



**CITY BIBLE FORUM**

*Ask the bigger questions*

# **EXPLORE PEOPLE'S WORLD VIEWS**

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*Ask the bigger questions*

# EXPLORE PEOPLE'S WORLD VIEWS

## WHAT'S INSIDE

A worldview is a lens through which we engage with the world and filter ideas. Everyone has a worldview - whether we are conscious of it or not - and our worldview defines how we see everything from the nature of reality to the purpose of life. Increasingly, Christians in the workplace need to engage with our colleagues' worldviews if we are to explain Jesus in a meaningful way to them. By thinking through different worldviews we can empathise with our colleagues better and identify opportunities and challenges towards a Christian worldview built on Christ.

## STUDIES

1. Engaging with peoples' worldviews
2. Engaging through peoples' existential cries
3. Major worldview: Islam
4. Major worldview: Buddhism
5. Major worldview: Secular Humanism
6. Beyond caricature: a melting pot of worldviews

## HOW TO USE THESE STUDIES



These studies are short modules to help readers think more deeply about different areas of your workplace witness. They are designed to be used in Evangelistic Prayer Teams (EPTs), but can also be used in any small group setting.

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# INTRODUCTION

Rico Tice, pastor and author of *Christianity Explored*, has observed that there has been a shift over the past 50 years that requires us to rethink our approach to evangelism.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, when Billy Graham preached the cross in London in the 1950s, of the 40,000 converted that night *90% were already regular church goers*. Historically, in the 1990s the culture had already shifted; common roadblocks now needed to be removed before even getting to the gospel - people would think it's untrue, they think it's irrelevant, they think Christians are weird and bigoted. But even in the 1990s these objections still predominantly operated from *within* a culturally Judeo-Christian worldview (at least in Australia).

Today, as we head towards 2020, this shared worldview can no longer be presumed in Australian society. Of course, as ever, the power for conversion is in the movement of the Holy Spirit as the Bible is open and the gospel is shared. Yet the socio-cultural shifts of the past 60 years means that *we can no longer presume that our hearers hold any biblical literacy or hold a Judeo-Christian worldview at all*.

This series provides a way to think about alternative “worldviews” - the lens through which people engage with the world and filter ideas. The intention of this booklet is to help you think through and examine the underlying presumptions, beliefs and metanarratives that people hold (often unconsciously).

Worldviews help us appreciate the various roads that people are heading down - to see how these worldviews meet some of the existential needs of life and, importantly, build bridges to the biblical worldview to show how it provides a compelling counter-narrative. For then - if indeed the gospel we believe *is* the *Truth* - we can share how this gospel message completes the picture and more fully fulfils the yearnings of their soul.

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This booklet introduces the reader to the concept of worldviews (study 1), and ties them to shared existential cries as a way in to explore them (study 2). The following studies (3-5) explore some major worldviews in greater depth - Islam, Buddhism and Secular Humanism. The goal is to provide a diverse taste of different types of worldviews. In reality, however, any given individual's worldview often does not fit neatly into a predefined bucket. The last study (6) provides some basic frameworks that attempt to survey the broad landscape of worldviews.

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**Acknowledgements:** Special thanks to the City Bible Forum Brisbane team. Much of this booklet has its origins in their yearly EPT study curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup> Rico Tice endorses The Word One to One. <https://youtu.be/VxyK3Ge0qhk>

# ENGAGING WITH PEOPLES' WORLDVIEWS

1

A worldview is “the framework or set of ideas and beliefs through which we view the world and our place in it. A worldview is 'never merely a vision of life. It is always a vision for life as well'. A worldview does not describe just the way things *are* but the way they *ought to be*.” - James Oltuis, from *A Spectator's Guide to World Views*

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions that may be true, partially true or entirely false) that 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.” - James Sire, *Universe Next Door*

**Q: What do you think?**

## Big Idea

**Everyone has a worldview, a lens through which we engage with the world and filter ideas. We need to engage with our colleagues' worldview if we are to genuinely love them and share the gospel of Jesus to them in a way that is meaningful.**

## Identifying a worldview

The following themes are a helpful starting point to break down and understand worldview:

- **Reality** – What is the nature of the Universe and the world around us?
- **Human Nature** – What is a human being?
- **Death** – What happens to people when they die?
- **Knowing** – How we know and what can we know?
- **Value** – How do we know what is right and wrong?
- **Purpose** – What is the meaning of human life?

**Q: Take a moment to ponder these. Do you think they capture most worldviews?**

**Q: Think about your colleagues: How do you think they would answer these questions?**

As we go through life we will encounter many different and varied worldviews. These worldviews might seem like philosophical ideas, but they have real life impact, influencing how people view the world, decide what is right and wrong, and how they treat others. In other words, they shape how people live their lives.

Realistically, very often, people hold a mixed view based on different philosophies born from experience, education and culture. Worldviews often operate at the ‘gut’ or ‘instinct’ level. People have rarely studied to learn these views, they are assumed socio-culturally, and developed through ‘living out life.’ Often people might not even realise there are other ways of viewing the world, and risk unconsciously assuming that everyone else fundamentally thinks the same way (“It is just what everyone thinks, isn’t it?”). Alternatively, people can be quick to presume - stereotyping and over simplifying worldviews that are dissimilar from their own (e.g. “People who don’t believe in God can’t have a sense of morality”).

## How to explore someone’s worldview

Spend a few moments thinking about the sort of questions you might ask to start drawing out someone’s worldview. Taking the worldview idea from the abstract to the everyday helps to identify underlying worldview concerns when they arise in daily conversation and helps you to be ready to talk it through. Don’t rush, and avoid being presumptive.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b><i>What conversations will show someone’s worldview? What real questions can we ask to determine worldview?</i></b>
Reality	What is the nature of the universe and the world around us?	E.g. “Do you think there is a spiritual element to life? What does that look like?”
Human Nature	What is a human being?	
Death	What happens to people when they die?	
Knowing	How do we know and what can we know?	
Value	How do we know what is right and wrong?	
Purpose	What is the meaning of human life?	

It is worth pondering the degree to which your colleague's worldview matches with the Bible. Most people aren't completely opposed to God's worldview; often there are overlaps.

**Q: Are there some points of agreement you can start from as you share Jesus?**

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## Prayer

Pray for a friend who has a very different worldview to yours. Pray that you would be able to start to understand them better.

## Further Reading

(Number of asterisks (\*) denotes difficulty.)

\* *A Spectators Guide to World Views*

\*\* James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*

\*\*\* Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*

### Episode 53: When the fashion model met the designer

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-53-when-fashion-model-met-designer](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-53-when-fashion-model-met-designer)

*At age 14, Tracy Trinita was given a modelling contract in New York. As Indonesia's first supermodel Tracy went on to model clothes for top designers. This was everything she'd hoped for in life. But surrounded by fame and glamour, she felt terribly empty. Real happiness eluded Tracy until she realised that people with a theistic worldview seemed happier. But which god(s)? Her family had Muslims, Hindus, Christians, which faith should she consider? So Tracy cried out – "Please reveal yourself to me!" Hear what happened in the inspiring story of Tracy Trinita.*





# ENGAGING THROUGH PEOPLES' EXISTENTIAL CRIES

# 2

“Some years ago I wrote a book called *The Reason for God*, which, as the title suggests, provides a case, a set of *reasons*, for belief in God and Christianity. While that book has been helpful to many, *it does not begin far back enough* for many people. Some will not even begin the journey of exploration, because, frankly, Christianity does not seem *relevant* enough to be worth their while.” - Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*

## Big Idea

**Existential cries are common across people and provide an entry point for people to re-evaluate their worldview. The Christian worldview provides answers that can make sense of questions people are already asking themselves.**

## Asking Questions

Sharing Jesus is all about the marvelous privilege of sharing Jesus with *people*. This is kind of obvious and yet vitally important to think through - people are not blank slates; they are full of ideas and opinions that profoundly shape them. We need to get to know and understand them better so that we can love them better and share Jesus with them.

Questions are great for this. We can start making sense of people's beliefs by considering the questions they may ask of themselves. These questions show what matters to them:

- “What will make my life happy?”
- “How can I and my family be secure in the future?”
- “Why is life so difficult?”

**Q: What are some other questions that people are asking themselves *already*?**

Worldviews tackle the underlying framework of *ideas* and *beliefs* in a person's life. However, as discussed, these underlying frameworks behind the way we live and act are often unconscious or presumed. If those frameworks are working, there is little incentive to challenge whether they are true or not (especially in a post-modern society where truth itself is elusive, subjective and personal).

Asking questions that people are already asking taps into what *already matters to them*. Empathising across shared human experience that we all cannot live life without:

<b>MEANING</b> (purpose)	<b>HAPPINESS</b> (satisfaction)	<b>FREEDOM</b> (liberty)	<b>IDENTITY</b> (self)	<b>JUSTICE</b> (morality)	<b>HOPE</b> (security)
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## Existential Cries: A Window into Worldview

Major life events can often be a catalyst for re-evaluating one’s worldview. These points in life are referred to as ‘*existential crisis*’ where external circumstances or major life choices force people to revisit their underlying ideas about reality, knowing, human nature, death, value, purpose, etc. Unfortunately, unless there is a deep relationship already in place, the separation between private and public spheres realms in today’s Western society often renders these existential crisis invisible - particularly in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the same ‘human needs’ that force the existential crisis still remain evident more subtly in everyday life - influencing where we spend our time, the choices we make, the causes we stand for, how we relax and even who our friends are. These ‘everyday’ human needs - what people seek and chase in life - are referred to as ‘*existential cries*’.

Distinct from *existential crisis* (where external circumstances *force* a revisit of internal worldviews) these *existential cries* provide an everyday opportunity to lovingly understand a person’s internal (often unexamined) beliefs; a window into the soul. Indeed, if the Christian worldview is indeed true, we can show how it can explain these human needs in ways that make more cultural sense, are more emotional fulfilling and offer greater consistency to their lived experiences. In other words it is showing not just that Christianity is *true* (worldview), but that this truth is relevant and *works* to address their existing real life needs (existential cry).

**Q: Consider how the existential cries related to the underlying (often unstated) worldview**

<b>Existential Cry</b>	<b>Questions people are already asking</b>	<b>Underlying worldview belief</b> (example: secular humanism)
Meaning	What am I living for?	“Although the universe is purposeless, our lives aren’t. We make our own purposes, and they’re real.”
Happiness	What will make me happy?	“Satisfaction is about attitude towards life.”
Identity	Who am I?	“You become yourself when you are true to your deepest desires and dreams”

Freedom		“You should be free to live as you see fit, as long as you don’t harm others”
Justice	Why is life so difficult?	“You don’t need to believe in God to have a basis for moral values and human rights”
Hope	How can I and my family be secure in the future?	

## Prayer

Pray that you your friends and colleagues might see that the Christian worldview provides answers that can make sense of questions they are already asking themselves. Pray you yourself might find these areas increasingly fulfilled in Christ.

## Further Reading

(Number of asterisks (\*) denotes difficulty.)

\* Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*

### Episode 82: Does Christianity bring freedom?

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-82-does-christianity-bring-freedom](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-82-does-christianity-bring-freedom)

The rapper Pitbull in his song *Freedom* says: "Feel free, do whatever you want whenever you want with whoever you want. Feel free, who cares what they say? Just live your life cause we don't live twice." This described the life of **Aimee Grinter**. But she found that this didn't work. Yet she found good news in a surprising place.



### Episode 83: Where can I find meaning?

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-83-where-can-i-find-meaning](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-83-where-can-i-find-meaning)

**Dale Stephenson** is senior pastor of a large church in Melbourne's East. Yet at one stage in his life he ridiculed Christians and thought them weak. Dale was also successful and achieved a lot at a young age, but ended up writing poetry about the pointlessness of life. What changed? Why did he change his mind?

### Episode 32: Fulfilment: I am what I do?

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-32-fulfilment-i-am-what-i-do](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-32-fulfilment-i-am-what-i-do)

What do you do for work? Are you what you do? In this episode, we discuss fulfilment and identity with **Andrew Laird** (Life@Work director and Dean of the Ridley Marketplace Institute). Why is our identity so important? And how does tying our identity with our work become dangerous, disappointing and ultimately unfulfilling. Andrew shares from his own personal work journey including a humorous incident when he was just 21 where he realised he tied too much of his self esteem to his work. Yet through the Scriptures Andrew shares a way of placing work in its proper place and provides a solution that is far more enduring.

## Brain dump

Take 5 minutes to write down what you know about *Islam*.

- What do Muslims believe? What are the practices?
- What is the popular perception of Islam?
- What do you think are the challenges of living as a Muslim in today's world?
- How do you think being a Muslim might help people who live in today's world?

## Islam: An Overview

**Origins:** Islam began in 609CE when a wealthy merchant heard the voice of God (“Allah” is the arabic word for “God”) when by himself in a cave in polytheistic Arabia. *Muhammad* soon rose to prominence, recognised as a prophet, but rejected as a heretic in his home town. He gathered his followers, and therefore strength and returned to his home town as a conquering hero. Islam rose in prominence against the polytheism of the day, and the monotheistic (though mistaken) Judaism and Christianity that were also present.

**Holy Texts:** The *Quran* (literally, “the recitation”), the central religious text of Islam, is Muhammad’s recording of Allah’s verbal revelation over the course of 23 years (from 609CE to his death 632 CE. It is the culmination and pinnacle God’s revelation - starting with Adam and ending with Muhammad. As Muhammad is the final messenger, the message revealed through him - explicitly, the Arabic words as transcribed in the Quran - are the literal word of God. Muhammad’s life is understood as the perfect example of this submission, and so his life, as recorded in the *Hadith* (prophetic traditions. Literally “report” or “account”) are also important and authoritative.<sup>2</sup>

**Central Tenants:** The word “Islam” originates from a class of words relating to concepts of wholeness, submission, safeness, and peace In a religious context it means “submission” or “surrender” to God. The word “Muslim” comes from the same root word, meaning “submitter” or “one who surrenders.” *Jihad* means to strive or struggle in this submission to God.<sup>3</sup> Islam is best understood as the practical outworking of its central belief – the *Shahada* – “There is no

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<sup>2</sup> Note, *Sharia (Law)* are rules and laws that derive from these authoritative holy texts (in conjunction with analogical reasoning and and juridical consensus). *Sharia* is contrasted with *fiqh*, where the former is considered divine law while the latter is scholarly interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> The object of *jihad* can be a visible enemy (e.g. the Devil) or aspects of one's own self (such as sinful desires). Some Muslim authorities distinguish between the "greater jihad", which pertains to spiritual self-perfection, and the "lesser jihad", defined as warfare.

god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger.” This forms the first and fundamental pillar of the *Five Pillars of Islam*:

<i>Shahada</i>	Declaration of faith	The basic creed of Islam that must be recited (in Arabic) under oath. It places primacy on God alone, and his final earthly messenger, Muhammad.
<i>Salat</i>	Prayer	Performed five times a day to focus the mind on God. A personal communication with God that expresses gratitude and worship. Recited in Arabic using verses from the Quran.
<i>Zakat</i>	Charity	Zakat is giving a fixed portion of wealth as alms for the poor (similar to Christian tithes). Sadaqah is optional additional charity out of religious duty and generosity
<i>Sawm</i>	Fasting	Fasting from food and drink, among other things, during daylight hours (sunrise to sunset) during the month of Ramadan. Fasting is to encourage nearness to God, an expression of gratitude to and dependence upon God, to atone for past sins, to develop self-control / restraint, and to think of the needy.
<i>Hajj</i>	Pilgrimage	Every able-bodied Muslim who can afford it must make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. The Hajj is a demonstration of the solidarity of the Muslim people, and their submission to God. It is as much an inward journey as an outward one.

**Major Forms:** All forms of Islam share the same foundations described above. The central branches of Islam - *Sunni* and *Shia* - arose historically from a disagreement over the choice of Muhammad's successor and subsequently acquired both broader political and theological dimensions. Today, ~85% of Muslims are *Sunni*, living across the Arab world (Turkey, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia), and ~15% are *Shi'ite* (Iran, Iraq and Bahrain). It should be noted that Sunni and Shia Islam cover a wide spectrum of doctrine / opinion and adherents also run the gamut from secular to fundamentalist.

For example, the Saudi royal family (that controls Mecca) practices a conservative strand of Sunni known as *Wahhabism*. In contrast, *Sufism* emphasizes the mystical, ascetic and “inward”; representing a “way” of approaching/understanding Islam but with adherents found in both *Sunni* and *Shia* branches.

## Through a Worldview Grid

The following present an *example* of how some central themes might be answered by an Islamic worldview. As always, it is important to know the individual personally - many Muslims would mix a Islamic worldview with a secular (or some other) worldview (as do many Christians).

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b><i>Islamic Worldview</i></b>
Reality	What is the nature of the universe and the world around us?	Reality is the creation of Allah who created by his will and by his word. There is one God who is infinite, simple (indivisible) and without form.
Human Nature	What is a human being?	A human is a creature of God whose purpose it is to give praise to God. But humans forget Allah and so disobey him.
Death	What happens to people when they die?	Those who are dead await the day of judgment when all will be appointed their place in paradise or hell depending upon their submission to God and their deeds.
Knowing	How do we know and what can we know?	While God has sent many prophets who received God's message and called people to return to the one God, many have distorted these prophet's simple message to embrace error. Muhammad is the final and only reliable messenger of God who calls humanity to a true knowledge of God.
Value	How do we know what is right and wrong?	Islam is the final revealing of the will of God in the words given by Muhammad in the Quran and in his life as example. Islam is the submission to the will of God that puts things right. Allah is full of compassion and mercy, and quick to forgive.
Purpose	What is the meaning of human life?	Our purpose is to submit to the will of Allah and to see the cause of Islam and Muslims furthered. This is achieved by following the five pillars of Islam.

As can be seen, there are many similarities between the Islamic worldview and the Christian worldview. The central difference is in Jesus. This presents both challenges and opportunities.

For example,

**Historical contrasts:**

- As the central human character of Islam is Muhammad, the central human character for Christianity is Jesus. Both are held to be the exemplar of life in submission to God. How do these lives contrast?<sup>4</sup>
- Jesus is a prophet in Islam and worthy of deep respect. The Quran speaks of his virgin birth, miracles, ascension and return.

**Theological challenges:**

- Christians see Jesus as God himself, whereas Islam records Jesus as a prophet (the prophet of love)
- Christianity believes in a trinitarian God. One God in three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This can represent a massive (intellectual) stumbling block for Muslims: how can 1 + 1 + 1 equal 1? Christians must be prepared to answer this.<sup>5</sup>

**Theological opportunity:**

- Jesus, *God who is a human being*, represents a *relational* God who walks alongside his followers and who understands our temptations and suffering.
- Jesus, *God who entered his own creation*, helps explain the goodness that can be found in the material world. It is not a binary distinction between physical and spiritual realms.
- Jesus, God who died for our sins, is the *exemplar of mercy and compassion*. These divine attributes manifest in action.
- Jesus, God who rose again, represents a *certainty* of hope. The victory over and salvation from sin and death is delivered by God himself, not dependent on the individual human actions.
- *Submission and surrender* to God is therefore a shared conviction between Islam and Christianity, however Christian submission and surrender is ultimately in what God has already accomplished; a trust (faith) in God’s work.

Note that some of these theological opportunities manifest as key differences in how we would see the fulfilment of our *existential cries*.

**Q: Think about the existential cries (ch.2). Where would you expect the greatest divergence / similarity between a Christian and a Muslim?**

<b>MEANING</b> (purpose)	<b>HAPPINESS</b> (satisfaction)	<b>FREEDOM</b> (liberty)	<b>IDENTITY</b> (self)	<b>JUSTICE</b> (morality)	<b>HOPE</b> (security)
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<sup>4</sup> We ought not to attack Islam or Muhammad but to reach out to Muslims with the message of Jesus. In part, the Quran can be read as a polemic against Christianity. Attacking Islam plays into expectations (and unnecessarily conflates political and sociological tensions where Christianity has strong association with the “Western world”)

<sup>5</sup> A helpful metaphor is to equate God as infinity. Infinity + infinity + infinity equals infinity.

## Application This Week

### Understand a Muslim colleague better

Aisha works on the same floor as you. She wears colourful hijabs, but isn't shy; joining in with the rest of the office with joking and having fun. What questions might you ask of Aisha to understand her beliefs?

- What does being a Muslim mean for you?
- How do you see that Islam and Christianity are similar?
- What do you think are the major differences between Christianity and Islam?
- Who do you think Jesus is?
- Who do you think Muhammad is?
- What would be the best way to know about Jesus or Muhammad?

**Do you have any muslim friends? What might you do to build better friendship with a muslim colleague?**

## Further Considerations

### ***Christianity and the “west”***

Many Muslims believe that all westerners are Christians and that (therefore) Christianity is corrupt as sin is so prevalent. They expect hostility to their Islamic faith. A context of relationship is very important to speaking about faith. That said, most Muslims will happily speak about matters of faith. Unlike secular Australia, religion is often an important part of their lives.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Five “Faces” of Islam***

Modern Islam is diverse. Here are five faces of Islam to help understand the complexity. They are simplistic, but help highlight what can seem like contrasting or even contradictory representations (for example in the media).

- The *missionary* face of Islam - seeks converts (dawah or invitation) either passively (trade or conquest) or actively; defines itself against Christianity and Judaism
- The *mystical* face of Islam - main face in Africa or Asia; syncretistic; believes in dreams, visions and is superstitious
- The *ideological* face of Islam - Islam has to be in power; no separation of secular and sacred; seek to implement sharia law; very similar to militant secularism; rather than praying 'your will be done' they try to implement God's will

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, so long as *everybody* feels like they are in a safe environment, including your Muslim friend in discussions can be a helpful strategy for more authentic and respectful dialogue about faith with secular / atheist friends.



- The *militant* face of Islam - implement political end through violence and warfare; taking the law of jihad into their own hands; most of their victims are Muslim; seek to purify Islam
- The *progressive* face of Islam - genuinely seek to reform Islam; their role models include Calvin, Luther, Zwingli

### **Sociological and Familial Integration**

Islam is usually tightly integrated with family and social life. These ties are both theological and sociological and often represent barriers and considerations that can be missed from a modern Western culture. These ties are further complicated in immigrant and generational contexts which will also often be at play in the modern Australian workplace.

### **Abrahamic Religions**

Islam is one of the three major Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Though seeing these as a linear progression is overly simplistic. It is worth understanding the common origins and divergences of these religions in their modern forms.

## Further Reading

(Number of asterisks (\*) denotes difficulty.)

\* John Dickson, *A Spectators Guide to World Religions*

\* Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*

### **Episode 62: Do you feel good enough?**

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-62-do-you-feel-good-enough](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-62-do-you-feel-good-enough)

*Nadia grew up in a Muslim home and Alan Lucas grew up in a Christian home in Australia. Yet they both felt a common struggle to be good enough for God. Yet something changed and they found freedom and love. We ask Nadia and Alan some Bigger Questions.*



### **Episode 66: How should we respond to Islamic Extremism?**

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-66-how-should-we-respond-islamic-extremism](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-66-how-should-we-respond-islamic-extremism)

*How do we understand Islam? Is terrorism and ISIS consistent with the Quran and true Islam? What is the difference between Jesus and Muhammad? Was Jesus an extremist? In this episode we think about Islam, violence and extremism and we meet Bernie Power. Bernie lectures in the comparative study of Islam and Christianity at Melbourne School of Theology. He lived for over 20 years in several countries in the Middle East. He's a popular speaker, regularly debates Muslims and is author of the book *Understanding Jesus and Muhammad*.*

## Brain dump

Take 5 minutes to write down what you know about *Buddhism*.

- What do Buddhists believe? What do Buddhists practice?
- What is the popular perception of Buddhists?
- What do you think are the challenges of living as a Buddhist in today's world?
- How do you think being a Buddhist might help people who live in today's world?

## Buddhism: An Overview

By definition, the core of Buddhism is not easy to pin down. The discomfort felt at such ambiguity is important to feel as it highlights the potential cultural and religious distance of the “Western” Christian evangelist. For, to the Buddhist, such multiplicity of doctrine and practice is in itself a testament to the grandeur of their religion.

Rather than focusing on what is “essential” to Buddhism, it is better therefore to provide an overview of the landscape of Buddhist practice.

Theravada and Mahayana form the two main branches of Buddhism practiced today. Though both share the same roots, Theravada Buddhism may be considered the more ‘orthodox’ branch while Mahayana Buddhism is marked by its diversity in both scripture and practice. When further coupled with the encouraged embrace of cultural syncretism and the interplay between ‘folk’ and ‘formal’ belief, the boundaries of Buddhism quickly become hard to define.

**Origins:** Buddhism originated in India around 500 BCE when a person called *The Buddha* discovered an ‘ageless wisdom’. While a traditional biography of this man (Siddhārtha Gautama) exists, detailing his spiritual quest from royal prince to Enlightened One, there is little historical evidence to verify the account. However, though the life account is difficult to validate, this has little bearing on the truthfulness and/or wisdom of what he discovered. That is, unlike Christianity, which would be invalidated if the historical authenticity of Jesus were disproven; the truthfulness of Buddhism is *not* reliant on a historically accurate Buddha.

**Truths:** More important are the foundational truths (*Dharma*) The Buddha is said to have taught – life means suffering; all life is full of suffering; suffering is the essence of all things in this earthly existence, and; the solution comes only from embracing what he came to call the middle way. This wisdom quickly became systemised into Buddhism’s *Four Noble Truths* –

central ‘doctrine’ regarding suffering (*dukkha*), its cause, hope of salvation and the “steps” to attain that salvation (*Noble Eightfold Path*). These fundamental teachings (translated in Table 1 below) are common across all schools of Buddhism including Theravada and Mahayana.

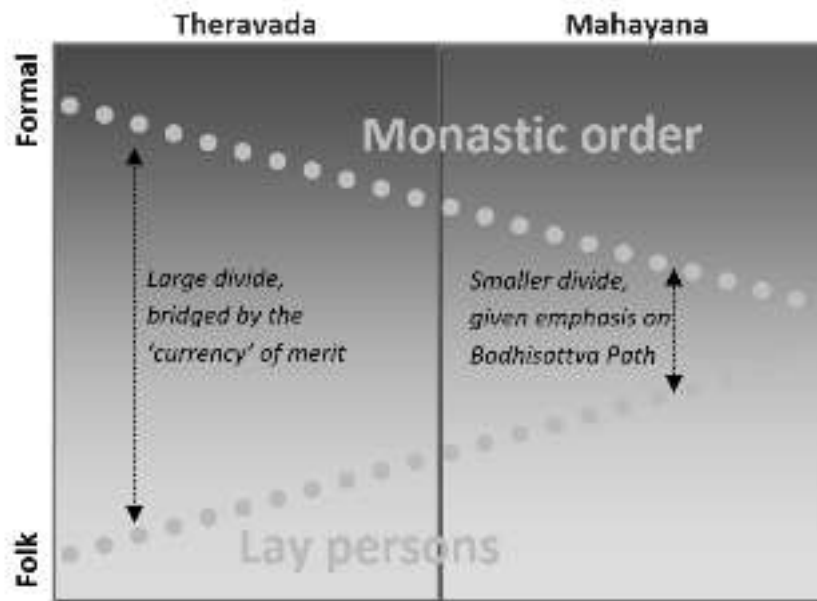
Common Terminology	Buddha’s first discourse
The truth of <i>dukkha</i> (suffering, impermanence)	<p>“What then is the Holy Truth of Ill?”</p> <p>Birth is ill, decay is ill, sickness is ill, death is ill. To be conjoined with what one dislikes means suffering. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants, also that means suffering. In short, all grasping at (any of) the five skandhas (involves) suffering.</p>
... its cause (craving/thirst for existence)	<p>“What then is the Holy Truth of the Origination of Ill?”</p> <p>It is that craving which leads to rebirth, accompanied by delight and greed, seeking its delight now here, now there. i.e. craving for sensuous experience, craving to perpetuate oneself, craving for extinction.</p>
... which can be eliminated (enlightenment)	<p>“What then is the Holy Truth of Stopping of Ill?”</p> <p>It is the complete stopping of that craving, the withdrawal from it, the renouncing of it, throwing it back, liberation from it, non-attachment to it.</p>
<p>... via the <i>Noble Eightfold Path</i> Practicing of Right... ...belief, ...attitude, ...speech, ...actions, ...livelihood ...effort, ...awareness, ...meditation</p>	<p>“What then is the Holy Truth of the steps which lead to the stopping of Ill?”</p> <p>It is this holy eight-fold Path, which consists of: Right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration</p>

Note that Buddhist teachings are *not* directly statements about the “nature of reality” (worldview), but advice on how to act, statements about modes of behaviour, and the experiences connected with them (existential experience). Where the Christian seeks to answer “what and why”, a Buddhist’s concern, even in the most elemental form, is “how”.

**History and Variety:** The Buddha’s enlightenment, consisting of both diagnosis and cure, formed the highpoint of history from which everything gradually degenerates. Buddhist history from this point can be roughly divided into 500 year segments.

The first period saw the originating movement between Mahayana and Theravada (where Mahayana is better seen not as a single school, but a broad umbrella across many schools) as meditation upon major philosophical questions drew differing answers across monastic schools - the status of the *Arhats* (“perfected persons”) and the nature of *Buddha* (both ‘ethereally’ and corporeally), the nature of ‘self’, and the nature of time (and *karma*). The different *philosophical* solutions to these conundrums laid the ideological groundwork for

differences in *practice* that impact even into modern day. So while the ideals of Theravada Buddhism remain upon enlightenment of *oneself*, Mahayana Buddhism, in contrast idealises the *Bodhisattva* path - working for the enlightenment of all *other* sentient beings as priority. In practice this difference in ideal affects the place and status of the laity. While all Buddhists tend distinguish between a monastic order (who tend towards formal religion) and the laity (that tend towards folk Buddhism), the divide is far wider in the Theravada tradition.



The second period marks a *geographical* expansion of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism spread south from India to Sri Lanka then throughout Southeast Asia while Mahayana Buddhism spread north to Tibet then to Central and East Asia. This spread has held through to modern times with Buddhism represented today by the 'Southern School' (Theravada) primarily found in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Kampuchea, and Laos, and the 'Northern School' (Mahayana) in Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, Mongolia and Japan. This period also began a period of syncretism so that Buddhism today (particularly Mahayana) is tightly entwined with cultural identity - national, societal and family - particularly at the folk religion level. These regional variations are important for effective missiological engagement with Buddhists today.

The development, diversification and syncretism of Buddhism continued through the third period (and beyond) e.g. the decline and revival in Indian heartland; the modern rise of popular Western Buddhism. So, today less 'orthodox' Mahayana schools would practice a more mystical/divine Buddhism with emphasis on worship of Buddha and *deva* (supernatural beings). Again, the historical, religious and cultural breadth of Buddhism is seen by adherent as part of its majesty - an ever growing Bodhi tree, or ripples and currents in a stream.

## Through a Worldview Grid

The following present an *example* of how some central themes might be answered by an *Theravada* Buddhist worldview. Hopefully, however, it becomes clear that ensuring a proper understanding of the individual is crucial when engaging with Buddhism. Indeed, Siddhārtha Gautama may well have found the concept of a worldview an illusion in and of itself!

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b><i>Buddhist (Theravada) Worldview</i></b>
Reality	What is the nature of the universe and the world around us?	Reality is the illusion of an endless chain of cause and effect. There are no god or gods, reality is suffering caused by craving which has the illusion of reality at its base.
Human Nature	What is a human being?	A human is the collection of sense perceptions, thoughts and emotions centred around a certain space. We have a mistaken notion of self that leads to our attachment to things and a craving for release from suffering without dealing with the source of suffering.
Death	What happens to people when they die?	Either we are reborn in the endless procession of cause and effect (karma) or we are released into Nirvana.
Knowing	How do we know and what can we know?	Elusive. Instead, embrace the idea that the self is an illusion and diligently detaching oneself from the illusion of reality.
Value	How do we know what is right and wrong?	Elusive. Instead, embrace the idea that the self is an illusion and diligently detaching oneself from the illusion of reality.
Purpose	What is the meaning of human life?	To eliminate suffering by ridding ourselves of craving by realising there is no 'self' by following the eightfold path.

As can be seen, an 'orthodox' (Theravada) reading of Buddhism stands in stark contrast to both Christian and modernist Western thought. Notice also, that can be attractive against the felt rigidity of dogmatic absolutism. Buddhism can provide (1) a religious/spiritual option that is compatible with and upholds postmodern pluralism, and (2) a methodology to escape the shallowness of modernity and materialism. (Note: engagement with Mahayana Buddhism, by contrast, tends to focus more on cross-cultural engagement. Indeed cultural Buddhism may not even hold much influence upon their worldview).

Consider these starting points:

**Philosophical challenges:**

- Where is meaning?
- How would you know what's true? How do you deal with incompatibilities?
- How does reincarnation work at a macro scale?

**Existential challenges:**

- Do you really *live* daily life as if it's an illusion?
- Do you live life like suffering is an illusion?
- Don't you find some things good? Are your family, good food, beautiful scenery actually good?
- Are you striving towards enlightenment? Is the hope to attain it in this life, or the next... or the next?

**Existential opportunities:**

- Do you think Jesus was 'enlightened'? Yet he said...
- Christianity also affirms a great need to overcome suffering
- Christianity talks a lot about the flesh and the spirit...
- Doing good to the needy is important... why do you think that is
- How is meditation the same and different from prayer?

**Q: Think about the existential cries (ch.2). How do Christian and Buddhist worldview presuppositions influence how these cries are attained?**

<b>MEANING</b> (purpose)	<b>HAPPINESS</b> (satisfaction)	<b>FREEDOM</b> (liberty)	<b>IDENTITY</b> (self)	<b>JUSTICE</b> (morality)	<b>HOPE</b> (security)
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## Application This Week

**Understand a Buddhist colleague better**

Khai is in the same workgroup as you. Khai grew up in Myanmar and has a Buddhist background. What questions might you ask of Khai to understand his beliefs?

- What does it mean for you to be a Buddhist?
- How is Buddhism practiced in your family/culture?
- What is the fundamental concept in Buddhism?
- How does Buddhism shape how you live day to day?
- Have you spent any time at the monastery?
- Who do you think Jesus was?

Jenny is a caucasian aussie who left the church in her university days. She is very interested in Buddhism which she sees as a peaceful alternative to western religion. What sort of questions might you ask Jenny about her beliefs.

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## Further Reading

(Number of asterisks (\*) denotes difficulty.)

\* John Dickson, *A Spectator's Guide to World Religion: An Introduction to the Big Five*

\*\* Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions - An Interdisciplinary Approach*

\*\*\* David Lim, Paul De Neui,

*Sharing Jesus in the Buddhist World*

*Sharing Jesus Effectively in the Buddhist World*

*Sharing Jesus Holistically with the Buddhist World*

\* Steve Cioccolanti,<sup>7</sup> *From Buddha to Jesus: An Insider's View of Buddhism & Christianity*

\*\* Paul Williams,<sup>8</sup> *The Unexpected Way: On Converting From Buddhism to Catholicism*

### Episode 71: Is mindfulness the answer to our problems?

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-71-mindfulness-answer-our-problems](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-71-mindfulness-answer-our-problems)

*Mindfulness is a new tool which is claimed to help modern workers keep up with the demands of our increasingly complex and uncertain world. But is self-awareness and being present in the moment really the answer to these problems? Can I find peace from within? Is there be another way of coping with the challenges of the modern world? We ask guest Mark Trench (Learning & Development Manager at St Vincents Hospital) some bigger questions.*



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<sup>7</sup> Cioccolanti grew up in Thailand in a multi-religious context and - after decades abroad in America, Australia and Europe - came to Christianity back in the Buddhist heartland of his birth country

<sup>8</sup> Williams was raised in the England in an Anglican context, becoming a prominent practitioner and lecturer of Buddhism before his conversion to Christianity.

# MAJOR WORLDVIEW: SECULAR HUMANISM

# 5

## Brain dump

Take 5 minutes to write down what you know about *Secular Humanism*.

- Have you come across this term?
- Is humanism necessarily secular?
- Why do many people live their lives effectively as humanists?

## Secular Humanism: An Overview

**Modern Definition:** In modern definition and popular usage *Humanism* is often synonymous with *Secular Humanism* (i.e. nontheistic). So, according to the American Humanist Association (AHA): “Humanism is a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity.”<sup>9</sup> Humanism is a worldview - a philosophical stance with ethical outworking - that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence (rationalism and empiricism) over acceptance of dogma and supernatural revelation.

### History and narratives:

Secular Humanists tend to trace their origins to the philosophical movements arising out of the 18th century *Age of Enlightenment* (and tightly associated with the preceding *Scientific Revolution* of the 17th century). Human-centred philosophy can also be found in strands of ancient philosophy/worldviews - e.g. Buddhism, Confucianism and Ancient Greek philosophy<sup>10</sup>

The history from the 18th century to modern day (Secular) Humanism is often painted as a narrative that combines both sociopolitical and philosophical strands - *politically*, Humanism projects humanity as the hero of liberty (e.g. democracy); *philosophically*, human autonomy and freedom of knowledge is key to fulfilment and freedom (from ignorance and “blind belief”). Thus, this (Western) narrative is often painted as an emancipation from the Church - its institution, dogma and superstition. Today, most modern definitions of Humanism not only emphasise human-centrism, but also explicitly deny theism or supernaturalism (see AHA definition above).

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<sup>9</sup> American Humanist Association

<https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/definition-of-humanism/>

<sup>10</sup> These connections are helpful to remember in modern contexts. In practice/experience humanist worldviews can often search within and combine with these other worldviews.



Historically, however, many early humanists saw no conflict between reason and their Christian faith. A historical counter-narrative notes that the *Renaissance* (14th to 17th century) and the Christian *Reformation* share a common motivation, methodology and timeline. Both were a pushback against the political authority of the Catholic Church, both saw a resurgence of learning emphasising classical source (*ad fontes*), and both occurred concurrently around the 15th to 17th centuries.<sup>11</sup> The Reformation and the Renaissance dealt with the same basic problems, supported the same science based on reason and empirical research, but had a different set of presuppositions (theistic versus naturalistic).

The history of Humanism is therefore complex and entangled with socio-political “Christendom” and Western/European history. So, for example, the Humanist Manifesto I (1933) arose from religious humanism, while the latest Humanist Manifesto III (2003), trademarked by the AHA (whose motto is “Good without a God”), is explicitly non-theistic. It is important therefore not to succumb to simplification (and be aware of biased readings towards supporting of one’s own worldview).

### **Modern Emphasis:**

As a worldview, Secular Humanism goes beyond Atheism (the absence of belief in gods and the supernatural) or Agnosticism (the view that such questions are unanswerable). It is a way of life that impacts values, meanings and identity. The AHA lists the following key guiding principles:<sup>12</sup>

- a naturalistic philosophy;
- a cosmic outlook (rooted in science);
- a consequentialist ethical system.

**Q: How does a person’s view of history affect their current worldview? How does this affect missional engagement?**

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<sup>11</sup> Preceded the *Scientific Revolution* (17th century) and the *Enlightenment* (18th century)

<sup>12</sup> <https://secularhumanism.org/index.php/3260>

## Through a Worldview Grid

The following how a worldview might be expressed through a strict Secular Humanist lens. Note that even in this simplistic expression, the themes of the table retain “religious” expression which may well jar with secular humanists who see such themes as simply not applicable (e.g. what happens “after death”).

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b><i>Secular Humanist Worldview</i></b>
Reality	What is the nature of the universe and the world around us?	The natural world is all there is.
Human Nature	What is a human being?	Human beings (and all life) are products of evolution. Consciousness and sense of self (“mind” and “soul”) are manifestations of neurological activity.
Death	What happens to people when they die?	An afterlife or spiritual existence after death is not recognized.
Knowing	How do we know and what can we know?	Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis (scientific method).
Value	How do we know what is right and wrong?	Relative. But tend to emphasise consequential - i.e. judged by results. Ethical principles develop and improve by examining results in the lives of people - e.g. through sociology, psychology, etc.
Purpose	What is the meaning of human life?	Each person has the right and responsibility to give meaning and purpose to their own lives (so long as it does not impinge upon another person's right to do so).

## Missional Opportunities

Humanism is entwined with Western historical sociological shifts and exerts influence at the cultural and individual level. It is important to ask questions to understand the nuance of the worldview.

For example, not secular humanist is “secular” in a strict philosophical sense. The strict secular humanist worldview described earlier sees naturalistic principles *natural extension* from the foundations of individualism and liberty - one implies the other. *However*, in more popular expression, this is not always the case. Secular Humanists may share an emphasis on

value and agency of humanity, while being only “nominally” secular - i.e. atheistic or agnostic by default and not strict empiricists.<sup>13</sup>

So, Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens*, distinguishes between three “sects” of in the broader Humanist worldview (what he calls Humanist “religion”).<sup>14</sup> The following table outlines the similarities and differences:<sup>15</sup>

Liberal Humanism	Socialist Humanism	Evolutionary Humanism
<i>Homo sapiens</i> has a unique and sacred nature that is fundamentally different from the nature of all other beings and phenomena. The supreme good is the good of humanity.		
Often a “default” secularity		“Strict” Secularism
‘Humanity’ is individualistic and resides within each individual <i>Homo sapiens</i>	‘Humanity’ is collective and resides within the specific <i>Homo sapiens</i> as a whole	‘Humanity’ is a mutable species. Humans might degenerate into subhumans or evolve into superhumans
The supreme commandment is to protect the inner core and freedom of each individual <i>Homo sapiens</i>	The supreme commandment is to protect equality within the species <i>Homo sapiens</i> .	The supreme commandment is to protect humankind from degenerating into subhumans, and to encourage its evolution into superhumans
“According to liberals, the sacred nature of humanity resides within each and every individual <i>Homo sapiens</i> . The inner core of individual humans gives meaning to the world, and is the source for all ethical and political authority. If we encounter an ethical or political dilemma, we should look inside and listen to our inner voice – the voice of humanity. The chief commandments of liberal humanism are meant to protect the liberty of this inner voice against intrusion or harm. These commandments are collectively known as ‘human rights’.”	“According to socialists, inequality is the worst blasphemy against the sanctity of humanity, because it privileges peripheral qualities of humans over their universal essence. For example, when the rich are privileged over the poor, it means that we value money more than the universal essence of all humans, which is the same for rich and poor alike.”	“At the dawn of the third millennium, the future of evolutionary humanism is unclear. For sixty years after the end of the war against Hitler it was taboo to link humanism with evolution and to advocate using biological methods to upgrade’ <i>Homo sapiens</i> . But today such projects are back in vogue. No one speaks about exterminating lower races or inferior people, but many contemplate using our increasing knowledge of human biology to create superhumans.”

<sup>13</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, notes three definitions of “secular” - (1) the classical definition, when religion touched every part of life and the public space, “secular” referred to non-sacred work - farming, industrial efforts, domestic chores, etc. it was a vocational description and said nothing of belief or disbelief in God; (2) a description of non-religious neutrality - i.e. secularism - where systems or philosophies are emptied of belief in god/gods. Strict Secular Humanism takes this sense of the word. (3) a definition of an age - i.e. secularity - where belief is just one option amongst many, and often not the default option. This describes the general condition under which people operate in the modern Western age.

<sup>14</sup> Harari is provocative here. Secular Humanists tend to avoid using the word “religion” to describe themselves (for both the theistic and dogmatic connotations).

<sup>15</sup> Yuval Noah Harari: *The Worship of Man*. <https://epri.ufm.edu/pensamientocritico/the-worship-of-man/>

### Why this matters for mission

It is important to distinguish between these nuances (in practice and in history and philosophy). Presuming all Secular Humanists adhere to “strict” secularism (in the evolutionary humanism sense) our missional engagement suffers as we paint every encounter as a battle between “religion” and “secularism.”

For example, some things to understand include:

- How thought through is the naturalistic worldview? Is secularism a philosophical position or a default stance in our secular age<sup>16</sup>?
- Is there a pushback (or anger) against religiosity or institutional authority in their own personal story?
- Is there a presumption that religion is unthinking adherence to dogma?
- Is the attraction to humanism more intellectual (e.g. confidence in science), or socio-cultural (e.g. human rights and agency)?
- How are political leanings tied into their worldview?

### Engagement dimensions:

Seeing the broader canvas of secular humanism also helps frames the engagement approach. While intellectual debate and apologetics can be helpful, often the emotional and existential questions provide better opportunities.

Engagement dimension	Notes
Relational (emotional) <sup>17</sup>	<p>Secular Humanism historically arose “in opposition” to the religious supernatural and dogma. This is paralleled in the lives of many individuals. In the emerging post-Christian culture and have had a negative experience with the church - this could range from boredom, to having questions ignored/dismissed, to extremes of abuse. These experiences may be personal, or societal.</p> <p>A relationship with a “real life” Christian is needed. Someone whose faith is integrated with all of their life - not just distant supernatural belief, nor unthinking dogma. Where Christ’s love overflows into love of others.</p> <p>Love builds trust to ask existential questions of sufficiency...</p>
Sufficiency (existential)	<p>What is their basis for hope?            What is their basis for morality?            What is their basis for their sense of meaning?</p> <p>Give space to properly explore and unpack these ideas. Are</p>

<sup>16</sup> Indeed given Humanist influences in the western society (and increasingly globally), it is important to parse your own Christian worldview. How much is your own Christian walk filtered through humanism in our secular age?

<sup>17</sup> See: Sharing Jesus at Work: Coffee Dinner Gospel booklet.

	<p>they simply inherited from society in general? Are these existential cries explainable in a purely naturalistic worldview, do they <i>reconcile</i> with lived experience? Are they living life in a way that is <i>internally consistent</i> with their worldview? And if they are, does it really feel <i>sufficient</i> to meet the inner yearnings?</p> <p>Defer to each to their own... which invites towards...</p>
Coherence (intellectual)	<p>On the one hand, work to demonstrate the Christian worldview is coherent <i>and</i> sufficient - e.g. Apologetics. This is a very broad area, some recommendations are found in the Further Reading below.</p> <p>On the other hand, what are some of the challenges to secular humanism. Is it internally consistent or self-defeating? Unlike some of the other major religions, the secular humanist worldview has yet to withstand the test of time.</p> <p>For example, human agency (individual or social) may be upheld to be of prime importance - liberal political and judicial systems are founded on this belief. Yet discoveries in the life sciences continue to undermine this belief. Human beings and human behaviour is determined by the biomechanical laws of hormones, genes and synapses no different to all other life. Why does <i>human</i> agency matter more? And does human <i>agency</i> even really exist?</p> <p>Similarly, for the evolutionary humanist, the betterment of humans and humanity also presumes an existing “supremacy” of humans against other species. Yet human kind has been a disaster for life as a whole. Why advance a species that shares such similarities to a supervirus?</p>

## Application This Week

### Identify three different Secular Humanists in your social network.

- How does missional engagement differ between these people?
- Do you know their personal story?
- How does your faith visibly differ from that of your humanist friend?

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## Further Reading

(Number of asterisks (\*) denotes difficulty.)

- \* Timothy Keller, *A Reason for God*
- \* Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God*
- \* Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*  
(includes helpful history and framing of secularism from a non-Christian source)
- \* Robert Martin, *Bigger Questions* podcast ([biggerquestions.org](http://biggerquestions.org))

### Episode 72: Why am I not an atheist

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-72-why-am-i-not-atheist](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-72-why-am-i-not-atheist)

*In Why I am not a Christian influential philosopher Bertrand Russell asked the big questions of the existence of God and immortality. Russell's conclusion: atheism - there was no god. David Robertson (Scottish author, debater, and pastor) was tempted by atheism and considered it an attractive option. But he is not persuaded by Russell. Instead he is a Christian and in this interview you'll hear why.*



### Episode 76: How can I believe that there is more than this?

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-76-how-can-i-believe-there-more](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-76-how-can-i-believe-there-more)

*How can I believe in something I can't see? What is the place of doubt? Is there no excuse for believing in God or any supernatural concept? James Garth is an aerospace engineer and fellow of ISCAST who regularly thinks about the bigger questions of life. He shares his reflections on the world and his encounter with doubt and uncertainty.*

### Episode 38: Encountering a Skeptic

[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-38-encountering-skeptic](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-38-encountering-skeptic)

*Even with video evidence, some people still won't believe. When is skepticism unreasonable? How did a spiritual atheist come to believe in God? What is it about Jesus that is so satisfying? In this episode, we discuss skepticism with Rob Buckingham (pastor Bayside Church). Hear Rob's remarkable encounter with death, his encounter with genuine Christianity (including expletives) and his life transforming encounter with Jesus.*

# BEYOND CARICATURE: A MELTING POT OF WORLDVIEWS

# 6

## Big Idea

**Worldviews can be highly nuanced between people. On the one hand, do not *presume* a “textbook” worldview upon people, on the other hand, there *are* helpful frameworks that can be of assistance.**

## An exercise

What do *you* see as the Christian worldview?

What do you see as the worldview of the average Australian who *self-identifies as Christian*?

What do you think the *average Australian* would see as the Christian worldview?

**Notice *the difference* between the presumed worldview and your own actual worldview.  
Notice how it *feels* to have your actual worldview presumed incorrectly.**

## The Melting Pot

There are many labels for worldviews - we have considered only three of those in the earlier studies. Hopefully, however, even within these presentations it has become increasingly clear that each “label” represents a great *diversity* of thought and practice. Moreover, these differences are further complicated by cultural and historical trajectories.

This booklet has focused on Islam, Buddhism and Humanism - these were selected to represent the breadth of divergent foundational views that people have about the world and our place in it. Yet there are many other worldviews still - Hindu, Sikhism, Judaism, Indigenous Australian traditions, Chinese folk religions, Confucianism, Shinto, New Age movement, Neopaganism, Unitarianism.... And indeed even some political ideologies have so shaped the belief systems of particular followers (individually and collectively) that many would argue they too would meet the definition of a constituting a “worldview” (as least functionally) - e.g. Socialism, Marxism, Free Market Capitalism. In practice many individuals might represent a melting pot of various worldviews and ideologies.

Missionally, in a sense, an awareness of the many intricacies between worldviews is unnecessary. As described in the introduction to this booklet, the important point is to simply recognise that many people no longer share a worldview that is culturally and historically rooted in the Christian faith. Nevertheless, it is helpful to have some simple maps to navigate

the broad landscape of worldviews; a way to quickly and genuinely empathise, connect and bridge with people where they are at.

## Framework: Belief or Non-Belief in a deity

One way to frame worldviews is across a spectrum of belief (or non-belief) in God or gods:

Category	Simple Description
Deism	A god or gods created / started the universe but is no longer actively involved in it
Pantheism	A god or gods is the inner spiritual essence of everything in the universe. Note that Panentheism is similar, but also includes a belief that god(s) exist beyond the universe too.
Theism	A god or gods created the universe and continues to actively participate in the world's activities and in human history
Atheism	There is no god of gods.

**Q: How would you classify Agnosticism into this framework?**

**Q: Where would you classify Theravada Buddhism?**

**Q: In a 2005 study surveying 3,000 teenagers, sociologist Christian Smith described the worldview of the majority of American youth as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)” - what do you think that means?**

**Q: Sometimes “Atheism” is described as a “religion”. In what ways is it helpful or unhelpful to highlight the similarities or differences to an atheist friend?**



## Framework: Cultural Paradigms

Another way to think about worldviews might be to consider how cultural paradigms might play a part. Published in 1950, *Customs and Cultures* notes three foundational binary frames found in all cultures, but to varying degrees.<sup>18</sup> Note that it can be simplistic and risky to apply these directly to different ethnic groups.

Cultural Paradigm <sup>19</sup>	Simple (simplistic) Description
Innocence - Guilt	In a Innocence/Guilt focused culture, schools focus on deductive reasoning, cause and effect, good questions, and process. Issues are often seen as black and white. Written contracts are paramount. Communication is direct, and can be blunt.
Honour - Shame	Societies with a predominantly Honour-Shame worldview teach children to make honorable choices according to the situations they find themselves in. Communication, interpersonal interaction, and business dealings are very relationship-driven, with every interaction having an effect on the honor-shame status of the participants.
Power - Fear	Societies with a predominantly Power-Fear worldview raise children to assess where they fit into the pecking order of every situation they are in, and behave accordingly. As they grow up, they learn how to align themselves with the right people to gain more power.

**Q: Pick a paradigm you least identify with. Think through a time you have experienced this dynamic - how would the gospel speak to this situation?**

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## Prayer

Pray for humility in our gospel sharing. Pray that we seek to better understand our friends and colleagues and to appreciate the fullness of the gospel in our own lives so we might better share it with others where they are. Thank God that the Bible speaks to the hearts and minds of all people from all walks of life.

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<sup>18</sup> Of missional note, these paradigms were originally framed around different ways to frame sin: “We have to reckon with three different types of reaction to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt” - Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*, p150.

<sup>19</sup> Table taken directly from: <http://knowledgeworkx.com/articles/three-colors-of-worldview>