

**Chapter 1:  
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What is Worldview?**

“Lance, what are you doing here? I thought you had a meeting with your ‘stupid conservative friends’ today,” Sally called out, with a giggle in her voice. Sally and Lance were really good friends and often hassled each other about their political beliefs.

Lance Jackson is a professor at the local university and teaches philosophy and religion. He is a tall, handsome guy with brown hair, a strong chin and quite an athletic build. He played football in his college days and continues to work out diligently to keep himself healthy and in shape. Liberals in this community tend to view conservatives as somewhat “unlearned.” This, however, certainly does not characterize Lance. While he is a staunch conservative, he is widely regarded as one of the more well-grounded advocates for that point of view in the community. In fact, he is the current president of the Conservative Council on campus.

For her part, Sally Livingston is one of Lance’s colleagues at the university and teaches history. She is very striking to look at and makes it a point to be noticed with her flaming red hair flowing in the wind and her always up to date wardrobe. As conservative as is Lance, Sally is an equally steadfast liberal. While liberals have a reputation among the conservative community for being a bit flaky, that term does not characterize Sally in the least. She is definitely one of the more thoughtful and intelligent members of her liberal community and is the current president of the campus Secular Humanist Society.

“Hey, liberal Sal,” Lance chuckled back. “I’m on my way to a meeting of the Conservative Council right now. You don’t have to worry about me being late. I lead the meeting so they can’t start without me.”

As they were both headed in the same direction, the two of them walked along together for a while. As they walked, they picked up the conversation where they had left off the last time they saw each other.

“Lance,” Sally offered, “I just don’t get why you fall for that conservative dribble. You are way too intelligent for that. You are not really like most of that conservative crowd at all, as far as I can tell. Seriously, what do you see in it?”

“Sally, your problem is that you operate too much off of stereotypes,” Lance countered. “I am way more like all of them than you can even imagine. And they are way more intelligent than you give them credit for. You ought to actually come meet some of them. I think you will be surprised. Your problem is, you just don’t understand the worldview basis for conservative beliefs.”

As Sally contemplated what Lance had just said, she turned a bit more serious and said, “I do understand that worldview, Lance. It is just that the whole conservative foundation about God being an objectively real person that you can literally talk to is just stupid – no offense. Don’t you realize that we now live in a day when science is able to explain reality in terms that make belief in God just silly?”

Lance stopped short and turned toward Sally to make his point more forceful. “Sally, you think you understand, but you really don’t get it,” Lance retorted. “I do realize that my conservative beliefs are founded on a faith foundation. But so are yours. What you are touting as a belief based on science is just as much a statement of faith as my belief about God. That is simply the nature of worldview beliefs.”

After walking just a short distance more, they arrived at the place where Lance had to turn off to go to his meeting. “Hey, Sally, why don’t you come to the meeting with me? I’m sure you will have a great time,” Lance said as he signaled his intent to leave her.

Sally raised and crossed her arms in the form of an X and shot back, “Ugh! I don’t think so today. It just seems to me such a waste of time. I’ll tell you what though, I really do think it would be valuable to understand your beliefs better. Maybe we can carve out some time just for the two of us to give our best shot at converting each other.”

Sally really thought what she said was funny and laughed out loud at the thought of trying to convince Lance that his beliefs were wrong. At that, Lance also thought it was funny and laughed with her. “You know,” he replied, “I like that idea. I think I can help you find the truth.” They both laughed some more and made arrangements to play phone tag the next week to set up a time.

They waved as they parted company, both knowing that they had better spend time preparing for the next encounter. Defending one’s worldview is not something that you enter into without planning well.

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Before diving too deeply into this book, you have to ask yourself one question: Do I really want to understand where liberal and conservative beliefs come from? If so, you are first going to have to step beyond mere pop culture definitions and explanations to learn about the topic of worldview. I hate to begin the book this way, but worldview is not yet a topic of everyday conversation. Because of that, there are not many places to go to get up to speed about it. That being said, it is where we have to go to understand the true nature of liberal and conservative beliefs. As we move deeper into the book, the more outward expressions of this topic will emerge. But, we can’t truly appreciate those “outward” parts without first getting a basic grasp of the topic itself.

Don’t get me wrong. Some will find this initial plunge utterly fascinating. For me personally, I love this topic. On the other hand, there will be some who wonder why we are even talking about this stuff. This is where you have to trust me. Just go ahead and allow yourself to get your initial foundation. After you do, everything will begin to make sense in a way that couldn’t happen without it. The truth is, no one can understand and appreciate any topic in existence without a basic foundation.

We throw around the terms liberal and conservative so much these days that, in many ways, the words themselves have lost most of their meaning. In modern times, these words are more closely associated with particular political tribes than with the meanings of the words themselves. It has become much like the feud between the Hatfields and McCoys – everyone still feuds, but no one really knows what the fight is all about.

If we are going to deal intelligently with such a deep topic, the first thing we need to do is understand what, exactly, we are talking about. To do that, we must do more than just define words. We must come to understand the actual worldview foundations that the words represent.

The word “worldview” is becoming ever more common in modern times. That being said, it is one of those terms which has a familiar ring, but very few people are able to define with any precision. As such, most use the word as a kind of generic placeholder, rather than as something truly meaningful. Most people conceive of worldview as “the way people think,” “the way people look at the world,” a “philosophy of life,” or a “point of view.” These expressions may all be true to a certain extent, but none of them really tell us anything. These definitions are mostly fluff. But the truth is, the word “worldview” has a very precise meaning. Understanding this meaning is critical for those who want to get to the heart of the difference between conservative and liberal beliefs.

### **So, What is Worldview?**

The word worldview, itself, is not that hard to define. That being said, the idea that the word represents is difficult for most people to grasp. The reason for the difficulty is that it deals with people’s very understanding of reality – that is, what they recognize to be real and unreal. What makes this even more complex is that, generally speaking, people are not even consciously aware of their own beliefs about reality. Beyond that, they tend to be even less aware of the beliefs of those who have a different worldview. In fact, it is difficult to even conceive that other people believe something is real that we consider to be unreal. How could they do that? Sure people disagree about many things, but everybody at least has the same way they understand what is real, right? Unfortunately, the answer to that question is NO!

There is, in fact, only one way that reality is *actually* structured. The world objectively exists in a particular way and it doesn’t exist any other way. That being said, there are various ways that different groups of people conceive of reality. These conflicting views are ultimately the root of the various clashes we observe in the culture. As we consider the clash between liberals and conservatives, the first thing we must grasp is that they operate from entirely different ways of understanding reality. Liberalism and conservatism are based on two different worldview foundations.

So, let’s get right to the definition. ***A worldview is a set of assumptions about the nature of reality.***

At first glance, this definition may seem a little academic and esoteric. But as we break it down, you will see that it is not as complicated as all that.

The phrase “set of assumptions” represents the first key concept in the definition. So, just what is an assumption? It is nothing more than a belief which seems so obvious it is hard to imagine anyone would question it. As such, assumptions are typically unconscious beliefs. We never question them. We just take them for granted. Worldview beliefs operate at this level.

The second key idea in the definition is “nature of reality.” All we are talking about here is the way the universe actually exists. It actually exists in some form and does not exist in any other form. The fact that people with different worldviews have different beliefs about reality does not change the reality itself. Every person in the world lives life *as if* it exists the way they believe – whether they are right or not.

So, let’s summarize the definition. A worldview is a set of beliefs about how reality is structured which seems so obvious, it is hard to imagine anyone would even question it.

### **Worldview Analogies**

While knowledge of the definition of worldview is an essential starting point, we need a little more explanation to understand its deep implications. In order to probe a little deeper, let's look at four analogies which will help us gain a deeper insight into the definition.

### ***A Worldview is Like an Environment***

Pretend for a moment that you are a fish living in a pond in the middle of a forest. As it turns out, you are not only the smartest fish in the pond, you have this insatiable appetite to know all you can about the pond in which you live. So you have learned everything there is to know. You know all of the other fish that live there, as well as about all of the other kinds of animal and plant life. You know the shape and bottom features of the pond. You have even studied the pond's surroundings and observed the grass, trees and various wildlife that encircle it.

One day, while doing some observations, you heard a loud splash. Being the curious sort that you are, you swam over to where you heard the sound. When you got there, you received the shock of your life. Right there in front of you was another fish – but this was like no other fish you had ever seen.

Well, because of your insatiable curiosity, you swam up to this new specimen and began giving him the third degree. As you listened to his answers, he told you that he had lived in another pond, been caught, brought to this new one and thrown in. Your first shock came because you never conceived that other ponds even existed. Your amazement compounded as he told you of other kinds of fish and creatures that lived in his pond that you had never even imagined. It was truly hard to believe that things like what he was describing could actually exist.

A worldview is a *belief environment*. Like the pond in the forest, this environment is very exclusive. And as the smart fish was not aware of other ponds in other places, most people are only aware of the particular beliefs about reality that they were raised with. As such, when they hear of the existence of other worldview beliefs (environments), they don't have any way to evaluate them so they don't make any sense. The natural reaction is, "How could anyone possibly believe that?"

### ***A Worldview is Like a Lens***

Imagine that when you were born, your mother put a pair of red glasses on your face. You had worn those glasses your entire life and had never seen anything that was not viewed through them. Under those circumstances, everything seen through the red lenses would look normal because that is all you had ever known.

If one day, though, you happened to put on a pair of glasses with uncolored lenses and looked through them, everything would look abnormal. This would be the case even though you would be seeing things the way they *actually* exist.

You would continue to live under this illusion until you could somehow come to the realization that the uncolored lenses show you actual reality. Until that realization hit you, you would continue to live life "as if" the red tinted glasses represented reality and would continue to believe that the clear ones actually skewed it.

A worldview is a set of belief lenses. People look through their worldview beliefs to understand how reality exists. If their own worldview beliefs do not represent actual reality, they simply don't know it and live life *as if* their beliefs were true – even though they are not.

Evaluating life through a belief lens which does not represent true reality will certainly cause people to have inner conflict as they rub up against the truth. But if they don't realize that

their beliefs are wrong, they will simply not recognize what is causing the feelings of conflict. It is possible for people to live their entire lives filtering their experience through a false set of beliefs and actually think that their belief lens represents the Truth. But it doesn't alter the fact that it is not.

### ***A Worldview is Like the Foundation of a Building***

There are two aspects of the foundation of a building that are critical. Both of these define the boundaries of what is possible when a building is constructed.

The first is its shape. When a foundation is laid, its shape defines the building's possible outer boundaries. Trying to build outside of the foundation will lead to the building's collapse.

The second critical part of the foundation is its strength. The superstructure of the building can be made lighter than what the foundation will support, but not heavier. If the weight of the building is heavier than what the foundation can support, it will ultimately collapse.

A worldview is a belief foundation. It defines the outer limits of a person's beliefs and its strength.

First, it defines the shape of the belief system. Beliefs which do not fit on the worldview foundation belong to some other system. If other beliefs are allowed in, it results in internal contradictions which will ultimately cause chaos within a person's heart.

Secondly, the belief foundation determines the strength of the belief system. If there are contradictions, historical untruths or logical weaknesses within the system, it will ultimately fall apart because these conflicting beliefs don't support one another. This, too, will result in bedlam within a person's core.

### ***A Worldview is Like a Language***

If two people do not speak the same language, they will not understand one another when they try to communicate. Even if they are trying to communicate about the same topic and are both competent on that topic, communication will not occur if they are not able to bridge the language barrier.

A worldview is a belief language. The ideas people talk about are based on their understanding of reality. So, even if two people are using a common verbal language, communication will be difficult if their worldview beliefs are different. That happens because the person hearing the speech will interpret the meaning of the words differently than what the speaker intended.

### ***Pulling it All Together***

When I lived in Japan, I came to appreciate and enjoy many of the arts that were uniquely Japanese. One thing in particular that I enjoyed was origami – the Japanese art of paper folding.

One of my favorite forms is the flying bird. I can take a piece of paper and fold it in a way that makes it appear to be a bird. With one particular pattern, the wings will even flap when I pull its tail.

But when I make that paper figure, is it a real bird? Of course not! Although it has the form of a bird and can make a certain motion like a bird, it is still only a paper representation. Real birds are living creatures which are able to eat, procreate and fly.

Every worldview system which does not represent actual reality is like the paper bird. It can imitate the real thing in certain respects, but it is not real. Our ultimate desire must be to grasp true reality and base the way we live life upon it.

At this point, we could take our definition of worldview and go in several different directions. We could use this knowledge to gain a deeper understanding of religion, business methodologies, social practices or many other issues. But our purpose here is not to look at any of these areas. Rather, we want to use the concept of worldview to understand liberalism and conservatism. So now let's use the basic definition and images to explore how worldview beliefs are actually expressed in the real world.