

Phil 2303 Intro to Worldviews  
James Sire, *The Universe Next Door:  
A Basic Worldview Catalog*

Chapter One  
A World of Difference

Introduction:

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,  
But often in the din of strife,  
There rises an unspeakable desire  
After the knowledge of our buried life:  
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force  
In tracking out our true, original course;  
A longing to inquire  
Into the mystery of this heart which beats  
So wild, so deep in us—to know  
Whence our lives come and where they go.  
—Matthew Arnold, "The Buried Life"

A man said to the universe:  
"Sir, I exist."  
"However," replied the universe,  
"The fact has not created in me  
A sense of obligation."  
—Stephen Crane, from *War is Kind and Other Lines* (1899)

Psalm 8

The above poems note our quest to know (Arnold) and then set forth two ways of looking at the world (Crane and Ps. 8). The point is: "There are many verbal or conceptual universes [world views]. Some have been around a long time; others are just now forming. Which is your universe? Which are the universes next door?" (p. 20).

**I. The Purposes of this Book (p. 15)**

A. To outline the basic world views that underlie the way we in the Western world think about ourselves, other people, the natural world, and God or ultimate reality.

B. To trace historically how these world views have developed from a breakdown in the theistic world view, moving into deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern mysticism and the new consciousness of the New Age.

C. To show how postmodernism puts a twist [of relativism] on these worldviews.

D. To encourage us all to think in terms of world views, that is, with a consciousness of not only our own way of thought but also that of other people, so that we can first understand and then genuinely communicate with others in our pluralistic society.

## II. Definition of World Views

### A. Definitions

A world view is a "universe fashioned by words and concepts that work together to provide a more or less coherent frame of reference for all thought and action." (p. 16)

"A world view is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of our world. (p. 16)

"Another way to get at what a worldview is is to see it as our essential, rock-bottom answers to the following seven questions" (P. 17)

### B. Seven basic questions

1. What is prime reality—the really real?
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?

### C. Illustrations

- a. Sunglasses (its not what yousee, but what you seewith!)
- b. Umpire at a baseball game
- c. Icebergs
- d. Road map
- e. Set of instructions or directions
- f. Top to a puzzle box

"A Noiseless Patient Spider" —Walt Whitman

I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,  
 Mark'd how to explore the vacant surrounding,  
 It launchéd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,  
 Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my soul, where you stand,  
 Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,  
 Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,  
 Seeking the spheres to connect them,  
 Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,  
 Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

### III. The Importance of World Views

A. It is the most important thing about the *world*

"To think intelligently today is to think world-viewishly, to come to terms with the mosaic of meaning systems which makes up modern thinking." — Os Guinness, from the back cover of this book

B. It is the most important thing about you *personally*

"I am convinced that for any of us to be fully conscious intellectually we should not only be able to detect the world views of others but be aware of our own—why it is ours and why in light of so many options we think it is true" (p. 10).

"To discover one's own world view is . . . a significant step toward self-awareness, self-knowledge and self-understanding" (p. 16).

1. A World View unifies thought and action.
2. A World View provides a knowledge of what is good.
3. A World View guides thought.
4. A World View guides action.
5. A World View enables us to communicate.

### IV. Worldview as a Vision of the Heart

A. Definition/description of the biblical doctrine of the 'heart'

1. As the image and likeness of God, people are animated subjectively from the core and throughout their being by that primary faculty of thought, affection, and will which the Bible calls the "heart."

2. Gordon Spykman: “The *imago Dei* embraces our entire selfhood in all its variegated functions, centered and unified in the heart.”

3. Karl Barth: “The heart is not merely *a* but *the* reality of man, both wholly of soul and wholly of body.”

B. The biblical data on the doctrine of the ‘heart’

1. The Old Testament (esp. Prov. 27: 19: 4: 23; 2 Sam. 16: 7)

2. The New Testament (esp. Matt. 6: 19-21; Luke 6: 43-45)

C. Implications of the biblical doctrine of the heart on the concept of worldview

1. A worldview is best understood in biblical terms as a *vision of the heart*, that is, “kardi-opically”

2. Into the heart go the issues of life in *shaping* a worldview

Concluding Quotes:

It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;  
what is essential is invisible to the eye.”  
—Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, 1943.

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Watch over your heart with all diligence,  
For from it flow the springs of life.  
Proverbs 4: 23