

# Integrating Contemporary Approaches to “Worldview”

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## Abstract

The human worldview provides the truth-predictive component of man’s epistemological framework, approximating and/or simulating perfect knowledge of reality for purposes of decision making. This article examining worldview dynamics correlates, compares, and contrasts several popular and contemporary worldview approaches, demonstrating how all successful methods at least partially answer the universal question: “How do I understand myself relative to ultimate truth?” Also, emotional and moral components inherent in a worldview are briefly examined.

A reasonably accurate definition for worldview *in toto* would be: The mechanism by which finite beings perceive, assimilate, evaluate, and respond to infinite reality. Moreover, it is what it means for a being to be both *finite* and *rational*, which involves synthesizing a working model of reality of a size he can comprehend and, as a consequence, also defines him to be a *moral* being. (Chisham, 2015, p.16)

## Introduction

Practically speaking, what does being finite mean, and how does that affect our rational ability to know? Modern theories of knowledge stipulate that “knowledge” must be true and then examine how we know and to what certainty. Consequently, philosophers eagerly attempt to either prove or disprove that human knowledge can and does accurately describe truth. Rarely has anyone explored its limits, however, where things *cannot* be humanly certain but rationality must continue. Hence, while most epistemologies ask how we know truth, the opening quote examines what moves one to act because this really gets to the core of why we wanted to know anyway.

Consequently, this epistemology is not primarily concerned with perception but with decision making, the superset that perception feeds into. While imme-

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ciate decisions or judgments may appear identical with perception, in no way does the need to get a pesky squirrel off your newly painted deck compare with long-term retirement planning. The first is a simple, immediate response to reality; the second engages a perception of predicted truth. Since most decisions are processed between the extremes of straightforward sense responses and perceptive models of reality, the distinction blurs as we lose sight of our presumptions and consequent bias. Worse, our finite constructs describing reality appear for all intents to *be* reality – and generally we would argue they are!

The first development in this new decision-based epistemology reduced worldview down to answers to a single question: “How do I understand myself relative to universal truth” (Chisham, 2012). Aristotle was right that *every* cognitive pursuit is driven by our desire to choose “the good” (Jefferson’s “pursuit of happiness”). Thus, worldviews form as our construct for situational awareness, functioning as a truth predictor assisting navigation toward “the good.” In terms of philosophical priority, truth must first apply to ourselves; consequently, worldview defines our self-image. Worldview thus is our understanding of reality synthesized from finite information for the purpose of predicting truth in order to judge courses of action we believe to be most beneficial.

These novel epistemological departures (Chisham, 2012, 2014, 2015) arose because existing definitions, descriptions, and discussions of worldview are often mistaken due to the simple fact that “worldview” and its underlying systematic mechanisms have never been precisely defined and explored.

However, with more than 250 years of commentary from notable men and women, prudence seems to obligate: (1) a demonstration of points of agreement between this approach and prior methods, (2) an attempt at correlation and harmonization, and (3) a discussion

of this new approach’s utility. Although previous approaches may have unstated limitations or unintentional errors, commentators *have* aided our understanding; so how does this new understanding of worldview dovetail with successful aspects of traditional and popular approaches?

### **The Need to Restrict Scope in Discussing Worldview**

Rather than broadly asking someone to state their entire general sense of reality, worldview discussions intuitively narrow focus toward specific areas of interest. Subdividing our “digitized reduction of reality” (Chisham, 2015, p. 10) into “bite-sized chunks” is simply required to engage most people in useful, interactive discussions regarding worldview matters. The introduction to Focus on the Family’s worldview tutorial, The Truth Project (Tackett et al., 2006), notes Tackett’s objective of building

a systematic framework in which you’re going to be able to put all of those truth claims from [a series of categories he would construct] into some sort of a logical framework that will make sense of it all. It will be something like putting hooks and shelves in your closet.

Unfortunately, hooks and shelves fail when improperly placed on metaphorical closet walls. Having re-inspected worldview structurally (Chisham, 2012, 2014, 2015), the current effort is to survey several methods used to focus worldview discussions, demonstrating how well-placed hooks and shelves really do aid our understanding of worldview and engagement with others. With this in mind, there are at least three significant ways to parse worldview.

### **Parsing Worldview Using the Prism of Time**

Every sense mechanism is constrained by the classic measurement limitations

of range, resolution, and accuracy. Even our ability to rationalize has granularity, as language becomes the finest resolution of our finite perspective. Without words to formulate a thought, creativity is brought to a grinding halt. This is what being finite means. Thus, language holds a fundamental role in worldview development. Our language base (including general sense experience) is both our communication medium and the fundamental fabric our rationality manipulates, providing the virtual “objects” needed to form conclusions. For example, creating a new surgical procedure requires vocabulary for rationalization, as well as extensive practical experience. Only by porting reality into the virtual (Aquinas would say spiritual) realm via symbolic language are we able to reason to project logical consequences. Language provides names, concepts, visualization, and sensations for truth identities (Chisham, 2012, pp. 64, 65), all of which populate our *worldview structure*, which is rationality’s reservoir of identified truths (Chisham, 2014). Moreover, since our conclusions are time sequential, earlier conclusions may cascade in the way of downstream decision errors or successes.

For that reason, one natural way of narrowing the universal worldview question is to subdivide it by time—past, present, and future. So, “How do I understand myself relative to universal truth?” becomes:

1. “Where did I come from?” (How do I understand myself relative to my infinite past?)
2. “How did I get (to) here?” (How do I explain my current existence?)
3. “Where am I headed, and what are the potential consequences of my actions?” (What meaning can my actions have on my infinite future?)

These simply describe the normal learning process in search of meaning (i.e., background knowledge, current conditions, desired results—seeking “the good,” per Aristotle), projected without

artificial time constraints. The point of contact obviously starts in Question 2 (current existence), which cannot be fully answered without engaging Question 1.

Nancy Pearcey (2005, p. 26), who coauthored *How Now Shall We Live?* with Charles Colson, rightly credits

the philosophy of Dutch Reformed thinkers like Kuyper and Dooyeweerd, whose ideas were seminal for *How Now Shall We Live?* especially its overall framework of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

Kuyper and Dooyeweerd influenced Cornelius Van Til, who mentored Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer in turn influenced many modern worldview commentators including Nancy Pearcey, Charles Colson, David Noebel, Del Tackett, and many others.

Both *How Now Shall We Live?* (Colson and Pearcey, 1999) and *Total Truth* (Pearcey, 2005) reduce those framework points to simply “Creation, Fall, and Redemption,” shorthand among Reformed commentators for Christian answers to the three worldview questions. Unfortunately, Colson and Pearcey (1999, p. 14) suggested those questions were: (1) “Where did we come from?” (2) “What went wrong?” and (3) “How do we fix it?” Chisham (2014, p. 144) noted their last two questions innocently but illegitimately admit the Christian presumptions that (a) something “went wrong” and (b) needs to be “fixed.” Atheists, for example, reject both as loaded questions, unrepresentative of their worldview, and would likely say life was headed nowhere and had no grand point (e.g., Nietzsche). Consequently, generic questions frame the principles more effectively. Also, their questions should have been stated in first person since “worldviews are first and foremost personal” (Chisham, 2014, p. 142).

Expanding worldview in time, *Answers in Genesis’s* “Seven C’s” (McKeever, 2010)—Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Confusion, Christ, Cross,

and Consummation—simply provide more granularity regarding Christian temporal perspectives. Thus, subdivision by time provides a natural, intuitive approach to worldview evaluation since it is acquired in like manner.

### **Apologetic Benefits of Subdividing Worldview by Time**

1. *Recognition of worldview’s time constraints highlights practical limitations in experimental science.* Soundbite comments like “you believe in religion, but I believe in science” often suggest long, technical, or convoluted replies will not be endured. One simple method of redirecting this tacit claim to omniscience is pointing out experimental science (since scientific method is the normal implication) requires test repetition, which is bounded by Question 2. Any view claiming certainty regarding origins or the future is by nature belief (i.e., necessarily religious) because Questions 1 and 3 lie outside *human* certainty. Anyone claiming otherwise may be a good scientist but is a poor philosopher! This common fallacy is the (self-refuting) philosophical mistake in positivism, which cannot be scientifically, logically, or mathematically validated because it claims too much.

When pushing the boundaries of time, all endeavor to use logic, science, history, religion, etc. for information; however, “proving” a past, unattended singularity is a forensic (i.e., inductive) exercise, not a deductive proof. Consequently, every view on origins ends in a statement of faith with its probability resting on its assumptions, the significance of which should be acknowledged. Note that actual truth is based in reality, not in the likelihood of our knowing or validating it. Some truth undoubtedly exists quite apart from our ability to predict, know, or to know it exhaustively. Failing to appreciate this difference confuses *our* worldview (approximation of reality) with *actual* truth.

The skeptic claiming “scientific” superiority over another’s “mere faith” will often dismiss evidence contrary to his view because he magically (i.e., preferentially) “knows” unverifiable things. The American Atheists Convention address (Thomson, 2009) entitled “Why We Believe in Gods” (now a book: Thomson and Aukofer, 2011) demonstrated just such philosophical overreach. Then CFO for Richard Dawkins’s Foundation for Reason and Science, Thomson’s three premises were that religious ideas are:

- a by-product of cognitive mechanisms “designed” for other purposes,
- an artifact of our ability to imagine social worlds, and
- simply human concepts with alterations.

While some of his cognitive mechanisms may well, for example, contribute to the fact “children will spontaneously invent the concept of god without adult intervention,” Thomson never examines his basic presumptions that (a) psychological mechanisms alone explain why people hold (presumably) false religious beliefs, (b) rational people, therefore, ought to be atheistic, and (c) belief in God (or gods) is therefore meritless, requiring his explanation—particularly given his admission to its ubiquity in human experience. By representing his view as objective science, he implies the epistemological superiority of his belief. To validate that no god exists, however, requires perfect knowledge over infinite time and infinite reality (including material and immaterial universes)—a point, like Hume’s skepticism of miracles, that he failed to appreciate.

Even granting some of his points, removing Thomson’s atheistic premise would certainly (a) admit the potential rationality of other faith options, and (b) force him to defend his faith position against other rational competitors. Thus, viewing worldview in time clarifies that finitude levels the epistemological playing field. It is unsurprising, then, that

the Supreme Court identified atheism as religious in *Kaufman vs. McCaughtry* and *Torcaso vs. Watkins*.

An important corollary is that intentionally rejecting views competitive to evolutionary doctrine from public education shows undue favoritism toward one particular belief framework. Preventing examination of even contrary evidence does not remove religion from the public sphere but establishes a national religion, or at least the philosophical mechanistic worldview framework for it.

2. *Time division of worldview demonstrates Question 1's importance, despite its faith nature.* Paradoxically, any answer to Question 1 also answers Question 3 because the nature of the universe's origin indicates its natural destiny. If the universe were self-caused, it would be eternally self-existent. If something outside the universe created it, that force would be independent of the universe (non-contingent) and eternal. It would be absurd to suggest the fundamental nature of the universe's cause would change through time; rather, time must be a product of whatever caused the universe. Hence, answering Question 1 consequentially identifies the universe's nature and purpose (and, thus, mine).

3. *Time also provides natural apologetic preferences.* The ability to perceive another's worldview through the lens of time can differentiate between "pre-evangelism" and "evangelism," depending on whether Question 1 or 2 is under consideration. Sometimes termed "two-step apologetics," classical Christian apologetics establishes the logical necessity for a Creator followed by evidence for the resurrection to establish Jesus' authority. An individual unconvinced his existence requires an independent Creator may or may not find the resurrection compelling. Thus, Question 1's critical nature usually requires an answer before pushing forward. Certainly, one unconcerned or convinced God does not exist is unlikely to be convinced of

Table I

That we were created by a Theistic Creator	That Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead	Implied belief system(s)
False	False	<i>Atheism, Buddhism</i>
True	False	<i>Judaism, Islam</i>
False	True	<i>Hinduism</i>
True	True	<i>Christianity</i>

any biblical truth. A Hindu, moreover, may reject a theistic creator but still accept Jesus' resurrection, viewing Him as just another avatar (or god). Hence, arguments from nature (i.e., general revelation) are necessary to establish a pre-evangelistic, theistic framework (cf. Romans 1:19–20). It might be said, then, that orthodox Christianity rests on the historicity of only two events: (1) Creation and (2) the resurrection (Table I).

### Dissecting Worldview Categorically

The previous discussion quickly narrowed toward religion because evaluating worldview through the lens of time naturally funnels toward meaning (revealing the mechanism driving our "God-shaped vacuum," which Thomson's atheistic address entirely missed: our worldview, generated by *rationality itself*). However, many pertinent topics were inadvertently left out, such as social views of government (*Weltanschauung*), categorical scientific limits, or philosophy and epistemology. These omissions point toward another way of dividing worldview. Consider Dr. David Noebel's (1997, p. 8) definition:

The term *worldview* refers to any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world, and man's relations to God and the world.

Specifically, a worldview should contain a particular perspective regarding each of the following ten disciplines: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics, and history.

Worldview's definition is more sweeping than Noebel imagined, essentially providing the mechanism and framework by which humans *integrate knowledge*, forming one's entire non-time-constrained, interactive mental image of reality. Nonetheless, Noebel helpfully points out that worldview perspectives may be subdivided *categorically*.

Likewise, *The Truth Project's* (Tackett, et al., 2006) "systematic framework" serves as "something like putting hooks and shelves in your closet." One of its graphic analogies resembled the Greek Parthenon, having three massive foundational stone steps supporting four pillars, which then supported a roofline holding seven embedded orbs. The three foundational steps represented theology ("who is God"), anthropology ("who is man"), and veritology ("what is truth"). The four pillars were mind (philosophy), matter (science), time (history), and values (ethics). Finally, the roofline contained the sociological spheres of law, politics, economics, art, science, music, and literature. Similar to AiG's "Seven C's" above, the building illustrates a finely granulated *categorical* breakdown of worldview.

Similarities between Noebel's and Tackett's categorical approaches are not accidental, as both were disciples of Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer famously drew parallels between philosophical shifts in social worldviews to illustrate how those shifts were mirrored through the visual arts. Schaeffer concluded that how individuals and societies view themselves affects how they behave, creating analogous shifts across categories.

### **Apologetic Benefits of Categorical Subdivision of Worldview**

Apologetic benefits exist for categorical division, just as the temporal approach showed above. First, it is possibly the most common and intuitive method. People discussing worldview typically want to consider how ideas affect practical life judgments and intentionally limit scope for clarity, perhaps later relating parts to a bigger picture. Moreover, nothing prevents dividing worldview categorically to consider one aspect and subsequently subdividing that by time. For example, many of Francis Schaeffer's works illustrate worldview changes by examining its effects on a category such as art and then evaluate that over time to demonstrate philosophy's influence on a period's artistic expression, as well as other aspects of human existence.

### **Dividing Worldview by Natural and Conventional Boundaries**

It should be apparent that any barrier to human communication, because of its effect on human knowledge, presents a possible way to subdivide worldview. For example, generational differences (Shallcross, 2009; Keeter and Taylor, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2007) or language are two obvious methods of division. The idea of *Weltanschauung* demonstrates that time, language, or nationalism can all account for differences in human perceptions to varying degrees. Cultural anthropologist Gary Palmer (1996, pp. 113–114) noted:

As I use the term [worldview], it refers to the fundamental cognitive orientation of a society ... subgroup or ... individual [encompassing] fundamental existential and normative postulates or themes, values [often conflicting], emotions and ethics; it includes conventional cognitive models of persons, spirits, and things in the world.... It includes as well metaphorical ... structuring of thought.

Because social groups communicate, they influence each other by sharing opinions and knowledge. For example, we often identify the "spirit of the age" by observing linguistic or generational boundaries (e.g., boomers, millennials, etc.). Likewise, belief groups (e.g., religious, political, etc.) are often identified by their defining social beliefs and viewpoints.

### **Worldview Constraints Highlight the Balance between Personal Freedom and Societal Restraint**

Human life span, rational capacity, and language boundaries preclude omniscience, forcing rationality to *simulate* perfect knowledge to arrive at practical, actionable conclusions (Chisham, 2015). It should be clear, then, that finite beings are theoretically incapable of being perfectly unbiased with the possible exception of matters involving direct observation and perception, since worldview represents the basis of one's perspective. This fact means humans are sure to arrive at a variety of (often conflicting) views, underscoring why religious freedom is a crucial principle. Otherwise, states engaging in worldview (thought) policing effectively grant a person or elite group the inherent privileged assumption of perfect knowledge in judging someone else to be wrong, which is despotism.

For this reason, the authors of the Declaration of Independence (US, 1776) established a worldview-neutral basis for governance: civil rights, which

prioritizes a hierarchy of human need. "Civil rights" is defined here as the *mitigation of rights in conflict*. They argued that God created all men equal and granted them "certain ... rights," making those rights "unalienable." The secret to civil equality, however, lies in their order; reversing any of them undermines civility. The right to life is necessarily the highest order right, for without it all others are mute. The second is liberty. Last of all, every individual is entitled to pursue happiness (i.e. Aristotle's "good"). Slavery's evil, for example, was promoting one man's right to personal happiness (wealth) at the expense of another's more basic right to freedom, reversing the second and third based on preferential skin color. Consequently, the nation fought its first two major engagements over these same principles, testing "whether (this) nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure" (Lincoln, 1863). (The answer, of course, always depends on whether the politically empowered have the commitment of character and will to act as guardians on behalf of the natural rights of the underprivileged and unempowered.) Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech expressed these same ideals.

Today the world grapples with abortion, apparently inverting the first and third rights. The deciding factor no longer is civil principle but how an individual is valued by others. Strangely, since 1973 the Supreme Court has remained silent on this pivotal question of when life begins, which should have been their first consideration. By avoiding judgment, they declared a fetus nonhuman *de facto* without taking judicial responsibility for enumerating their legal justifications. This seems like the penultimate dereliction of duty given their guidance over a nation so conceived, which used those civil principles alone as justification for secession from England. Indeed, given the unqualified ubiquity of the "unalienable

rights” statement, as penned it appears to provide the basis for international law.

Every individual has a worldview because thinking generates it. But even when we disagree, being free to admit and acknowledge each other’s worldview provides a basis for human dialog and understanding, freeing all to choose their beliefs and convictions. Christian and atheist can both be at peace knowing this is their natural (i.e., God-given) freedom. Freedom of thought can be constrained only when preventing one from violating someone else’s higher-order rights. So it is with Islamic extremism, for example. They are free to hold their views but not to impose them on others by enslaving or killing those who do not. Accepting a person’s right to hold a view is not admission it is correct but simply admits every individual’s freedom to hold convictions without compulsion from the state or suffering harm from civil rights violators.

Moreover, the First Amendment’s freedom of speech is necessary, otherwise we cannot learn from each other. Persuasion or public proclamation should never be confused with control. Freedom is a *social* phenomenon that exists only if others are free to disagree.

### **Worldview Involves More than Logical Manipulation of Knowledge**

Traditional approaches to epistemology focus on “judgments,” which is a present-tense preoccupation (e.g., “Is that a squirrel in my backyard?”). In contrast, worldview is about decision making: how does one’s current mass of information influence his future actions? Consider what factors motivate a decision—any decision. For example, why does a person buy a certain house, start a business, or convert to a religion? Beyond cold judgment, there are nearly always a range of influential circumstances such as finances, emotional

readiness, and matters of trust surrounding perceived obligations. Cressey (1996, p. 657) comments that the Bible views knowledge (a worldview’s foundation) as similarly multifaceted:

The Greek [New Testament] ideal of knowledge was a contemplation of reality in its static and abiding being; the Hebrew [Old Testament] ... primarily ... conceived knowledge as an entry into relationship with the experienced world which makes demands not only on man’s understanding but also on man’s will.

For example, the Hebrew word (*yāda*) is used regarding knowing the loss of children (Isaiah 47:8), grief (Isaiah 53:3), sin (Jeremiah 3:13), God’s hand and might (Jeremiah 16:21), and His vengeance (Ezekiel 25:14) and as a euphemism for sexual relations (e.g., Genesis 4:1; Judges 11:39).

Likewise, an evangelistically interesting question is why a person, given all his intellectual answers, would not immediately convert to Christianity (which tends toward the Greek notion above)? Such conversions are the exception, however, not the rule. Calvinistic approaches might attribute this disconnect to predestination and election, whereas an Arminian might complain this makes for an easy and quick excuse, failing to understand what drives the individual’s convictions. Either position ought to appreciate an observation regarding the greatest Mosaic command, which Jesus said was to love God with all one’s heart, mind, and soul (Matthew 22:36–38). If believers must love God these diverse ways, it seems logical individuals coming to faith must also come to love God those same ways: intellectually, emotionally, and as a matter of duty or conviction.

As a matter of fact, these same areas do play a part in every personal consideration of consequence, whether a major purchase or a religious conversion. Sales consultants (Heiman et al., 1999, pp. 31–32) note:

Buying is a special case of decision-making.... By ignoring or working against the customer’s decision-making process, you ensure confusion, resentment, and – sooner or later—lost sales.

They note further:

In traditional selling, product knowledge was a magic elixir. Coupled with glibness—allegedly the sales professional’s contribution to human interaction—it could turn the most recalcitrant buyer into a willing victim by enabling the salesperson to “sell” her whether she wanted to buy or not. Hence the ultimate salesman cliché: “He could sell iceboxes to Eskimos.” (pp. 19–20)

But, they assert:

People buy for their own reasons, not for yours. (p. 22)

Thus, it might be said a person merely intellectually convinced is only one-third of the way to full conviction. Something more is required to even rise to a simple majority in his mind. Moreover, those who are “persuading” need to see others holistically, not relying simply on rational argument or strictly emotional appeal. Though a cliché, we must live our message, not just preach it. While an individual must ultimately encounter God, not just be “sold” some truth, this suggests parts we play in helping others to make, really, all manner of decisions. Perhaps this explains Lee Strobel’s (Murashko, 2012) appeal for a more “relational” apologetic approach:

The trend is toward dialogue, discussion, and conversations. I call it “relational apologetics.” This isn’t your grandfather’s apologetics, where we line up people against the wall and machine gun them with a barrage of facts. It’s where we invite spiritually curious friends and neighbors into a safe environment where we can engage with them, listen, empathize, validate them as people, and help them get answers to the “spiritual

sticking points” that are holding up their journey toward Christ.

## Conclusion

Having examined worldview mechanics (Chisham, 2012, 2014, 2015) and finding them to forge a rational simulation of reality from finite data, this article correlated that new epistemological understanding with contemporary and historical approaches. Though worldview is a single, unified principle that drives human decision making, its global perspective often makes it difficult to visualize and understand. Consequently, people typically subdivide worldview when discussing it. Worldview can be conceptually subdivided at least three ways: by examining one’s worldview conclusions through time, by discussing the categories worldviews affect, or by observing effects on perception resulting from worldview’s natural boundaries (e.g., mortality and language) or conventional boundaries (e.g., religion or nationality).

Moreover, decisions are typically not entirely based on objective, cold facts. For a person to make a decision, particularly an important decision, he must be convinced not only intellectually but also by intuition, which involves one’s emotions and sense of duty, as well. However, each individual will assign his own weight to these aspects, depending on his natural and situational disposition, which is why what convinces one person to act in a certain situation may be very different for others in the same scenario.

Understanding these dynamics surrounding worldview helps us relate to others in healthier ways, rather than trying to control other people’s thoughts and opinions. It also helps to draw healthier boundaries for those who would overstep their ability to know, possibly violating the civil rights of others, such as the intellectual right to freedom of thought and belief or even the right to life itself.

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