

Worldview Paper Prompt

Instructions:

Write a 4-to-5-page paper based on the prompt below. (Longer papers are acceptable, but try not to go over 6 pages). Your paper must be double spaced, with 1" margins, and written in a standard font (Times New Roman and Calibri, for example). You do not need to conduct research for this paper, though you can. If you want suggestions for resources, ask me. If you do use/consult an outside source, you should cite that source using a standard citation method (Chicago, MLA, etc.). Late papers will receive a 1-letter-grade deduction for each day they are late. You will turn this paper in via Canvas. It is worth 15% of your final grade (15 points).

I will not tolerate any academic dishonesty on this paper. The penalty for academic dishonesty will at least be an F on the paper and may be an F in the class. Thus, you should consult CSN's policy on academic integrity (<http://www.csn.edu/academicintegrity/>). Please talk with me if you are having difficulty understanding the policy.

The Prompt

Answer the following bolded questions according to your current belief system.* For each belief you report, *say why you hold to that belief*. That is, give your *reasons* or *evidence* for holding to that belief. Your reasons do not need to be detailed arguments, but merely a report of the basis for your belief. For example, you might say, "I believe in God for these reasons: the cosmological argument is compelling, I had a profound, personal experience of God, . . ." If you have no reasons or evidence for a given belief, just say so. But if you have no evidence, explain how it is that you came to that belief (for example, you might say that you were raised in that belief or that everyone you know holds to that belief or something like that). If you do not have an answer to a particular question, say so. But if you have no answer, explain why you do not (for example, you might say that you have never considered the evidence that is relevant to answering the question). If you think that humans lack the ability to answer a given question, say so. If so, explain why you think humans cannot answer that question. Note: You do not need to answer every non-bolded question. I included these to give you ideas for how to answer the bolded questions.

1. What is the fundamental reality? That is, what, if anything, is that by which all things exist or that upon which all things depend or that through which all things come to be? (Basically: does God exist or is the universe all there is?) Is it God or something similar? Does God or something similar even exist? Is the fundamental reality something physical like the universe? Is it not the universe but some other physical reality? Is there no fundamental and everything "just exists"? Does anything other than the fundamental reality exist (that is, is there only one thing – the fundamental reality – or do other things exist in addition to the fundamental reality)? Other relevant questions: Where did the universe or multiverse come from? Has physical reality always been here or did it pop into existence at a finite time in the past? Is there an explanation for how the universe got here or not?

2. What are human beings? Are we mere meat machines, that is, mere physical objects? Do we have a soul or some similar immaterial aspect? Are we mere advanced animals on the evolutionary tree? Do we even exist? If we exist, are we distinct from the fundamental reality in some way?

3. Do we have free will? Why or why not? If we are just physical objects in a mechanistic universe, does that threaten free will? If we have a soul, does that help explain why we have free will? If you think that God exists and knows the future, does that threaten our free will?

4. What happens when we die? Is there life after death? If so, what is that like? Do we cease to exist when we die? Do we come back to life as something else?

5. What is the good life for human beings? That is, how ought we live? What is a successful life? Is goodness important in your worldview? Does goodness even exist? If so, what is the good or goodness? How do we recognize it when we see it? How do we know what is right and wrong?

6. What is the meaning of life? Do we have a sort of cosmic or objective purpose? Are we simply free to choose our own purpose(s) for our life? Is life utterly meaningless?

7. Why is there suffering in the world? Does suffering even exist? Does evil exist? What is evil? How do we recognize it when we see it? Why is there evil?

8. How do we know anything? Did God design us to know truth? Did we evolve the capacity to know things via a blind, mechanistic process such as natural selection? If the latter, how can we be confident that we evolved the capacity to reliably discover truths?

9. Do your answers to the above questions fit together well? That is, is there some tension between one answer and another? For example, if you said that God does not exist but that we have a cosmic or objective purpose for our existence, these answers seem to be in tension with each other. How do you explain the tension between your answers, if such a tension exists? Is there one particular belief you hold upon which all your other beliefs hinge?

10. How does your worldview affect the way you live? Does it affect the way you live? Do you live consistently with your beliefs?

Resources

Writing for philosophy is difficult. I strongly recommend that you take advantage of the website of philosophy professor James Pryor listed below, for both reading and writing philosophy. Pryor's site is very helpful in both regards. There are links on the page for How to Read Philosophy and for How to Write Philosophy. The address is: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/index.html>

As always, I am here to help and want you to succeed. I am available to help you in office hours or via email. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

*The above eight worldview questions are inspired by James Sires' worldview questions in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th Edition. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009.