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— [V] [I] [E] [W] [?]

AN INTERACTIVE APPROACH TO LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS

James N. Anderson

“I can think of readers to whom I would *not* give this book: they like their reading material to be straightforward exposition. The notion of an interactive book, where readers are forced to choose distinguishable paths and interact with discrete lines of thought, finding their own worldviews challenged—well, that does not sound very relaxing, and it may be a bit intimidating. But James Anderson has written something that is as creative as it is unusual: he has written a book in clear prose and at a popular level that nevertheless challenges readers to think, and especially to identify and evaluate their own worldviews. If the style is akin to ‘Choose Your Own Adventure’ books, the content is at least as entertaining and far more important.”

D. A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“This book will become ‘the book’ that will be used by campus ministers, students, and a host of others who are constantly being drawn into conversations concerning worldviews. The layout of this book is ingenious, helpful, and engaging. The information found in these short pages will provide accurate long-term care for those on a ‘worldview journey.’”

Rod Mays, National Coordinator, Reformed University Fellowship

“*What’s Your Worldview?* is a brilliant concept, because each generation stumbles into its own ways to learn about God. Francis Schaeffer spoke about truth to many now old. James Anderson speaks to the young who grew up with ‘Choose Your Own Adventure’ books, where the outcome depends on the choices readers make. A great gift for thoughtful teens who need to choose wisely.”

Marvin Olasky, Editor in Chief, World News Group

“James Anderson’s *What’s Your Worldview?* is a delightfully innovative apologetic. I know of nothing like it. It gets the reader to interact by asking crucial worldview questions. Depending on the reader’s answers, he is led to further questions or to a conclusion. Animating the journey is a cogent Christian apologetic, showing that only the Christian worldview yields cogent answers to the questions. Anderson’s approach is both winsome and biblical, as well as being the most creative apologetic book in many years. I pray that it gets a wide readership.”

John M. Frame, J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Thanks to James Anderson for filling a massive gap in apologetics and worldview thinking. This book is unique in that it is wholly and broadly accessible to readers of any background and educational level, and yet written by an accomplished Christian philosopher. Written with wit, clarity, cogency and

simplicity, this book ingeniously guides the reader from a chosen worldview to its implications. Urging the reader to connect the conceptual dots of his own thinking, this book should lead its reader either to turmoil or to truth. This will now be the first book on my list for people who ask ultimate questions about Christianity and its relationship to other ways of thinking. Get this book, read it, then get more to give away to friends and family.”

K. Scott Oliphant, Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

“*What’s Your Worldview?* offers a uniquely interactive approach to finding answers to life’s biggest and most important questions. It makes identifying your worldview, and perhaps replacing it with a better one, an enjoyable adventure.”

Tim Challies, blogger, Challies.com; author, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*

“There has been a plethora of books written *about* worldview in the past 25 years, but Dr. Anderson has done something much better—he has written a book that helps you discern your worldview, and then ask yourself some penetrating questions about it. Is all as it should be in your worldview? Read on, and find out.”

Rev. William Fullilove, Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Assistant Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta

“For some time now, the church has been in desperate need of an accessible and practical tool that would help people evaluate the cogency and coherence of their worldviews. Finally, with this new book, that need is being met. James Anderson is one of the brightest new voices in the world of philosophical theology. You will not want to miss this book.”

Michael J. Kruger, President and Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte; author, *Canon Revisited*

“Not the last word on worldviews, but quite possibly the first! *What’s Your Worldview?* is creative, clear, and fun, but with some ‘nice’ and necessary sharp edges. I hope and pray it will have the desired effect of making all those who read it stop and think (Isa. 44:19).”

Daniel Strange, Academic Vice Principal and Tutor in Culture, Religion, and Public Theology, Oak Hill Theological College, London

“Dr. James Anderson has provided the church with a unique new tool to help the next generation be prepared to give the reason for the hope that is within them.”

Hugh Whelchel, Executive Director, The Institute for Faith, Work & Economics; author, *How Then Should We Work?*

What's Your Worldview? An Interactive Approach to Life's Big Questions

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Introduction

Have you ever read one of the “Choose Your Own Adventure” (CYOA) books? The basic idea behind them is ingenious. Rather than telling a story from a traditional third-person perspective, with a linear storyline and a pre-determined ending, a CYOA book has an “interactive storyline” in which the reader acts as the main character and determines the plot by making decisions at key points. CYOA books are sometimes called “game books” because reading one is like playing a game. Each book has many possible endings—some happy, some not so happy—but the outcome always depends crucially on *your* choices.

For example, on one page of a CYOA book you might find a beligerent goblin standing in your way. Do you try to flatter him into letting you pass or do you use the mysterious magic potion you picked up on page 12? If you choose the flattery strategy, you turn to page 22; if the potion, you turn instead to page 31. On one of these two pages, the adventure continues unabated. On the other page, things pan out a whole lot better for the hook-nosed green dude than for you. (Now you’re dying to know which page was which. Exciting stuff, isn’t it?)

This book is similar to a “Choose Your Own Adventure” book in some ways and very different in other ways. The similarity is that it’s not meant to be read sequentially from cover to cover. (Please don’t try to do that—you’ll find it very confusing!) Instead, you’re invited to make key decisions or choices at a number of points in order to determine the outcome. It’s not really a “game book,” but there’s still a sense in which you’re a “player.” How things turn out in the end really depends on *you*.

I’ll be the first to admit that this book may not be quite as exciting and entertaining as a CYOA book, but it deals with something far

more important—one might even say *infinitely* more important. I hope you'll agree once you get into it. In this book, rather than choosing an adventure, you'll end up choosing a *worldview*.

What in the World Is a Worldview?

You may have come across the word *worldview* before, but don't be put off if you haven't. I'll try to define the term clearly and explain why it's such an important concept.

Just as the word itself suggests, a worldview is an overall view of the world. It's not a *physical* view of the world, like the sight of planet Earth you might get from an orbiting space station. Rather, it's a *philosophical* view of the world—and not just of our planet, but of all of reality. A worldview is an all-encompassing perspective on everything that exists and matters to us.

Your worldview represents your most fundamental beliefs and assumptions about the universe you inhabit. It reflects how you would answer all the “big questions” of human existence, the fundamental questions we ask about life, the universe, and everything.

Is there a God? If so, what is God like and how do I relate to God? If there isn't a God, does it matter? What is truth and can anyone really know the truth anyway? Where did the universe come from and where is it going—if anywhere? What's the meaning of life? Does my life have a purpose—and, if so, what is it? What am I supposed to do with my life? What does it mean to live a *good* life? Does it really matter in the end whether or not I live a good life? Is there life after death? Are humans basically just smart apes with superior hygiene and fashion sense—or is there more to us than that?

You get the idea. Your worldview directly influences how you answer those kinds of big questions—or how you *would* answer them if you were asked and gave them some thought.

Worldviews are like belly buttons. Everyone has one, but we don't talk about them very often. Or perhaps it would be better to say that worldviews are like cerebellums: everyone has one and we can't live without them, but not everyone *knows* that he has one.

A worldview is as indispensable for thinking as an atmosphere

is for breathing. You can't think in an intellectual vacuum any more than you can breathe without a physical atmosphere. Most of the time, you take the atmosphere around you for granted: you look *through* it rather than *at* it, even though you know it's always there. Much the same goes for your worldview: normally you look through it rather than directly at it. It's essential, but it usually sits in the background of your thought.

Your worldview shapes and informs your experiences of the world around you. Like a pair of spectacles with colored lenses, it affects what you see and how you see it. Depending on the "color" of the lenses, you see some things more easily, while other things are de-emphasized or distorted. In some cases, you don't see things at all.

Here are a few examples to illustrate how your worldview affects the way you see things. Suppose that one day a close friend tells you that she recently met with a spiritualist who put her in touch with a loved one who died ten years ago. Later that day, you read an article about a statue of the Virgin Mary that witnesses claim to have seen weeping blood. You also hear a news story on the radio about possible signs of complex organic life discovered on Mars. Your worldview—your background assumptions about God, the origin and nature of the universe, human beginnings, life after death, and so forth—strongly influences how you interpret these reports and react to them.

Worldviews also largely determine people's opinions on matters of ethics and politics. What you think about abortion, euthanasia, same-sex relationships, public education, economic policy, foreign aid, the use of military force, environmentalism, animal rights, genetic enhancement, and almost any other major issue of the day depends on your underlying worldview more than anything else.

As you can see, then, worldviews play a central and defining role in our lives. They shape what we believe and what we're willing to believe, how we interpret our experiences, how we behave in response to those experiences, and how we relate to others.

I hope by now you have a good sense of what a worldview is and why it's so significant. As I said earlier, this book is about choosing a

worldview rather than choosing an adventure (although I like to think there's something quite adventurous about reflecting deeply on all the big questions). Strictly speaking, however, in this book you're not so much *choosing* a worldview as *identifying* your worldview, because you already have a worldview, even if you don't realize it. So one of the purposes of this book is to help you identify and clarify your worldview and its implications.

Nevertheless, what you read here may also prompt you to reconsider your worldview—perhaps even to change it. It isn't easy for someone to change his or her worldview—it can be like relocating to another continent, intellectually speaking—but it can and does happen. For example, the novelist C. S. Lewis famously moved from an Atheist worldview to a Theist worldview, partly through discussions with his colleague and friend J. R. R. Tolkien. But even if you stick with your current worldview, this book will give you the opportunity to explore a number of alternative worldviews, all of which are (or have been) held by real people at some time and place.

Here are the main goals of this book:

- To help you identify and clarify your worldview.
- To encourage you to consider the big questions and to think through some of the implications of various answers.
- To help you appreciate that there are important differences between worldviews—and that not all worldviews are created equal! (I'll say more about this last point in a moment.)

How Does the Book Work?

You'll be presented with a series of questions that are designed to be answered yes or no. (Don't worry if you're not really sure how to answer a particular question. Just go with the answer that best reflects your current beliefs, the answer that seems to you most likely to be true. You can always go back and choose a different answer later if you want to.) The question will be stated in a box at the top of the page, and the rest of the page will give an explanation of the question to make sure you understand exactly what you're being asked.

Depending on your answer to the question, you'll be directed to another page, where you'll find one of the following:

- A further question, to narrow down the remaining options.
- A brief commentary on your answer and its implications.
- A final worldview page.

The last of these will have “Worldview” in the page heading. If you land on one of these pages, you've hit the end of the trail you have followed. There you'll find a summary of the type of worldview you have based on all the answers you gave, along with some commentary designed to provoke further thought. You'll also have the option to go back up the trail, so to speak, by returning to one of the earlier question pages.

As I mentioned at the beginning, one of the features of a “Choose Your Own Adventure” book is that not all of the possible storylines have happy endings. Often a poor choice leads to a short and sticky end. Your choices have consequences—sometimes fatal consequences! In a manner of speaking, the same goes for the different outcomes in this book. Some worldviews have more serious problems than others. Some walk with a pronounced limp. Some have failing organs. Some are mortally wounded. A few are simply “dead on arrival”! In each case, I'll point out a few of these problems, but I'll leave it to you to make the final diagnosis and prognosis.

Let's go back to the encounter with the goblin for a moment. In fact, going back is exactly what you would do, I suspect, if you made a poor choice the first time you met the goblin. I know I would! If I got squished, I'd flip back to the earlier page and take a different path. I'm pretty sure that's what most readers of CYOA books do when their stories come to abrupt and undesirable ends. Is that cheating? Not at all. It's just getting your money's worth from the book!

I want to encourage you to approach this book in much the same way. If you don't like the outcome of your answers to the questions, please feel free to flip back to the previous question, or to an even earlier one, and follow a *different* path. I want you to get your money's

Introduction

worth! In fact, I hope you'll be intrigued enough to explore *every* path in the book, along with the worldviews at the ends of all those paths, because that will help you to gain an even better understanding of your own worldview.

There's one other issue I should mention before we get started. Since everyone has a worldview, I have my own worldview, too, of course. I'm not going to tell you which worldview that is, but I haven't tried to disguise it. You should be able to figure it out by exploring the different "storylines" in the book and reflecting on my comments on each worldview.

Does that mean the whole book is biased? Well, sure! But if you think about it, that's unavoidable. Since everyone has a worldview, everyone has a bias. All of us are naturally biased toward our own worldviews, and all of us tend to interpret and evaluate the world in accordance with our worldviews. So do I have a bias? Yes, of course—but so do you!

The real issue isn't whether we have biases—we all do—but whether we're aware of them and able to think critically about them. In a certain sense, each of us can step into someone else's worldview, just as we can step into someone else's house, to examine it "from the inside" and to compare it with our own. I've tried to represent other worldviews fairly in this book: to summarize them accurately and to be realistic about their strengths and weaknesses. Even if you think I've failed in some cases, I hope you will nonetheless learn something useful along the way and benefit from thinking about these important matters.

No doubt this book will raise a number of questions in your mind. I've tried to anticipate the most common questions and provide answers in the appendix (page 97).

Well, that's more than enough introduction!

Are you ready to begin the "adventure"? If so, just turn the page.

Part I

QUESTIONS

The Freedom Question

DO YOU HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE *FREE* CHOICES?

Chips or salad? Diet Coke or Dr Pepper? Dine-in or take-out?

It's a basic fact of human life that we make choices. We make them all the time—sometimes so effortlessly and so subtly that we don't even notice it. For example, you chose to start reading this book. By continuing to read it, you're implicitly choosing not to do something else right now. Before this day is over, you'll make hundreds more choices.

But are those choices *free*? That's one of the most enduring questions in the history of human thought. Some philosophers have said that we do make free choices, while others have denied it. Still others have said that our choices are free in some senses but not free in others.

There's a sense in which even a computer makes choices. For instance, it chooses the best time to run maintenance services (usually when the computer is idle). Nevertheless, we don't usually think of a computer as making *free* choices, the kind of choices that are made by a thoughtful, self-conscious, morally responsible agent. It's just a machine following its programming.

But what about *you*? Are your choices just the stimulus-response outputs of a neurological computer (also known as your brain)? Or are they the free choices of a morally responsible agent?

Do you have the power to make *free* choices?

If you answered yes to the Freedom Question, go to page 20.

If you answered no to the Freedom Question, go to page 20.

A Joke with a Serious Point

Forgive me! I couldn't resist beginning with a little philosophical humor. As you probably realized, you were directed to this page no matter how you answered the Freedom Question.

But there's a serious point here, too. One of our most basic human intuitions is that we, unlike computers and robots, have the ability to make free choices in life: to deliberate about our options and to select between different courses of action. What's more, we're often held morally responsible for our choices (and rightly so). You may be reading this book simply for entertainment, but how you decide to answer the questions, and how you respond to what you subsequently read, is, in a very important sense, *up to you*. And how you choose to respond may well have important implications for your life and the lives of others.

So press on! Consider carefully how you would answer the questions and take responsibility for the choices you make and their implications for your worldview.

Of course, some readers of this book may still want to insist that in reality none of us make any free choices and none of us are morally responsible for our choices, despite our strong intuitions to the contrary. If that's what you really think, it's going to be difficult to change your mind at this point.

But on one level, that doesn't matter for the purposes of this book. After all, you've already made the choices to pick up the book and to read this far, even if those weren't *free* choices. In the same way, you can choose to *continue* to read: to answer the questions and to reflect further on your worldview.

For the time being, I'm happy to settle for that.

Now continue to page 21.

The Truth Question

IS THERE ANY OBJECTIVE TRUTH?

“It’s all relative, isn’t it?”

Some people believe—or at least claim to believe—that all truth is relative. They say that what’s true for one person need not be true for another person, or that what’s true for people in one culture (e.g., a Jewish community in New York) needn’t be true for people in another culture (e.g., a Buddhist community in Tibet). Such folk often insist that truth isn’t something “out there” to be discovered; rather, truth is something we choose or create for ourselves. Truth is always “inside” us rather than “outside” us.

So, for example, while the statement “There is a God” may be true for some people, it doesn’t have to be true for everyone. What’s true is always *relative* to a person’s particular viewpoint, context, or culture. So we shouldn’t speak about *the* truth, as though truth is the same for everyone. Rather, we should speak about *my* truth, *your* truth, *their* truth, and so on.

In contrast, other people insist that many truths—including the most important truths—are *objectively* true. There are some things that are just true period, regardless of what anyone happens to think, hope, or feel about those matters. (As they sometimes say, “The truth hurts!”) These objective truths are true for everyone, everywhere, because they’re based on objective facts about reality that are independent of human ideas, desires, and feelings. According to this view, it makes no sense to say that the statement “There is a God” could be true for me but not true for you. Either it’s true or it isn’t: end of story.

But which position do you take? Is there *any* objective truth?

If you answered yes to the Truth Question, go to page 22.

If you answered no to the Truth Question, go to page 91.

The Knowledge Question

IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW THE TRUTH?

It's little use having millions of dollars in the bank if you can't *access* that money. In the same way, objective truth is little use to us if we can't *access* it—if we can't know, with some degree of confidence, just what that truth is. If the truth is unknowable, if it's always beyond our grasp, there might as well be no truth at all. We'd be wasting our time by trying to pursue it.

Most people would agree that we have intellectual faculties, such as reason and perception, that allow us to investigate matters of interest to us and to discover the truth about those matters. Even if we don't have absolute certainty about most things, we can still know a great deal about ourselves and the world around us by using our intellectual faculties in responsible ways. For example, most educated folk would say they know that Mount Everest is the highest peak in the world, even though, strictly speaking, it's possible to be mistaken about something like that.

Other people, however, take a much lower view of the human mind. They insist that even if there is objective truth about important matters, no one can really know what it is. Everyone has his own opinions, and some of those opinions may happen to be true, but no one's opinions are more or less reasonable than anyone else's. Certainly no one has any right to say she *knows* the truth. We're all mired in ignorance, and the sooner we accept that the better.

Which side do you take on this issue? Is it possible to *know* the truth—at least *some* truth?

If you answered yes to the Knowledge Question, go to page 23.

If you answered no to the Knowledge Question, go to page 93.

The Goodness Question

IS ANYTHING *OBJECTIVELY* GOOD OR BAD?

“That was a good meal!” “Bush was a bad president.” “I’m sure you did the right thing.” “Abortion is always wrong.” “Osama bin Laden was an evil man.” “The invasion of Iraq wasn’t justified.”

All of these statements involve value judgments of some kind or another. They don’t simply state facts in a disinterested way; rather, they make evaluations of the facts. They make judgments that certain things are “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong,” “justified” or “unjustified.”

All of us make value judgments all the time. Some are very significant, others not so much. Either way, value judgments are an essential feature of human life.

But is anything *objectively* valuable? Is anything *objectively* good in the sense that it is a good thing *period*, regardless of what anyone happens to think, hope, or feel about it?

Some people believe that all value judgments are ultimately relative or subjective, that they’re no more than expressions of human preferences, either personal preferences or cultural preferences. On this view, nothing is *intrinsically* good or bad. Instead, we *make* things valuable by projecting our desires, tastes, and goals onto the world.

Other people insist that some things—such as marital love and musical skill—are *objectively* good, while other things—such as rape and child abuse—are *objectively* bad. Their goodness or badness isn’t ultimately a matter of personal or cultural preferences.

Which view do you take? Is anything *objectively* good or bad?

If you answered yes to the Goodness Question, go to page 24.

If you answered no to the Goodness Question, go to page 75.

The Religion Question

IS THERE MORE THAN ONE VALID RELIGION?

There's a bewildering diversity of religion in our world, and we're more aware of it than ever. Encyclopedias are devoted to documenting the ever-increasing number of religious faiths and ideologies, some of which are quite obscure. By most estimates, there are around twenty religions (or families of religions) that have more than one million adherents. Whatever else you might think about religion, it's clear that humans have a natural religious impulse.

But what do we make of this diversity? Some simply insist that all religions are misguided. (Atheists usually take this view.) Others want to say that *at most* one religion can be valid. For example, Christians often claim that Christianity is the only true religion, while Muslims say the same for Islam, and so forth.

An increasingly popular view, however, is that *more than one* religion can be valid. According to this view, Hinduism is right for some people; Buddhism works for other people; Judaism for still others; and so on. By the same logic, some people might not be suited to any religion at all.

On this way of thinking, the different religions represent diverse but equally valid perspectives on the ultimate reality. Sometimes the analogy is used of a group of blind men encountering an elephant. One feels the trunk and says, "It's like a snake!" Finding a tusk, another says, "It's like a spear!" A third grasps the tail and says, "It's like a rope!" The conclusions are vastly different, but none of them is more or less right than the others. Each man interprets the whole according to his own individual (and limited) perspective. So the major world religions, some argue, are like those men feeling the elephant.

Do you agree? Is there more than one valid religion?

If you answered yes to the Religion Question, go to page 87.

If you answered no to the Religion Question, go to page 25.

The God Question

IS THERE A GOD?

This is the big one. You knew it was coming. The God Question is undoubtedly one of the most important questions to ask, because it marks a major fork in the road when it comes to worldviews. How you answer the God Question has enormous implications for how you understand yourself, your relation to others, and your place in the universe. Remarkably, however, many people in the West today don't give this question nearly the attention it deserves; they live as though it doesn't really matter to everyday life. As the rest of this book will show, that kind of indifference is a big mistake.

But what exactly is this question asking? What precisely do we mean by "God"? Definitions are crucial here, because often people who claim to believe in God have very different conceptions of God.

For the purposes of this question, and to keep things relatively simple for now, let's define "God" in fairly broad terms. We can nail down the details later on, such as whether God is a personal being, whether God has communicated with human beings, and whether there is only one God.

So here's our question spelled out more precisely: Is there a Supreme Being that deserves our worship and gives meaning, purpose, and direction to the universe and to human life? (If you think more than one being meets this description, you should answer yes to the God Question for now.)

If you answered yes to the God Question, go to page 45.

If you answered no to the God Question, go to page 43.

The Unity Question

IS EVERYTHING ULTIMATELY ONE?

What did the Buddhist say to the hot dog vendor? “Make me one with everything.”

It’s an old joke—and a pretty lame one, too—but lurking behind it is one of the most enduring philosophical issues of all time. It’s essentially a question of *counting*. Ultimately, how many distinct things are there? Is there really only one thing or are there many things? Is the universe an indivisible unity? Or is it divisible into more fundamental parts or constituents, such as atomic particles?

The ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides (ca. 500 BC) insisted that everything is indeed ultimately one. At the most fundamental level, there is only one being, one existent thing—which Parmenides imaginatively referred to as “the One.” (If you’ve seen the movie *The Matrix*, try not to picture Keanu Reeves at this point.) According to Parmenides, everything that has real existence is ultimately identical with the One. It is a pure, infinite, indivisible unity, and there is nothing else but the One.

Parmenides doesn’t stand alone in his answer to the Unity Question. (Well, unless he was *right*, of course!) A few other philosophers have sided with him, but most have taken the opposite view, that there is more than one thing in reality. The apparent diversity in the world is real. It’s not a mere illusion.

Whose side do *you* take? Is everything ultimately one?

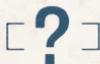
If you answered yes to the Unity Question, go to page 71.

If you answered no to the Unity Question, go to page 27.

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE WORLD?

IT'S A BIG QUESTION. AND HOW YOU ANSWER IS ONE
OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS ABOUT YOU.

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APOLOGETICS