

Christian Apologetics
“always be prepared to give a defense...”

III. Worldviews

A *worldview* is a philosophical system that attempts to explain how the facts of reality relate and fit together. Since our thoughts influence our emotions, reactions and behaviors, it is important for us to know not only what we believe and why we believe it. We also need to be reminded of the historical consequences that are the direct and indirect logical results of a worldview, and the beliefs and convictions based upon it. [Hitler example]

There are numerous “worldviews”, but most can be categorized into seven groups: theism, atheism, pantheism, panentheism, deism, polytheism and finite godism. Let’s take a look at the three primary worldviews – theism, atheism and pantheism.

	Theism	Atheism	Pantheism
God	He is both one and triune, personal, moral, infinite	Does not exist; only the universe exists	He is one, infinite, impersonal, he is the universe
Universe	Finite and created by an infinite God	Is eternal and randomly came to be	It is an illusion, a manifestation of God
Humanity (origin)	We were created by God, have/are eternal/immortal souls	We have evolved, are made of molecules, and are not immortal	The human’s true self is God
Humanity (destiny)	By free will, we’ll either spend eternity with God or separated from Him	We have not eternal destiny and will be annihilated	Our destiny is determined by karma/cycles of life
Evil (origin)	Adversity, hardship, disobedience and imperfection caused by choice [self-will, pride]	It is real, caused by human ignorance	It is an illusion, caused by errors of the mind
Evil (destiny)	Will ultimately be defeated by God	It can be defeated by man through education	It will be re-absorbed by God
Ethics (basis)	Grounded in the nature of God	Are created by and grounded in humanity	Are grounded in the lower manifestations of God
Ethics (nature)	Absolute, objective and prescriptive	Are relative, determined by the situation	Are relative, transcending the illusion of good and evil

The atheist and the theist look at the same facts and, because of their worldview lens, arrive at irreconcilably different conclusions. So, since our conclusions and judgments about life are drawn from the same “facts”, how do we reconcile the confusion and make any progress? By finding *common* ground and asking the right *questions*.

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Finding Common Ground

Understanding the assumptions behind a worldview helps us communicate our beliefs with a lesser chance of having them misinterpreted. Even though we are looking at the world through different colored lenses, we may be able to find some *mutual assumptions* upon which to build a logical discussion – before we argue about which interpretation of the evidence is the correct one. [Paul’s Areopagus address – Acts 17:16-31]

Remember that the ultimate goal of apologetics is to gently confirm and defend our beliefs (*I Peter 3:15*), in the hope that God will draw individuals into a relationship with Himself, through Jesus Christ. Spouting off answers and emotional retorts will not help build a relationship, let alone allow a decent discussion. Sometimes a good way to communicate across worldviews, seeking some sort of common ground, is to ask questions.

Addressing Worldviews with Questions, not Answers

Most of us have been taught to respond to questions with answers. However, this is not always the wisest approach. Asking the right questions can help to disarm a potentially explosive dialogue – where it is “producing more heat than light” - and turn it into an effective discussion. [College classroom example – question of miracles].

As we can see from this example, a couple of questions could help clarify the *terms* and *premises* before launching into the *argument* in an attempt to immediately answer the original question. Another important point from this example – not all questions are sincere. Many are asked just to get a reaction or trick/trap the recipient (*Matthew 22:15-22*). We still need to respond in a truthful and gracious way – and while we may not win over the questioner, *we may influence others who could be in the background waiting to hear our response.* (*Acts 17:32-34*)

Our goal in questioning is to *shift the burden of proof* from us to the questioner. And its success depends not merely upon asking questions, but rather upon *asking the right questions*.

Asking the Right Questions

It is important to remember that when beliefs become convictions, a personal dimension enters the dialogue where emotions can run very high. The right question(s) can move a conversation back to common ground where it is more probable that a healthy discussion will take place.

Why does evil exist?

What do you think of free will and personal choice?

Can God make a rock too big for Him to lift?

Since God is infinite, and a rock is finite, exactly how big do you think the rock needs to be?

Why do you believe in miracles when science has proven that they don’t exist?

What is your definition of a “miracle”?

Not every question is automatically meaningful just because it is asked. Use the first principles of reason and logic to determine *the validity of the question*. (Logic’s function is to correct or identify faulty thinking or groundless reasoning). Then use careful *questioning* to steer the conversation *toward a common ground or assumption*.