Towards a Pedagogical Taxonomy for Worldview; Or, What do Seinfeld, Morpheus, and Yoda Teach Us?
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"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." Inigo Montoya, *The Princess Bride*

Introduction: The Problem Defined

The purpose of this paper is to provide a plan for teaching worldview studies in a Christian context. When I was first assigned to teach worldview classes to Christian university students, I wasn't sure where to start. There is no canonical source of worldview pedagogy. The good news is that a worldview teacher can choose just about anything; the bad news is that a worldview teacher can choose just about anything. One can teach anything, but one cannot teach everything. Taking inventory of various approaches was confusing. At a more fundamental level, however, defining worldview was more difficult than finding a helpful methodology.

David Naugle's book *Worldview: The History of a Concept* is the standard resource for the history of worldview.[1] It is particularly enlightening to learn that the word *Weltanschauung* was invented by Immanuel Kant in 1790 while trying to explain a somewhat complicated philosophical idea. Naugle traces the development of *Weltanschauung* from Kant's philosophical disciples through Christian thinkers like Abraham Kuyper to more modern evangelicals like Francis Schaeffer. The current version of worldview studies are amalgams of diverse philosophical and sociological positions. Many authors use the word worldview interchangeably with "philosophy of . . .". The word worldview has become a placeholder for general ideas of background information on a specific topic.

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[1] Naugle, David K. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005.

Finding a useful definition of worldview is nearly impossible. The most common definition in use today by Christians is probably James Sire's which has undergone significant change over the last few years. Sire defines worldview as

> a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which 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.[2]

The length of this definition betrays the complicated nature of the worldview concept. The fact that Sire needs sixty-four words to define worldview also shows how difficult it is to design a pedagogical strategy for teaching it. Sire's book contains some constructive ideas, but it lacks a consistent framework. Sire attempts to unfold worldview through different philosophical questions. But in a more reflective mindset, he admits that even his structure is problematic.

Another problem with developing a plan to teach worldview is a common metaphor used when explaining it. A worldview, it is frequently suggested, is like a pair of glasses. The lenses that exist between the observer and the thing that is observed shapes one's view. However, as James H. Gilmore has recently noted, there are many lenses which can alter the world in many different ways. Seeing a blood cell requires a microscope; studying the moon demands a telescope. Using a telescope won't help us understand a blood cell, and a microscope is useless for the astronomer. The lens metaphor, then, needs to be vastly expanded to serve as an accurate model.[3] Although most people don't recognize it, this proverbial lens operates a lot like Kant's

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[2] James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 141.

[3] James H. Gilmore, *Look: A Practical Guide for Improving Your Observational Skills* (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2016). The idea of augmented reality would be a better metaphor than lenses in a pair of glasses. Whereas glasses are static, augmented reality offers a more interactive picture of the world. Rather than finding inherent meaning in a cultural artifact, meaning is projected onto it.

categories. Just as one never experiences a thing in itself, the worldview participant never truly encounters the world. The worldview lens, like Kant's categories, projects a view of the world rather than the actual world itself.

Once I understood the nearly impossible task of defining and developing a strategy for teaching worldview, I decided to survey as many worldview sources as I could find. After researching a broad spectrum of books, I have developed a simplified definition of worldview pedagogy. This definition also offers a strategy for developing and teaching worldview. In the following pages, I will share the definition and also propose a game plan for organizing teaching materials for worldview studies.

The Definition.

For my undergraduate Biblical Worldview class, I use the following definition: *A worldview is an explicit/implicit way of belonging, believing, and becoming*. This definition contains four main components which unfold the nature of thinking and the type of subjects covered by worldview books. First of all, "explicit/implicit" refers to the ideas of presuppositions and the tricky nature of thinking itself. Secondly, "belonging, believing, and becoming" point to the different emphases authors place on their worldview thinking. Some authors tend to stress the sociological nature of views that shape individuals. Other authors link worldview to more philosophical endeavors. And lastly, James K. A. Smith's work develops the idea of the experience of life as formative in who we are becoming.

In the rest of this paper, I will lay out a strategy for thinking through this definition by unfolding the categories and suggesting a few resources that could help in understanding the definition.

The Starting Point: Explicit/Implicit

Alan Jacobs' book *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* is a grave warning about our inability to think well. Using current research about the limits of human cognition, Jacobs develops a fresh theology of thinking. A journey into worldview studies must take an honest look at how we look at the world. Jacobs' sobering assessment reveals the danger of dismissing the likelihood that our thinking can be derailed by errors like "[a]nchoring, availability cascades, confirmation bias, the Dunning-Kruger effect, the endowment effect, framing effects, group attribution errors, halo effect, ingroup and outgroup homogeneity biases, recency illusions" just to name a few.[4] Jacobs' book is a necessary lesson in humility; we cannot merely assume that our thinking is unbiased and accurate. As a starting point, then, we must work hard to ensure clear thinking about thinking.

Another helpful way to think about thinking is through works like Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Kahneman unfolds a useful structure for helping us understand why our implicit thought structures frequently conflict with our need for explicit deliberation. Kahneman's model of fast and slow thinking explains how we interact with the world around us. Fast thinking (or system 1) is employed at an instinctive level; we quickly react to stimuli without any rumination. When shown a picture of an angry woman, for example, we just know she is mad, no investigation needed. Slow thinking (or system 2) kicks in when we are faced with more difficult cognitive tasks like needing to multiply two digit numbers in our head or when a right-handed person tries to write with her left hand. Fast thinking does most of the heavy lifting, and since slow thinking is lazy and doesn't want to do much, our default mode of

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[4] Alan Jacobs, *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* (New York: Currency, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017), 12.

cognition is mostly intuitive. We are capable of looking beyond the surface of issues, but since our slow thinking doesn't like to work, our opinions and beliefs rarely develop much beyond platitudes and simplistic ideas. Kahneman's work, then, forces us to be extremely cautious of unchallenged presuppositions we import into our study of worldview.[5]

It's important to differentiate between ideas which are imported through presuppositional beliefs and ideas which are developed upon intentional reflection. Differences between theoretical, pretheoretical, and presuppositional need to be defined. Chapter four of Sire's *Naming the Elephant* is especially helpful here. Using Michael Kearney's observation that worldviews have both bones and flesh, Sire says, "the bones are pretheoretical, the flesh is presuppositional."[6] Accounting for the difference between the implicit background of our ideas and our explicit pondering enables us to enter into the specific categories of our definition.

The Seinfeld Category: Belonging

Great comedians can show us the world as it is. In Jerry Seinfeld's recent Netflix show, *Jerry Before Seinfeld*, he comments on how we get *on* a train, but we get *in* a taxi, and we *take* an Uber. Once Seinfeld points out this peculiar use of language we are forced to agree that it is indeed strange. This puzzling use of prepositions and verbs doesn't make any logical sense. George Carlin wondered how you could get off a non-stop flight and why "chili" is hot. Why do we park on driveways, drive on parkways, and pay tolls on freeways? Comedians like Seinfeld uncover cultural oddities hiding in plain sight. The comedian is a sociologist who reveals the bizarre ways we humans live and interact with each other. The first category of worldview,

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[5] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015).

[6] Sire, 107.

belonging, likewise serves to help us see the specific communities that shape our world in mysterious ways.

I have used the category of belonging to explore the shaping of group perceptions of, and our participation in, the world around us. We all belong to many groups: family, church, schools, nations, circles of friends, towns/cities, communities of fans of entertainment/sports teams. With a bit of reflection, one could list scores of groups to which one belongs. Each of these groups possesses a specific identity which could potentially align or misalign with other groups. For example, a Christian raised in a believing family attending a local church and sending its children to Christian schools will enjoy a lot of alignment. When this Christian, however, starts dating a "secular" girl who enjoys reading Sam Harris and is convinced of thoroughgoing Darwinism, misalignment will inevitably produce severe anxiety at a very fundamental level. The book *Hidden Worldviews* by Steve Wilkens and Mark Sanford does an outstanding job of highlighting the tension points between biblical Christianity and cultural positions like consumerism, naturalism, and nationalism.[7] I have used this book to help students see that the borders between Christianity and competing ideas are much more porous than we realize. We need a robust wall to keep dangerous ideas from corrupting our viewpoints. Let's make our worldview great again!

We could categorize influential groups in countless ways. At the most basic level, however, American Christians have been trying to come to terms with the secular realm as the primary competitor to Christianity. In other words, the most basic division of the world is either Christian or secular. Nancy Pearcey's sacred/secular split is a favorite way of understanding a

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[7] Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories that Shape our Lives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

secular ideology. A consistent Christian worldview, Pearcey argues, refuses to divide faith from the everyday world of life. One must choose between Christianity and secularism. You cannot serve both God and secularism. In *Total Truth*, Pearcey warns of secularists who "are too politically savvy to attack religion directly or to debunk it as false . . . So . . . [t]hey consign religion to the *value* sphere--which takes it out of the realm of true and false altogether."[8]. Pearcey's description of secularism as the principal enemy of Christian ideals, however, should be rethought.

Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, suggests a less conspiratorial and more nuanced understanding of secularism. According to Taylor there are three uses of the term secular. James K. A. Smith's midrash *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* summarizes Taylor's ideas well. The first understanding of "secular" is the temporal part of Pearcey's sacred/secular divide. The second use of "secular" describes a public square that would be considered neutral ground, for example, the state which is resolutely uninfluenced by the church. In this view, those who "self-identify as 'secular' are usually identifying as areligious."[9] Taylor, however, provides a much more insightful understanding in his third use of "secular." The secular is a condition of belief, or we might say unbelief. The secular age is the antithesis to a pre-enlightenment world where belief in God was the default setting for people. This third sense of secular rotates around the issue of theistic belief.

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[8] Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), Kindle Location 579.

[9] James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), Kindle Location 473. For further commentary and application of Taylor's ideas see Collin Hansen, *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2017).

The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace. In this meaning, as against sense 2, at least many milieux in the United States are secularized, and I would argue that the United States as a whole is.[10]

Taylor's category of the secular lack of belief makes sense of an attitude towards Christianity which is more apathetic than antagonistic. For every hostile Richard Dawkins, there are a lot more non-Christians who see Christianity as irrelevantly quaint.

In sum, the category of belonging needs Seinfelds who can shine a light on things we look at but don't see.[11]

The Morpheus Category: Believing

In the movie *The Matrix,* Morpheus discloses a hideous reality to Neo who is a dweller in Plato's cave of shadows. After providing the red pill, Morpheus gives a compelling philosophical lecture on metaphysics and epistemology. Neo's perceptions have been massively distorted. He is, in the most literal way, a brain in a vat. The Matrix feeds electrical impulses into Neo's brain, causing him to think he is living in the physical world. This scenario is, of course, a modern version of Descartes' evil demon proposition. Whereas Seinfeld helps us to consider our culture(s) from a fresh perspective, Morpheus forces us to think about thinking. Seinfeld is a sociologist. Morpheus is a philosopher. Seinfeld asks where we belong. Morpheus challenges our beliefs.

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[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge (Mass.): Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), Kindle Page 3.

[11] Another important book for a cultural understanding of modern Christianity's relationship to society is James Davison. Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Peter Berger is also a relevant commentator for understanding the foreground and background of specific sociological thought structures. For example see Peter Ludwig Berger and Anton Cornelis Zijderveld, *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions Without Becoming a Fanatic* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

Just as many worldview thinkers, like Pearcey, see worldview from a social and cultural perspective, others see worldview primarily as a philosophical construct. According to Ronald Nash, "philosophical systems of great thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle were worldviews."[12] Philosophy, according to Moreland and Craig, "can help someone form a rationally justified, true worldview, that is, an ordered set of propositions that one believes, especially propositions about life's most important questions."[13] Like Morpheus, Nash, Moreland, and Craig try to refine and correct our philosophical knowledge to understand our perception of, and participation in, our world.

The category of believing provides students with a more robust cultural literacy; the western world can only be adequately understood through understanding how Plato, Descartes, and Kant have shaped the way we see ourselves and our world. One helpful resource for establishing a concise background in a Christian understanding of the history and method of philosophical thinking is John Frame's *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*.[14] Frame approaches philosophy from an unapologetically theological perspective.

Along with a general understanding of philosophy, it is helpful to pay attention to Sire's emphasis on the relationship between ontology and epistemology. In the pre-modern world, ontology proceeded epistemology; belief leads to understanding. Modernity flipped this sequence. One's ontology could only include objects of certainty. Sire's *Naming the Elephant*

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[12] Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub., 1992), 16.

[13] James Porter Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), Kindle Locations 621-622.

[14] John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015).

stresses that, "[i]t cannot be said too strongly: Ontology precedes epistemology. Though it may

not appear to be so at first, to turn this around and presuppose the epistemology determines

ontology is devastating to the Christian worldview."[15] Sire is not talking about the theoretical

categories of ontology and epistemology; rather, "that being itself logically precedes the act of

knowing."[16] Obviously everyone has some ontological presuppositions that determine the limits

of proper epistemology. The relationship between being and knowing is a fruitfully suitable

candidate for exploration in an age where Sam Harris preaches against the sin of believing

anything not grounded in absolute empirical evidence.

The Yoda Category: Becoming

Seinfeld helps us see where we belong. Morpheus teaches us how to believe. Yoda helps

us understand who we are becoming. Yoda is both teacher and coach. Once Yoda's disciple Luke

learns to harness the Force, he can become a Jedi. All Christian worldview studies have the goal

of developing disciples. It's not enough to see correctly. We must also be the right kind of people.

The previous categories, belonging and believing, emphasize means of developing Christian

character. The becoming type, however, focuses directly on the act of spiritual formation itself.

The most helpful sources for this becoming category are the works of James K. A. Smith.

Smith's book, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit,* develops a powerful

polemic for focusing more on how we live than how we think. Smith borrows Taylor's idea of

excarnation to describe modern evangelicalism's proclivity to elevate the cognitive development

of doctrine over the embodied liturgy of traditional Christian worship. This escape from the

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[15] James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview As a Concept* (IVP Academic, 2015), Kindle Page 75.

[16] Ibid., 95.

physical to the cerebral has resulted in "Christianity reduced to something for brains-on-a-stick."[17] Smith is not advocating a mindless Christianity; he is, however, warning us about thinking that thinking can develop our character and form us into the people we need to be. If a worldview is only concerned with training our brains, it will never transform us. Reading a book about exercising is obviously not the same thing as exercising. Smith observes that "discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting than of knowing and believing."[18]

A comprehensive worldview strategy, then, must acknowledge the fact that giving information is not the same thing as helping students form healthy habits of character formation. According to Smith, ordinary activities like checking Facebook multiple time throughout the day does something to us. We might believe and confess that Facebook is not an integral part of our lives, but our behavior reveals that we are, in fact, addicts. The becoming category, then, corrects our penchant for allowing seeing to eclipse being.

Jordan Peterson's book *12 Rules For Life* might work well for the category of becoming.[19] Peterson has become more than just a cultural guru over the last year. His paternal wisdom, including a simple challenge of personal responsibility, has found a responsive audience among young adults who are looking for more than the politically correct message of rights and privilege.

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[17] James K. A. Smith, *You are What you Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), Kindle Location 1590.

[18] Ibid., 102-103.

[19] Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules For Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (S.l.: Random House Canada, 2018).

Conclusion

       This proposed strategy will surely need fine-tuning, or maybe even a major overhaul. It has, however, provided me with a useful plan for constructing a worldview curriculum that is more focused and comprehensive than currently available strategies.