Elenctic Theology: Bibliology

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*Worldview & The Doctrine of Revelation*

## Worldview & revelation

### The Definition and Relevance of Worldview Thinking for Establishing the Concept of Revelation

#### A worldview is “an overall perspective on life that sums up what we know about the world”[[1]](#footnote-1) Thus, simply speaking, a worldview is a set of beliefs about the most important issues of life.

#### The tacit implication is that the beliefs forming the worldview must logically cohere in some way to form a system or conceptual scheme. If this is accomplished, the worldview is a “conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and *by which we interpret and judge reality*.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

#### And although the answers differ in the diverse worldviews, the philosophical questions about ultimate reality are essentially the same, and include questions about what exists (metaphysics and ontology), how human being should live and treat others (ethics), and how human beings know things (epistemology and logic).[[3]](#footnote-3) The answers to these questions form the presuppositions from which one evaluates the world—and more specifically, the importance and nature of human persons.

### The Major Elements of a Worldview

#### **Introduction**

##### An unabridged worldview should include beliefs in at least five major spheres of thought: God, reality, knowledge, morality, and humanness itself.[[4]](#footnote-4)

##### Moreover, there are important sub-issues that flow from the five main issues. Issues such as the meaning of human history and what happens to a person at death contribute important factors to the discussion of the definition and value of personhood. In sum, a worldview is a set of presuppositions that one holds, consciously or unconsciously, concerning the essential composition of the world.

#### **The Elements of a Worldview**

##### **God in a Worldview**

###### The *Encyclopedia of Gods* lists over 2,500 names for the various gods worshipped by human beings.[[5]](#footnote-5) Nonetheless, these 2,500 appellations for deity represent a mere handful of substantive concepts about God—such as monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, panentheism, dualism, and atheism—with their respective subcategories.[[6]](#footnote-6)

###### The question of God is the most important in any worldview and the various worldview differ greatly on the issue. Here, the inquiry concerns such issues as whether God exists, the number of Gods, what are God’s characteristics or attributes, whether God is personal or impersonal, and whether God can know, love, forgive, or act in any sense in our realm of existence.[[7]](#footnote-7)

###### Classic atheism does not escape this worldview concern since the term “God” is employed to mean “one’s ultimate concern.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam are simultaneously different religions and different worldviews because of their divergent conceptions of deity. However, conservative Judaism, Islam, and Christianity—the classic western monotheistic religions—have much in common because of their similar ideas of God.[[9]](#footnote-9)

##### **Ultimate Reality in a Worldview**

###### When the issue of ultimate reality is raised, it is ultimately a discussion of metaphysics.[[10]](#footnote-10) Here, the most frequent question is whether there are only material entities (materialism), whether there are only immaterial mental entities (idealism), or whether both exist simultaneously (metaphysical dualism).[[11]](#footnote-11) Other issues raised here are: the nature and individuation of substances, space and time, and identity.[[12]](#footnote-12) Also, related to the previous category, the issues of the relationship of God to the universe, whether God created the universe and, as a result, our dependency on God, and such questions as the possibility of miracles.[[13]](#footnote-13)

###### This is significant for answering the anthropological question of the metaphysics of humanness. For example, if naturalism is the true view of the world, then there is no God and no such thing as an immaterial soul, in which personality is grounded, that survives the death of the body. But if theism is correct, with its corresponding view of substance dualism, then souls are possible. And should be given great weight in a discussion of what a complete person is.

##### **Knowledge in a Worldview**

###### The third main element of a worldview is one’s view of knowledge—or more specifically, the justification of knowledge. The questions are simple to pose, but the answers are lengthy and seemingly enigmatic in nature. Is knowledge about the world possible? If it is, how can we know it and to what degree of certainty?[[14]](#footnote-14) Here, the epistemological scope of responses range from the topics of axiomatic certainty[[15]](#footnote-15) and absolute skepticism[[16]](#footnote-16) to foundationalism,[[17]](#footnote-17) methodism and particularism.[[18]](#footnote-18)

###### These are certainly essential prerequisites for approaching the question of when and how we will know the nature of human persons in the context of a legal issue. For example, if skepticism is the true approach, then judges and legislators should suspend judgment on the issue because they cannot know the truth about it.[[19]](#footnote-19)

##### **Morality in a Worldview**

###### Here, in worldview analysis, the focus is not on casuistry,[[20]](#footnote-20) but on systemic concerns such as whether morality is action based or virtue based, deontological or[[21]](#footnote-21) teleological,[[22]](#footnote-22) or whether morality is absolute[[23]](#footnote-23) or relative. These ethical factors are necessary for answering a question such as whether it is ever morally right to kill a human person.

##### **Humanness in a Worldview**

###### Here lies the core of the essay. What are human beings and why are they important in the worldview? Are humans merely physical beings or, as previously stated, do we have an immaterial soul as well? Are human persons essentially sleeping gods—as in Idealism, persons in the image of God—as in Theism, merely physical machines or highly evolved apes—Naturalism? Are our wills free or determined? This would be essential to answer for the sake of moral culpability. What is the nature of human death? Do we survive death or is death all that there is? If we do survive death, is there reward and punishment based on what we do in this life? This would certainly be a determining factor regarding whether to “pull the plug” or wait as long as one can and hope for a miracle.

### Worldview Analysis & Revelation

#### ***Pantheism***

##### All that exists is divine. There is only one substance that exists.

##### This leads to an ontological and axiological egalitarianism, that is, all things are of the same essence and are, thus, equally valuable.

##### In this view, humans and trees share the same essence.

##### What is Revelation in this view?

#### ***Atheistic Physicalism (i.e., Atheistic Materialism or Atheistic Naturalism)***

##### All that exists is a-teleological matter-in-motion, that is, non-purposeful, non-designed, accidentally assembled physical particles.

##### There is no design or purpose inherent in any existing thing.

##### Arguably, the concept of a hierarchy of intrinsic value in this worldview is impossible.

##### In this view, humans and trees are different accidental arrangements of physical particles.

##### What is Revelation in this view?

#### ***Monotheism***

##### God is an eternal, immutable perfect Being. And since He is the most valuable Being, He is the measure for all lesser beings and things.

##### God creates, out of nothing, a world distinct from Himself. In the created, contingent world there are persons and things that are similar God.

##### In theism, the things that are the most like God would be the most valuable. The things that are least like God are the least valuable. (cf. Matt. 10:31)

##### Thus, monotheism provides a clear basis for a hierarchy of the value of beings.

##### What is Revelation in this view?

## The Foundations of Theology

### Principia Theologiae

There are two principles or foundations of theology, Scripture & God, the Revelation & the Revelator Himself.

#### *Principium Cognoscendi*

##### The Cognitive Foundation of theology is Scripture.

##### This is the noetic or epistemological principle.

###### *Externum:* The External principle is the written Word of God

###### *Internum*: The Internal principal of faith which knows the external Word and answers its call, i.e., faith resting on the testimony of the Spirit.

#### *Principium Essendi*

##### The ontological or essential Foundation is the Triune God.

##### God is the objective ground of theology without Whom there could be neither divine revelation nor theology.

## General revelation & Natural Theology

### Biblical Texts

#### **Psalm 19:1** What is revealed by God according to this verse?

#### **Acts 14:17** What is revealed by God according to this verse?

#### **Romans 1:18-20** What is revealed by God according to these verses?

#### **Romans 2:14-15** What is revealed by God in these verses?

### Definitions

#### *Revelation* is any species of knowledge of which God is the ultimate source or cause.[[24]](#footnote-24)

#### *General Revelation* is the gift of knowledge of God to all people in and through the created order.[[25]](#footnote-25)

#### *Natural Theology* is the knowledge of God is available to reason through the light of nature. People can know God as the highest good through natural theology. Additionally, through natural theology, man can know that God requires perfect obedience to His natural law.[[26]](#footnote-26)

### Usefulness of Natural Theology

#### *Natural Theology of the Unregenerate*

#### *Natural Theology of the Regenerate*

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## The Necessity of Special revelation

### Definitions

#### *Special Revelation* is the special gift of saving knowledge in Christ in and through the prophets and apostles and in and through the teaching or prophetic office of Christ.[[27]](#footnote-27)

#### ***Contingency & Necessity[[28]](#footnote-28)***

##### A contingency is a thing or event that is neither impossible nor necessary.

##### Necessity can be distinguished in a number of ways, including:

###### **Absolute Necessity** **(*necessitas absoluta*)**

A thing is absolutely or simply necessary if its opposite or denial is self contradictory.

Thus a thing is necessary if it is impossible to be otherwise.

###### **Necessity of the Consequent (*necessitas consequentis)***

This is also a type of absolute necessity.

A necessity of the consequent arises out of the connection of necessary causes with the effects that must follow.

###### **Necessity of the Consequences** **(*necessitas consequentiae*)**

This is a necessity brought about or conditioned by a previous contingent act or event so that the necessity arises out of the contingent circumstance.

This is also called Conditional Necessity or Hypothetical Necessity.

###### **Necessity of Nature (*necessitas naturae*)**

This is a limit of thought and action grounded in the being itself.

It is not an externally imposed type of necessity.

This means no being can act against its own nature.

Liberty of Nature (*libertas naturae*) is the freedom that is proper to a being given its particular nature.

### The Necessity of Verbal Revelation

#### Verbal Revelation is necessary because General Revelation is inadequate for salvation and sanctification.

#### Verbal Revelation, the Word of God, is necessary for salvation as:

##### It is the *Seed* by which we are born again. (I Pet. 1:23)

##### It is the *Light* by which we are directed. (Psalm 119:105)

##### It is the *Food* by which we are spiritually fed. (Heb. 5:13,14)

##### It is the *Source of Knowledge of Redemption*. (Rom. 10:17; 16:25-26)[[29]](#footnote-29)

### The Necessity of Written Special Revelation

#### The word “Scripture” is used in two senses.

##### *Materially* it refers to the doctrine delivered to us.

##### *Formally* it refers to the writing and mode of delivery.

#### Arguments for the Necessity of Scripture

##### *The Preservation of the Word of God*

###### It was necessary to commit the Word of God to writing to preserved it in its pure form and guard it against the frailty of and weakness of human memory.

##### *The Vindication of the Word of God*

###### The Word of God was committed to writing so it is more easily defended against fraud and corruption.

##### *The Propagation of the Word of God*

###### The Word of God was committed to writing so that it could be more easily transmitted and disseminated.[[30]](#footnote-30)

## Theology & revelation

### Etymological Definition

#### The term “theology” conjoins the Greek words *theos*, “God” and *logos*, “speech or rational expression.”

#### Thus the etymological meaning of “theology” is “an organized discourse concerning God.” (Muller, *DLGTT*, 298)

### The Four General Categories of Theology[[31]](#footnote-31)

#### Divine revelation itself given in Scripture, the sum of all knowledge necessary for salvation.

#### Knowledge held by faith that is acquired by reading the Scriptures or by drawing conclusions from the text of Scripture.

#### The science or wisdom constructed from revelation by means of reason for the purpose of explaining and defending the faith.

#### Divine Self-knowledge, which is the archetype of all true knowledge of God.

### Special Categories of Theology

#### **Archetypal Theology**

##### The infinite knowledge of God which is known only to God Himself

##### It is the Archetype or ultimate pattern or model for all theology

#### **Ectypal Theology**

##### This is all true finite theology. It is a true reflection of the divine archetype.

##### Natural theology can be in this category if it is a true reflection of the divine archetype.

##### This kind of theology is distinguished according to the knower.

#### **Higher Theology**

##### This is the theology of the learned.

##### It is for theologians and pastors for the purpose of detailed exposition and defense of the faith.

#### **Catechetical Theology**

##### This is basic and essential theology taught to and required of all Christians.

##### They are the necessary truths of the faith.

#### **Theology of Pilgrims**

##### The incomplete theology of believers in the world

##### Contrasted with the theology of the blessed

#### **Theology of the Blessed**

##### Form of Ectypal Theology

##### The perfected form of human theology, equivalent to the final vision of God (*visio Dei*)

#### **Theology of the Cross**

##### Luther’s term for the nature of revelation and theology as a whole.

##### God chose to reveal Himself, ultimately, in the weakness and scandal of the cross.

#### **Theology of Glory**

##### Luther’s term for the rationalistic theology of the scholastics that discussed God in terms of His glorious attributes, rather than in terms of His self-revelation in suffering and the cross.

#### **Theology of Angels**

##### Because of the nature of angels, they have a higher form of the knowledge of God.

#### **False Theology**

##### This is false teaching concerning God as opposed to all forms of Christian theology, both natural and revealed.

##### This kind does not reflect the divine archetype.

#### **Theology of the Unregenerate**

##### This is correct doctrinal knowledge held by a person untouched by saving grace.

##### This kind may be grounded in a Historical Faith or Legal faith

#### **Natural Theology**

##### Knowledge of God that is available to reason through the light of nature.

##### Can know of God as the Highest Good

##### Can know the end of man in God by way of perfect obedience

#### **Natural Theology of the Regenerate**

##### Since natural theology cannot produce saving knowledge, the connection between natural and revealed theology is severed.

##### Thus, natural theology is useful only when employed in the context of a prior saving knowledge

#### **Positive Theology**

##### Theology positively stated according to the logic of its doctrines

##### Contrasted with negative or polemical theology stated according to the order of debate with adversaries

#### **Polemical & Elenctic Theology**

##### A polemic is an attack on another theological system.

##### Elenctic theology is a confutation or logical refutation leading toward a positive statement.

#### **Supernatural or Revealed Theology**

##### Theology resting on divine propositional revelation

##### It presents the truths necessary for salvation and inaccessible to unaided human reason

1. *See* Rudolph A. Makkreel, “Wilhelm Dilthey,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second Edition, Robert Audi, General Editor, pp. 235-236 (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Note that Dilthey is credited with coining the term “worldview.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *See* Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict,* p. 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Id.* at 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *See* *generally* James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* pp. 21-119 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988). These ideas correspond respectively to the disciplines of theology, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and the various forms of anthropology—theological, biological, psychological, and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *See* Michael Jordan, *Encyclopedia of Gods*, New York: FOF, Inc., 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *See* *generally*, H.P. Owen, *Concepts of Deity*, New York: Herder & Herder, 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *See* Nash, *supra*, at 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Id.* at 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *See* *generally*, Samuel Jackson, *The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), pp. 496-500; and *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the World Religions*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 110-113. Here, I am using the term “metaphysics” in its philosophical sense of the study of the nature, structure, and constitution of reality, not in its religious sense as it is used to designate groups such as Christian Science and other modern, Neo-Gnostic groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *See* Audi, *supra*, at pp. 563-566. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *See* *generally* D. W. Hamlyn, *Metaphysics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *See* Nash, *supra*, at 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *See generally*, Louis Pojam, *The Theory of Knowledge*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1993); and Robert Audi, *Belief, Justification, and Knowledge*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *See* Peter Angeles, *The Harper-Collins Dictionary of Philosophy*, (NY: Harper-Collins, 1992), pp. 307-308. This is also known as *tautological certainty*, meaning the proposition is true by definition. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *See Id*. at 280. Here, the skepticism of the Greek philosopher Sextus Empiricus, who maintained that we should be skeptical about the possibility of any kind of knowledge—that is, he knows we can know nothing. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *See* *generally* Pojman, *supra*, at 206-213. This is a type of epistemology that holds there are instances of knowledge that are non-inferential. The law of non-contradiction—A cannot be non-A at the same time and in the same sense—is an example of this kind of knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *See* Matthias Steup, “The Problem of the Criterion,” in the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, *supra*, at p. 747. Particularism and Methodism are opposing camps in the epistemological debate regarding the need to formulate criteria for knowledge and determine the extent of it. David Hume was one of the most famous advocates of Methodism, which stated that one needs a criterion to recognize an instance of knowledge. His empirical criteria were what could be tested with the five senses. Particularists, on the other hand, argue that for one to know the criteria for knowledge, one must already be able to recognize instances of knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Here I am using the word “truth” in the sense of the Correspondence Theory of Truth, which holds that a proposition *p* is true if what it asserts actually corresponds to the real world. *See* Audi, *supra*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Here, I mean the application of moral principles to specific instances of conduct for the purpose of determining its rightness or wrongness, not the alternative denotative meaning of “sophistry.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *See* Angeles, *supra*, at pp. 69, 93. The terms “deontic” or “deontological” generally refers to concepts of necessity or duty. In ethics, it is the theory that the rightness or wrongness of a moral action is determined primarily by formal rules of conduct and that one is obliged to act in accordance with these rules. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *See Id.* at p. 96. This is the opposing theory to deontology, holding that the consequences or results of the moral act determine the act’s moral status. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *See* Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), Chs. 1-3.Often associated with deontological ethics—but not exclusively so—absolutism is usually manifests in one of three kinds of systems. Unqualified absolutism is the view that the moral absolute is always to be obeyed and there are not mitigating or balancing factors to consider. This view presumes there will never be a conflict of moral absolutes. Conflicting absolutism allows that there may a conflict between two opposing moral absolutes. Graded or hierarchical absolutism, as a system, holds that there are many moral absolutes, but the various mores are weighted to greater or lesser degree. Here, for example, one would be exempted from duty not to lie only to the degree necessary to obey a weightier matter of the law, such as protecting human life. These systems claim to present an objective approach to ethics. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology, 3rd Ed.* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003), 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “*Revelatio Generalis*” in Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms* (Grand rapids: Baker, 1985), 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Ibid.,* “*theologia naturalis*,” 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “*revelatio specialis*” in Muller, *DLGTT*, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *See* Muller, “*necessitas*,” in DLGTT; Audi, “Necessity,” CDP [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, translated by George Giger, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishers, 1992), 55-57. [Turretin’s *Institutes* were first published in Latin in 1679.] [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Ibid*., 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 298-299. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)