

**General Distinctiveness of This Approach:
Psychology and Counseling as Disciplines
Born from the Biblical Worldview**

Christopher Cone, Th.D, Ph.D, Ph.D

President / Research Professor of Bible and Theology
Calvary University

www.drcone.com

www.calvary.edu

Introduction to Worldview

In order to be sufficiently comprehensive and reliable, any thoroughgoing worldview must address four major areas of inquiry: (1) how we can know what is true or not (epistemology), (2) what is real (metaphysics), (3) what should a person do (ethics), and (4) and what should we do in community (socio-political). There is an obvious necessitated order to these questions, and that necessity should guide any discipline. We can't answer socio-political questions until we first deal with ethics, as one can't address how to behave in community if the question of how to behave hasn't first been addressed. The questions of ethics can't be answered without an adequate metaphysic that addresses what actually exists (ontology), what is good (axiology), what is the design or purpose (teleology), and what will happen in the future (eschatology).

Without having the foundational answers to these guiding questions, one could never prescribe properly. Without an accurate description of what is, one cannot instruct about what *should* be. Metaphysics answers are preface to ethical

inquiry. We can't handle ethics until we answer questions of metaphysics, and we can't answer the metaphysics questions until we address the epistemological ones. Before metaphysics questions about reality, good, purpose, and the future can be answered, we have to know where to go for reliable answers. Epistemology, then, constitutes the first necessary stage of inquiry in worldview. Whom shall we trust? To whom can we go for knowledge? With what tools shall we embark on that journey? Answering these questions are the foundational role of epistemology. In particular, we must understand what is the source of authority on which the entire worldview is built, and how we can have certainty that we can properly understand that source of authority.

Components of Worldview



Throughout the worldview investigation it is important to distinguish between that which *is* and that which *ought* to be. Descriptions of reality constitute that which is, and the

prescriptions which result constitute the ought. Without answering questions pertaining to descriptions of what is, we have no basis for addressing questions of what ought to be prescribed. In any worldview, that which ought to be flows directly from what is. From descriptions come prescriptions.

It is incumbent upon any worldview, if it is to be trusted, to address each of these questions, and to do so in a way that corresponds to reality (if the resulting worldview is to reflect an accurate perspective of reality). Perhaps the greatest challenge in pursuing this metanarrative is the obvious need for a first step of faith. In pursuing foundational epistemological answers, one must decide at the outset whom or what that investigator will trust – one must take a leap of faith, basing their very first step on a pre-commitment. That leap of faith can be tested and evaluated as the worldview begins to take shape, but there is no such luxury at the beginning of the process.

Shall one trust human experience as the ultimate authority of truth, interpreting that experience through the lens of the senses? David Hume answers in the affirmative, undergirding his worldview with a naturalistic epistemology. Hume's empirical approach allows no room whatsoever for the supernatural, as his first step of faith blinds him to that possibility.

Shall one trust human reason as the ultimate authority of truth, interpreting all phenomena through the lens of guided thought? Rene Descartes answers in the affirmative, grounding his worldview with a rationalistic epistemology. Descartes' rationalism understands the phenomena independent of external voices, as reason is sufficient to comprehend the

function of nature and the existence of anything beyond the natural.

Shall one trust only themselves to be the arbiter of truth, interpreting life and experience through the lens of their own existence? Friedrich Nietzsche answers in the affirmative, building his worldview on an egocentric perspective, since he doesn't believe that any other basis for meaning can be understood or trusted. Nietzsche's faith in himself, Descartes' faith in reason, and Hume's faith in experience are three common epistemological pre-commitments representative of much contemporary thought, but it is important to realize that there is another far more viable option.

The Biblical Worldview

In the Biblical worldview, the first step is faith in the Biblical God. He has revealed Himself in three ways: in general revelation through that which has been created,¹ in personal revelation with Jesus Christ the incarnate word – God revealed *in person*,² and in special revelation in the original autographs of the Biblical text.³ God's revelation in nature is sufficient for all to have the knowledge of His invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature.⁴ His revelation in Jesus Christ allows all to access the Father through the Person and work of the Son.⁵ God's special revelation, the written word of God,

¹ Genesis 1, Romans 1.

² John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1.

³ Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 9:10, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21.

⁴ Romans 1:20.

⁵ John 6:47, 14:6, 1 Timothy 2:5.

provides all that is needed for the believer in Him to be equipped for everything He has designed His people to do.⁶

In the Biblical model, God is the Source of authority, and our worldview inquiry seeks to understand Him through His revelation in Scripture, as creation simply introduces us to Him, and His Son has revealed the Father in the written word that He commissioned.

The second task of a Biblical epistemology is to discern a hermeneutic in the Bible itself. If we have to go outside the Bible to answer this important question, then the resulting worldview is no longer rooted in the Bible. It is most helpful then that the Bible does provide a hermeneutic method that we can easily follow. In the book of Genesis are found nearly one hundred references to God speaking, and in each of the speech acts in which the response is evident in the context, God either interprets Himself, or the other listeners interpret Him in a normative, literal grammatical-historical way. This sets a vital precedent. Genesis spans the first two-thousand years of recorded history, consequently, the hermeneutic model provided in the book is indicative of how God expects to be understood. In short, the Bible illustrates an internal hermeneutic method, and sufficiently addresses the epistemological question of how we are to interpret the source of authority.

Once the epistemological questions are resolved, the Biblicist will be able to confidently answer the metaphysics questions of ontology, axiology, teleology, and eschatology. It is in this context that we first encounter the need for psychology as a legitimate inquiry and as a discipline properly engaged

⁶ Ephesians 2:10, 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

within a Biblical worldview. In considering what actually exists (ontology), we are met with the Person of God,⁷ who creates all that exists,⁸ and thus has sovereign rights over all of His creation.⁹ As the Sovereign, He defines what is good (axiology) in general,¹⁰ and He defines what is good for His creation.¹¹ He determines the design and purpose for all things (teleology), and declares that all serves to express His glory.¹² As the Creator of all, He has determined the outcome and revealed much of it,¹³ including His framework of covenants and promises to Abraham and his descendants,¹⁴ His plan for redemption,¹⁵ His plan for the nation of Israel,¹⁶ for other nations,¹⁷ and for His church,¹⁸ His plan for the prophetic calendar and the installation of His kingdom on earth,¹⁹ for judgment and fulfillment,²⁰ and for the ushering in of eternity.²¹

Within these detailed explanations of metaphysical truth is found much about the human soul and mind. God created humanity as male and female, in His image, and for

⁷ Genesis 1:1, Psalm 14:1.

⁸ Genesis 1, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16.

⁹ Job 37-42, Isaiah 40:18-26, Romans 9.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:31.

¹¹ E.g., Genesis 15:6, Micah 6:8.

¹² Romans 11:36, Revelation 4:11, Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14.

¹³ Ecclesiastes 3:11, Isaiah 46:9-10.

¹⁴ Genesis 12:2-3, 15:1-21, 49:10, 2 Samuel 7, Jeremiah 31.

¹⁵ Genesis 2:15-17, 3:15, Isaiah 53, Matthew 16:21ff.

¹⁶ Romans 9-11.

¹⁷ Revelation 21.

¹⁸ Matthew 16:18, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

¹⁹ Daniel 9:24-27, Matthew 24, Revelation 4-22.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, Revelation 20:11-15.

²¹ Revelation 21-22.

His purposes.²² He designed humanity to be spirit and/or soul,²³ and to have body, heart, soul, mind,²⁴ and flesh.²⁵ Because of the first man's sin, all who follow are stained with sin,²⁶ and all have a brokenness added to what God had designed – having fallen short of His glory²⁷ and being by nature children of wrath.²⁸ That brokenness includes a separation of human from Creator,²⁹ and physical consequences of that brokenness include dysfunction ultimately leading to physical death.³⁰ Those physical consequences impact not just broken humanity, but even every aspect of the physical realm is likewise stained with sin, and is profoundly dysfunctional.³¹ Because of this great state of disorder, we observe all manner of maladies experienced during the times of the Biblical narrative, the foremost of which is the spiritual separation, but which also include physical ailments and illness,³² mental dysfunction,³³ spiritual oppression and possession,³⁴ and the pervasive self-destructive tendencies of the flesh.³⁵

The metaphysics revealed in the Biblical record are thankfully not limited to the otherwise hopelessness of

²² Genesis 1:26-27.

²³ Genesis 2:7.

²⁴ Matthew 22:37 (Deuteronomy 6:5).

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:39.

²⁶ Romans 5:12-19.

²⁷ Romans 3:23.

²⁸ Ephesians 2:1-3.

²⁹ Genesis 2:15-17.

³⁰ Genesis 3:17-19.

³¹ Genesis 3:17, Romans 8:22.

³² Matthew 4:24.

³³ Colossians 1:21, James 1:8.

³⁴ Matthew 8:16.

³⁵ Romans 7:21-24.

humanity's sinful condition. We also discover in the narrative how God intervened in order to overcome sin and its consequences,³⁶ how positional righteousness and right relationship was paid for by Christ's sacrifice,³⁷ how those provisions are applied to the individual by faith in Jesus the Christ in the moment of justification and new birth,³⁸ how through the process of sanctification many of the consequences of sin are being countered daily,³⁹ and at the culmination in glorification the believer will see the destructive impact of sin completely resolved.⁴⁰

The Discipline of Psychology In Relation to Epistemology and Metaphysics

These are some of the key metaphysical descriptions found in Scripture comprising the first foundational principles of the discipline of psychology. If one ignores these revelations (as do the humanistic and naturalistic worldviews), then there is no hope for properly ascertaining a psychology that corresponds to reality. Empirical tools only provide access to a small fraction of these truths, and if those are the only tools employed, then the resulting psychology will be necessarily and woefully limited if not completely errant.

It is worth noting that "science *does not* compete with Biblical epistemology, but rather complements it. Science is only potent in particular contexts. It is abundantly descriptive of life,

³⁶ Romans 3:21-22, Ephesians 2:4-10.

³⁷ Isaiah 53:4-6, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 1 John 2:2.

³⁸ John 3:3-16, Ephesians 2:8-9.

³⁹ Romans 5:1-8, 6:12-23.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:42-58, Colossians 3:3-4.

but doesn't decipher the origin of life. It measures functions of mind, but doesn't help us understand the derivation of mind. It does not comment intelligently on whether or not the will is free, nor does it shed light on the interaction problem – how the material and immaterial intersect, or if there is even such an intersection. The limits of science can extend only as far as the human sensory apparatus and the human reasoning apparatus intersect. As long as those who would pursue science acknowledge that limitation, the pursuit can be engaged with requisite humility, and resulting conclusions can be completely compatible with a Biblical worldview.”⁴¹ Further, the “conflict between science and the Biblical worldview arises when it is assumed that the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world is *all that exists*. That assumption demands that science is the only reliable vehicle for deriving truth and knowledge. On the other hand, where it is acknowledged that reality extends (or, at least, could possibly extend) beyond the physical and natural world, there is a humility that calls for more comprehensive tools of measure that reach beyond simply the reasoning and experiential apparatus.”⁴²

The core distinctions between psychology in the Biblical worldview versus the naturalistic perspectives are first evident in epistemology, with reliance on differing sources of authority. The Biblical worldview depends entirely on God as revealed in Scripture and encourages investigation through that lens. Naturalistic worldviews consider reason, experience, or the self as the source of authority, and pursue investigation with a very limited set of (empirical) tools. The resultant metaphysical

⁴¹ Christopher Cone, *Applied Biblical Worldview: Essays on Christian Ethics* (Fort Worth, TX: Exegetica, 2016), 12-13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

conclusions are not shockingly disparate, because in the naturalistic model, extra-natural (Scriptural) evidence is not allowed, thus the conclusions stemming from that evidential data is discarded completely.

While psychology to this point has been considered here largely in its descriptive context (working from epistemological and metaphysical foundations), the practical value of the study is in providing prescriptions for appropriately caring for the soul and the mind. Once the epistemological questions have been addressed, one can address the metaphysical problems. Together, these inquiries comprise the descriptive, or the *is*. Once that groundwork has been laid, we move on to the *ought*, considering the prescriptions demanded by the foundational truths that have been understood. In psychology, this practical and prescriptive element related to treatment and care of the soul and mind is often referred to simply as *counseling*.

The Discipline of Counseling In Relation to Ethics and Socio-Political Interaction

The Biblical worldview builds an important bridge from *is* to *ought*, from *descriptive* to *prescriptive*. Paul, for example, reveals that bridge in his letters to the Romans and to the Ephesians. Romans addresses epistemological and metaphysical questions in chapters 1-11, and in 12:1 he challenges believers in light of those foundational answers to present their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. He further explains that this is the believer's reasonable service of worship. First outlining the description, Paul can then voice a call to action. Without the description, there is no basis for the prescription. He utilizes the same device in his letter to the

Ephesians, first addressing in chapters 1-3 the epistemological and metaphysical elements related to the believer's identity, discussing at length the believer's divine calling. Then in 4:1 he calls the reader to action, "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called..." In both of these contexts Paul's description of reality undergirds the prescription. The description provides necessary foundations for the call to action to have significance. In both letters Paul develops a great deal of psychological material. Both deal with human identity and the reality of the human experience. Both demonstrate how God's involvement in that experience is lifegiving and empowering. Paul considers elements of the mind extensively in both letters,⁴³ briefly considers the soul,⁴⁴ and makes extensive reference to the human spirit.⁴⁵ That extensive psychological data helps us put into context the exhortations that comprise the ethics of the Biblical worldview.

In Ephesians 4-6, as one example, Paul offers many ethical prescriptions, but especially noteworthy with respect to counseling are the exhortations that (a) speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects of Him,⁴⁶ (b) we no longer walk in the futility of the mind,⁴⁷ (c) that we lay aside the old self, be renewed in the spirit of our mind, and put on the new self,⁴⁸ (d) that we speak only that which is edifying,⁴⁹ (e) that

⁴³ Romans 1:28, 7:23, 25, 8:5-7, 27, 11:34, 12:2, 16, 14:5, 15:5, Ephesians 2:3, 4:17, 4:23.

⁴⁴ Romans 2:9.

⁴⁵ Romans 1:9, 8:9-10, 16, 11:8, 12:11, Ephesians 1:17, 4:23, 6:18.

⁴⁶ Ephesians 4:15.

⁴⁷ 4:17-19.

⁴⁸ 4:22-24.

⁴⁹ 4:29.

we be forgiving,⁵⁰ (f) that we are not be deceived by empty words,⁵¹ (g) that we try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord,⁵² (h) that we be filled with the Holy Spirit,⁵³ (i) that we speak to one another in edifying song and thankfulness,⁵⁴ (j) that we engage properly in every relationship,⁵⁵ and (k) that we understand and take up the armor of God for sustaining in spiritual battle.⁵⁶ These prescriptions are vital applications of psychological data revealed in previous chapters (1-3), and illustrate that the ethics of Scripture rely on the positional and foundational truths that comprise Biblical epistemology.

Peter, for example in both of his letters continually reminds believers of who they are, what God has done for them, and what the future holds. He does this always as a context-setting for a call to action. 1 Peter 1:1-12 considers the living hope of the believer in Christ, and the very next verse challenges the reader to prepare the mind for action and be unwaveringly fixed upon Christ. To undergird the prescription of 1:22, that believers fervently love one another, he reminds his readers of their identity (metaphysics)⁵⁷ and the trustworthiness of God's word (epistemology).⁵⁸

Biblical counseling is one way we “stimulate one another to love and good deeds,”⁵⁹ applying the epistemological and metaphysical foundations of Scripture in ethics (individually)

⁵⁰ 4:31-32.

⁵¹ 5:6.

⁵² 5:10.

⁵³ 5:15-18.

⁵⁴ 5:19-20.

⁵⁵ 5:21-6:9.

⁵⁶ 6:10-18.

⁵⁷ 1 Peter 1:23.

⁵⁸ 1:24-25.

⁵⁹ Hebrews 10:24.

and socio-political interaction (in community). In the Biblical worldview there are two essential recipients of ethical prescriptions. First is the unbeliever. Biblical ethics for them is fairly straightforward: their primary responsibility is to believe in Him. Biblical ethics for the believer is much more detailed, as there are perhaps more than one-thousand directives in the New Testament for believers to follow. The purpose of Biblical counseling is to encourage one another to be more like Christ in our thinking, our speaking, and our actions, thus counseling can play a helpful and needed role in the sanctification process for believers. For unbelievers, Biblical counseling can help them with their primary directive: to believe in Jesus. While counseling can be of great help to unbelievers as an expression of common grace, the overarching desired outcome is that they become new creatures who have the mind of Christ,⁶⁰ and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.⁶¹

While not all aspects of psychology are not merely descriptive, and not all aspects of counseling are merely prescriptive, generally, the descriptions of the Biblical model for psychology lead directly to the Biblical prescriptions for counseling. If the psychological data and foundations are rooted in a different worldview – Hume’s, Descartes’, or Nietzsche’s, for example, then the counseling prescriptions will necessarily look very different.

Conclusion

The general distinctiveness of the model we are advocating is that it be rooted in and engaged through Biblical

⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:16.

⁶¹ Ephesians 1:13-14.

authority as the fundamental epistemological truth, with the Biblical descriptions providing the essential metaphysical concepts through which we understand human psychology and undergirding the prescriptions for the purpose and approach to counseling. Observation and scientific pursuit are very important, and as long as their limitations are acknowledged, they can be invaluable tools in properly applying the metaphysical concepts presented in Scripture. If on the other hand, we fail to put those tools in their proper place as limited devices for considering the metaphysical principles' impact on human experience, then we begin to mishandle and distort the two first stages of worldview, and we are no longer operating anywhere close to the Biblical worldview.

It is necessary that we do psychology according to the Biblical worldview *without* integrating any other competing worldview concepts with the Biblical foundations. If we embark on this journey faithfully guarding those boundaries, then we can be assured of coming much closer to understanding that which corresponds to reality as the Creator designed and sees it than we otherwise would if we add our own limited perspectives whether they be extra-biblical theological presuppositions or secular pre-commitments to leave Him out of the equation altogether.

Just as Paul cautions believers not to be taken captive through philosophies not according to Christ,⁶² we must examine every aspect of our worldview to assure alignment with His word. Any time we step outside the boundaries of His worldview, we are no longer engaging in the philosophy

⁶² Colossians 2:8.

according to Christ but are instead being captivated by competing worldviews – by empty deceptions.

