

Why Worldviews Matter (For The Future of Sentientity)

TL;DR Abstract

Worldviews, whether religious or not, are the foundation of how we understand and navigate the world. They help us work out what's true, what matters, and who matters.

Our personal worldviews underpin our every belief and every decision. But worldviews also steer our institutions, our systems, our culture, our politics, our laws, even our AIs.

In this workshop we'll explore what worldviews are and why worldviews are so important for nonhuman and human sentient beings (sentientity.)

We'll then explore the tenets and radical implications of an example worldview, Sentientism, using materials I use in UK school Religious Education and Philosophy workshops.

Participant Activities (All Optional)

1. Consider our own, personal worldview, and how it links to how we think about nonhuman animal ethics (and sharing if people are comfortable)
2. Explore how the Sentientism worldview differs from, or has common ground with, our own personal worldview (and other worldviews) (sharing if people are comfortable)
3. Generate and share ideas about our vision for a more Sentientist world, in law / politics / economics / culture or elsewhere
4. Discuss how worldviews should affect our education and advocacy work – and how to work effectively with people of diverse worldviews re: nonhuman animals.

Facilitator Bio – Jamie Woodhouse

Jamie advocates for the [Sentientism](#) worldview (“Evidence, reason, and compassion for all sentient beings”). He hosts the Sentientism [Podcast](#) and [YouTube](#) and speaks at schools and universities. He facilitates global Sentientism [Communities](#) (open to all) that span over 100 countries. Jamie is on BlueSky [@JamieWoodhouse](#) and [@Sentientism](#). Full links [here](#).

Full Abstract

Worldviews, whether they're religious or not, are the foundation of how we understand the world and how we think about ethics. They help us work out what's true, what matters, and who matters.

Our personal worldviews underpin every human belief and every human decision. But worldviews also underpin our institutions, our systems, our culture, our politics and our laws. Increasingly, they're underpinning the beliefs and decisions of artificial intelligences.

That deep role makes worldviews foundationally important. And yet, despite the critical role they play, we rarely examine, challenge, refine or change worldviews. Our personal worldviews were set by our parents and our society in childhood. As adults, most of us unthinkingly continue to accept them, forgetting just how much our everyday thought and action is guided by these deep, unchallenged assumptions. And most institutional and cultural worldviews were set long ago. Today, they are protected by status quo bias and the inertias of tradition and identity.

As we think about the future of animal law, the future of humanity, and indeed the future of sentience (our shared community of all sentient beings), worldviews may determine whether we head towards utopia, viatopia, survival, slow decline or catastrophe. We urgently need to pay attention to them.

In this workshop we'll start by exploring what worldviews are and why worldviews, particularly in how they answer the "who matters?" question, are so important for nonhuman and human sentient beings (sentience.)

We'll then explore an example worldview, Sentientism, using materials I use in UK school Religious Education workshops. The Sentientism worldview is grounded in a naturalistic epistemology, a sentiocentric moral scope and a minimum baseline non-maleficence moral obligation. In more everyday language, it can be summarised as "evidence, reason, and compassion for all sentient beings." We'll explore its ancient intellectual history and how Sentientism differs from and shares common ground with other worldviews, both religious and not. We'll also explore some of the [Implications of Sentientism](#) for our shared future, ranging across Sentientist Law, Justice, Rights (including a [UDSR](#)), Politics, Economics, Culture, SDGs, Agriculture, Language and Education.

Depending on the time available we can also explore how Sentientism's epistemological and moral scope commitments can enhance our advocacy for sentient beings, both human and non. Participants may also be interested in my experiences of bringing Sentientism into Religion & Worldviews Education classrooms (ages 5-18), and we can touch on how Sentientism might shape some radical developments in our near future re: potentially digital moral agents and sentient beings.

I plan to close out the workshop with some thoughts about how almost every worldview, both religious and not, can adapt to be more pro-sentient being. Whether we change our worldview to a more sentiocentric one like Sentientism, or refine our existing worldview to be more sentiocentric, future sentient beings, ourselves included, will benefit.