STUDY GUIDE

WHAT'S YOUR WORLD VIEW?

AN INTERACTIVE APPROACH TO LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS

James N. Anderson
STUDY GUIDE FOR

WHAT’S YOUR WORLDVIEW?

BY JAMES N. ANDERSON
What's Your Worldview? is a book about worldviews—of course. In the first place, it’s a book about your worldview. But it’s also about the worldviews of other people. In theory, it’s about everyone’s worldviews. Whatever worldview you or anyone else has, it should be covered somewhere in the book.

What is a worldview? If you can’t answer that question, don’t worry! The first goal of the book is to help you understand what a worldview is and why worldviews are important. In addition, the book is designed to help you to identify your worldview and to think more deeply about that worldview and its implications. (If you aren’t aware that you have a worldview and it’s one of the most important things about you, then this book may rock your world—or perhaps I should say, rock your worldview!)

One useful way to understand and evaluate something is to compare it with the alternatives. For example, if you’re interested in buying a new car and you have a particular make and model in mind, you’re likely to do some research by comparing it with other makes and models. The same principle applies to worldviews. One of the best ways to understand and evaluate your worldview is to compare it with the alternatives. So another goal of What's Your Worldview? is to introduce you to worldviews other than your own and to encourage you to compare and contrast them with your worldview. What are some of the fundamental differences between worldviews? What do people find appealing about particular worldviews? Are some worldviews better than others—and, if so, in what ways?

The reality is that while all people are created equal, not all worldviews are created equal. Some are more reasonable and coherent than others. Some make more sense of the world than others. Some have serious problems. Some have practical implications that are frankly dangerous. In short, it really matters what worldview you hold. Ultimately, all of us should want to hold the right worldview: the one that represents the world as it really is. This book will help you to understand and navigate the options, to ask the important questions, and to find your way toward the most reasonable answers.

As you’ll quickly discover, What's Your Worldview? isn’t written like a regular book. It has an interactive, nonlinear format, which means you shouldn’t read it sequentially from the first page to the last. Instead, at certain points in the book, you’ll be presented with questions, and your answers to those questions will direct you to other pages in the book. Depending on how you answer the questions, you’ll follow a particular “trail” through the book, leading to a final destination. You’ll also have the opportunity to go back and explore alternative “trails” by answering the questions differently.

Due to the nonlinear format of the book, this study guide has a somewhat different format than most study guides. Instead of asking you to read the book sequentially, chapter by chapter, and offering discussion questions for each chapter, the study guide is divided into eight “sessions” that will lead you through different parts of the book. In each session, you’ll be given some directions on what parts of the book to read or explore, followed by some questions to stimulate discussion and to help you think through the implications of what you’ve read and how it could be applied.

If you’re planning to read the book as part of a study group using this guide, I recommend you complete the “Explore” section before you meet as a group and then work through the “Discuss” section together as a group. The “Reflect” section could also be used in a group setting, but it’s probably best for personal reflection and application.

What's Your Worldview? was both fun and challenging to write, and I hope you’ll find it both fun and challenging to read. And I hope that this study guide will help you get the most out of it.

Note for e-book readers: The study guide uses page numbers from the print version of the book, but if you’re using an e-book version, you can still follow the directions in the “Explore” sections by using the Contents page to find your starting point and then following the hyperlinks within the book.

Note for group discussion leaders: Don’t feel that you have to cover all the questions in the “Discuss” sections! Some of the questions are more challenging than others, so feel free to be selective depending on the makeup of the group and the amount of time you have available.
SESSION I

Introduction

Explore
Read the Introduction of the book (pp. 11–16).

Discuss
1. Were you familiar with the term worldview before you started reading the book? Did the introduction give you any insights that you didn’t have before?

2. How would you explain the concept of a “worldview” to someone who hasn’t encountered the idea before?

3. “Everyone has [a worldview] and we can’t live without them, but not everyone knows that he has one” (p. 12). Do you agree? How could a person have a worldview without realizing it?

4. Someone might say: “People have different worldviews, just like people have different tastes in music and follow different sports teams. It’s all part of the beautiful diversity of human life, and ultimately there’s no right or wrong about it. It’s a mistake to think that there’s a ‘correct’ worldview.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. Does it really matter what worldview a person has? What practical difference does it make?

6. How does a person’s worldview influence his or her views on ethics and politics? Discuss some examples from everyday life or from recent news stories.

7. How can you determine what worldview someone has?

8. How does a person end up with his or her worldview? How easy is it for a person to change his or her worldview?

**Reflect**

Think about an article or book you read recently, or perhaps a movie you watched. What worldviews were represented by the people depicted in that article, book, or movie? What worldview was reflected or promoted by the article, book, or movie itself (i.e., by the author, screenwriter, or director)?

Do you agree with the worldview(s) that were presented? How might a different worldview have affected the presentation or conclusion in the article, book, or movie?
SESSION 2

What’s Your Worldview?

Explore
Start with the Freedom Question on page 19 and answer the questions in the book as thoughtfully and honestly as you can, following the directions that go with your answers. Sooner or later, you’ll end up at a worldview in Part III. Read through that section (it will be only two pages long) and spend some time reflecting on the worldview described and the questions raised in that section.

Discuss
1. Some of the questions you were probably able to answer immediately, without much thought, while others required you to think more carefully and deeply. Which questions did you find hardest to answer—and why? Were you unsure how to answer some questions?

2. All of the questions are designed to be answered either yes or no. Did you encounter any questions you thought shouldn’t be answered yes or no?

3. Which worldview did you end up with? Was it the one you expected to end up with?
4. Did you find the description of your worldview to be generally accurate? How would you have summarized your worldview?

5. What are the strengths of your worldview? What are its weaknesses?

6. Does your worldview face any problems or challenges that make you uncomfortable?

7. How similar is your worldview to those of others in the group?

**Reflect**
As you go about your daily activities this week, try to think more self-consciously about your worldview and how it affects what you think and how you behave. Do you always live in a way that’s consistent with that worldview? If not, why not?
SESSION 3

Dead-End Worldviews

Explore
Start on page 21 and answer no to the Truth Question. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 21, answer yes to the Truth Question, then answer no to the Knowledge Question on page 22.
   Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 22, answer yes to the Knowledge Question, then answer no to the Goodness Question on page 23. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 23, answer yes to the Goodness Question, then answer yes to the Religion Question on page 24. Where does that take you?

Discuss
1. Did you end up with one of these four worldviews (Relativism, Skepticism, Nihilism, and Pluralism) when you first went through the book, giving your honest answers to the questions? If so, have you changed your views since then?

2. Do you know anyone who holds one of these four worldviews? Why do you think he or she holds that worldview? Does he or she live consistently with that worldview?

3. “Some worldviews have more serious problems than others. Some walk with a pronounced limp. Some have failing organs. Some are mortally wounded. A few are simply ‘dead on arrival!’” (p. 15). If you were a “worldview physician,” how would you assess the health of these four worldviews?
4. “There is only one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.” So wrote Alan Bloom in his provocative book *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). Was he exaggerating? Why would the worldview of Relativism be so prevalent among new university students?

5. Pluralism appears to be more prevalent in Western culture today than ever before. Why do you think that is? What is the appeal of Pluralism as a worldview?

6. If you wanted to demonstrate to someone the problems with these worldviews, how would you do it? What topics would make for a fruitful conversation?

**Reflect**
Think about some activity you plan to engage in this week (e.g., working on an office project, chairing a meeting, studying for a class, playing a sport, or hanging out with friends). How would you approach that activity differently if you were a Relativist, a Skeptic, or a Nihilist? What would be the practical implications of living out those worldviews?
SESSION 4

Atheist Worldviews

Explore
Start on page 24, answer no to the Religion Question, then answer no to the God Question on page 25. Read the section on Atheist Worldviews, then continue to page 26 and answer yes to the Unity Question. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 26, answer no to the Unity Question, then answer yes to the Matter Question on page 27. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 27, answer no to the Matter Question, then answer yes to the Mind Question on page 28. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 28 and answer no to the Mind Question. Where does that take you?

Discuss
1. Some people claim that Atheism isn't a belief but rather a lack of belief, and that there's no such thing as an Atheist worldview. Do you agree? Why or why not?

2. How important is belief in God (or disbelief in God) to a person's worldview?

3. Did you end up with one of these four worldviews (Monism, Materialism, Atheistic Idealism, and Atheistic Dualism) when you first went through the book, giving your honest answers to the questions? If so, have you changed your views since then?
4. Which of these worldviews is the most plausible? Which is the least plausible?

5. Which of these worldviews is most prevalent among Atheists today, and why?

6. Someone might say: “Let’s be honest: whether or not someone believes in God usually makes little difference to how he or she actually lives.” Is there some truth to this statement?

7. “The challenge is to explain how Atheism can avoid being dragged into the black hole of Nihilism” (p. 44). Why is it difficult for an Atheist to explain how some things can be objectively good or bad? What are some of the explanations that Atheists have given? How satisfying are those explanations?

Reflect
Think again about some activity you plan to engage in this coming week. If there were no God, what practical difference (if any) would that make to how you engage in that activity? What practical difference should it make?
Quasi-Theist Worldviews

Explore
Start on page 25 and answer yes to the God Question. Read the section on Theist Worldviews, then continue to page 29 and answer no to the Personality Question. Read the section on Quasi-Theist Worldviews, then continue to page 30 and answer yes to the All-Is-God Question. Where does that take you?

Go back to page 30, answer no to the All-Is-God Question, then answer yes to the All-In-God Question on page 31. Where does that take you?

Go back to page 31 and answer no to the All-In-God Question. Where does that take you?

Discuss
1. Someone might say: “It's very important that you believe in some kind of Supreme Being or Higher Power, but how you conceive of that Supreme Being or Higher Power doesn’t matter so much.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

2. What are some reasons to think that God is a personal being? What are some reasons to think that God is not a personal being?

3. If God were not a personal being, what implications would that fact have for how we think about ourselves as human beings?
4. Did you end up with one of these three worldviews (Pantheism, Panentheism, and Platonism) when you first went through the book, giving your honest answers to the questions? If so, have you changed your views since then?

5. Which of these worldviews is the most plausible? Which is the least plausible?

6. Where are these worldviews represented in the world today?

Reflect
Do some research and find a religion that teaches that God is not a personal being. Which worldview does that religion most represent? If you were to have a conversation with an adherent of that religion, what do you think would be most fruitful to talk about?
SESSION 6

Finite Theist Worldviews

Explore
Start on page 29, answer yes to the Personality Question, then answer no to the Perfection Question on page 32. Read the section on Finite Theist Worldviews, then continue to page 33 and answer yes to the Uniqueness Question. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 33 and answer no to the Uniqueness Question. Where does that take you?

Discuss
1. Someone might say: “God is by definition a perfect being. An imperfect God is a contradiction in terms!” Do you agree? Why or why not?

2. What kinds of limitations could God have? Would it be a good thing for God to be limited in some respects?

3. Did you end up with one of these two worldviews (Finite Godism and Polytheism) when you first went through the book, giving your honest answers to the questions? If so, have you changed your views since then?
4. Some people have claimed that parts of the Bible reflect either Finite Godism or Polytheism. Does the Bible give any support for either worldview? Does it contradict either worldview? (Ideally, you should discuss some specific biblical texts. Here are some suggestions to get you started: Gen. 1:1; Gen. 6:5–6; Ex. 15:11; Ex. 20:3; Deut. 6:13–15; Job 42:2; Ps. 86:8; Isa. 44:6–8; Isa. 46:8–11; Luke 1:37; 1 Cor. 8:4–6.)

5. Some people have suggested that if God is limited in knowledge and power, that explains why there’s evil in the world, and it gets God “off the hook” for that evil. How satisfying do you find that explanation?

6. In one of his last sermons, the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith claimed that the God of the Bible is “an exalted man,” that there are actually many gods, and that every one of us has the potential to become a god. What worldview do these statements reflect? What are some of the practical implications of holding such a worldview?

Reflect
Think about a major news story from the past week involving human suffering. How would someone with a Finite Theist worldview (either Finite Godism or Polytheism) think about that event differently than someone with a Classical Theist worldview (who thinks that God is perfect in goodness, knowledge, and power)? Which worldview do you find more compelling?
SESSION 7

Non-Christian Theist Worldviews

Explore
Start on page 32, answer yes to the Perfection Question, then answer no to the Communication Question on page 34. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 34, answer yes to the Communication Question, then answer no to the Openness Question on page 35. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 35, answer yes to the Openness Question, then answer no to the Resurrection Question on page 36. Read the section on Non-Christian Theist Worldviews, then continue to page 37 and answer yes to the Muhammad Question. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 37, answer no to the Muhammad Question, then answer yes to the Moses Question on page 38. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 38 and answer no to the Moses Question. Where does that take you?

Discuss
1. If God is a personal being, is it reasonable to think he would communicate with us? How would we expect a personal God to communicate with us?

2. “A mute God might as well be a dead God” (p. 62). What does the author mean here? Do you agree with him?

3. “Mysticism seems to lead inevitably to religious anarchy—and perhaps moral anarchy, as well” (p. 74). What are some of the practical implications of the idea that God speaks to people only privately and individually?
4. “Finding out what a Theist believes about Jesus is arguably the most effective way to identify what worldview he or she has” (p. 36). Why would this be so?

5. Someone might say: “Christianity, Judaism, and Islam agree on the most important point: there's only one God, and we should love and worship God above all else. They just disagree on the details of how we should love and worship God.” Is this a fair assessment?

6. Every worldview has its distinctive view of salvation: its view of what the basic human problem is and how that problem can be overcome. How is that fact reflected in the worldviews you’ve explored in this session?

7. Do you know anyone who holds one of the worldviews you've explored in this session (Deism, Mysticism, Islam, Judaism, and Non-Mainstream Monotheism)? What would you say are the major points of agreement and disagreement between your worldview and his or hers? Do you think your worldview is more reasonable—and if so, why?

Reflect

Many people today have a very negative view of religion because of the violent conflicts around the world between religious groups. As one writer put it, “Religion poisons everything.” Do you agree? How might an understanding of the relationship between religions and worldviews help to address this negative view? Does history suggest that atheistic worldviews are more likely to promote peace and tolerance than theistic worldviews?
SESSION 8

Christianity and Its Imitators

Explore
Start on page 36, answer yes to the Resurrection Question, then answer no to the Divinity Question on page 39. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 39, answer yes to the Divinity Question, then answer yes to the Salvation Question on page 40. Where does that take you?
   Go back to page 40 and answer no to the Salvation Question. Where does that take you?

Discuss
1. Did you end up with one of these three worldviews (Unitarianism, Pelagianism, and Christianity) when you first went through the book, giving your honest answers to the questions? If so, have you changed your views since then?

2. Some people would suggest that all three worldviews are Christian worldviews: they just represent different versions of Christianity. Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. “Remarkably, however, there are many people today who consider themselves Christians but are actually closer to Pelagius when it comes to their beliefs about who gets to heaven and on what basis” (p. 84). Is this a fair observation? If so, how did these people get their beliefs?

4. Someone might say: “Jesus never actually said, ‘I am God.’ Only later did his followers start claiming he was divine.” How would you respond to such a claim?
5. Someone might say: “The gospel is simply the message that Jesus suffered and died for us. It's the humanity of Jesus that really matters, not his supposed divinity.” Do you agree? How important is the divinity of Jesus to the Christian worldview?

6. Approximately one third of the population of the world claims to be Christian. Does that mean the Christian worldview is the most influential worldview in the world today?

7. Some people argue that there's really no such thing as the Christian worldview. They say there are as many Christian worldviews as there are Christians. Are they right? Does it make sense to talk about “the Christian worldview”?

8. What are the most appealing elements of the Christian worldview? What are the most offensive or problematic elements?

Reflect
For readers with a non-Christian worldview: Does the Christian worldview have any advantages over your current worldview? How would you live your life differently this coming week if you held a Christian worldview?

For readers with a Christian worldview: If someone were to ask you to explain in three minutes why you hold a Christian worldview, what would you say? If a complete stranger had observed your life over the last week, what would he or she conclude about your worldview? In what ways will your Christian worldview inform and influence your thoughts, words, and actions in this coming week?