

CONTENTS

The Blind Men And The Elephant	2
What Is A Worldview? . . .	3
What Are The Major Worldviews?	4
Questions A Worldview Seeks To Answer	12
<i>What Is Real?</i>	12
<i>Who Am I?</i>	14
<i>Where Did I Come From?</i>	16
<i>Why Am I Here?</i>	18
<i>What Is The Basis For My Values?</i>	19
<i>What Does The Future Hold?</i>	21
Distinctives Of A Biblical Worldview	23
Is Each Worldview Partially Right?	30
Which Worldview Will You Choose?	32

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD A Comparison Of Major Worldviews

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have been born into another home, culture, or religious system? We've all probably questioned what our beliefs and values would look like through different eyes.

Everyone looks at life through a particular window on the world. So I'm pleased to recommend to you the work that RBC research editor Dennis Fisher has done on the subject of worldviews. In the following pages, he summarizes and compares worldviews and shows how each one attempts to answer certain basic questions of life. Then he examines the biblical worldview to help us decide which way of looking at life actually makes the most sense. *Mart De Haan*

Managing Editor: David Sper

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THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

Nineteenth-century American poet John Godfrey Saxe is most remembered for his poem “The Blind Men And The Elephant.” It was based on his version of an ancient Indian fable about six blind men who were examining an elephant. By touching only part of the elephant, each blind man arrived at a different conclusion of what an elephant was like. Feeling the huge animal’s side, one of them said it was like a wall. Another touched its tusk and thought it was like a spear. Holding on to its trunk, one blind man said the elephant was like a snake. Touching one of its legs, another believed it was like a tree. Grasping one of its ears, still another concluded it was like a fan.

Grabbing its tail, one of the blind men thought the elephant was like a rope.

The poem concludes:

And so these men
of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was
partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!
Each one of the blind
men was partially right in
what he experienced but
ultimately wrong in his
conclusion. Together they
confused their limited
viewpoint with the whole
of reality.

Not only is this clever parable amusing to read, it also carries an important point about the way we all look at our world. The part of reality that we see shapes our view of what is true.

The reality that each of us sees, however, is often fragmented and confused by the different windows of

popular media. Just by clicking on the TV remote, we find ourselves leaping from one perspective to another. *The History Channel* reviews past events and analyzes their meaning. *Discovery Channel* takes us to different parts of the globe, examining animal and plant life while explaining their relationship to evolution. The series *Lost* depicts complex characters on an island, with flashbacks that often redefine each person's identity and relationships. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* offers free and compelling counsel on spirituality. *Seinfeld* tickles our funny bone but has no unifying plot—only disjointed and absurd life situations. *The X-Files* traces disturbing evidence that points to the paranormal. And various reality shows film the conflicts of real people in real situations. Interestingly, each of these programs assumes some kind of

window on the world, but its perspective is often hidden.

With so many different windows to look through, how do we discern the key ingredients of a worldview?

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

From the dockworker to the teacher of philosophy, all of us are trying to make sense of life. On the way home from a funeral or when suffering a serious loss of health, we are often prompted to ask the “why” questions. How we answer those questions is likely to reflect our personal philosophy of life and our worldview.

For example, most of us would agree with our five senses that an external world outside of our own awareness actually does exist. After this admission, however, we are apt to believe, with unswerving

conviction, that our window gives us the clearest reflection of ourselves and the best view of our world.

A worldview, therefore, is our assumptions about what makes up our world. More often than not, worldviews influence us in ways we may not always be conscious of.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR WORLDVIEWS?

In an age of global communication and travel, our interaction with other cultures has made us increasingly aware of the different ways we look at our world. Let's see what distinguishes these worldviews and what they have in common.

MONOTHEISM

One God exists who is separate from but involved with the universe. The three great

monotheistic world religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Together, they believe that God is an eternal Spirit who brought our material world into existence and enables it to operate according to natural law. Their shared beliefs include: the story of the rebellion of the human race against God, His providential guidance of human affairs, His desire for reconciliation, and the promise of ultimate peace and justice. All of these monotheistic systems believe in one God who exists separate from but is involved with the universe.

But despite their similarities, they are marked by some profound differences. The major beliefs of Judaism are drawn from the first five books of Moses, often called the Pentateuch. Members of the Jewish faith believe that God has uniquely revealed

Himself to them through Moses and the Prophets. Obedience to God's law is central to their faith. Their hope lies in the anticipation of a Messiah who has not yet come but will one day usher in a time of world peace and righteousness.

The second great monotheistic religion is Christianity. Building on the Jewish Scriptures, Christians believe that the long-awaited Jewish Messiah has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. His followers point to His fulfillment of prophecies as well as a series of very public miracles. According to the New Testament, His mission on earth was to keep the law of God perfectly and then die upon a cross to pay the penalty for our sin. His miraculous resurrection from the dead is seen as a basis for providing eternal life for all who believe in Him. Just

prior to His supernatural ascension into heaven, this same Christ promised to return and to rule over a new heaven and earth. The authoritative Scriptures of Christianity include the Old and New Testaments.

Islam, the third great monotheistic religion, claims to build upon and supersede the Scriptures of both Jews and Christians. Its central authority is the Koran, which presents itself as the infallible word of Allah (the Arabic word for God). According to Islam, the world we see was created by Allah for His own sovereign reasons. Like Judaism and Christianity, it affirms the rebellion and sin of the human race and the hope of an afterlife. Muslims, as followers of Islam are called, believe that reaching paradise is possible if one submits to the laws of Allah. Although Islam affirms that Jesus was the Messiah, it

does not believe that He was equal to God or that He died on a cross as a sacrifice for our sin.

DEISM

God created an orderly world to operate on its own.

In the 17th century, the progress of science and technology gave birth to a philosophy that stressed the value of human reason over revelation. Great champions of this philosophy were John Locke and Voltaire. Sir Isaac Newton's laws of physics also led to a view that some have called "the clockwork universe." Deism holds that an intelligent Creator set up the world to operate on its own without divine interference.

Many Americans honor the founding fathers of the United States as Christians in faith and practice. But some of its finest minds, such as Thomas Jefferson

and Benjamin Franklin, were deists.

As a philosophy, deism derives its understanding of God from reason and personal experience—not from revelation. Jefferson, like other deists, rejected miracles and asserted instead that God does not interfere with human affairs or with the laws of the universe.

To become more familiar with the history and beliefs of contemporary deism, see *The Ontario Consultants On Religious Tolerance* at www.religioustolerance.org/deism.htm.

NATURALISM

Matter is all that exists and is best understood through science.

During the 18th century, most scientists still believed in a Creator as the First Cause of our universe. But with the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin Of*

The Species, a naturalistic explanation for origins was proposed. The theory of evolution claimed that given enough time and under the right conditions, simple life-forms would spring from nonliving matter. Then, over countless eons, these life-forms evolved into more complex ones until finally man appeared on the scene as a highly developed ape. With this explanation, many in the scientific community began to replace a Creator as First Cause with random chance. Many concluded that matter is all that exists and that the best way of exploring truth is through the scientific method. The naturalistic worldview is widely held today.

One who has popularized this view is Carl Sagan. In Episode 1 of his TV show *Cosmos*, titled “The Shores Of The Cosmic Ocean,” Sagan made a comment that is at the

heart of the naturalistic worldview: “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” Struck with awe and wonder at the vastness of space, he believed our tiny planetary home is lost somewhere between immensity and eternity.

For books written from a naturalistic perspective, see Carl Sagan’s *The Dragons Of Eden* and *Broca’s Brain*.

NIHILISM

Objective truth and positive values are to be questioned and dismissed. Nihilism is

more of an attitude than a formal philosophy. It questions the validity of knowing truth and moral values. If man is determined by irrational forces beyond his control, then why trust his own rationality? Any certainty of knowledge is clouded by a former nonreflective animal brain. Nihilists believe

that objective truth is, at best, arbitrary and relativistic. Because of this assumption, they feel compelled to tell others how inadequate traditional ideologies are. In many ways, nihilists are “anti-philosophy activists” who seek to debunk what others affirm.

A nihilistic view is also skeptical about moral values. In the novel *Fathers And Sons*, Ivan Turgenev wrote:

A nihilist is a person who does not bow down to any authority, who does not accept any principle on faith, however much that principle may be revered.

The word *nihilism* is derived from the Latin word for “nothing.” It holds that all traditional values are baseless. In response to religion, it repudiates previously held morality and spiritual belief. When

it is brought into politics, it favors the destruction of existing traditional social institutions as a means of making way for improvements.

Literature that reflects a nihilistic worldview is Samuel Beckett’s play *Waiting For Godot*, Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22*, and Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*.

EXISTENTIALISM

Life has no objective meaning, so significance must be subjectively created within.

There are various existentialist philosophies. Whether atheistic or theistic, each emphasizes the meaninglessness of life and the isolation of the individual. Those who assume there is no God view the objective world as absurd and pointless with no overarching purpose. Despite this grim reality, the committed existentialist

must rebel against the objective world and subjectively create his own meaning. When he makes personal choices, he is said to have “authenticated” himself (i.e., created significance subjectively). That which “authenticates” the individual is strictly a personal choice. An act that is meaningful to you may be absurd to me.

A representative of this view is Jean Paul Sartre. Other examples of existentialism may be seen in Albert Camus’ *The Plague* and Kierkegaard’s *Fear And Trembling*.

PANTHEISM

Everything that exists is God (Spirit). Matter is an illusion. Some of the most ancient religious texts are the Vedas (which comes from the Sanskrit word for “knowledge”). They form the oldest Sanskrit literature and

are the ancient Hindu sacred texts of India. For thousands of years, these religious writings have exerted their influence primarily in the East through Hinduism and Buddhism. With the advent of modern communication and travel, however, their influence has spread into the West. A starting premise of this kind of pantheism is that man’s spirit is part of the Soul of the universe. God is Spirit and is all that exists. Therefore, the external world we experience is an illusion. Through meditation, however, one can “become one with the universe.” These themes have been popularized in the West by the New Age Movement.

A proponent of this view has been Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Born in India in 1917, he became a proponent of the relaxation technique called “transcendental meditation.” The medical

benefits of such practices began to attract attention from clients in the West. The Beatles were among his celebrity disciples. Many in the West who use transcendental meditation seem not to be fully aware of the pantheistic philosophy that lies at its base. For this kind of pantheism, the ultimate reality is Spirit.

Someone who has promoted a pantheistic worldview is Hollywood personality Shirley MacLaine in books like *Out On A Limb*. The novel *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse is also written from a pantheistic perspective.

**NEW
CONSCIOUSNESS
Reality is beyond
reason and can only be
understood by altering
the mind.** During the

1960s, experimentation with various hallucinogenic drugs

piqued interest in finding truth beyond logic and data gathering. College students in the US were encouraged to “tune in, turn on, and drop out.” The response of the youth led to hippies, communes, love-ins, and a variety of other social changes.

A high-profile representative of New Consciousness was Timothy Leary. He began his career as a professor of psychology at Harvard University. One day in 1957, Dr. Leary read a 17-page article in *Life* magazine in which R. Gordon Wasson reported his experiences with hallucinogenic mushrooms in a village in the mountains of Mexico. Leary was so fascinated by this that he traveled to Mexico and ate the mushrooms himself. The experience was so overwhelming that when he returned to Harvard he shifted his study to research

the properties of psychedelic drugs. Ultimately, Leary was fired from Harvard. He went on to lead an eccentric life, including time spent as a convict, a fugitive, a lecturer, and an author.

Although Dr. Leary would admit that the external world exists, he also believed that the ultimate quest for truth cannot be apprehended by reason alone. Instead, “stoned thinking” opens up the thought process to new categories and perceptions that shed the limitations of logic.

A series of books illustrating New Consciousness have been written by Carlos Castaneda. First in the series is the book *The Teachings Of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way Of Knowledge*.

PERSONAL COMBINATIONS

Interestingly, many people see the world through parts and pieces of the worldviews

we’ve just described. For instance, some believe in the scientific method as the ultimate guide to truth while using transcendental meditation (a pantheistic practice) to relieve stress. Others think like existentialists, believing that all objective values are meaningless, while joining a social activist organization to fight for social justice.

Yet, in spite of inconsistencies, people hold on to their perception of reality with strong conviction. Why? The answer may lie in how much is at stake in our own attempts to answer some of life’s most heartfelt questions:

- What is real?
- Who am I?
- Where did I come from?
- Why am I here?
- What is the basis for my values?
- What does the future hold?

We will now look at how each worldview answers these questions.

QUESTIONS A WORLDVIEW SEEKS TO ANSWER

Even though we all live in the same world and time, our varying worldviews can profoundly change the way we interpret who we are and what we are doing here. The windows through which we look at our world and one another can give us radically different answers to the same basic questions:

WHAT IS REAL?

Often when sorting out a problem we might say, “Let’s do a reality check.” Interestingly, this is the starting point for each worldview.

Monotheism And Reality. All three

monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—see reality in terms of a sovereign Creator who is involved with His world. Each assumes the existence of God, an eternal Spirit being, who has created both a material and a spiritual reality. The objective world of matter is there to be observed. God’s special revelation, however, is required to know about the spiritual realities of heaven, angels, the devil, and the afterlife. Monotheists regard as real what they observe in nature and understand from their religious writings.

Deism And Reality.

Deists proceed from the assumption that an orderly universe exists. They see its First Cause as a Creator who *does not* guide its movements, intervene in human affairs, or answer prayers. Their pursuit of what is real comes through reason and sound inquiry.

They do not take seriously any revelation that portrays the miraculous. Their reality is limited to nature.

Naturalism And Reality. The naturalist assumes that matter is all that exists and is best investigated through the scientific method. Unlike deism, it does not hold to God as a First Cause for the universe. Because matter is the only thing that can be measured under repeatable laboratory conditions, it is the only thing we can be sure of. Naturalists believe that matter is real and that spirit is not.

Nihilism And Reality. The nihilist believes that we cannot know objective truth or moral values with any certainty. Adopting a strong skepticism, the nihilist rejects what are traditionally held truth-claims about reality. At best, even

scientific experiments and the records of history are inaccurate and irrelevant distortions of what is claimed to be “real.”

Existentialism And Reality. Atheistic existentialists view the external cosmos as real. Their problem, however, is that they find it to be ultimately absurd and meaningless. Subjective experience is the only way to arrive at meaning that is relevant to the individual. Although the existentialist believes the objective world exists, he sees no objective reason for existing.

Pantheism And Reality. The term *pantheism* comes from the Greek words *pan* for “all or everything” and *theos* for God. In other words, “everything is God.” Eastern pantheism, popularized by the New Age Movement, assumes that one impersonal spiritual force constitutes reality.

Pantheists believe that Spirit is the ultimate reality and that matter is an illusion.

New Consciousness And Reality. Central to New Consciousness is the assumption that self is the prime reality. This view assumes that we experience reality in two different ways: the visible through the senses, and the invisible through altered states of consciousness. New Consciousness believes that ultimate reality is suprarational and can only be understood through altered states of mind.

The view of reality may vary from one worldview to the next. But what can they tell us about personal identity?

WHO AM I?

Identity theft has become a real concern for our generation. The threat of someone stealing our name, social security number, date

of birth, and citizenship is a serious misuse of who we are. Yet a worldview seeks to answer the question of “Who am I?” on a much deeper level.

Monotheism And Identity. Monotheists are in agreement that human beings are made in the image of God but are morally flawed and in need of redemption. For the Jew, this means keeping the law and its traditions. The Christian believes in redemption through faith in Christ’s atoning death and resurrection. The Muslim advocates submitting to the will of Allah and obeying the Koran.

Deism And Identity. Deists believe that man is a personal being who is part of the “clockwork universe.” He is not abnormal or fallen but is as he is supposed to be. Freedom to explore nature will lead to self-knowledge and

understanding of the impersonal God who set up the universe.

Naturalism And Identity. Naturalists view humans as a highly developed animal who possesses self-consciousness, reason, and conscience. They believe that humans are highly complex biological “machines” who have physical and mental capabilities not yet fully known.

Nihilism And Identity. Awash in a sea of uncertainty, nihilists have no clear, lasting identity. Their own understanding is biased and limited. But they do assume that an identity applied to them by traditional institutions and religious values is bogus and to be rejected.

Existentialism And Identity. Existentialists believe that because humans have self-consciousness and reason, we must define who

and what we are. With no credible external source to give identity, we must subjectively invent who we are. No one else can do this for us.

Pantheism And Identity. The pantheistic view of identity is holistic. My little soul is part of the big Soul of the universe. Through meditation, each of us can experience becoming one with the cosmos. When we achieve this state of enlightenment, our personality and the external world of matter will disappear.

New Consciousness And Identity. New Consciousness teaches that the ultimate center of our personhood is within our mind. We are what our altered state of consciousness shows us. To facilitate this discovery, some use psychedelic drugs.

Worldviews establish identity through various

means: God, evolution, our own search for meaning, or other sources. But how do these different windows on the world explain where we come from?

WHERE DID I COME FROM?

When getting to know someone, we often ask the question, “Where are you from?” What usually follows is a brief description of our hometown and the family in which we grew up. But sometimes, in our private moments, we may ask ourselves the ultimate question of origin, “Did I have a Creator, was I the result of evolution, or did I have some other origin?”

Monotheism And Origins. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would all agree that our universe was created by a personal God. Our original ancestors were created to be in relationship with God,

but they and their offspring chose to go their own independent way. Being reconciled to our Creator requires faith and obedience to His revealed truth to us.

Deism And Origins.

The orderliness of the known universe argues in favor of an intelligent designer as First Cause. This God has set up the laws of motion in the cosmos like an intelligent clockmaker who winds up a clock and leaves it to run on its own. The deist believes that our origin is traceable back through the generations to an impersonal God.

Naturalism And Origins. Many naturalists believe that the known universe likely exploded into existence over 15 billion years ago. They believe that the process of evolution began about 5 billion years ago with the formation of amino acids, the first cell, and then lower species

adapting into more complex ones. Naturalists believe that humans are the closest kin to the monkey, and just one of many primates.

Nihilism And Origins. Nihilists believe that history has been shown to be unreliable. Even if the scientific theory of evolution were true, they assume that all it would mean is that human beings have a highly developed monkey brain that is, at best, unreliable. The nihilist holds the view that origins are under “a great cloud of unknowing.”

Existentialism And Origins. If we assume there is no God, we most likely have appeared on the scene as conscious beings from evolution. But unlike lower life-forms, we cry out for a meaning that does not exist. If we believe in some kind of Creator, the past is still irrelevant to our personal significance. Even the texts of religion are filled

with “paradoxes” that can complicate our current life experience.

Pantheism And Origins. Pantheism teaches that the soul that dwells within our human body has come from numerous reincarnations. Reincarnation (literally “to be made flesh again”) means that some essential part of a living being (soul or spirit) survives death to be reborn in a new body.

New Consciousness And Origins. Through the past process of evolution, our former primitive monkey brain has now developed to the point where we are at the threshold of “cosmic consciousness” (seeing the big picture through an altered state of mind).

Worldviews offer a variety of explanations for our ultimate origin. But when it comes to the meaning of life, there is even more diversity of opinion.

WHY AM I HERE?

The title of Viktor Frankl's book *Man's Search For Meaning* hits on an important aspect of life for all of us. "Why am I here and what difference does it make?" A worldview has a way of probing this question within the human heart.

Monotheism And Meaning. The monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam would all agree that we derive meaning from our Creator. Having been made for a relationship with God, we can only find lasting purpose in honoring Him and finding joy in His presence.

Deism And Meaning. Deists do not believe we derive our meaning from a personal Creator. Instead, they believe we make use of our intelligence, conscience, community, and creativity to find meaning in nature.

Naturalism And Meaning. Many naturalists find meaning in "progress." They believe that the human race developed into a modern society from its primitive beginnings. This leads them to believe that we are capable of improving our behavior and living conditions. We therefore should skillfully use science and technology to benefit mankind.

Nihilism And Meaning. The nihilist feels that traditional theories of meaning may satisfy the masses but are all built on foundations of sand. Because the nihilist sees the flaws in existing institutions, he often views himself as an activist who must challenge the superficial meanings provided by tradition.

Existentialism And Meaning. Existentialists believe that the cruel joke of our world is that each of us comes into the world without

any overarching purpose. No objective meaning exists in the external cosmos. The existentialist must subjectively invent his own “reason for being” through the exercise of free will.

Pantheism And Meaning. As the pantheist cooperates with good moral choices of “karma,” he will later be reincarnated into a higher station. His ultimate meaning will be realized when he becomes one with the universe.

New Consciousness And Meaning. Those who embrace New Consciousness discover meaning through those experiences provided in an altered state of consciousness. The spread of “cosmic consciousness” to others will initiate more individuals into being lords of their own universe.

People find significance for their lives in a variety of ways. But meaning is often

connected in some way with moral guidelines of “being a good person.” But where do the values to be good come from?

WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR MY VALUES?

It can be enlightening to listen to the moral judgments we make. Regardless of our worldview, and despite how inconsistent we might sound, we all are inclined to say things like, “This isn’t right.” “That wasn’t fair.” “I want to do the right thing.” It seems the sense of “oughtness” is an indelible part of our human nature. But where does each worldview get its guidelines for moral decisions?

Monotheism And Ethics. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all agree that God has placed a conscience in human personality. They are divided, however, on what

specific special revelation informs that conscience. The Jews derive their moral code from the Torah and the Jewish commentaries on it. The Christians go to the Old and New Testaments for ethical guidance. Muslims build their ethical systems on select parts of the Old and New Testaments, the Koran, and teachings of their respective Islamic sects.

Deism And Ethics.

Since God does not tamper with His universe, “special revelation” should not be the basis of moral values. Instead, the deist believes that we should pursue general revelation (nature) because it is there that we will find the self-evident moral values to inform our conscience by reason and free inquiry.

Naturalism And Ethics. According to naturalists, social groups are the sole source of ethical systems. Because of this, we

must realize that there are no ethical absolutes from one culture to another. The moral consensus of a group, however, can provide helpful guidelines for ethical decisions. Most often it is easier to live in conformity with the laws and moral guidelines of the culture in which one lives.

Nihilism And Ethics.

Those with this worldview have no binding moral values to judge behavior. Nihilists believe that values promoted by traditional institutions coerce and confine human potential. Because of this, these institutions must be challenged and in some cases even destroyed.

Existentialism And Ethics. Those looking through this window believe that human societies not only provide superficial consolation for meaning but also artificial moral guidance. Existentialists

think that most of us fail to see that “morally good behavior” is a simplistic kind of cultural conformity. The existentialist believes that the highest value is for the individual to choose an act that makes his subjective existence meaningful.

Pantheism And Ethics. According to pantheism, building up the merit of “good karma” is best guided by *dharma*. This term refers to the unchanging universal law of order, which decrees that every entity should behave according to its own particular nature. Pantheism is found in many Eastern religious writings.

New Consciousness And Ethics. People with this view believe that because of our animal origin, we are prone toward destructive behavior. Through the expansion of “cosmic consciousness,” however, the mind can be

transformed to greater love and peace. Being the lord of one’s own universe can lead to creating one’s own values.

These windows on the world draw their moral codes from personal invention, sacred texts, and social norms. Yet the final question facing each worldview is related directly to the future.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Each of us knows that some day we will die. Along with this is the realization that the universe itself won’t last forever. So how do the different worldviews answer questions related to personal mortality and the future of the world?

Monotheism And The Future. The major monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe that human consciousness survives physical death either to be

welcomed into God's eternal presence or to be turned away from Him. But the means of attaining eternal life differs in each belief system. Judaism looks to faith and obedience to the Torah. Christianity teaches that faith in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ provides salvation. Muslims believe that submitting to Allah may merit a paradise of sensual delight.

Deism And The Future. The deist does not know if the soul survives death. Although it seems the universe functions like a wind-up clock that will eventually wind down, we should concern ourselves only with the present and the foreseeable future in improving the human condition.

Naturalism And The Future. The naturalist believes that the consciousness and

personality of the individual is forever terminated at physical death. The future of the known universe will be the extinction of all the stars and the end of all life.

Nihilism And The Future. In this view, the positive ideal of human "progress" and the belief in an afterlife have no credibility. The nihilist is also pessimistic about what is to come. We really can't postulate what the future holds for us or our universe.

Existentialism And The Future. For the existentialist, there is no purpose to existence. One's ultimate destiny is to die and never be remembered. The future of the universe is doomed to death and extinction.

Pantheism And The Future. Pantheism teaches that the ultimate destiny of "enlightened ones" is to leave the world of material illusion and transcend to

become one with the universe. In the meantime, we must experience numerous reincarnations in this universe, which is eternal.

New Consciousness And The Future. This worldview tries to explore the human brain's unlimited capacities for perception. Those who hold this view believe that through altered states of mind we can transcend ourselves and even possibly contact entities in other dimensions. Personal death or even the death of the universe may be a way to a different reality.

It's apparent that all these windows on the world differ in their views of personal mortality and even where the universe is headed. Indeed, every question asked has a surprising variety of responses. Are we to conclude, then, that each view is equally

valid among this diversity of opinion? Or might there be a single view that most consistently contains the truth?

DISTINCTIVES OF A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

In our multicultural global age, tolerance seems to be an important virtue. Many believe that it is arrogant to claim that one's own worldview is right and that the others are wrong. Yet in looking at the alternatives, could there be a third option? Like the analogy of the blind men and the elephant, might it be possible that every worldview is at least partially right? Even more important, is it possible that one worldview could actually bring together individual parts of the other views?

THE BIBLE AND REALITY

Lunar-mission astronauts who saw the earth rising over the surface of the moon said it made them feel there was an intelligent spiritual reality behind it. The Bible offers a basis for such universal human intuition when it says of our Creator:

Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20).

According to the Scriptures, we can all see God's divine power and attributes by looking at the design and beauty of nature.

The biblical view, however, goes on to make the point that "nature watching" alone is not enough to discover the Intelligence behind what we see. The Bible claims that the Designer has revealed

Himself to us through its own inspired record.

Speaking of the Bible as prophecy, Peter said:

Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

Here the Bible claims that its authors communicated knowledge that is not merely of human origin. Peter said that God Himself empowered His authors to write down what He intended.

According to both Old and New Testaments, there is a spiritual reality behind the universe we see:

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (Heb. 11:3).

But the Bible goes beyond the idea that there is a Designer behind the

cosmos. It also provides a window into a realm of the spirit where God, heaven, and angels are part of a greater reality. Concerning this, the apostle Paul wrote:

[Through Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Col. 1:16).

The Bible describes the existence of both physical and spiritual realms. The first is open to the five senses. The second requires divine revelation to learn of its reality.

THE BIBLE AND IDENTITY

The various perspectives of major worldviews suggest that knowing who we are isn't that easy. We are complex and, at times,

contradictory beings. Accordingly, we have built institutions of commerce, developed medicines to bring health to millions, and launched space probes. Yet as a race, we have also built concentration camps, used instruments of torture, and implemented policies of genocide. Why would there be such a contradiction in attitudes and behavior?

The biblical worldview offers an explanation for this apparent contradiction. The Bible indicates that by virtue of our being made in God's image, we derive our identity and moral conscience from our Creator (Gen. 1:26). Many biblical scholars believe the image of God includes reason, emotion, will, self-consciousness, creativity, and conscience. These attributes have enabled us to pursue the beautiful and creative aspects of the arts and sciences.

But the unfolding drama of the Bible also describes and chronicles the destructive capacity of our hearts. In fact, its pages are filled with those who did both great and terrible things. David, the shepherd king, wrote beautiful psalms, showed courage in battle, and was even called a man after God's own heart. But the same King David also committed adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11:1-17).

The Bible is a disturbingly realistic book that recognizes the human capacity for evil. Jesus Christ, the most loving and accepting person who has ever lived, said:

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man (Mt. 15:19-20).

The biblical worldview, therefore, recognizes more

than our conscience and love for what is beautiful and good. It also shows that we are morally flawed and prone to misuse our capabilities as people made in the likeness of God. But where did this negative moral bent come from?

THE BIBLE AND ORIGINS

Genesis has been called the book of beginnings. It introduces us to the God who created our first parents and entrusted them with an ideal garden environment. Although Adam and Eve were completely innocent, their moral character had not yet been tested. So, according to Genesis:

The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of

*it you shall surely die
(Gen. 2:16-17).*

Upon reading such an account, it seems obvious to ask, “Why would God want to provide a moral test for Adam and Eve in the first place? Why would there even be the choice of evil?”

To answer that we need to understand the backstory of Scripture. Earlier in God’s created order, Satan, a high-ranking angel, chose to rebel against God’s authority. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 seem to indicate that Satan was cast down from heaven and took on the form of a serpent in order to tempt the first man and woman. By cleverly casting doubt on God’s motives, the devil tempted the first couple to distrust their Creator and do the one thing He had told them not to do (Gen. 3:6-8).

There were consequences to this initial act of independence. Adam and Eve experienced

alienation from each other, their environment, and their Creator. The personal friendship they had shared with their Creator was now broken. Yet as God described the consequences of their disobedience, He made a mysterious prediction. Looking back, we can now see that God was planning, through the future offspring of Eve, to send a Deliverer to defeat the evil one and offer hope to the world (Gen. 3:15). But who do the Scriptures reveal this Deliverer to be?

THE BIBLE AND MEANING

Those who mourn the meaninglessness of life have struck upon the heart of the matter. If all we are to do during our lives is experience pleasure and pain, only to be extinguished at death, then truly, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2).

But according to the Bible, when we see what God did to bring us back to Himself, everything can begin to fall into place. If Jesus is not just a teacher from Nazareth, but actually our Creator, the Son of God, Mediator, Savior, King of kings, Lord of lords, and ruler of the age to come, then everything has meaning in relation to Him. When we see Christ as God's offer of atonement, life, hope, peace, and immeasurable love, then everything we think or do is a step toward or away from Him.

THE BIBLE AND ETHICS

Considering the biblical worldview as true resonates with what we know about the brightest and darkest sides of our human nature. It should help us to understand why we have an inner sense that some things

really are right or wrong. That's what the apostle Paul reasoned when he wrote:

When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them (Rom. 2:14-15).

"The law" that Paul referred to is contained in what we know today as the law God revealed to Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. It was the standard a Jew was bound to obey. But even though Gentiles weren't exposed to this divinely revealed moral guideline, they recognized right and wrong by their very nature. The law written in tablets of stone, in the Scriptures, and then finally

personified perfectly and fully in the person of Jesus is what the Bible describes as a basis for understanding the morality of personal or social choices.

THE BIBLE AND THE FUTURE

The biblical worldview offers hope in a life to come. Because it tells us that we are made in the image of God, it offers us reason to believe that our identity and personality are eternal.

Yet, according to the Scriptures, everlasting fellowship with God after death is not automatic. It requires a decision. For those who respond to the forgiveness offered in Christ, the promise of eternal life will be realized. For those who reject it, a place of existence away from communion with God awaits them after death.

Yet the hope offered by Christ's work of redemption

is not just limited to personal survival beyond the grave. The Bible tells us that the future of the observable universe is also tied to the sovereign work of God in Christ. Because Christ is the Creator of our material world, He has the power to restore what has been lost and to renew the goodness of His original creation.

Revelation, the last book in the Bible, tells us that Christ will one day say, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). The word translated "new" carries the idea of an innovation based on a form that has preceded it. This remaking of heaven and earth will have a familiarity to what we already know and is reflected in the words, "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1).

IS EACH WORLDVIEW PARTIALLY RIGHT?

If the biblical distinctives provide the most consistent and inclusive explanation for life as we know it, how would such a perspective relate to other worldviews? Is it possible that what the Bible affirms as a whole shows up in part within the other views we have seen?

THE SOURCE OF WHAT IS RIGHT

In his book *The Abolition Of Man*, C. S. Lewis cites common values that are shared by every major civilization. At the core of each is a set of ethics that affirm honesty, respect for parents, and care for the poor. These commonly recognized standards also prohibit lying, stealing, killing, and committing

adultery. Lewis considers these standards for conduct a part of the doctrine of objective moral values. He reasons that this common awareness of right and wrong is “not one among a series of possible systems of value. It is the sole source of all value judgments. If it is rejected, all value is rejected. If any value is retained, it is retained” (*The Abolition Of Man*, HarperOne, 2001, p.43).

But if different cultures tend to agree on the most foundational principles of ethics, why do we also then see such differences when it comes to other aspects of reality? The answer lies in the universal tendency of our human nature to view a part of the truth as the whole truth.

FRAGMENTING WHAT IS RIGHT

The biblical worldview claims to offer a view and system of truth

that is consistent with God's character, the physical world, and the spiritual dimension of existence. But Lewis perceptively observes that competing ideologies often borrow from the whole as described in the Bible. By attempting to take fragments of the truth to escape obligation to the whole, other ideologies generalize their chosen insight into independent worldviews. Lewis believes that "new ideologies" are only fragments of God's truth "arbitrarily wrenched from their context in the whole and then swollen to madness in their isolation, yet still owing to [it] and to it alone such validity as they possess" (*The Abolition Of Man*, p.44).

If Lewis is right, then we should be able to see in the Scriptures the whole picture and pattern from which others borrow. For instance, the Bible teaches that:

- God is the First Cause of the universe (Deism—Gen. 1:1);
- creation is guided by Providence (Theism—Eph. 1:11);
- matter exists and can be observed (Naturalism—Eccl. 1:5-7);
- spiritual realities do exist and can be experienced (Pantheism—Jn. 4:24);
- skepticism has its place, and apprehending truth often encounters mystery (Nihilism—Eph. 1:9);
- life without God has no objective meaning (Existentialism—Eccl. 1:1-4);
- apprehension of reality requires a new way of thinking (New Consciousness—1 Cor. 2:13-16).

This is not to say that the Bible agrees with every aspect of these worldviews. Instead, the parallel of agreement indicates that the other ideologies have taken

part of God's truth and turned it into the whole.

WHICH WORLDVIEW WILL YOU CHOOSE?

After this brief comparison of worldviews, let's think again about the parable of the elephant and the blind men. Each blind man was partially right in what he experienced but ultimately wrong in his conclusion. All of them confused their partial perception with the whole of reality.

We have seen how major worldviews can sometimes take a part of God's objective truth and then make it into a whole. We've seen how the biblical worldview contains all the major strands of truth in the best and most unified whole.

The question that remains for each of us is now the same. "Which worldview will I choose?" That choice is one of the most important decisions of our lives.

***The biblical
worldview contains
all the major
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unified whole.***

Choosing the biblical worldview is not just adopting a philosophical change of mind and adopting a new set of assumptions. It means trusting Christ as our Savior from sin and following Him as Lord. For Christ is the centerpiece of the biblical worldview.



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