

## **UNDERSTANDING WORLDVIEW**

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### Worldview and Culture

1. A system of ideas and values within a specific culture
2. Shared framework of ideas held by a particular society
3. Relates to the ways by which a society perceives reality
4. Worldview is learned

### Understanding another Worldview

1. What beliefs are held strongly?
2. How do parents teach children to behave?
3. What do people regard as major offences (sins)?
4. What do people do in crisis?
5. What rituals do people perform?
6. Who are the trend-setters?
7. What are the greatest fears that people have?
8. What are considered to be words of wisdom?
9. What is expressed in the art forms of the people
10. What aspects of the culture are most resistant to change?

### Characteristic Functions of a Worldview

1. To explain how and why the world came to be, and how it continues
2. To serve as a tool for evaluation
3. To provide psychological reinforcement during times of crisis
4. To function as an integrator
5. To enable people to adapt

### Principal Components of a Worldview

1. The cosmos – What is reality? How do we understand the universe?
2. Self – What is human? “Who am I?”
3. Knowing – What is truth? How do we know what is real?
4. Community – What is society? How do we live together?
5. Time – What is time? How does it move?
6. Value – what is good

## **SECULARISM**

### Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

- Cartesian dualism – “mind” and “matter”
- Scientists study the body and the material universe
- Philosophers and theologians study the soul or mind

### John Locke (1632-1704)

- “I am because I think”
- human reason is the judge of what is true
- knowledge comes through the physical senses
- revelation was demoted and discarded

### Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872)

- “religious illusion”
- God did not create humanity
- Humanity created God

- “God” represents human wishes and desires

#### Forms of Secularism

- Secular humanism – Deism (theological counterpart)
- Consumerism
- Marxism

#### Secularism and the Universe

- distinction between fact and fiction (natural world and human imagination)
- universe is totally self-sufficient – a ‘closed’ system – not open to outside interference or control
- universe is consistent and orderly – changes take place according to predictable processes – laws of cause-and-effect – miracles cannot occur
- there is no God – God is not part of the “real world” – God in the same category as Superman, Father Christmas, and fairies
- the world and knowledge are divided into categories

#### Secularist View of Man

- Machine metaphor -- man is a complex machine – body is a complex system of chemicals – the mind is a function of the mechanism of the body – soul is superfluous
- Computer metaphor – man is made up of “hardware” and “software” – body is “hardware” and mind is “software” – brain is “hardware” and culture/mind is “software”
- Result: an individualistic concept of human beings

#### Secularist View of Knowing

- empiricism – observing, identifying, analysing laws that govern nature
- observer has no influence upon what is observed
- only what registers as sensory information exists

#### Secularist View of Community

- society/family = an association of individuals living together for mutual co-operation and benefit
- worth of the individual is more than that of the group
- clubs and associations become more important than kinship

#### Secularist View of Time

- time is linear – from infinite past to limitless future
- time extends without repeating itself – only one life to live
- time becomes a commodity of great value
- “tyranny” of time – “tyranny” of the urgent

#### Secularist View of Value

- no absolute ethical considerations -- ethics are relative
- rule of expediency – competitive attitude towards others; aggressive policy towards the material world

## HINDU WORLDVIEW

Key paradigm: monistic – a system of belief based on the acceptance of one indescribable force, impersonal, and without attributes, “Brahman”

Key Scriptures: the *Vedas* – written between 1000 and 500 BC

Key historical elements: no single founder or prophet; no established creed; no body of doctrine; not one system of beliefs but an interrelated series of ideas; no ecclesiastical or institutional structure

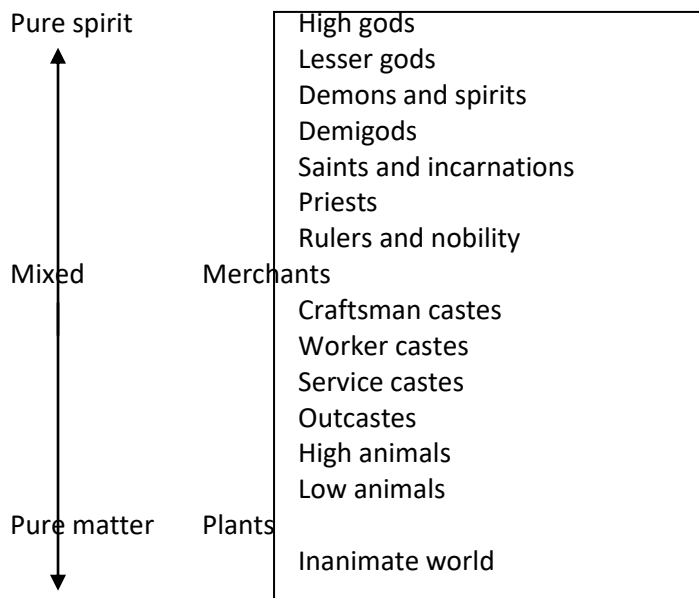
#### Hindu View of the Cosmos

- concept of *maya* – the world around us is an illusion – Brahman is real – everything else is the creation of the mind
- there is no distinction between objective experiences and imagination or supernatural and natural

Reality: Brahman (the only reality, unknowable to the passing world)

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Illusion



Hindu View of Self

- the self is *maya*
- the soul, *atman*, is the divine self – it is eternal
- the *atman* goes through the cycle of *samsara*, birth and rebirth
- the law of *karma* determines where the *atman* is in the cycle of *samsara*
- *moksha* is the release of the *atman* and its reunion with Brahman
- the body is simply a disposable cage

Hindu View of Knowing

- *jnana* (wisdom) is a principal goal of life
- wisdom is a flash of inner light that transforms life and relationships
- Hindu thought is concerned with mystical insight – uses the language of symbols and analogies
- Transcendental experience and knowledge – sacred sounds

Hindu View of Community

- hierarchical nature of human society – caste system
- people are not of equal value
- a person is born into a caste and his/her life is to be compatible to his/her caste
- no possibility of social mobility
- hierarchy of human relationships
- a person has primary responsibility for and ties with the caste

Hindu View of Time

- time is cyclic – endless series of evolings and devolvings
- universe is in a series of perpetual cycles of growth and decay

- basic cycle is the *kalpa*, the day of Brahma – 4.2 billion years
- Cosmic Cycle:  
Vishnu asleep – from his navel grows a lotus – from the lotus' unfolding petals is born Brahma  
Brahma creates the cosmos  
Vishnu awakens and looks after the cosmos – this is cosmic day  
Vishnu then falls asleep again – cosmos is reabsorbed into his body – this is cosmic night  
Vishnu is now in his 51<sup>st</sup> year – in his 100<sup>th</sup> year, Vishnu and the cosmos will merge with Brahman – process will then repeat itself

#### Hindu View of Value

- there is one ultimate reality – the cosmos is perfect at every moment – there is no absolute morality
- four aims of life: *dharma* (religious duty), wealth, pleasure, *moksha*
- a person must build up good *karma* – doing one's duty and living within the rules of one's caste – follow one's *dharma*
- "right" is conformity to the cosmic order
- the goal in life is release from the hardships of *karma*

#### BUDDHIST WORLDVIEW

##### Historical notes:

- founded by Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince
- four life-changing experiences: old man; ill person; corpse; monk
- became a monk at 29 – renounced everything
- received enlightenment in Bodh Gaya
- became Buddha or "the enlightened one"/"he who is awake" – Asaraha Bucha Day – was 35
- became itinerant teacher for 45 years – died at 80
- Last words: "Impermanent are all created things; strive with awareness." (cf. Eccl 12:8, 13)
- Buddhism became an exported religion and lost its standing in India

##### Types:

- Theravada (southern) – "way of the elders" – traditionalists – in southeast Asia and Sri Lanka – non-theistic
- Mahayana (northern) – "great tradition" – liberals – in north Asia – theistic – believe in the "middle way"
- Sub-types: Lamaism in Tibet; Pure Land Buddhism in China; and Zen Buddhism in Japan

##### Four Noble Truths

###### 1. Life is suffering

- *dhukha* – Sanskrit meaning suffering, imperfection, anguish
- 3 causes: impermanence; interconnectedness; interdependence

###### 2. Suffering is due to attachment

- *trishna* – Sanskrit meaning "thirst" – desire, clinging, greed, craving, lust
- causes: attachment to things; hatred; ignorance
- attachment is a mistaken effort at permanence

###### 3. Attachment can be overcome

- *nirvana* – Sanskrit meaning "blowing out" – elimination of attachment – end of suffering
- *nirvana* is achieved by
  - \* letting go of attachment, hatred, ignorance
  - \* full acceptance of imperfection, impermanence, and interconnectedness

#### 4. There is a path to accomplish this

- *dharma* – Sanskrit meaning duty or devotion – Buddha called it “middle way”
- the Eightfold Path:
  - \* Prajna (wisdom): right understanding  
right thinking/aspiration
  - \* Shila (morality): right speech  
right action/behaviour  
right livelihood/vocation
  - \* Samadhi (meditation): right effort  
right mindfulness  
right concentration

#### Buddhist View of the Cosmos

- Buddha was not concerned about God or creation – refused to speculate on cosmology
- Buddha taught that all beings are reborn in one of 5 or 6 states: gods (*devas*), human, animal, ghosts, hell-beings
- Distinct absence of creation myths in Buddhism

#### Buddhist View of Self

- disputed the eternal quality of *atman*
- proposed the concept of “non-self” – *anatta* or *an-atman*
- the self is simply an aggregate of physical and mental energies or *skandhas*:
  - matter – physical body
  - sensation experiences – contact with external world
  - perception – contact with external world
  - disposition – volitional activities
  - consciousness – based on the six faculties – eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch, mind
- *atman* is in state of flux
- belief in “rebirth” (preferred to “reincarnation”) – rebirth is based upon *karma* (volitional actions)

#### Buddhist View of Knowing

- quest to know things in accordance with reality
- origin of highest knowledge lies in Buddha’s enlightenment
- ignorance is the root cause of *dhukha*
- ignorance overcome through *bhavana* (meditation)

#### Buddhist View of Community

- quest for ultimate realisation
- this is quest is an individual and solitary path
- monastic order – *sangha* – involves monks and nuns – these are people who have renounced ordinary way of life to seek *nirvana*
- mutual interdependence of *sangha* and laity
- differentiates men and women
- Buddhist society has four axis: *sangha*-lay & men-women

#### Buddhist View of Time

- while accepting births and rebirths cycle, Buddhism avoids speculation about time
- time is merely part of the flow of birth and rebirth – one should be aware of it but without attachment

#### Buddhist View of Value

- *dharma* – Sanskrit meaning duty or devotion – Buddha called it “middle way” – avoids the extremes of sensual indulgence and physical austerity
- the Eightfold Path:
  - \* Prajna (wisdom): right understanding

- \* Shila (morality):
  - right thinking/aspiration
  - right speech
  - right action/behaviour
  - right livelihood/vocation
- \* Samadhi (meditation): right effort; right mindfulness; right concentration

## CHINESE WORLDVIEW

### Chinese View of Cosmos

- the world of humanity and the world of nature are inseparable
- the wholeness of the universe – human beings a part of it
- the *tao* is the cosmic principle – the path that the universe follows – all things evolve from it – it includes and pervades all things that exist
- the *tao* manifests itself in dual principles: *yin* and *yang*
- *Yin*: earth, darkness, cold, femininity, death, weakness
- *Yang*: heaven, light, heat, masculinity, life, strength
- the universe is swarming with spirits (good [*shen*] and bad [*kwei*]), ghosts, and ancestors
- the spirits control all parts of nature – may bring blessing or harm
- no concept of a supreme creator God – there are many deities

### Chinese View of Self

- humans are the product of the integration of *yin* and *yang*
- at death the two components separate into purer elements
- health is a balance between the body and nature
- sickness is caused by an excess of *yin* or *yang* – this imbalance affects the *chi* (body's vital energy) which flows along certain meridians
- the body is also possessed by two souls: *hun* (superior) and *p'o* (inferior)
- at death *hun* escapes from the body but *p'o* remains until decomposition is complete – the *p'o* may possess frightening powers and commit atrocities
- consequence of all this is a fear and respect for the dead

### Chinese View of Knowing

- high value placed upon learning
- mystical philosophy of Taoism
- the art of divination – almanacs, *feng shui*, fortune sticks
- respect for the scholar
- primary interest of common people is how to cope with life – pragmatic approach to knowledge

### Chinese View of community

- 5 categories of relationships: ruler-subject, parent-child, husband-wife, elder-younger siblings, friend-friend
- these relationships regulate all life – *li* is the principle that governs relationships
- the family is the central social unit – the importance of filial piety
- the categories determine a person's status
- status is also determined by the concept of "face" – loss of face is collective shame
- family extends from past generations to the unborn – ancestors play an important role – to worship ancestors means to harmonise relations between the living and the dead

### Chinese View of Time

- time stretches into the past and the future – it is not a commodity
- man occupies the centre stage of time
- each cycle has definite beginning and ending

## Chinese View of Value

- no teaching of original sin or inherent depravity
- people are inherently good
- people are differentiated into polite or vulgar by *jen*
- five qualities of *jen*: politeness, liberality, good faith, diligence, generosity
- social harmony is of great value – the most important element of a person with *jen* is right social relationships

## ISLAMIC WORLDVIEW

### Historical Notes:

- Founder: Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah – Quraish tribe – born in Mecca – c. 570 AD
- Arabs divided into many tribes – rampant feudalism – traditional animistic religion – Islam calls this period *Jahiliya* (ignorance)
- Muhammad orphaned early and raised by his uncle – became a camel driver
- At 25 married his employer, the rich widow Khadija (40 years old)
- Marriage provided time for his contemplative nature
- Reacted to the polytheism of his people – during one of these meditations was given vision by angel Gabriel
- Initial work met with severe reaction – fled Mecca to Medina in 622 AD – the Hijra (flight) – first year of the Muslim calendar
- Re-entered Mecca in 631 – united Arabs under Islam
- Died 632 AD

### Special Characteristics:

- subscribes to absolute monotheism
- simplicity of faith and practice
- legalistic religion

### Islamic View of Cosmos

- Islam begins and ends with the concept that there is no God but Allah
- *Tawhid* is the dominant theme: the oneness and unity of God
- Allah is the creator God – there is a clear distinction between creator and creation
- Creator's domain is two part: "unseen" (*al ghaib*) and "seen" (*al shahada*) – only the "seen" is accessible to humans – the "unseen" can only be known through revelation
- The "unseen" world is populated by angels (who carry out Allah's will) and *jinn*s (spirits who follow Satan)
- All beings, good and evil, are subject to Allah
- Allah is all-powerful – the universe is totally under his control – in the final analysis everyone does his bidding – misfortune, suffering, death, success, and life are all the will of Allah
- Allah's sovereignty is absolute, inscrutable, and unquestioned
- Islam is primarily concerned the fact that Allah is creator – it is less interested in the process of creation

### Islamic View of Self

- humans are creatures of Allah – subject to his will
- humans are dependent on and sustained by Allah
- the proper relation is slave to Master: no rights, no intrinsic value, obedience not an option
- must perform the 5 principal duties or Pillars of Faith:
  - *shahada* (confession of faith)
  - *salat* (performance of ritual prayers five times a day)

*zakat* (the giving of alms)  
*sawm/siyam* (annual fast during Ramadan)  
*hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca)

- humans are also obligated to Shariah law
- human free will is tenuous at best

#### Islamic View of Knowing

- supremacy of the revelation – the Qur'an
- learning the Qur'an is primarily by rote not by deductive logic
- Qur'an came as inspiration to Muhammad – was first transmitted orally – eventually written down word for word dictation style – is regarded as possessing a quality of spiritual power
- the revelation remains distinct from human culture
- the revelation is not of God's nature but only his will

#### Islamic View of Community

- Islamic community is both religious and political
- The community of believers is the *ummah*
- A person has two sources of identification: family and *ummah*
- Family: marked distinction between male and female roles in all areas of social life – husband takes dominant role – wife often called his "garden" – husband takes public roles – wife remains in seclusion – husband is concerned with business and social decisions – wife looks after children, cooks, and manages household
- Ummah: regulated by a system of laws, *Shariah* laws

#### Islamic View of time

- Time is a linear series of events – not a commodity as in secular thinking
- Personal relationship more important than time
- Immutable nature of Qur'an means change is to be resisted – Qur'an cannot be updated or rewritten – time orientation is the golden age of Islam not the future

#### Islamic View of Value

- ethical considerations based solely on Allah's sovereign will
- humans are essentially good but weak and forgetful
- Islam presents a recognised pattern of outward behaviour that is universal
- honour is a commodity – is derived from family – is passed from one generation to another
- hospitality is closely related to honour

## NEW AGE WORLDVIEW

#### Historical Notes:

- Madame Helena Blavatsky – *Isis Unveiled* – theosophy
- Alice Bailey – coined phrase "New Age"
- Carl Jung – transpersonal psychology – common collective consciousness that enabled human connection to the earth and the world around them
- Gurdjieff – harmonious development of man – everyone capable of attaining an enlightened state
- Marilyn Ferguson – *Aquarian Conspiracy* – New Age "Bible"
- The "sixties" – interest in alternative spirituality – counter-culture movement – the "flower people" – the Beatles – Shirley MacLaine
- movies such as *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Dark Crystal*
- television shows such as *Kung Fu*, *Hercules*, *The X-Files*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Star Gate*, etc.



- created interest in “enlightenment,” “higher states of consciousness,” holistic medicine and healing, holistic food, meditation techniques – big business involvement
- a complex web of views rather than a singular view – blends spiritualistic phenomena, eastern mysticism, western thought, astrology and ancient tribal ideas

#### New Age View of Cosmos

- the cosmos is pure, universal energy or “life force”
- everything is interconnected and can be considered deity
- God is all and all is God – he is an impersonal force
- the cosmos is a living organic unity – matter is not the basic building block – fields are the basic building blocks – fields are folds in the space-time continuum – dreams and fantasies are of equal reality to objective experiences – no distinction between natural and supernatural – nature is the reflection of ultimate reality (“mother earth”)
- all religions are essentially one – all religions teach the same thing, the way to be united with the One – syncretistic religious approach – belief in universalism

#### New Age View of Self

- humanity is essentially divine – “I am God” – all humanity is one
- humans are basically spiritual not merely physical entities
- humanity is made up of the One Self not of individual selves
- a person’s main task is to discover that he or she is divine
- belief in reincarnation and karma
- pain and illness are derived from an imbalance of spiritual energy

#### New Age View of Knowing

- knowing is non-empirical – know more intuitively – need for enlightenment
- knowing is non-revelational – no outside revelation but inner insight – knowing in the inner you
- primacy of the mind – meditation – states of consciousness
- knowing is about discovering one’s true Self – cosmic consciousness

#### New Age View of Community

- emphasis on the individual – “self-actualisation” – “human potential” – “self-potential”
- emphasis on the equality of all – tried to balance men-women disparity – racial and political boundaries are becoming obsolete – call for one world government – emphasis on world peace

#### New Age View of Time

- time is cyclic – reincarnation at the individual level -- astrological epochs at the universal level of history

#### New Age View of Value

- no absolutes – all is relative – no dichotomy between good and evil – good and evil are social labels
- people are essentially good – only sin is not knowing/believing one’s selfness – since all is one sexual activity (unless violent) does not violate a person

### NEO-PAGANISM

Types: Wicca, Asatru, Druidry, Shamanism

#### View of the Universe

- interconnectedness – everything is connected to everything else
- an inseparable web of life – animals, plants, social issues, environment, thoughts, actions, events – mind, body, spirit
- divinity is both God and Goddess – divinity is immanent in nature and humanity

- nature knows best – earth is a living deity – it is conscious and self-regulating – love and kinship with nature – not aggression and domination
- natural laws are supreme

#### View of Self

- gender equality assumed – believe in self-empowerment – personal will must be aligned with greater will of the planet and the deities
- believe in personal energy fields
- believe in the use of rituals and tools to dramatise and focus positive thinking and visualisation – “magic”
- believe in the power to change the circumstances around them

#### View of Knowing

- knowing is largely based on magic – it is esoteric
- important to know one’s power and responsibility
- most important is to know one’s connectedness to everything and that every action has consequences
- each person is responsible for discovering his or her own true nature and developing it fully in harmony with the outer world

#### View of Community

- celebrate religious ceremonies in small groups – covens, groves, circles, garths, hearths, kindreds
- strong groups bonds
- groups are to enable intimacy and creativity and to keep ceremonies simple and personal
- emphasis on the individual – minimal or no hierarchical structures
- embraces religious plurality

#### View of Time

- everything is cyclic – cycles of nature are fundamental to the ceremonies and to life itself
- life, death, rebirth are stages of human life – death is the rest and recuperation before rebirth
- worship occurs in conjunction with the cycles of the moon or the sun or nature
- reincarnation is the most common eschatological belief

#### View of Value

- emphasis on both personal freedom and personal responsibility
- no concept of sin and forgiveness
- no arbitrary rules about moral issues
- basic ethic: “Do what you will, but harm none” – ethics is based strictly around the concept of harm – what is right or wrong is weighed against the idea of what harm it causes
- a second ethic: “Whatever you do returns to you threefold”
- have a positive attitude about sexuality – sexuality is sacred – needs and feelings of the body are to be enjoyed and celebrated – any form of consensual sex is alright as long as no harm is done to oneself or to another

### CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

#### View of the Cosmos

- the universe as divine creation (Gen 1:1) – created order is both material and immaterial

- God: the creator – a godhead of plurality (trinity) – the unity of God – he is immanent yet transcendent – he is involved with his creation yet different from it – he is sovereign over his creation
- God’s original creation was flawless and essentially good – present negativity exists because of sin
- the world is habitat for humans and it is real

#### View of Self

- humans created in God’s image (Gen 1:26-27)
- humans possess divine-like attributes such as personality, rationality, volitional powers, intelligence, creative powers, self-consciousness, self-determination
- humans are a combination of matter and divine energy (Gen 2:7)
- humans are moral beings – they are also spiritual beings
- humans were created perfect but are in a state of fallenness (sin) at present – this state of sin is being reversed via a divine plan called salvation

#### View of Knowing

- via rational means – thought and reason
- also through divine communication or revelation – revelation is encapsulated in the Bible – revelation combines human thought and experience with divine knowledge to provide fuller view of reality

#### View of Community

- all humans are of a single initial parentage
- humans are social creatures – marriage, family, community (Gen 2:18)
- the egalitarian nature of humanity, especially as God impacts it (Gal 3:26-29)
- because of sin God establishes a covenant community – in the OT it was Israel (Exod 19:4-6) – in the NT it is the Church (1 Pet 2:9-10)

#### View of Time

- progressive view of time
- time began with creation – it moves meaningfully and purposefully forward
- God has entered into time (incarnation)
- time and history are non-reversible
- everything is moving towards an eschatological fulfilment

#### View of Value

- biblical morality is based on the nature of God
- God is good and the principles of this goodness are revealed to humanity
- God’s absolute goodness is reflected in his Law/revelation
- humans are equipped with a moral sense
- sin-limited humans cannot reach God’s absolute standards on their own – they must await a judgement – they will however receive divine assistance in this quest if they are prepared to accept
- the ultimate good is love