

*Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Second Edition)

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## James Sire Updates Classic Worldview Title

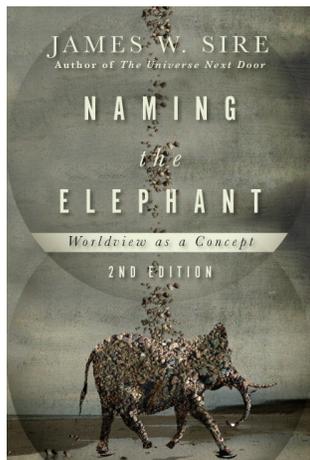
With indefatigable spirit, James W. Sire has championed worldview thinking for more than forty years. In 1976 his book *The Universe Next Door: A Worldview Catalog*, now in its fifth edition and used as a text at over one hundred colleges and universities, introduced Christians and non-Christians to the value of worldview thinking. *Naming the Elephant*, a companion volume for those desiring a more in-depth discussion of the nature of a worldview, addresses such issues as

- the history of the concept of worldview
- the first question we should ask in formulating a worldview
- how worldviews are formed existentially as well as intellectually
- whether a worldview is primarily an intellectual system, a way of life or a story
- the public and private dimensions of a worldview
- the role worldview thinking plays in assessing our own worldview and those of others

Since the first edition of *Naming the Elephant* in 2004, scholars such as N. T. Wright, Charles Taylor, James Davison Hunter, James K. A. Smith and Andy Crouch have made significant contributions to the concept of worldview. Thus, “it’s time for another reassessment and reformulation of the concept,” says the author. In this edition, revised and updated throughout, Sire adds important details to the basic conception of worldview described in the first edition. The concept of worldview is expanded to include the positive additions and the more negative critiques offered in the past ten years. However, Sire concludes, “In all of this tinkering with the concept of worldview analysis, I still remain convinced of its great value.”

### *Naming the Elephant*

- Briefly surveys the history of worldview thinking
- Offers critical reflection on the nature and usefulness of worldview thinking
- Explains Sire’s new, refined definition of *worldview*
- Examines the existential and intellectual formation of worldviews
- Examines the public and private dimensions of worldviews
- Explores how our worldview shapes the way we live (assumptions, thoughts and actions)
- Shows how worldview thinking can help you navigate an increasingly pluralistic world



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## James Sire on Worldview, *The Universe Next Door* and *Naming the Elephant*

### Why is a discussion and understanding of one's worldview so important?

**James Sire:** It is impossible to understand ourselves well if we do not know at least the rudiments of our worldview. What do we think is the prime reality—God, material nature, some cosmic spirit or, maybe, nothing we can even speak of? And what is this God or nature or spirit really like? Who do we think we are—just a piece of complex matter that disappears at death? Or are we an “eternal soul” caught in a body? Or are we made in the image of God? And what do we think happens at death? Why do we think this? What is the purpose of life, if any? These are all vital questions. If we understand our answers and why we think them true, we will be able to live more stable and purposeful lives.

### What is the significance of the title *Naming the Elephant*?

**Sire:** At the foundation of a person's understanding of reality lies the Elephant that holds up their whole conception of life. The name each of us gives to that Elephant—God, the cosmos, the divine fire, the Void—is the most important aspect of our worldview.

### Describe the difference between your worldview books, *The Universe Next Door* and *Naming the Elephant*.

**Sire:** *The Universe Next Door* is a basic catalog of worldviews—that is, of the primary ways people have viewed reality. In part, the book is a work of popular intellectual history. It begins with Christian theism, the worldview dominant in the seventeenth century and very much alive today, and shows how subsequent worldviews (deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism) developed from theism, and then how Eastern pantheism, New Age thought and postmodernism have emerged to further complicate the pluralistic character of our Western culture. The book is also a work to help individuals understand their own worldview and why they think it is true. *The Universe Next Door* is not itself an apologetic for the Christian faith, but it provides much of the material from which an apologetic can be constructed by those who think through its implications. A short answer to the question of why I wrote this book in the first place is in its epigraph: “For any of us to be fully conscious intellectually we should not only be able to detect the worldviews of others but be aware of our own—why it is ours and why in light of so many options we think it is true.”

*Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* asks—What exactly is a worldview? It takes the largely intellectual concept I first formulated in *The Universe Next Door* in 1976 and asks whether it is still adequate. As a result of this analysis, I offer a revised definition that preserves the importance of the intellect but identifies the essence of a worldview as a matter of the heart—the central control room of the human being—rather than solely as a matter of the mind. The final chapter suggests ways in which worldview analysis can benefit us and our culture.



## James Sire, Longtime Champion for Worldview Thinking

James W. Sire (PhD, University of Missouri), formerly a senior editor at InterVarsity Press, is an active speaker and writer. He has taught English, philosophy, theology and short courses at many universities and seminaries. He continues to be a frequent guest lecturer in the United States and Europe.

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His InterVarsity Press books and Bible studies include:

- *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*
- *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible*
- *Discipleship of the Mind*
- *Chris Chrisman Goes to College*
- *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?*
- *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling*
- *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*
- *Learning to Pray Through the Psalms*
- *Why Good Arguments Often Fail*
- *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics*