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Worldview Analysis as a Tool for Conflict Resolution

*Ann Taves**

When we survey the current theoretical landscape, we find two distinct approaches to the analysis of worldviews. The systemic approach centers on responses to fundamental worldview questions (aka “big questions”); the cognitive-behavioral approach focuses on the processes that give rise to behaviors that express worldviews. If we think of worldviews as subjective representations of the environment, that is, subjective “worlds,” we can think of the first approach as a means of eliciting, documenting, and comparing “worlds-made” and the second as a framework for understanding the nonconscious processes of “world-making.” It is not clear, however, how the two approaches are related. If human answers to the fundamental worldview questions are simply reflective additions to underlying cognitive processes, we would anticipate that worldview conflicts could be resolved relatively easily. If the implicit answers are embedded in nonconscious processes that are presupposed by various ways of life, we would expect that the process of resolving conflicts would be much more complex. An evolutionary approach, which views world-making as an evolved capacity, not only suggests that the latter is the case, but also offers a way to integrate the two approaches. If, as an evolutionary approach would suggest, all mobile organisms must implicitly answer basic, species-appropriate versions of the big questions in order to survive, then we can integrate the two approaches by defining worldviews in terms of simplified big questions that allow for both proximate and ultimate answers. This allows us to embed the systemic framework in an agent-based cognitive-behavioral process grounded in the everyday life and behavior of humans and other animals. The article is divided

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into three parts. The first demonstrates how we can use simplified versions of the big questions to integrate the systemic and cognitive-behavioral approaches, ground the big questions in ways of life, and shift between systemic and agent-based perspectives. The second offers more refined analytic concepts—modes, scale, and scope—for characterizing this dynamic, multilevel approach to worldviews. The third offers several comparisons to illustrate the benefits of this more-nuanced approach in the context of conflict resolution.

Keywords: conflict resolution, worldviews, world-making, big questions, systemic, agent-based, cognitive-behavioral

Introduction

References to differences in people's worldviews are common in ordinary conversation and there is a long history of academic discussion of worldviews (*Weltanschauung*) in philosophy (Naugle 2002), as well as more recent discussions in religious studies (Smart 2000), political science (DeWitt 2018), and sociology (Sheikh and Juergensmeyer 2019). There is now growing interest in applying the concept in educational circles (Matthews 2009; Jackson 2016; Bråten and Everington 2019) and in relation to social, political, and especially environmental problems (Hedlund-de Witt 2013; de la Sierra, Smith, and Mitchell 2017). However, the use of worldview analysis as a tool for conflict resolution is relatively new (Docherty 2001; Seul 2018, 2021).

Coming out of religious studies, my initial efforts at theorizing worldviews were triggered by a desire to locate secular and religious perspectives under a common rubric. In addressing scholars of religion, I have argued that subsuming religions under the broader heading of worldviews and ways of life allows us to avoid some of our long-standing theoretical problems (Taves, Asprem, and Ihm 2018; Taves and Asprem 2019; Taves 2020). Here I want to consider how an integrated approach, grounded in an evolutionary perspective, can deepen our theoretical understanding of worldviews and enhance our ability to resolve conflicts.

When we survey the current theoretical landscape, we find two distinct approaches, which we can think of as systemic and cognitive-behavioral. The systemic approach centers on responses to fundamental worldview questions (aka "big questions"); the cognitive-behavioral focuses on the processes that give rise to behaviors that express worldviews. The Worldview Inquiry Framework

developed by Rousseau and Billingham (2018) provides an integrated overview of the systemic approaches that rely on “big questions.” The Transdisciplinary Framework of Worldviews and Behaviors developed by de la Sierra, Smith, and Mitchell (2017) exemplifies the cognitive-behavioral approach.

These two frameworks focus on different levels of analysis and were designed to meet different needs. The systemic approach focuses on the level of conscious reflective thought and was designed “to govern the process of eliciting, documenting, and comparing the worldviews of stakeholders” (Rousseau and Billingham 2018: 1). The cognitive-behavioral focuses on pre-conscious levels of processing and was designed to explain “how the body gives rise to the mind, how the mind forms a constellation of meanings named worldview, and how our own personal worldview is continuously determining how each of us feel, think, and act” (de la Sierra, Smith, and Mitchell 2017: 11). If we think of worldviews as subjective maps or representations of the environment, that is, subjective “worlds,” we can think of the first framework as allowing us to elicit, document, and compare “worlds-made” and the second framework as allowing us to investigate the non-conscious processes of “world-making.” The first approach enables us to focus on worldviews as abstract systems of interrelated components (answers to the big questions) independent of those who hold them and the second on the agent-based processes that shape the behavior of actors.

It is not clear, however, how the two approaches are related. If we define worldviews in terms of answers to fundamental questions, in keeping with the systemic approach, it is not clear how these answers fit into the dynamic cognitive-behavioral process. Are they conscious, reflective additions to underlying processes or are they embedded in or emergent from underlying nonconscious processes? If human answers to the fundamental worldview questions are simply reflective additions to underlying processes, we would anticipate that worldview conflicts could be resolved relatively easily. If the implicit answers are embedded in nonconscious processes that are presupposed by various ways of life, we would expect that the process of resolving conflicts would be much more complex. When viewed from an evolutionary perspective, the latter appears to be the case.

Building on earlier work, I will argue that world-making is an evolved capacity and that all mobile organisms must implicitly answer basic, species-appropriate versions of the big questions in order to survive. An evolutionary approach allows us to situate the systemic framework in an agent-based cognitive-behavioral process that is grounded in the everyday life and behavior of humans *and other*

animals. Framing the generation of worldviews in this way allows us to conceive of world-making as a dynamic multilevel process and, at the same time, requires us to develop more refined analytic tools to describe what we are observing. This more integrated evolutionary approach has implications for those engaged in mediating conflicts. Instead of conceiving of worldviews as relatively static, consciously held systems of thought, this approach allows mediators to explore how worldviews are embedded in ways of life and can shift in response to people's perceptions of their situation and their roles in the process.

The argument is divided into three sections. The first demonstrates how we can use simplified versions of the big questions to integrate the systemic and cognitive-behavioral approaches, ground the big questions in ways of life, and shift between systemic and agent-based perspectives. The second offers more refined analytic concepts—modes, scale, and scope—for characterizing this dynamic, multilevel approach to worldviews. The third offers several comparisons to illustrate the benefits of the approach in practice.

Big Questions

Due to their interest in solving different problems, the systemic and cognitive-behavioral frameworks approach worldviews in different ways, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

Systemic Framework

In developing the Worldview Inquiry Framework, Rousseau and Billingham drew from a number of different proposals for cataloging the components of worldviews (Aerts et al. 1994; Smart 2000; Funk 2001; Sire 2004; Samples 2007; Vidal 2008; Bunge 2009; De Witt et al. 2016). All of the proposals are premised on “big questions” that can be located under traditional philosophical headings (i.e., ontology, metaphysics, cosmology, axiology, praxeology, and epistemology). Rousseau and Billingham (2018: 8) compared the proposals to “generate a comprehensive, yet succinct framework” on which to base surveys and “a consistent set of concepts for formulating worldview questions and documenting beliefs.” Their framework represents a significant advance in terms of survey development. Theoretically, however, it is important to recognize that their seven components with corresponding “key questions” (see [Table One](#)) presuppose concepts, such as “fundamental substances,” that only adult humans have the capacity to understand, as well as highly elaborated, reflective answers that only adult humans have the capacity to articulate, systematize, and debate.

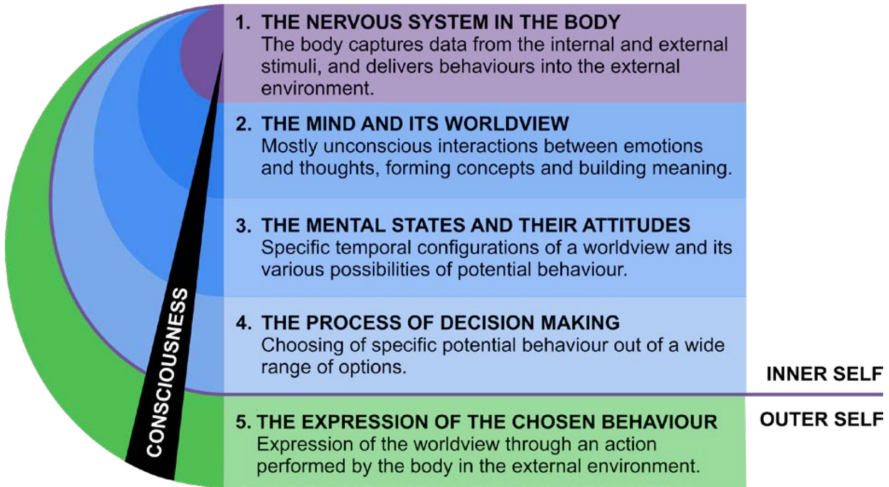
Table One
A Framework for Cataloging the Components of a Worldview
(Taken from Rousseau and Billingham, 2018)

Worldview Component	Key Questions
Ontology	What kinds of substances exist most fundamentally? What grounds the existence of reality?
Metaphysics	What is the nature of the fundamental existents?
Cosmology I	What is the nature, origin, developmental history, and potential of the natural world?
Cosmology II	What is the nature, origin, developmental history, and potential of human beings?
Axiology	What is important and why? What makes something good?
Praxiology	How should we live? What gives action meaning? What are our purposes and how can we achieve them?
Epistemology	What/how can we (not) know?

Cognitive-Behavioral Framework

The Transdisciplinary Framework of Worldviews and Behaviors (de la Sierra, Smith, and Mitchell 2017) highlights the gathering of data, the production of meaning, and the decision-making processes that give rise to both enacted and consciously expressed worldviews. In keeping with the psychological approach to meaning-making processes (Park 2010; Markman, Proulx, and Lindberg 2013), they focus on the processes that interact to make sense of situations and give rise to a wide range of behaviors (see Figure One). Their approach makes it clear that our worldviews are not simply the product of conscious learning and reflection, but they do not spend much time reflecting on what worldviews are. The authors simply characterize worldviews as “complex and hierarchical constellation[s] of meaning created by someone to describe her/his own reality or ‘sense of self’” (de la Sierra, Smith, and Mitchell 2017: 2), but they do not conceptualize worldviews in terms of components. Their approach gives the impression that the big questions approach is not only limited to humans, but relevant only at the level of conscious, reflective processing.

Figure One
The Transdisciplinary Framework of Worldviews and Behaviors
 (de la Sierra, Smith, and Mitchell 2017)



An Evolutionary Approach

To integrate these two approaches, we need to recognize two things. First, highly rationalized, systematized answers to the fundamental worldview questions of the sort presupposed by Rousseau and Billingham—whether philosophical, religious, or ideological—are exceptional not prototypical. Experts, including philosophers and theologians, do develop and try to disseminate these systematized worldviews, but most humans do not think or act consistently based on explicit, rationalized answers to these questions. Much of the time most people act based on more pragmatic, proximate assessments of what seems most real right now, rather than on the basis of ultimate or fundamental conceptions of reality. Moreover, few humans live within a single, homogeneous world. Most of us navigate within and between multiple worlds that relate to one another in complicated ways.

Second, in keeping with the cognitive-behavioral approach proposed by de la Sierra et al., other animals also gather data, choose behaviors, and express a view of themselves and their environment (i.e., the world as they perceive it) through their actions. As William Paden (1988: 52) pointed out some years ago:

In the broadest sense there are as many worlds as there are species; all living things select and sense “the way things are” through their own organs and modes of activity. They

constellate the environment in terms of their own needs, sensory system, and values. They see—or smell or feel—what they need to, and everything else may as well not exist. A world, of whatever set of creatures, is defined by this double process of selection and exclusion.

When organisms “sense the way things are,” they are making sense—so to speak—of events in their environment. Is it food or it is poison? Should I take it in or move away from it? As indicated at the outset, other animals must generate implicit answers to basic, species appropriate versions of the big questions in order to survive. If—as I am suggesting—world-making is an evolved capacity, then humans, building on their evolutionary heritage, must also generate implicit answers to basic versions of the fundamental worldview questions below the threshold of consciousness. In some cases, our “impulses” to act in a certain way lead to conscious reflection, but, like other animals, we often enact implicit answers to the BQs without consciously reflecting on them.

To integrate the two approaches, we built on the proposals of Vidal (2008) and Droogers and van Harskamp (2014) to suggest a series of big questions that can be answered implicitly or explicitly in either proximate or ultimate terms (Taves, Asprem, and Ihm 2018; Taves and Asprem 2019; Taves and Asprem 2020). In testing the BQs in a course on comparing religions and other worldviews, we added a BQ that asks people to characterize the situation in which they find themselves. Answered in ultimate terms, it elicits people’s view of human nature (e.g., “sinful or fallen,” “evolved”) and/or their understanding of the human condition (e.g., “caught in samsara”); answered in more proximate terms, it elicits their perception of their immediate context. The resulting six BQs form two logical sets of three that taken together characterize worldviews as they are embedded in ways of life (Taves 2020).

- **BQ1—Ontology:** What exists? What is real?
- **BQ2—Cosmology:** Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?
- **BQ3—Epistemology:** How do we know these things?
- **BQ4—Situation:** What is the situation in which we find ourselves?
- **BQ5—Axiology-Goal:** What is the good (or goal) that we should strive for?
- **BQ6—Praxiology-Path:** What actions should we take? What path should we follow?

To test our evolutionary approach, we translated the six questions into the language of (evolutionary) predictive processing (Table Two).

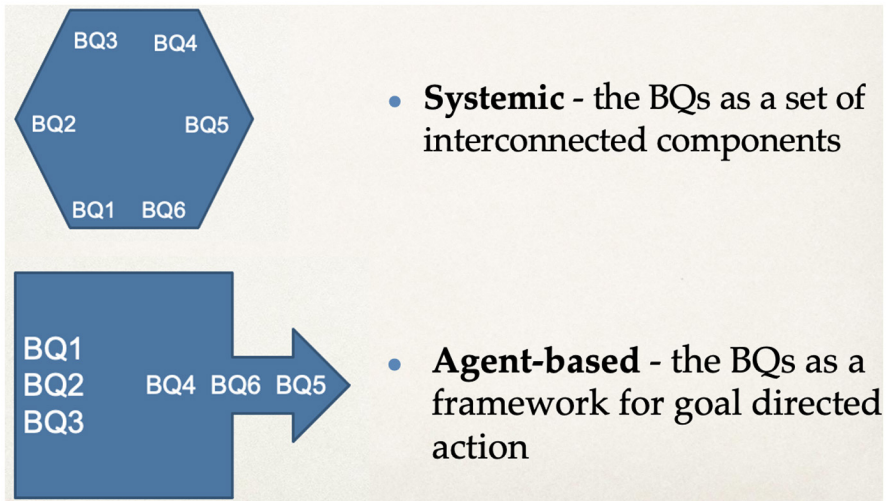
Table Two
Six BQs in the Language of (Evolutionary) Predictive Processing
 (Taves and Asprem 2020, building on Taves, Asprem, and Ihm 2018, and Taves and Asprem 2019)

Big Question	Language of (Evolutionary) Predictive Processing
Ontology What exists?	Organisms actively select and appraise incoming information against top-down predictions (based in genetics and/or prior experience) in order to guess “what is.” In doing so, they create self- and world-models.
Cosmology Who am I?	The organism’s self-model provides an answer to the most basic cosmology question.
Situation What is the situation in which I find myself?	The organism’s world-model provides an answer to the most basic situational question.
Axiology What is my goal? What is good and bad?	Ultimate preferences (good and bad) are built into the organism’s world-and-self models through a natural selection of goals: organisms embodying models that strive for survival-enhancing uses of available affordances (food, mating, avoidance of predators and environmental dangers) prevail.
Praxeology What do I do? How do I act?	Best available actions in a situation are determined from an organism’s best prediction of what is (ontology) in accord with the affordance-based goals and values embodied in its self-model (axiology).
Epistemology How does it know what is true about the world?	Organisms embody a Bayesian epistemology that constantly tests “what is true” through probability-based interactions with the environment constrained by survival pressures. Revising the models can be very slow and often works on the population level through natural selection.

Although we were not able to translate the cosmology questions (“Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?”), we can see the evolutionary basis from which they emerge. In generating an implicit prediction regarding “what is,” the organism generates a self-and-world model that contains an implicit sense of itself (who am I?). Social animals presumably generate an implicit sense of their group (who are we?). When formulated in these terms, it is clear that the implicit answers form the basis for the organism’s goal-directed actions.

The addition of the situation question makes it possible to view the BQs from both a systemic and an agent-based perspective (Figure Two). From a systemic perspective, answers to the BQs form a set of interconnected components. This perspective is useful when we want to see how a set of answers fit together and when we want to compare similarities and differences between worldviews. From an agent-based perspective, the answers to the BQs appear as a framework for goal-directed action. From this perspective, BQ4—the agent’s characterization of the situation in which they find themselves—is central. How the agent perceives their situation is shaped by their answers to BQs 1–3 (the ontology, cosmology, and epistemology questions) and leads to goal-directed action by means of a path. From an evolutionary perspective, this is the more basic way of thinking about the BQs. As far as we know, only humans abstract and systematize their answers to the BQs.

Figure Two
The BQs Viewed from Systemic and Agent-Based Perspectives



Better Analytic Tools

When we take an evolutionary perspective that allows us to shift between agent-based and systemic perspectives, we introduce a great deal of complexity into our analysis. Because agent-based responses are driven by the immediate situation (as opposed to—say—the ultimate situation in which humans find themselves), they may be unconscious, proximate, episodic, and fragmentary. Given these possibilities, we need more refined descriptors that we can use to characterize the types of answers we elicit from people or infer from their actions. We can use three descriptors—mode, scale, and scope—to characterize responses to BQs in this more dynamic, multilevel approach to worldviews.

- **Modes of Expression**—indicates the degree to which the answers to the BQs are made explicit
- **Scale of Expression**—indicates the level of generality at which the BQs are answered
- **Scope of Expression**—indicates the extent to which answers to the BQs shift between situations

Modes of Worldview Expression

We can specify four distinct modes of expression: enacted, articulated, memorized, and textualized (see [Table Three](#); Taves, Asprem, and Ihm 2018). Each has distinctive affordances. Answers to the BQs can be **enacted** in practice. They are embedded in a way of life. They are generally learned informally and mostly taken for granted. They do not necessarily cohere. Answers can be **articulated**. What is said may or may not reflect the enacted answers. Articulation enables people to offer justifications for their behavior. Answers can be **memorized** and recounted orally. This enables more formal teaching and empowers specialists. Finally, answers may also be preserved in **writing**. Textualization enables systemization, rationalization, and commentary.

Although it is possible to view these forms of expression developmentally, they are all present in literate cultures and build on, but do not replace, each other. They are always interacting. This is part of what makes the analysis of worldview dynamics so complex.

Scale of Expression

We can think of scale in terms of the level of resolution that the answers depict, much as we can zoom in and out on Google Earth. When we zoom out, we can get a macro view of the whole earth; when we zoom in, we get a close-up, micro view of a particular place. Micro and macro

Table Three
Four Modes of Worldview Expression (Taves, Asprem, and Ihm 2018)

Modes of Expression

Enacted Worldviews—acted out in practice

- Embedded in a way of life
- Taken for granted
- Learned informally
- May be episodic, fragmented

Articulated Worldviews—spoken

- May or may not reflect enacted worldview
- Enables justifications of behavior

Memorized Worldviews—recounted orally

- Enables more formal teachings
- Empowers specialists

Textualized Worldviews—preserved in writing

- Enables commentary
 - Enables systemization and rationalization
-

Table Four
Two Scales of Worldview Expression

Scales (Nested Identities)

Earth	Animal
Land-Region-Nation	Mammal
Peoples-Cultures	Primate – Hominid
Family-Community	Homo sapiens

are relative (Table Four). If we define the micro level in terms of individuals, we can think of individuals as embedded in progressively larger groups of people. If we think of humans as a species, humans can be nested in progressively larger groups of animals.

At the macro level, we have an inclusive picture with low resolution. At the micro level, we have a limited picture with high resolution. Different things stand out at different scales of analysis. Compared to the other great apes, the *common* human ability to develop, enact, and

transmit very different cultures or ways of life stands out. If we focus on humans, the *differences* between human cultures and ways of life may stand out. If we focus on individuals, the differences within a community or culture will likely stand out. Comparisons, and thus similarities and differences, are always at a particular scale of analysis. The important thing to recognize is that whatever scale we select, it will enable us to see some things clearly and obscure others.

Scope of Expression

Individuals may belong to more than one family and identify with more than one group. This takes us to the question of scope. Scope refers to the extent to which answers to the BQs shift between situations. Who we say we are and the goals we seek to pursue often shift based on our context or social situation. We can think of the range of contexts in which a given set of answers are possible and permitted as matters of scope. Possibility and permission, obviously, involve issues of power and authority that are part of the dynamics within and between groups. The options for scope include (see [Table Five](#)):

- overlapping or merged identities, for example, any hyphenated identify such as African American;
- distinct but compatible identities, for example, dual citizenship; and
- distinct and incompatible identities, for example, Christian and atheist.

If we think of identities as roles, we can also consider the possibility of role-specific answers. The umpire has a different role than the players and thus different goals, but the umpire can shift roles and play the game. Similarly, in the context of conflict resolution, the mediator has a different role than the various stakeholders, but the mediator can shift out of the role and also speak as a negotiator or advocate.

Table Five
Examples of Scope of Worldview Expression

Scope

Overlapping or Merged Categories

Distinct but Compatible Identities

Distinct and Incompatible Identities

Analysis in Practice

We can use this expanded set of analytic tools to illustrate the benefits of this approach in practice. The first example offers a high-level systemic comparison of two approaches to conflict resolution. The second compares enacted and articulated answers to the BQs and the transformation that is possible when various modes are acknowledged. The third compares the identities and roles that different actors bring to the table when attempting to resolve conflicts and the role of worldview analysis in moderating the scope of group identity.

Comparing Systems of Thought

In his article “Beyond Liberal Peacemaking,” Ofer Zalzberg (2019) argues that liberal peacemakers should acknowledge that liberalism is only one of several political philosophies with particular worldviews and contrasts it with “illiberal” approaches embraced by others. We can use the BQs to compare the liberal and illiberal approaches as systems (see Table Six). This is a very **low-resolution** comparison that obscures differences between parties within these two groups. If we increased the resolution (and reduced the **scale**), we could compare different liberal approaches or spell out the specifics of the various illiberal approaches. In terms of mode, both groups have likely **articulated** their answers verbally or in writing, but they may or may not always **act** in accord with the views they articulate. In terms of **scope**, we can consider whether these answers apply only in the context of peacemaking processes or are adopted more widely.

Comparing Modes of Expression

In her discussion of the role of dignity in resolving conflicts, Donna Hicks (2021) provides an illustration of how **enacted** and **articulated** modes of expression can be at odds and how attention to the enacted expression can lead to transformation. Hicks opens her introduction with a description of a workshop on communication skills that she was supposed to conduct with civilian and military leaders drawn from different sides of a decades-long civil war in a Latin American country. When she entered the room, “[t]here was so much hostility, the parties in conflict wouldn’t look at each other or at me” (Hicks 2021: 1). The articulated goal of the meeting was to mend relationships between warring parties by enhancing their communication skills. Feeling the tension in the room, Hicks concluded that enhanced skills would not improve the situation. Participants were enacting their sense of having been violated by their opponents and their desire to avoid further indignities by refusing to engage with either Hicks or their opponents.

To transform the situation, Hicks redefined the situation from “leaders unable to work together” to “vulnerable people whose dignity has been

Table Six
A Systemic Comparison of Liberal and Illiberal Approaches to Peacemaking

BQs	Liberal Peacemakers	Illiberal Groups
What exists? What's real?	Natural, secularizing socio-political world	God; God-given sacred places
Who are we?	Rights-based peacemakers	God's people
How do we know this?	International law; self-evident human rights	Revelation, scripture, tradition
Situation	Intractable conflict over sacred sites	Intractable conflict over sacred sites
Goal	Territorial partition, end of conflict and claims	Control of sacred sites
Path	Negotiated exchange of secular goods	Maintain and/or enhance control over sacred sites

violated.” In light of this redefined situation, her goal was not mending relationships via enhanced communication skills but restoring everyone’s sense of dignity by encouraging them to name, acknowledge, and address the ways their dignity had been violated and, in the process, enhance their empathy for one another (see [Table Seven](#)). Addressing the enacted situation by shifting the goal and path led to greater empathy, which in turn enabled better communication and enhanced the leaders’ ability to negotiate.

Comparing Identities and Roles

In peacemaking processes, people take on particular roles and peacemakers discuss the form those roles should take. For example, both Zalzburg (2019) and Seul (2021) argue that the role of the mediator should be to help parties to a conflict negotiate across worldviews. We can use an agent-based perspective to compare the role and identity of the mediator with that of the negotiator and the partisan (see [Table Eight](#)). In conflict situations, the scope of the partisans’ answers to the ontology and cosmology questions is typically all-encompassing. Their perception of reality is defined by their group and their identification with their group is heightened by conflict. Their goal is to find a solution that works for them regardless of its effect on their opponents. The result is polarization and more conflict.

The mediator, who recognizes the partisans’ polarized perceptions of reality, assumes a situation-specific role in which they identify as a

Table Seven
An Agent-Based Comparison of Shifts in Goals in Response to Framing of Situation

BQs	Articulated	Enacted	Enacted Reframed
What exists? What's real?	Unresolvable conflict	Unresolvable conflict	Humans who have value and worth
Who are we?	Parties in conflict	People who do not matter to others; humiliated, enraged	We are invaluable, priceless, and irreplaceable members of the human family
How do we know this?	Parties would not look at each other	They violated our dignity	It is inherent
Situation	Leaders unable to work together due to decades of civil war	Vulnerable people whose dignity has been violated	Vulnerable people whose dignity has been violated
Goal	Mend relationships	Avoid further indignities (by prevailing over opponents)	Recognize dignity of self and others; restore capacity for empathy
Path	Enhance communication skills	Fight (argue) or flight (avoid interaction)	Demonstrate care and attention for self and others by naming and acknowledging indignities

Table Eight
An Agent-Based Comparison of Three Roles/Identities in the Context of Peacemaking

BQs	Mediator	Negotiator	Partisan
What exists? What's real?	Multiple perceived realities	Multiple perceived realities	Reality as defined by group (e.g., our God, our sacred space)
Who am I? Who are we?	Mediator (identifies with role instead of group)—a situation-specific role	Both negotiator and group member (dual identity)—a situation-specific role	Identity defined by group (e.g., we are God's people)—a continuous identity
How do we know this?	Role is acknowledged by stakeholders; behavior is in accord with role	Role is acknowledged by stakeholders; behavior is in accord with role	Source of identity is defined by group (e.g., revelation, scripture)
Situation	Intractable conflict based on firmly held beliefs	Intractable conflict based on firmly held beliefs	Intractable conflict based on firmly held beliefs
Goal	Facilitate negotiations	Negotiate solution that works for all parties	Attain solution that works for their own group
Path	Enable stakeholders to name and acknowledge own and other's worldview	Negotiate for own group with an eye to the needs of other group	Advocate group's position

mediator rather than with the parties to the conflict. The mediator's goal is to facilitate negotiations by enabling stakeholders to name and acknowledge their own worldview and that of the other parties to the conflict. In doing so, they support negotiators, who typically have a dual identity as both negotiator and group member. Their goal is to negotiate a solution that works for all parties to the conflict. This requires them to advocate for their own group with an awareness of the worldview and interests of other parties to the conflict. In adopting a stance that takes more than their own worldview into account, negotiators must at least temporarily moderate the scope of their identification with their group. In this approach, theologians and other experts from within the group are enlisted to consider whether potential solutions can be understood in terms of the tradition's sources of knowledge (BQ3).

Conclusion

Although partisans typically want to claim that their articulated worldview remains intact in the wake of negotiations, the resolution of conflicts of necessity involves implicit adjustments, if not overt changes, in enacted worldviews. To identify and encourage nuanced change, we need an approach that allows us to do more than compare the ultimate, articulated worldviews of parties to a conflict. Cognitive-behavioral approaches, which reveal the dynamic, largely unconscious nature of world-making processing, highlight the extent to which we act based on nonreflective assessments of situations without worrying about whether our actions fit into a consistent overall worldview.

We can integrate these two approaches—systemic and cognitive-behavioral—by adopting an evolutionary approach that defines worldviews in terms of simplified “big questions” that allow for both proximate and ultimate answers and characterizes responses to the BQs based on their mode, scope, and scale. This added complexity allows us to explore how people's answers change as they shift between modes, scope, and scale and facilitates a search for seemingly small (non-ultimate) changes that may in turn enable significant movement in resolving conflicts.

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