

Worldview Overview:

What is a Worldview?

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“Life is like arriving late for a movie, having to figure out what was going on without bothering everybody with a lot of questions, and then being unexpectedly called away before you find out how it ends.” (Joseph Campbell, *Creative Mythology*)

1.1 **What is a Worldview?**

Everyone has a worldview that directs the way they think about the World and their place in it. Every worldview is both a vision *of* and a vision *for* life and reality. For this reason it is important to understand what a worldview is and how it works.

Key Definition: Worldview.

A **way of seeing** the world that is developed around the **core commitment** (at heart level) to a set of **ideas** and **beliefs** (whether true or untrue), most often set in the form of a **Master Story**, which directs the way we understand **reality** and **live our lives together with others**.

A Worldview is a way of seeing. We are all trying to make sense out of our life experience. A worldview is first a *view*—a way of trying to see the “big picture”, the “frame of reference” for life.

A Worldview is a core commitment. This first issue is very important to understand: *we think, feel and act the way we do because we have committed ourselves to a certain way of thinking, feeling and acting.* We are usually not even aware that we have made this commitment because it begins and is largely formed at an unconscious level. *Everyone lives out of a worldview even if they are not aware of what that worldview is.*

For every human this commitment is first formed by the family and culture that we are born into; it is *given* to us. This commitment is a *heart level* issue. The heart (spiritually speaking) is not just the place of your emotions as it has come to be understood in popular culture; *the heart is the very core of your soul, your entire being.* As Jesus taught, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). He also said, “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

At this heart-level we have already committed ourselves to a certain way of thinking. You can think of this commitment in terms of the question, “Whose side am I on?” “Who is Master of my life?”

A Worldview works in some measure by belief, faith, trust. *Everyone lives their lives by faith.* Everyone, whether Saint or Scientist, is living his or her life by *trusting* in someone or something to give the answers to life's questions. Whether it is believing in God, or just believing in yourself, we all live by a set of beliefs. Although your worldview is not *just* a belief system or a set of ideas, these are both essential parts of your worldview.

Another significant point to keep in mind here is that beliefs and ideas may be *true* or *untrue*. They may line up with reality or they may be out of touch with reality. Just because we believe something does not make it true. One of the most important things that we do with our worldview is make sure that it lines up with reality.

A Worldview is given coherence by a Master Story. A Master Story is a “story of all things.” It answers our critical life questions: 1) Where did we come from? 2) Where are we heading? 3) Why are we here? and 4) How should we live? If you think about it for a minute, you will realize that you need a large narrative (a big story) in order to answer those questions. We simply do not live our lives by following a list of facts; we generally organize the facts and ideas about life into a Master Story that makes sense out of the large issues of life and all the details.

A Worldview is the way of seeking to understand reality. Ultimately your worldview helps you make sense out of life. It helps you understand and comprehend why things work the way they do. At the core of every worldview is the key question: “**What is really real?**”

A Worldview shapes our values and so the way we actually live. Even if we have never really thought *about* our worldview, we always think and act *with* and *because of* our worldview. Everyone has some definition of right and wrong, good and evil. This distinction is a product of our worldview. Jesus said, “You will know a tree by its fruit...” (Luke 6:44) meaning *the way a person acts reveals who they really are*. In a similar way, your *actual worldview* is revealed in your behavior.

What we really believe is also linked to what we really love. In fact, our desires, our passions and love in some way precede what we believe. *We believe what we want—or choose—to believe.* It is important to realize that *what we say we believe* can in some cases be in conflict with *what we do* in pursuing *what we really love*.

1.2 **What are the Common Components of a Worldview?**

All worldviews share a common set of components or categories. These categories are filled by the knowledge and understanding that each world view has developed to answer core life questions.

1.2.1 **A Master Story Which Makes Sense Of Life And Should Give Hope.**

Life has a beginning, a middle, and an end; Life comes to us as a story. Every worldview is summarized in a Larger Story, a Master Story that seeks to fill out the basic answers to our Big Questions. This Story will define the **Setting**, the major **Characters** (the good guys, the bad guys, the Hero/Savior, The Enemy/Villain), and **the Plot** (Beginning > Middle > End) that defines *the Story of Life on planet Earth* (Past > Present > Future).

This Larger Story produces a **Tradition** which produces the **Vision** and **Mission** of the people who believe and affirm this Master Story. The major worldviews have different

answers to the Big Questions of Life. It is important to figure out which worldviews give the best answers.

In our time, some are living in The Story revealed in the Bible, some are living in the Story of Evolution, some are living in the Story of Self, some are living in the Story of Islam, etc. Everyone is living life directed by a Master Story that answers 1) *where we have come from* (**Origin**), 2) *where we are heading* (**Destiny**) and 3) *why we are here* (**Meaning & Purpose**) and 4) *how we should live* (**Ethics**).

1.2.2 An Ultimate Source Of Reality.

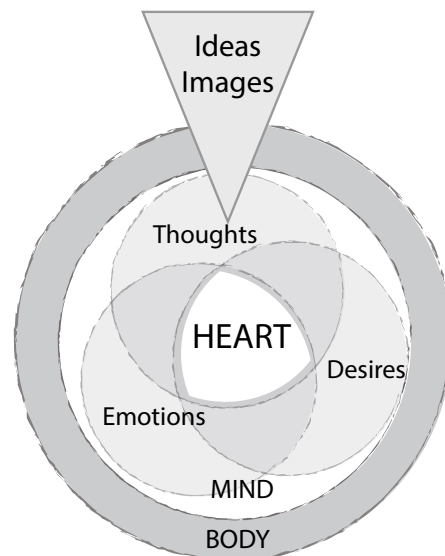
We all must deal with the question, “What is really real?” *Truth describes what we believe to be really real.* Everyone is submitting to some final or ultimate source that defines both reality and truth. This source becomes an Authority for knowledge and wisdom. The source answers our major life questions—The Big Questions of Life—and is the foundation of the Master Story.

In the Ancient world, this source was always a “god.” For Christians, this source of Truth is God the Father who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ His Son through the Holy Spirit in creation, in history and especially in the Bible.

In our modern world this source may be Science for some or the individual themselves. Whatever the case, everyone is *submitting* to someone or something that tells them what is really real, what is true.

1.2.3 Sacred Media Which Records And Transmits The Ideas And Images Of The Master Story.

The Master Story is remembered, recorded and passed on to others through some form of media. For some this medium is a Sacred Text like the Bible or the Qu’ran. For some it is the scientific books and journals which record and spread the word about all the latest discoveries. For some it is *Vanity Fair* or *Cosmopolitan* or *Field and Stream*. In our times, Television and Internet are a powerful way that Worldview is spread. Whatever the case, The Sacred Medium always reinforces the Master Story and the Ultimate Source of Reality that it is submitting to.



1.2.4 A Set of Values that are practically lived out.

The three things above all work together to define what is True and what is Un-True (Lie) in the Worldview. These values define what is good and what is evil, what is ugly and what is beautiful, what is just and what is unjust, etc. This set of values is usually gathered together in some set of principles or laws that define the people of that worldview (A Code of Ethics that defines Morality). These Values are always worked out and spread through the retelling of the Master Story and all of the “smaller stories” that make up the Master Story.

For centuries, philosophers and theologians have recognized three “transcendentals” that orient our thinking about values and virtue. These are Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

Many times, the stated values of the group that holds a particular Worldview are not the practical, lived-out values of the group. An example would be someone who says that taking care of the poor is very important and the right thing to do, but never helps in taking care of the poor. Another would be someone who believes that praying is important but never prays. Some would believe that lying is wrong and yet lie multiple times in a day. *What we actually do reveals our practical values.*

1.2.5 **An “In-Group” Which Connects Those Of “Like-Mind.”**

Every worldview, has an “in-group.” These are the men and women who are bound together by the first four issues that we have discussed. Those who do not adhere to the same answers are part of the “outside”—the “out-group.”

The “in group” are the members of a family, club, organization, or institution that gathers together to support and encourage one another as they navigate life together. In your real “in-group,” you usually feel the freedom to be who you really are without putting on a “mask” or pretending to be who you are not.

1.2.6 **A “Priesthood” Which Is Honored, Respected And Trusted.**

Every Worldview has a *small number of men and women* who are considered to be the *experts* or the *masters* of the system. This “Priesthood” exists to keep the “in-group” in order and to spread both the Master Story and the Values that lead the group to submit to the knowledge and wisdom of the Ultimate Source of Reality. The “Priesthood” also interprets the Sacred Media for the group to help everyone understand and commit to the *core ideas* and *images* of the Worldview. This Priesthood is trusted because we all need help to figure out the difficult issues of life.

1.2.7 **A Way of Worship.**

As the “in-group” gathers and The Master Story is told and retold, a response is required. Every Worldview asks for a giving, a **sacrifice**, of at least two things: **time** and **money/resources**. We give our time in celebrating together, serving one another and often *others* outside the group. Because we believe that our Worldview is worthy of our time, we will give money to support the spread of the Vision through the Mission of our in-group. Ultimately, every Worldview believes that its source of Ultimate Reality should be honored by all and that it is worthy of praise and devotion.

1.3 **Evaluating a Worldview:**

The following questions help us evaluate a worldview to see if it is “livable”:

1. *Is it comprehensive, large enough to explain life and answer the hard questions?*
2. *Does the Worldview make sense of the actual facts of reality?*
3. *Does the worldview make logical sense according to its own beliefs and commitments? Or Is it internally coherent and consistent (at peace with itself)?*
4. *Does it encourage humility? Is it open to correction?*
5. *Could you actually live your life according to this worldview? or Does this Worldview provide a satisfying view of the world?*