. Davis. *God and the Cosmos: Divine Activity in Space, Time and History* (Kindle Locations 2918-2919).

John Walton makes this observation;

Based on the semantic categories that are available (and recall that “perfect, pristine” is not among them) and the contextual indicators (specifically a use of a negation), I would conclude that “good” refers to a condition in which something is functioning optimally as it was designed to do in an ordered system— it is working the way God intended.³

Humans were created good, that is they worked correctly, but due to sin, that is rebellion, they have become defaced, that is they no longer work correctly. Someone, seeking a more 21st century definition of ‘sin’ came up with this: *The tendency for all humans to stuff things up.*

God however has provided the path of restoration. This path is the Christian narrative.

A Christian world view will always affirm two aspects of humanity. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, but we are also fallen creatures. It is important that we take both seriously. If I only believe in the goodness of people, I will be doomed to disappointment. The reality of the Fall permeates every area of life. This needs to be taken with the utmost seriousness, and finds tangible expression when society provides practical safeguards against human sinfulness.⁴

6/ What is the meaning of human history?

History can be summed up in four words: creation, rebellion, redemption, renewal. History has meaning because it tells us where we came from and points us towards our future.

The defining point in human history was the incarnation of God into humanity in Jesus and his life, death and resurrection.

The study of human history via the bible allows us to measure our current behaviour and ideas with what has come before us.

For the Christian faith death is no longer the end due to the resurrection of Jesus. That there is hope of life after death is fundamental to the Christian worldview. The resurrection as a historical event is the basis for the Christian faith.

1 Cor. 15:12-19 (NLT)

³ Walton, John H.. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (p. 55). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Harris, Brian. *The Big Picture: Building Blocks of a Christian World View* (Kindle Locations 1995-1998). Paternoster. Kindle Edition.

2/ Naturalism

“The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.
 Our contemplations of the cosmos stir us,
 There’s a tingling in the spine a catch in the voice
 A faint sensation as if a distant memory
 Of falling from a great height.
 We know we are approaching the grandest of mysteries.”⁵

1/ *What is Prime Reality?*

For the naturalist matter is all that exists. This means that it is the nature of the cosmos which is the consideration of this question.

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

All reality is made up of matter. The cosmos is determined because it is a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system: no miracle is possible, because there is nothing outside the universe.

The cosmos is determined – that is there is no real freewill, only perceived freewill. If the cosmos is a closed system of cause and effect then our supposed freewill choices are really only the end result of a line of causes and effects.

3/ *What is a human being?*

Humans are complex machines. Personality is an interplay of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.

Richard Dawkins speaking about his book *The Selfish Gene* makes this statement about what an individual is and while he is speaking species wide he is including human beings;

An individual is a survival machine, and that is by far the most powerful of interpreting what an individual organism is; an individual organism is a throw away survival machine, for the self-replicating coded information which it contains.

4/ *Why is it possible to know anything at all?*

Knowing is a result of chemical actions in the body. Human reason, a product of the eternal universe, is autonomous and all sufficient.

Knowledge is only gained by information being inputted to the organism via the sensors.

⁵ Introduction to *The Cosmos*, TV documentary narrated and produced by Carl Sagan

5/ How do we know what is right and wrong?

Human morality is a human construct. G. G. Simpson argues that ethics should be based on objective inquiry and finds it in a harmonious adjustment of people to each other and their environment.

Whatever promotes harmony is good; what does not is bad.⁶

6/ What is the meaning of human history?

All that we do is determined by history and the end of life is the end of history for that individual.

Purpose is not found in the nature of the universe but rather must be determined by the individual.

Richard Dawkins explains this with a metaphor, “Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view.”

Death is the cessation of life and nothing continues on from death.

⁶ G. G. Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, (Virginia, USA: Yale University Press, 1949), 145.