



WORLD VIEWS

I grew up in a home where it seemed like we didn't believe anything. We never went to church and never read a single religious book. My parents never told me to believe or not to believe anything. Education was purely academic and secular. God was never mentioned.

But strangely enough, or maybe it's not so strange, we did believe in something. For some reason we humans automatically know certain things, as if some kind of moral code is written into our DNA.

One day when I was about six years old, I went down the street to my friend's house to play. I saw a big fat wallet full of cash lying on the driveway by his dad's car. Wow! I had never seen that much money before. I snatched up the wallet and ran home. Man was I nervous! For days I hovered over that wallet, engaged in a massive struggle. After spending one dollar on candy, I could take the heat no longer. So early one morning, I crept up to my friend's house, laid the wallet on the driveway and ran home like someone was chasing me.

All that moral activity was going on in my six year old brain, and without any religious education! So I did believe something, even as a kid growing up in a non-religious home. You might say I had the beginnings of a world view.

What I'd like to suggest is that everybody on the planet believes something.

Each of us holds within our minds what is sometimes called a "paradigm," as in, "paradigm shift." The term comes from the Greek word *paradigma*. *Para* simply means "beside," as in parallel. *Digma* refers to a "pattern" or "model." So a person's "*paradigm*" is basically the model held in the mind to represent what they believe about reality. Or think of it like this: A person's paradigm is like a window through which they see the world. It's the set of fundamental ideas that form the structure of a person's world view or belief system.

But now check this out: With almost 7 billion people living in our world, you'd think there would be countless belief systems. But it turns out that there are basically only six. Don't get me wrong, I don't mean to oversimplify. Of course there are numerous different philosophies and religions, but here's the thing: All of them boil down to one of six basic ideas regarding "what's up" in our universe.

WORLD VIEWS CONTINUED

Paradigm One is what's called Materialism, or, more to the point, Atheism. There is no God and life is merely a biological accident with no meaning whatsoever.

Paradigm Two is Pantheism. The idea here is that nature itself is God and there is no personal God distinct from nature.

Paradigm Three is what we'll call Appeasement Theism. God is a bloodthirsty tyrant and we're all in trouble unless we can find a way to placate His wrath.

Paradigm Four is Deterministic Theism. God is all about control. Everything that happens is by His sovereign will. All of it! The good, the bad and the ugly.

Paradigm Five is Deism. God made the world and then left us to our own devices and demise. He's not involved in our lives at all.

And Paradigm Six is what we'll call Benevolent Theism, sometimes characterized as Freewill Theism. In this view, God is love, and He made us for love, which means that He had to design us with freewill as our fundamental mode of operation.

Even if we can't articulate what we believe, we do believe something.

It's such a short list, I know. But try this sometime: Take a moment to stop and think about which world view you might hold. I think you'll find that we all fit into one of the six basic paradigms.

It's as if each one of us is standing at a window looking out over the world. We all have at least a gut level picture of the world, of reality in general, of God and of ourselves. Even if we can't articulate what we believe, we do believe something. We at least feel the picture we hold in our hearts, and we live by the dictates of its emotional weight. It drives us, whether we can name it or not, explain it or not, to act how we act and be who we are.

You know, I put that wallet back because on some level in my six year old heart I believed it was wrong to keep it. It's unavoidable . . .

We believe things.

So what do you believe?

What's your paradigm?