World View Assignment


A world view (or worldview) is a term coined from the German word Weltanschauung. Welt is the German word for 'world,' and Anschauung is the German word for 'view' or 'outlook.' It implies a concept fundamental to German philosophy and epistemology and refers to a wide world perception. Additionally, it refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts in it.

The Christian thinker James W. Sire defines a worldview as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world." and suggests that "we should all think in terms of worldviews, that is, with a consciousness not only of our own way of thought but also that of other people, so that we can first understand and then genuinely communicate with others in our pluralistic society."

World View concept employed in BIOL 444. We will explore four primary aspects of world view (although students are welcome to go beyond these four, as dictated by their own interests). The aspects of primary interest are expressed by the following questions:

1) Ontology. What is there? “In its general meaning, ontology is the study or concern about what kinds of things exist - what entities there are in the universe”*

2) Operation. How do things work: i.e., are there rules, and if so, what are they?

3) Intent. To what extent, if any, do the ontology and/or operation of the universe reflect underlying intent, purpose, or design? And what is this source of this intent, if any?

4) Value and ethics. What is of value? What is ethical? And what are the bases for value and ethics?

*Source of “ontology” definition: http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0,,sid9_gci212702,00.html

The Assignment

In this assignment, students are asked to examine, express, and hopefully enrich their individual world views. The concept of world view will be a theme that weaves through all aspects of the course, and will be an aspect of recurrent discussion. The formal world view assignment has three written components.

Assignment details:

**Part 1.** In this 3-5 page essay, each student will address the following:

- What is meant by “world view”? Briefly define this concept.
- What does my world view consist of? What do I believe in relation to each of the four world view components listed above?
- What is the source of my world view, or views? How did I acquire it/them?
- To what extent have I subjected my own world view to critical examination?

**Part 2.** In this 2-3 page essay, students will report on how the course, or on any aspect of their experience since the start of classes, has altered, enriched, or in any way influenced their world view.

**Part 3.** In this 3-5 page essay, students will summarize the status of their semester-long examination of world view, in particular making reference to the influences (if any) of specific student and guest presentations.
Mike,

Here you go - I'm building the boat as I paddle upstream, but here's what my version of the "world view assignment" looks like so far (documents attached):

- an initial response paper early in the semester that asks students to reflect upon their ideas concerning the course themes of social inequality, social mobility, and opportunity. My idea is that this gives me a "cognitive map" of each student's starting place.

- a survey administered to the class that is based on ideas and themes culled from the individual response papers.

- a simple "analysis" that compiles the survey results in terms of (1) mean scores, which highlights questions with which students strongly agreed and disagreed, and then (2) standard deviations, which highlights items with the least/most variation (or degree of consensus) within the class. To some extent, this constitutes a "cognitive map" for the class as a whole, and I've referred back to the results of this survey several times in the course of class discussions.

My plan is to administer the same survey at semester's end to see if the views of the class as a whole have shifted in any clear way. Finally, one question on the final exam will ask students to re-evaluate the thesis of their initial response paper in light of what they've learned over the course of the semester. I'm not concerned so much with whether they keep or revise the initial thesis. Rather, I want to see how they connect the evidence from the course to their own world views.

So, by the end of the semester I hope to be able to make some conclusions about my students' learning (both individual and in the aggregate) regarding the main themes of the course using Tom's "world view" exercise as a mechanism.

Cliff

Response Paper 1

The purpose of this paper is to provide an initial "cognitive map" of your knowledge, underlying assumptions, and questions concerning the main themes of the course. In short, the response will document what you believe and why you believe it, establishing a point of reference for the remainder of the semester. Your response should address the following three sets of questions via a well-crafted and organized essay. Because I want you to reflect on your own beliefs, I have intentionally made these questions rather broad; feel free to interpret or refine them as necessary.

1. What does equality mean to you? How much inequality do you perceive? Is this level of inequality problematic?
2. How much social mobility is there? What factors are the most important determinants of individual success? Why do some people get ahead while others fail?
3. What experiences or evidence have shaped your thinking about these issues? To what extent have you subjected your beliefs to critical examination?