

What is a Worldview, and Who Cares?

By David P. Diaz, Ed.D.



What do we know about worldviews? For starters, everybody has one. “The question is not whether one holds a worldview, but whether one’s worldview is complete or incomplete, rational or irrational, true or false, precise or fuzzy” (Diaz 2020, 201). So, if everyone has a worldview, why can so few people readily explain their own?

What is a Worldview?

A *worldview* can be expressed as a set of *propositions*¹ that we believe to be true about the world. The core propositions of a worldview form a lens of sorts through which we interpret the world around us. James W. Sire (2020, 11) explains it this way:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed in a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.

A *worldview* provides explanations for fundamental questions about the universe.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why is there something rather than nothing?
2. What caused the universe?
3. What is truth, and how are we to understand it?
4. What can cause a rational mind?
5. Is there life after death?
6. Is the brain equal to the mind?
7. Do humans possess free will?
8. Do humans possess authentic purpose, or are we purposeless and insignificant in the universe?

“To put it another way, if one’s worldview does not answer these questions, then one’s beliefs on such crucial matters are likely to be bereft of a consistent and rational foundation.”

One’s worldview should provide rational answers, not only to these questions but also to many more. In other words, if one’s worldview does not answer these questions, one’s beliefs on such crucial matters will likely be bereft of a consistent, rational foundation.

A worldview can and does change over time. We will likely modify many of our views during our lives based on our experiences with family members, friends, and the community at large. Our worldview will most likely further change based on the input we gain from formal and informal education.

Many people cannot identify their worldview because they have not taken the time to evaluate the relative strengths and weaknesses of different views. Such an absence of inquiry may also explain why so many people are unsure of the truth about the universe’s realities.

For the purposes of this paper, there are five major philosophical and religious

worldviews: monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, and *philosophical naturalism*.² Most of these general worldviews can be further subdivided into smaller and more discrete views (e.g., Secular humanism, deism, Christian theism, Islamic monotheism, etc.). Although this paper will not evaluate each worldview, it will provide criteria on which to base such an assessment.

How to Evaluate a Worldview

“*One’s worldview should be more than scattered viewpoints about essential topics. Indeed, a worldview should provide rational and reasonable answers to a host of foundational questions.*”

One’s worldview should be more than scattered viewpoints about essential topics. Indeed, a worldview should provide rational and reasonable answers to a host of foundational questions. A worldview cannot be a hodgepodge of rhetoric, but it must satisfy our need to know the truth about the profound questions that we humans have asked ourselves since the beginning. Below are a few criteria (adapted from Groothuis 2011, 52-60) that can be used to evaluate one’s worldview.

An intellectually sound worldview is:

Rational and reasonable

A sound worldview must provide a rational explanation for the key features of the universe (e.g., the origin of the universe, the apparent distinction between body and mind, the origin and existence of human life, and others). In short, a sound worldview will supply *good reasons* for believing the things we do.

Internally logically consistent

Logical consistency is a necessary condition of truth. Each worldview will have

several *essential components*.³ These components must be in accord. They cannot be contradictory; otherwise, we must accept that the worldview (or at least certain essential elements) cannot be true. A worldview *may* be true if it is logically *consistent* but is necessarily false if its essential concepts are logically *inconsistent*. Therefore, the central tenets of a worldview must not be self-contradictory.

Coherent

This criterion is very similar to the previous one but emphasizes the interrelatedness of the core concepts. If a worldview's core propositions are coherent (i.e., meaningfully interconnected), the worldview is more likely to be true than if its core propositions are incoherent (i.e., not so interconnected). For example, in Christian theism, God's being and behavior are meaningfully related to the human condition. God is an intellectual and personal being who loves his creation (i.e., humans). Since humans are created in God's image and likeness, it is not surprising that humans exist as intellectual and personal beings. Moreover, it is not surprising that God has created humans to enjoy loving relationships with their Creator. Each of these core concepts of Christian theism demonstrates the interrelatedness between *God* and *creation*.

Factually adequate

The more facts and evidence that can be brought together to support the core propositions, the more likely the worldview is to be true. Conversely, the less evidence that supports a worldview, the less likely it is to be true.

Existentially viable

A worldview must be *livable in the real world*. To be viable, the core tenets of a worldview should not encourage *philosophical hypocrisy*.⁴

The Value of Having a Worldview



According to Sire (2020, 11), “to discover one’s own worldview... is a significant step toward self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-understanding.” What makes a worldview (or set of opinions) helpful to those who seek the truth is that it provides *rational explanations* for the fundamental questions of interest. In the end, the benefit of aligning one’s beliefs with a particular worldview is to have systematic, rational explanations or answers to the most critical questions that we humans have asked ourselves since we began to contemplate such matters.

One does not need to have a well-thought-out worldview to develop reasonable explanations for *some* essential questions. Nevertheless, by examining the major worldviews and understanding how they differ, one should start to see which worldview best explains more of the universe’s essential realities. Eventually, one should seek to align oneself, at least provisionally, with the worldview that best meets the criteria above.

Conclusion

“ Thus, we should accept the worldview that best explains all phenomena or observable data relative to other worldviews until the evidence warrants otherwise.”

In summary, for a worldview to be considered ‘rational,’ its arguments

should: (1) Reasonably and sufficiently explain what they ought to explain and (2) be logically consistent with applicable norms of rationality and with accepted laws or principles of science (i.e., gravity, thermodynamics, etc.). It should (3) be internally coherent, (4) factually adequate, (5) livable in the real world, and (6) intellectually and culturally beneficial.

When a worldview can show itself to have solid, rational answers to the universe's fundamental questions, and when other significant worldviews falter, it is rational and reasonable to hold such a worldview. Thus, we should accept the worldview that *best explains more phenomena or observable data relative to other worldviews until the evidence warrants otherwise*.

About the Author

David P. Diaz, Ed.D. is an author, retired college professor, and publisher of the *Things I Believe Project*. His writings have spanned the gamut from peer-reviewed technical articles to his memoir, which won the 2006 American Book Award. Dr. Diaz holds a Bachelor's and Master of Science degrees from California Polytechnic State University, a Master of Arts in Philosophical Apologetics from Houston Christian University, and a Doctor of Education specializing in Computing and Information Technology from Nova Southeastern University.

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Footnotes