

ONLY A UNIVERSE,  
OR A WORLD TOO?

**A Study Of Naturalism**  
**Presented by: Rick Harvey**

**Roundtable in Ideology**  
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Only A Universe, Or A World Too?  
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## A BURDEN OF PROOF

*Of the sons of Issachar,  
men who understood the times,  
with knowledge of what Israel should do.  
-I Chronicles-*

Since the birth of Christianity, Christians have faced a bewildering host of challenges, both internal and external, some greater than others. Among these challenges have been the Christian faith's relationship to Judaism, the polytheistic worldview of the cultural milieu in which it found itself, the brutal Roman persecution of its first three centuries, troubling differences on the meaning of critical Christian doctrines, volcanic disruptions to the unity of the Church, and many more.

Certainly among the greatest external challenges which the Church has faced, particularly in the Western world, is the development during the past two to three centuries of what is called *naturalism* as a comprehensive worldview, and the attendant cultural phenomena of *modernism*. While important movements of philosophical thought have arisen since the zenith of modernism, as we will see, aspects of naturalism still remain as bedrock concepts, even within those subsequent ideologies.

When the subject of philosophy comes up, it is quite natural for those unfamiliar or untrained in the subject to feel uncomfortable with it, and sometimes even to be dismissive. Some aspects of philosophy seem far removed from everyday practical living. Yet philosophies and ideas profoundly shape the world in which we live, and the people with whom we regularly interact, often without either they or us being aware of how they have been subtly influenced. The perceptive critic of naturalism, Phillip Johnson, observes: "In fact, metaphysical assumptions are most powerful when they are unconscious and do not come to the surface because everyone in the relevant community

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takes them for granted.”<sup>1</sup> The prominence of naturalism in the mainstream of Western thought places it among one of the preeminent shaping influences of our times whether we know it or not.

For those who wish to understand the times, like the sons of Issachar in ancient Israel, with a knowledge of what the Church should do (1 Chronicles 12:32), a good grasp of the worldview of naturalism is essential. Laying a foundational understanding of naturalism and a thoughtful philosophical and biblical response to it is the objective of this presentation.

While it is necessary to reserve a thoroughgoing description of naturalism until later in this presentation, a brief preliminary explanation of what we are discussing will be helpful at this juncture. The Christian philosophers J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig define naturalism as meaning that “...reality is exhausted by the spatiotemporal world of physical objects accessible in some way to the sense and embraced by our best scientific theories.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, according to naturalism, there is no reality beyond the physical or natural world, and all reality can be examined and explored through the physical sciences such as biology, physics, cosmology, etc. By extension, therefore, as we will see, naturalism precludes the real existence of anything not accessible to science. This includes such things as God, evil, the mind, the soul, the supernatural, and those things typically associated with religious faith.

<b>Spaciotemporal:</b> belonging to space and time, or to space- time.
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One of the intentions of this presentation is to help equip people to be able to satisfactorily identify naturalistic ideas and influences when they are present, and to be able to assist themselves as well as others in carefully weighing the validity of those naturalistic influences, presuppositions, and conclusions.

Often Christians find themselves on the defensive when encountering naturalism. It is my contention that this need not necessarily be the case. The Christian apologist

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<sup>1</sup> Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1995), 67

<sup>2</sup> J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations For A Christian Worldview*, (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, Intervarsity Press, 2003), 184

Greg Koukl, in his very helpful series on Tactics in Defending the Faith<sup>3</sup>, points out that Christians do not always have the burden of proof. Generally, it is the person presenting or promoting a specific view that carries the burden of proof to establish the validity of their viewpoint. If I am approached by someone wishing me to adopt their naturalistic worldview, then they have the burden of proving that their view is superior to the one I already hold. A key tool in placing the burden of proof where it belongs is to ask questions. By understanding the underlying assumptions and presuppositions of a naturalistic worldview, we will be in a place to be able to ask the kinds of questions that expose the weaknesses of naturalism, and will then be in a place to offer a superior worldview. Once we have begun to offer our own Christian worldview for consideration, then the burden of proof shifts to us.

Within the larger context of the public square, I would contend that any worldview vying for consideration carries its own burden of proof. As we will see, naturalism makes some very bold claims. One responsibility of the Church within the public square is to ask of naturalism the hard questions that expose the sandy foundations upon which it is erected. Hopefully, this presentation will assist in equipping us for just such a task.

To accomplish this end, I will first survey how we have arrived where we are as a culture and society by tracing the historical roots of naturalism. Then we will examine naturalism in depth, seeking to understand its essential elements. Of special concern to the Christian, is naturalism's view of what it means to be human, so we will examine in depth the aspect of naturalism called physicalism. It will also be necessary to consider naturalism's scientific pretensions, or its reliance on scientism. Having hopefully acquired a substantial understanding of what naturalism is, then we will look at the long-term implications of naturalism, as well as the subject of naturalism's influence within our culture. Finally, we will consider the Christian's response to naturalism.

One point of definition is in order. Throughout this paper I will use the term *naturalist*. This word has chiefly two meanings in common usage. First, it is used to refer to someone who is an expert or student of nature or natural history. As such, there have

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<sup>3</sup> Greg Koukl, *Tactics in Defending the Faith*, Audio recordings, 5 CDs, (Signal Hill, CA, Stand to Reason, 2005)

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been many theistic naturalists who have given themselves to the study of nature. Second, the word naturalist refers to someone who holds to naturalism as a worldview or ideology. Throughout this paper I will be using the word naturalist in this second sense of one who holds to naturalism.

So, without further introduction, let's begin by discovering how we have arrived at the place where naturalism so profoundly influences the world in which we live.

## A JOURNEY OF A THOUSAND MILES

*Is there anything of which one might say,*

*“See this, it is new”?*

*Already it has existed for ages*

*Which were before us.*

*-Solomon-*

While the prominence of a naturalistic worldview such as we have today is unprecedented in world history, the existence of key elements of naturalism are hardly new. Naturalists speak of encountering the Ionian Enchantment.<sup>4</sup> This refers to the wonder experienced by viewing the world. This wonder is held alongside the view that the material universe is the only reality that exists. Ionia was an ancient Greek region in Asia Minor (8<sup>th</sup> century BCE), and the home of the Greek philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer, Thales of Miletus (c. 624 – c. 546 BCE). Thales is considered by some naturalists to be the father of naturalism. Thales supposedly thought of the entire natural world as consisting of insensate matter and impersonal forces operating independently of human or supernatural volition.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Insensate:</b> lacking in physical sensation or reason.
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Other Greek philosophers similarly dismissed the Greek pantheon from any causal-explanatory role in their views of the order and source of nature. For example, the sophist Protagoras (490-420 BCE) was agnostic and viewed the world from an essentially naturalist perspective.<sup>6</sup> In Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro* (written 380 BCE), Socrates (c.

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<sup>4</sup> E.O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*, pp. 4-5, cited by:  
<http://www.naturalism.org/history.htm>, last accessed 1/27/13

<sup>5</sup> “Thales is the first person about whom we know to propose explanations of natural phenomena which were materialistic rather than mythological or theological.”

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/thales/> Last accessed 1/21/13. See also

<http://www.naturalism.org/history.htm> last accessed 1/21/13

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.iep.utm.edu/protagor/>, last accessed 1/21/13

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469-399 BCE) calls into question the idea that the Greek gods were a source of ethics.<sup>7</sup> The Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BCE), father of Epicureanism, denied that the soul continued after death and viewed nature from a materialistic viewpoint.<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that these ancient Greeks held to a thoroughgoing modern naturalism, yet elements of naturalism are detectable in their views.<sup>9</sup>

Moving forward in history, ideas associated with naturalism continue to be detectable. Epicurean philosophy viewed all things from the gods to the thoughts of men from a materialist perspective.<sup>10</sup> The Romans employed highly developed applied knowledge of the natural world to construct the many marvels of the Roman world, including roads, bridges, aqueducts, and the like.

While all of these factors of emphasis on the natural world, materialistic ideas, and dismissal of theological causation or ethics are observable in ancient to medieval times, they do not reveal the clearly logical chain of events that becomes obvious beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Up until the sixteenth century, the overwhelmingly dominant worldview, at least in the Western world, was theistic. As Douglas Groothuis, associate professor of philosophy at Denver Seminary says, "...the premodern medieval period was characterized by a fairly stable sense of cultural authority."<sup>11</sup> God was believed to have created the entire natural world, and to be intimately involved in an ongoing way in all the affairs of the world, both great and small. In addition to their physical bodies, humankind was believed to possess non-material souls or minds which were associated with their bodies but distinct from them. Because God was above and outside of the natural world, it was believed that He could, and sometimes did, supersede natural laws by supernatural events to accomplish His ends.

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Kenny, *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy*, (Malden, MA, Blackwell Pub., 2006), 28-31.

See also <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html>, last accessed 1/21/13

<sup>8</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epicurus/>, last accessed 1/21/13

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.naturalism.org/history.htm>, last accessed, 1/21/13

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicureanism> last accessed 1/7/13

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2000), 34

### THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

All of this began to change dramatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries due to the Renaissance and the protestant Reformation. While the Renaissance contained both Christian and non-Christian elements, some thinkers began to develop their thinking outside the traditional biblical framework. The medieval synthesis of Christian and Greek thought had started to unravel.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Reformation called into question the heretofore monolithic authority of the Roman Catholic Church. As Groothuis observes, “The social effect of this theological reform, however, was a further destabilization of Christendom.”<sup>13</sup> This destabilization resulted in a lengthy period of largely religious wars across Europe, including the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). This bloody acrimony contributed to a sense of disillusionment with the church and many began questioning the very idea of divine revelation as a source of authority, giving impetus to the Enlightenment skepticism.<sup>14</sup>

The period referred to as the Age of Reason, the Age of Enlightenment, or simply the Enlightenment, covers roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was a cultural and intellectual phenomenon in Europe and the Americas. The eighteenth century philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his essay “What Is Enlightenment?” declared the motto of the Enlightenment to be “Dare to know.”<sup>15</sup> A spirit of criticism led thinkers to question all received beliefs in the cause of rationality.<sup>16</sup> Allan Bloom identifies one of the defining aspects of the period: “What distinguished the Enlightenment from earlier philosophy was its intention to extend to all men what had been the preserve of only a few: the life lived according to reason.”<sup>17</sup>

It is difficult to be critical of an era denominated with such a positive term as enlightenment, and indeed, when I was studying the Enlightenment in school, I recall

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<sup>12</sup> Groothuis, 34

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 35

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing Of The American Mind*, (New York, NY, Simon and Schuster, 1987), 164

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very little, if anything, that encouraged a critical analysis of the period and ideas of the Enlightenment.

Two factors may render the Enlightenment somewhat paradoxical for the Christian to evaluate objectively. First, the initial personalities who influenced Enlightenment thinking were Christian theists, and were committed to an essentially Christian worldview. Second, as the Enlightenment progressed, it became increasingly anti-theistic, and led ultimately, as we shall see, to a naturalistic worldview which rejected theism in general, and Christianity specifically.

In the century leading up to the Enlightenment several key figures played an influential roll in shaping Enlightenment ideas. Among the first was René Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes was a Christian theist. He is best known for his conclusion: “I think, therefore I am.” Theologian and philosopher James W. Sire observes that Descartes:

...set the stage by conceiving of the universe as a giant mechanism of ‘matter’ which people comprehended by “mind.” He thus split reality into two kinds of being; ever since then the Western world has found it hard to see itself as an integrated whole. The naturalist, taking one route to unification, made mind a subcategory of mechanistic matter.<sup>18</sup>

The ideas of English philosopher and physician, John Locke (1632-1704), in large part a Christian theist,<sup>19</sup> helped shape what is called the “Enlightenment Project.”<sup>20</sup> Locke emphasized that God-given reason is the arbiter of what can be taken as true from the revelation in the Bible. According to Sire, “The naturalists removed the ‘God-given’ from this conception, and made ‘reason’ the sole criterion for truth.”<sup>21</sup>

Prior to the Enlightenment, Platonic influences on Christian thinking tended to deemphasize the natural world and emphasize the knowledge of God.<sup>22</sup> While this negative view of the natural world is distinctly unbiblical, it nevertheless has shown itself at various points in

**Platonism:** one aspect of which was the view of the soul as good, but the body and physical world is evil.

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<sup>18</sup> James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, InterVarsity Press, 2009), 67

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 67

<sup>20</sup> Groothuis, 35

<sup>21</sup> Sire, 67

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 48

Church history. During the Renaissance (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) a vigorous inquisitiveness about the natural world intensified. As great minds, like that of Copernicus, began to explore that natural world, a picture of that world began to emerge as a magnificent, well ordered machine, much like a finely developed timepiece with interworking gears and levers.<sup>23</sup> As such it was open to investigation and understanding by the human mind in ways not previously anticipated. It was this recognition of the ability of the human mind to understand and explain the natural world through human reason that ignited the excitement of the Enlightenment era. Modern science had been born and was proving to be remarkably successful in explaining the natural world.<sup>24</sup>

### *Shift In Authority*

Herein lies a primary development fostered by the Enlightenment: the dramatic shift of authority. Prior to the Enlightenment there were two primary sources of authority for determining truth, the Scriptures (as interpreted by the Church), and the classics.<sup>25</sup> Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes, Locke, and Sir Francis Bacon led to a supreme confidence in human reason.<sup>26</sup> Man could acquire a true knowledge by employing the five senses and human reason.<sup>27</sup> Anything which could not be verified by the senses was considered unknowable. The *necessity* of reason had been replaced by the *sufficiency* of reason.<sup>28</sup> Thus human reason replaced Scriptures and the classics as the basis of authoritative knowledge. But knowledge had now been constricted. It no longer included the knowledge of God, but merely that of the natural world.<sup>29</sup> Since God and theology were not something that could be measured, weighed, touched, or seen, He was no longer relevant, and, in fact, probably did not exist. The universe, as it seems, is all there is. The spiritual world existed only as a figment of man's imagination. In this regard, the eighteenth century thinker, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751), who was thought in

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<sup>23</sup> Sire, 49

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 49

<sup>25</sup> Groothuis, 34; Sire, 48, 67;

<http://www.christianchronicler.com/history1/enlightenment.html>, last accessed 1/26/13

<sup>26</sup> Sire, 67

<sup>27</sup> Groothuis, 41

<sup>28</sup> Sire, 49, 50

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 67

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his day to be an atheist, but was actually a deist, considered the deity to be of little interest. God's existence could be disregarded as of no significance. According to Sire, "It is precisely this feeling, this conclusion, which marks the transition to naturalism."<sup>30</sup>

With man's reason now elevated to the position of ultimate authority, and the need of divine revelation dethroned, a consequential shift occurred in how mankind was viewed. As church historian Michael Hines points out, prior to the Enlightenment man was viewed pessimistically, as one whose reason was fallen, corrupted by sin.

Enlightenment optimism now ruled the day, arguing that man was capable, with the implementation of his reason, of overcoming all obstacles and ushering in a new day.<sup>31</sup>

As the eighteenth century progressed, Enlightenment thinkers became increasingly hostile to Christianity or to the Church, or both. In France there developed a cadre of philosophers called the *philosophes* who were aggressively hostile to Catholic Christianity as it existed in France at the time.<sup>32</sup> Most influential among these *philosophes*, until his falling out with them, was Voltaire (1694-1778). Voltaire became increasingly hostile to the Church throughout his life. His influence in France and Europe was profound.<sup>33</sup> In his later years he sought to encourage a virtual intellectual crusade against the Church, repeatedly uttering his watchword: "Crush the infamy!" He repudiated most of the distinctive doctrines of the church, including original sin, the Trinity, incarnation, atonement, the Eucharist, and ridiculed the sacrifice of God on the cross.<sup>34</sup>

### *Hostility*

Another, even more influential philosopher of the Enlightenment era than Voltaire, was the Swiss born Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).<sup>35</sup> While Rousseau was not aligned with the *philosophes*, his writings were deeply influential, not least in the

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<sup>30</sup> Sire, 68

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.christianchronicler.com/history1/enlightenment.html>, last accessed 1/26/13; see also Groothuis, 35

<sup>32</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *The Age Of Voltaire*, (New York, NY, Simon and Schuster, 1965), 605

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 715

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 738

<sup>35</sup> Kenny, 267

French Revolution, where followers of the then-dead Rousseau, purporting to be the embodiment of Rousseau's idea of *general will*, engaged in the Reign of Terror.<sup>36</sup>

The historian of philosophy Sir Anthony Kenny reports:

The revolution could claim to be the offspring not only of Rousseau but also of the Enlightenment *philosophes* whom he opposed. The revolutionaries did their best to destroy the Catholic Church not only because of the political and economic power it had enjoyed... but also because of their belief that it was an obstacle to scientific progress.<sup>37</sup>

The impact of the *philosophes* and Voltaire on the French religious environment, particularly in Paris and among the literate classes, was remarkable. The renowned French historian, Henri Martin (1810-1883), in somewhat of an exaggeration, wrote that the people of France in 1762 were "a generation which had no belief in Christianity."<sup>38</sup>

Men were not in a hurry, however, to abandon God altogether. The religious instinct is too deeply engrained. Hence, many influential thinkers of the eighteenth century, among them Mettrie, Voltaire, and Rousseau, while abandoning overt theism, nevertheless retained a belief in God, albeit a distant and uninvolved deity.<sup>39</sup> He may have created the world, but had since left it and man to their own devices. This was Deism.<sup>40</sup>

Deism recognized certain useful qualities of religion, but rejected the authority of Scripture in favor of confidence in man's reason. Deists such as Thomas Jefferson rejected the idea of the supernatural. Jefferson is famous for excising all the miracles from his bible.<sup>41</sup> Deism, while acknowledging God, denies that God can be known through revelation or incarnation. He can only be known through nature, and nature can be understood through rationality and human reason.<sup>42</sup> Deism, then, became the bridge between theism and naturalism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kenny, 271

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Durant, 780

<sup>39</sup> Sire, 50, 51

<sup>40</sup> Groothuis, 35

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.christianchronicler.com/history1/enlightenment.html> last accessed 1/25/13

<sup>42</sup> Sire, 49

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 49, 66

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## THE ENLIGHTENMENT PROJECT

The Enlightenment was more than simply an intellectual exercise. It was an endeavor; one that the renowned Scottish philosopher Alasdair McIntyre called the Enlightenment Project.<sup>44</sup> This endeavor was to “free humanity from superstition and found a philosophy and civilization on rational inquiry, empirical evidence and scientific discovery.”<sup>45</sup> This Project is typically referred to as *modernism*.

The significance of modernism, to the extent that it is distinct from the Enlightenment, is that although the Enlightenment as an intellectual phenomenon eventually ended, due in part to the excesses of the French Revolution, modernism, impelled by the Industrial Revolution and a spirit of pragmatism,<sup>46</sup> took deep root and endured well into the twentieth century (and, some would argue, beyond). Modernism can refer to several schools of thought related to various disciplines, but when used in the context of which we are concerned in this presentation, it refers to “concepts of universal rationality, objectivity, the development of science and goal of historical progress through these newfound human powers.”<sup>47</sup>

Modernism, so defined, was characterized by a highly rationalistic understanding of the world. Human Reason was extolled as the means by which all questions could be answered and all problems could be resolved. Reason and rationality were ultimately infallible, and when employed in the service of science and technology, there was nothing that man could not do to create the new heavens and earth. Science became the unquestionable dogma, displacing Scripture and revelation.

Along with millions of European soldiers, modernism met its match in the trenches of World War I, its optimism in humanity exposed.<sup>48</sup> But the non-theistic answers to modernism were deeply troubling in their own respects. Two of the most

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<sup>44</sup> Groothuis, 35

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.iep.utm.edu/technolo/>, last accessed 1/22/13

<sup>47</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Consequence of Ideas*, (Wheaton, IL, Crossways Books, div. of Good News Pub., 2000), 159-171. Also, Groothuis, 36

<sup>48</sup> During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Modernism encountered its stepchild, Post-modernism. A convincing argument can be made that Post-modernism is not so much a replacement of modernism, but rather modernism “gone to seed.” (See Groothuis, 40ff)

pronounced have been Nihilism and Post-modernism.<sup>49</sup> Both lie beyond the scope of this presentation.

It is helpful to make a distinction between Modernism and Modernity. Modernism can be seen as an intellectual frame of mind or worldview. Modernity, as Os Guinness, the Christian social analyst and critic makes clear, can be seen in a much broader sense of a sociological phenomenon influenced certainly by Modernism's ideology, but also by social and cultural factors such as the capitalist revolution of the fifteenth century, the technological and industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, and the communications revolution of the twentieth century. So while some aspects of the ideology of Modernism may have been eclipsed, Modernity as a social/cultural phenomenon is still very much with us.<sup>50</sup> As Guinness points out:

Modernism as a set of ideas may well have collapsed and "postmodern" may therefore be legitimate to describe the set of ideas that succeeds it. But to be postmodern in the structural sense is as yet inconceivable.<sup>51</sup>

### AN ENDURING WORLDVIEW

It is a curious feature of history that the Enlightenment foundered so badly on French soil. The French Revolution played a role in ending the Enlightenment intellectual experiment. Similarly, it was in the trenches in France that the ill-founded optimism of Modernism was exposed, ultimately to receive its death blow at Treblinka, Dachau, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.

Nevertheless, the Enlightenment has had an ongoing and profound influence in a key contribution to Western thought, naturalism.<sup>52</sup> God, the spiritual, the supernatural, had all been erased from perceived reality. All that was real was exhausted in the material, spatiotemporal universe.<sup>53</sup> And all that was real could ultimately be discovered and understood merely through the mechanisms of the physical sciences. This

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<sup>49</sup> Groothuis, 38; Sire, 97; Sproul, 159, 171

<sup>50</sup> Os Guinness, *The American Hour*, (New York, NY, The Free Press, Div. of Macmillan, Inc., 1993), 26, 27

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 27

<sup>52</sup> Sire, 66-68

<sup>53</sup> Moorland and Craig, 184

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understanding of reality survived the Enlightenment, it survived the Enlightenment Project of Modernism, and as we will see, it remains a dominant intellectual and cultural influence to the present day.

One of the contributing factors that has enabled naturalism to persist and thrive, to become a prevalent worldview, even in the face of considerable challenges, has been that it managed to achieve what all great religions possess: a comprehensive creation story.<sup>54</sup> It can be argued persuasively that had Darwin's theory of evolution and related scientific theories of origin not gained wide acceptance beginning in the nineteenth century, naturalism would not have possessed the intellectual force and apparent integrity and coherence necessary to become a prominent worldview.<sup>55</sup> It must be remembered that, as we have seen, naturalistic concepts have been around for nearly three millennia. Yet it has only been since *The Origin of the Species* that they have gained widespread intellectual acceptance. As Phillip Johnson observes, "If nature is all there is, how did complex things like ourselves come into existence? Without a satisfying answer to that question, naturalism is a nonstarter."<sup>56</sup>

But naturalism possesses feet of clay, as we shall see. The theory of evolution is a theory in crisis, as the best selling author, scientist, and mathematician, David Berlinski, argues so wittingly in his assessment of the scientific pretensions of atheism, *The Devil's Delusion*.<sup>57</sup> But apart from the weakness of naturalism's so-called scientific foundations, its metaphysical underpinnings are equally suspect. And, yes, naturalism is loaded with metaphysical presuppositions not rooted in science.

But I get ahead of myself. What, exactly is naturalism, and what are its challenges?

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<sup>54</sup> David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion*, (New York, NY, Basic Books, member of Perseus Books Group, 2009),190-192

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, 16

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Berlinski, 192-197

## UNDERSTANDING NATURALISM

*The universe is everything that is,*

*or was,*

*or will be.*

*-Carl Sagan-*

It is no accident that the term naturalism ends as it does with the suffix *ism*. In spite of what many naturalists would have us believe, naturalism is chiefly a metaphysical or philosophical construct, or what pastor and author Ronnie Rogers calls a “non-supernatural religion.”<sup>58</sup> While it makes numerous specific claims about reality, about science, and about knowledge, as we will see, those claims issue from philosophical or metaphysical presuppositions, not from empirical evidence. This does not, in itself, disprove naturalism, but it places it upon the same level playing field as other philosophical worldviews, and not above them as it so often claims.

At this point it is necessary for me to introduce a somewhat counter-intuitive way of speaking. When speaking of the existence of reality with reference to naturalism, philosophers sometimes speak of the world and the universe. But when they do so, they speak of them in just the opposite way that we might typically conceive. The *world*, in this respect, is “the sum total of everything whatever that exists including nonspatiotemporal abstract entities as well as the spatiotemporal universe of physical realities.”<sup>59</sup> The *universe*, on the other hand, is conceived only of spatiotemporal material realities (such as atoms, stars, rocks, energy). When spoken of in this way, it is seen that the universe is actually *less* than the world. The universe contains only material realities, whereas the world includes the universe and also includes all non-material realities such as spirit, mind, soul, God, etc. An ontologist is someone who believes in the world. A

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<sup>58</sup> Ronnie W. Rogers, *The Death Of Man As Man*, (Bloomington, IN, CrossBooks, a div. of Lifeway, 2011), 8

<sup>59</sup> Moreland and Craig, 184

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naturalist is someone who believes only in the universe. Hence the naturalist holds that there are no nonspatiotemporal realities.

Two striking features of naturalism are its belief that the universe is all there is to reality, and its overweening confidence in the powers of human reason and rationality.

Concerning naturalists, Moreland and Craig state:

...philosophical naturalists...hold that reality is exhausted by the spatiotemporal world of physical objects embraced by our best scientific theories.<sup>60</sup>

Naturalists believe only in the universe; philosophers who are sometimes called ontologists believe in the world. For the naturalist, therefore, nothing exists that does not have spatial (or temporal) location and/or duration.<sup>61</sup>

Sire identifies eight elements of naturalism answering basic worldview questions.<sup>62</sup> These are:

1. Prime reality is matter and is all there is. Quoting Carl Sagan: “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”

2. The Cosmos is a closed system. He says: “...the universe is a *closed* system. It is not open to reordering from the outside—either by a transcendent Being (for there is none) or...by self-transcendent or autonomous human beings.”

3. Humans are merely complex matter. Yet they are distinct from the rest of the cosmos. This yields a significance to humanity and a basis for morality. Inherent in this view of humans as mere matter is the belief that the brain and the mind are the same thing. Quoting Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis: “...the brain secretes thoughts as the liver secretes bile.”

4. Death is extinction.

5. The universe is knowable through innate and autonomous human reason. This is an extension of the Enlightenment’s confidence in rationality and human reason.

6. Ethics are a construct developed by human beings following the evolution of consciousness and self-determination. Naturalism does not deny ethical norms, but posits a radically different basis for them from theism.

7. History is linear, but without purpose. While recognizing that history (both natural and human) moves in a linear, cause and effect,

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<sup>60</sup> Moreland and Craig, 178

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 207

<sup>62</sup> Sire, 68-85

trajectory, Naturalists are emphatic in denying any teleological aspect to history.

8. Naturalism implies no core commitment. Individuals are at liberty to select their own core commitments, whether to their culture, community, or whatever.

Put succinctly, what becomes clear is that naturalism holds to a purely material view of reality. Reality is exhausted by the material universe. There is no reason to look beyond matter and energy to explain any phenomenon. As Carl Sagan boldly affirms, “the universe is everything that is, or was, or will be.”<sup>63</sup> (Remember our distinction between universe and world.) This is what is called philosophical naturalism or metaphysical naturalism.<sup>64</sup>

If naturalism were true, what would it have to say about the meaning of humanness? This leads us to consider a sub-category of naturalism called *physicalism*.

### WHAT IS MAN?

Implicit in Sire’s eight points, listed above, particularly numbers two and three, are important naturalistic claims about what it means to be human. It is naturalism’s claims regarding the nature of being human that have the most profound implications and consequences. Naturalism’s philosophy of humanness is called *physicalism*.

If physicalism is naturalism’s philosophy of humanness, *dualism* identifies what is commonly the theist’s philosophy of humanness.

Moreland and Craig summarize the two views in this way:

The two main views are physicalism and dualism. Physicalism claims that a human being is completely physical, and dualism claims that a human being is both physical and mental.<sup>65</sup>

In this context, when using *mental* or *mind* it refers to the entire non-material aspect of humanness, or the mind/soul. Dualism holds that the human being consists of

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<sup>63</sup> Cited in Berlinski, 51

<sup>64</sup> A distinction between philosophical and methodological naturalism should be made. Methodological naturalism is an approach to doing science in a manner consistent with naturalistic assumptions. It is possible for a person who is not a philosophical naturalist to adhere to a naturalistic methodology in their practice of doing science.

<sup>65</sup> Moreland and Craig, 229

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two distinct but connected realities, the body and the mind. Note that in this view, the brain is part of the body, and is distinct from the mind. Physicalism, on the other hand holds that a human being is only physical, or a body. Phenomena that we associate with our minds, such as thinking, intentionality, self-consciousness, etc., are to the physicalist nothing more than physical/material events transpiring in the brain.

As one might expect, in such a philosophical subject, the foregoing description is somewhat of an oversimplification of otherwise complex views. It will, however, suffice for the purposes of our discussion in this presentation.<sup>66</sup>

Clearly, physicalism has profound implications as it denies dualism. According to physicalism, human beings are nothing more than a collection of material substances and events. They have no soul. As Sire points out, to the naturalist death is extinction. The consciousness that dualists attribute to the existence of the mind or soul, and that causes a person to see himself or herself as in some sense distinct from his or her body, physicalists dismiss as nothing more than the illusionary product of evolutionary physical development along with chemical and electrical events within the brain. Upon death, that consciousness will cease to exist.

This is not to suggest that all naturalists view humans as of no greater significance than the rest of the physical world, or that there is no basis for ethics. While this is true of some naturalists, most hold that the very presence of self-consciousness and other features unique to humanness render the human being as special within the natural world. In the words of a naturalist:

We humans are, of course, unique in that our behavior also demonstrates rationality, purposefulness, and the kinds of socially available meaning that we communicate through language and other cultural practices. The naturalist, however, believes that we can recognize all these hallmarks of human uniqueness while retaining a view of ourselves as entirely natural creatures whose behavior is in principle explainable using standard scientific methods.<sup>67</sup>

It is difficult, admittedly, to understand how such features of humanness, if they are, in fact, the consequence of random, purposeless mutations within the human lineage,

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<sup>66</sup> For a more thoroughgoing discussion of the mind-body problem, one can read Moreland and Craig, chapters 11-14, pp. 228-303

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.naturalism.org/history.htm> last accessed 1/8/13

can be consistently considered as anything other than random luck without any grandeur or significance. Nevertheless, the Naturalist holds that such features do indeed render them significant, if only because no other life form possesses such aspects.

The theist, however, employing the philosophy of dualism, counters that man is significant precisely because he is not only physical, but spiritual as well. He possesses a mind/soul, made in some sense like God and capable of knowing and relating to God. Man's significance lies not primarily in his difference from the rest of living creatures, as in naturalism, though that difference is great, but rather in his likeness to his Creator.

As the self-identified secular Jew, David Berlinski, remarks in his chapter on naturalism's pretensions pertaining to the human mind:

We do not have a serious scientific theory explaining the powers and properties of the human mind. The claim that the human mind is the product of evolution is *not* unassailable fact. It is barely coherent. The idea that man was created in the image of God *remains* what it has always been: And that is the instinctive default position of the human race.<sup>68</sup>  
(emphasis his)

This debate about the mind is far more than an incidental skirmish on the perimeter of the naturalist/theist conflict. It actually lies at the very heart of the issue.

Philipp Johnson, the astute critic of scientism and naturalism, clarifies this:

There is a great deal at stake in the argument about whether the mind can really be explained as a strictly material phenomenon. ...If science cannot explain consciousness, the way is open for some rival discipline—religion in particular—to fill the vacuum with a different metaphysical story of great emotional or imaginative appeal. ...Whoever explains the mind explains science, and gains authority to say how great or small a role science should play in the life of the mind. That is not an authority that scientists will voluntarily surrender to philosophers or theologians.<sup>69</sup>

### *Do I Have A Mind?*

On what basis does the dualist hold to the belief that the mind is distinct from the physical brain? Perhaps the primary argument supporting the dualist claim has to do with

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<sup>68</sup> Berlinski, 179

<sup>69</sup> Johnson, 66

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the law of Indiscernibility of Identicals. This law of logic states that, “If you’ve got two truly identical things, then there is only one thing you are talking about—not two—and any truth that applies to “one” applies to the “other.”<sup>70</sup> Hence, if it is possible to show that something is true about one thing that is not true about another, then those two things are in fact distinct from one another and not the same thing.

This law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals has bearing on the debate between physicalists and dualists for this reason, the physicalist maintains that “alleged mental entities are really identical to physical entities—brain states, properties of the brain, overt bodily behavior and dispositions to behave.”<sup>71</sup> If the dualist can show that some (or any) things true of the mind and/or its properties and states are not true of the brain and/or its properties or states, or vice versa, then physicalism fails and dualism is established.

Employing this approach, physicalism can be challenged at a number of points. For example, mental properties/events (i.e. sensations, thoughts, beliefs, desires, and free choice) are what are called *self-presenting properties*. These properties present themselves directly to the subject, he has them immediately in his consciousness.<sup>72</sup> In addition, a person has private access to his mental properties. No one else has direct access to such properties. On the other hand, physical properties are not self-presenting. This is true of states within the brain such as chemical or electrical events. J. P. Moreland writes:

**Properties**, such as redness or a thought, can be *in* substances or *had* by them. They can be in or had by other substances also. A property itself does not change.

The examination of physical states and events is in principle publicly accessible. But a subject has a way of knowing about his own mental states not available to others—through introspection. ...Mental states are made up of directly available—or self-presenting—properties. One can be aware of the external, physical world only by means of one’s mental states, but one need not be aware of one’s mental states by means of anything else. One is directly aware of them.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> J. P. Moreland, “Physicalism, Naturalism and the Nature of Human Persons,” in *To Everyone An Answer*, ed. By Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland, (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, div. of InterVarsity Press, 2004), 229

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 230

<sup>72</sup> Moreland and Craig, 234, 235

<sup>73</sup> Moreland, 231

On another level, a subject not only has private access to his or her mental properties, but he or she also has them *incorrigibly*. That is, the subject is incapable of being mistaken about that mental property. Someone may experience something, such as a large oak tree. Now it is possible that a person may not be really seeing the tree, but it does not appear possible to be mistaken that one is seeming to see the tree. Physical properties, however are not incorrigible.<sup>74</sup>

So, the dualist argues, the fact that mental properties are both self-presenting and incorrigible, contra physical properties, given the law of identification, demonstrates that the mind is distinct from the physical aspects of the person.

Another key aspect of humanness to which the dualist points as evidence of a non-physical mind is human consciousness. In the words of Anthony Flew, once one of the leading and most influential atheists of the last century, who became a theist shortly before his death in 2010, “We are conscious, and conscious that we are conscious.”<sup>75</sup> In pointing out that there is no adequate physical explanation for consciousness he remarks,

First of all, neurons show no resemblance to our conscious life. Second and more important, their physical properties do not in any way give reason to believe that they can or will produce consciousness. ...Only blind and baseless faith in matter lies behind the claim that certain bits of matter can suddenly “create” a new reality [consciousness] that bears no resemblance to matter.<sup>76</sup>

Flew goes on to quote the American neuroscientist, philosopher, and author Sam Harris:

“The problem, however, is that nothing about a brain, when surveyed as a physical system, declares it to be a bearer of that peculiar, interior dimension that each of us experiences as consciousness in his own case.” The upshot is startling: “Consciousness may be a far more rudimentary phenomenon than are living creatures and their brains. And there appears to be no obvious way of ruling out such a thesis experimentally.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Moreland and Craig, 234-236

<sup>75</sup> Anthony Flew, w/Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is A God*, (New York, NY, HarperOne, imprint of Harper Collins Pub., 2007), 173

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 173, 174

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 175, 176

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Other aspects of humanness which point to a dualist reality of humanness are things like first person perspective, ongoing personal identity over time, and free will.<sup>78</sup>

### *Objections To Dualism*

Physicalism raises its own objections to dualism. Three in particular should be noted. First, physicalists argue that dualism fails to account for how the non-material mind interacts with the brain. However, the objection assumes that because we do not know *how* one thing causes another, it is not reasonable to believe *that* it does. This is clearly a non sequitur. It is quite feasible to not know the mechanism by which something causes something else, and yet for the cause-effect relationship to exist.

Second, physicalists claim that since we know that humans are the result of the entirely physical process of evolution within wholly physical matter, then humans are only physical. However, the objection begs the question against the dualist by assuming that humans are merely the result of strictly material processes. But this, in part, is what the debate is about. The dualist argues that humans are not merely the result of strictly material processes. For example, Berlinski states:

No one doubts that human beings now alive are connected to human beings who lived thousands of years ago. ...And no one doubts that human beings are connected to the rest of the animal kingdom. It is more difficult to take what no one doubts and fashion it into an effective defense of a thesis that human beings are *nothing but* the living record of an extended evolutionary process. That requires a disciplined commitment to a point of view that owes nothing to the sciences, however loosely construed, and astonishingly little to the evidence.<sup>79</sup> (emphasis his)

The third objection employs Ockham's razor. The argument states that physicalism is simpler than dualism because it postulates just one type entity to explain a human being instead of two.

Applying Ockham's razor, the simpler solution should be preferred.

However, once again the physicalist begs the question, because the dualist argues that there are several phenomena for which physicalism gives inadequate answers, hence it is not the simplest answer to the problem. Further, as Moreland and Craig point out, employing Ockham's razor seeks unfairly to shift the burden of proof to the dualist:

<p><b>Ockham's razor:</b> the principle that the simplest solution to a problem is normally the preferred one.</p>
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<sup>78</sup> Moreland and Craig, 238-243

<sup>79</sup> Berlinski, 159, 160

In light of both first-person awareness of one's own self and the self-presenting nature of my mental states—one's knowledge of them is often incorrigible and one has private access to them, neither of which is true for physical states—one is more certain that one has a soul than that one has a body. So the burden of proof may very well be on the physicalist.<sup>80</sup>

What is the primary intellectual driving force behind physicalism? While there are a couple of challenges raised by physicalists against dualism, these are answered without much difficulty. But as Moreland and Craig point out:

In our view, the real intellectual driving force behind modern physicalism is not the philosophical case for it and against dualism, but a cultural commitment to naturalism and to scientism. As Lynne Rudder Baker points out, 'Physicalism is the product of a claim about science together with a particular conception of science. The claim is that science is the exclusive arbiter of reality. ... On this view, scientific knowledge is exhaustive.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Moreland and Craig, 245

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 261, 262

## THE DISAPPEARING PILLAR

*It is said that naturalism is science,  
whereas theism belongs to religion:  
naturalism is based on reason,  
whereas theism is based on faith;  
and naturalism provides knowledge,  
whereas theism provides only belief.  
-Phillip Johnson-*

Naturalism, and its sub-category of physicalism, appear initially to sit atop two pillars of support. The first is science, and the second is metaphysical claims. Upon reflection, what becomes particularly interesting is that many naturalists seek to claim only the first pillar, science. Yet when that claim is examined thoughtfully, the pillar of scientific support evaporates and merges into the second pillar, metaphysics. But, though metaphysics is the essential and exclusive support of naturalism, it is like the crazy uncle many families would wish to keep concealed from public view.

### Scientism: Science Turned Religion

The absolute central tenet of naturalism, without which it crumbles as a convincing worldview, is the conviction that empirical science is either the only source of knowledge, or else is so far above any others as to render them irrelevant.

Paradoxically, naturalism claims that science is the only source, or only infallible, source of knowledge, while also claiming that naturalism is true because science shows it to be true. This is classic circular reasoning; science proves naturalism is true, while naturalism argues science's infallible assessment of reality. But of course, aside from naturalism's unrestrained confidence in science, how can we know that science is the only or best way to know reality? We cannot simply say that science says science is the only way to truth. This is to assume what we are arguing and constitutes a logical fallacy.

## The Disappearing Pillar

Put another way, we can view naturalism's affirmations of science to be a sleight of hand. Naturalism offers us a theory *about* science as though it were a theory *of* science. But there is a world of difference. A scientific theory, a theory of science, states a proposition in a way that can be empirically tested and in a way that is falsifiable. A theory of science is a theory within the scope and potential of science to prove or disprove.

<b>Falsifiable:</b> A necessary aspect of a scientific theory by which it can be tested empirically and, if false, can be shown to be false.
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By contrast, the theory about science that science exhausts all reality, is itself a theory that lies outside the limits of science. It is a theory that is not subject to the scientific method. Consider it this way. Science reveals a certain body of knowledge, say body of knowledge A. This is all that science knows, and it cannot know any more than A. Now, someone says, "Wait, there is more knowledge out there, there is also knowledge A'." But the theory that there is some knowledge A', by definition, lies beyond the purview of science. Science *cannot* know whether or not there is any knowledge beyond what it can know. So, by definition, a theory that posits that science exhausts all reality, is a theory about science that presumes things that science cannot know and does not address.

The world renowned atheist turned theist, Anthony Flew, expresses the issue this way:

You might ask how I, a philosopher, could speak to issues treated by scientists. The best way to answer this is with another question. Are we engaging in science or philosophy here? When you study the interaction of two physical bodies, for instance, two subatomic particles, you are engaged in science. When you ask how it is that those subatomic particles—or *anything* physical—could exist and why, you are engaged in philosophy. When you draw philosophical conclusions from scientific data, then you are thinking as a philosopher.<sup>82</sup> (emphasis his)

While this is true, nevertheless, many naturalists continue to posit such a theory about science as though it were scientifically verifiable. This scientific pretension is addressed in David Berlinski's excellent book *The Devil's Delusion*.

Peter Atkins is a professor of physical chemistry at Oxford University, and he too, is ardent in his atheism. In the course of an essay denouncing not only theology but poetry and philosophy as well, he observed favorably of himself that scientists "are at the summit of knowledge, beacons of

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<sup>82</sup> Flew, 89

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rationality, and intellectually honest.” It goes without saying, Atkins adds, that “there is no reason to suppose that science cannot deal with every aspect of existence.” Science is, after all, “the apotheosis of the intellect and the consummation of the Renaissance.” These comical declarations may be abbreviated by observing that Atkins is persuaded that not only is science a very good thing, but no other thing is good at all.<sup>83</sup>

At the conclusion of his introductory chapter, Berlinski observes:

If nothing else, the attack on traditional religious thought marks the consolidation in our time of science as the single system of belief in which rational men and women might place their faith, and if not their faith, then certainly their devotion. From cosmology to biology, its narratives have become *the* narratives. They are, these narratives, immensely seductive, so much so that looking at them with innocent eyes requires a very deliberate act. And like any militant church, this one places a familiar demand before all others: Thou shalt have no other gods before me.<sup>84</sup> (emphasis his)

Berlinski raises the specter of science that elevates science from a science to a religion. It is this metaphysical view of science, this theory *about* science, that has created out of science what is often called *scientism*.<sup>85</sup> Groothuis gives us the example of Carl Sagan:

His near worship of the cosmos, “all that is, was, or ever will be,” drove him to fathom its mysteries and to persuade others to adopt scientism as a worldview. Sagan believed his beloved cosmos was knowable through scientific procedures, however resistant it might be to our fumbling probes. His metanarrative was philosophical materialism; his organizing principle was evolution. These were not in question.<sup>86</sup>

Moreland and Craig explain scientism thus:

If something does not square with currently well-established scientific beliefs, if it is not within the domain of entities appropriate for scientific investigation, or if it is not amenable to scientific methodology, then it is not true or rational. Everything outside of science is a matter of mere belief and subjective opinion, of which rational assessment is impossible. Science, exclusively and ideally, is our model of intellectual excellence.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Berlinski, 7

<sup>84</sup> Berlinski, 10

<sup>85</sup> Moreland and Craig, 347, divide scientism into two categories: Strong scientism, which holds that all knowledge is scientific knowledge, and weak scientism, which holds that scientific knowledge is the best knowledge.

<sup>86</sup> Groothuis, 46

<sup>87</sup> Moreland and Craig, 346-347

It sometimes gets difficult to discern where science leaves off, and scientism takes over. But it is important to understand that naturalism as a worldview is rooted in scientism, not science. Ronnie Rogers makes this clear:

This latter understanding is often referred to by terms such as scientism, epistemic naturalism, naturalism, materialism or metaphysical naturalism in order to distinguish between “real” science and philosophical or religious beliefs ensconced under the banner of science. Anthony Flew pointed out, “... When you draw philosophical conclusions from scientific data, then you are thinking as a philosopher.” ...However, when[science] becomes the supreme sovereign governing public life, publicly imposable knowledge, and other issues beyond science proper, it is thereby necessarily transformed into scientism; therefore, having no innately superior status over any other philosophy or religion because they must all compete at the level of a worldview.<sup>88</sup>

### The Sandlot Bully

Why is this distinction important? Simply because if, as the naturalist argues, science reigns as supreme over all other forms of knowledge and exhausts all reality, then it becomes impossible to question naturalism as a worldview. It becomes *the* worldview by fiat. And though, as a worldview it has abandoned the realm of science and entered the world of metaphysics and theology, it cannot be questioned on metaphysical or theological grounds. Like a playground bully, it has burst onto the sandlot, insisting to play the game, but refusing to do so by the rules, since, obviously, it knows better.

But there’s a problem. The sandlot bully of naturalism, or scientism, claims that it exhausts all reality. However, there are obvious signs that such is far from the case, that there are other ways of knowing, and other realities which lie far beyond the scope of science. For example, from where do the laws of nature come which are the life blood of science? Since we know that materialistically nothing comes from nothing, from where came the tiny singularity that became the Big Bang? How does one avoid the infinite regress? And more profoundly, how does one account for the mind and soul of man? Physicalism, of

**Infinite regress:** An attempt to solve a problem in which the problem is reintroduced in the solution.

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<sup>88</sup> Rogers, 2

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course, denies it exists. But this assertion is without scientific support, and offers only weak metaphysical arguments.

It has long been known that Darwinian evolution makes no pretense at answering many of the great questions about from where the primordial soup came. That project fell to the cosmologists. The promise provided by the Big Bang, however, quickly fizzled when it was realized it only led further down the path of the infinite regress... or else to God. Berlinski wryly observes: “The first [of two aims] is to find a way around the initial singularity of standard Big Bang cosmology. Physicists accept this aim devoutly because the Big Bang singularity strikes an uncomfortably theistic note.”<sup>89</sup>

Speaking as an accomplished mathematician, Berlinski points out the real metaphysical nature of quantum cosmology’s attempt to answer the big questions of the origin of the universe:

Quantum cosmology is a branch of mathematical metaphysics. It provides no cause for the emergence of the universe. ...and it offers no reason for the existence of the universe... If the mystification induced by its modest mathematics were removed from the subject, what remains would not appear appreciably different in kind from various creation myths in which the origin of the universe is attributed to sexual congress between primordial deities.<sup>90</sup>

“Mathematical metaphysics.” “Creation myths.” “Primordial deities.” This is not the stuff of science, but rather of a metaphysical view of reality that must defend itself, not on a quasi scientific field, but on the field of philosophy and metaphysics.

### *Naturalism’s Task*

Given that naturalism is first and foremost metaphysical in nature, there are important issues it must address in order to hold its own as persuasive worldview. Moreland and Craig list three things that the naturalist, by virtue of his assertions regarding reality, must do before he can defend naturalism in a broad metaphysical sense.

1. The naturalist must show that mental entities (thoughts, beliefs, sensations, desires, free choice) are not real, either by denying them altogether, by reducing them to

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<sup>89</sup> Berlinski, 97

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 107, 108

merely physical entities in space and time, or by showing they somehow depend on the physical world for their existence.

2. The naturalist must deny that properties (such as the property of being red) and relations (such as the relation of being taller than) are abstract realities either by denying they exist or by treating them as material realities wholly inside of space and time.

3. The naturalist must show that abstract entities (like properties, sets, numbers, propositions) are not real by either denying their existence outright, or by reducing them to physical entities in space and time.<sup>91</sup>

These are substantial challenges for the naturalist, and are clearly not within the purview of science, but are profoundly metaphysical questions.

It is of interest to me that it is the very hubris and pretension of scientism that seems to undermine the public's confidence in science. Speaking only anecdotally, I have often heard individuals dismiss many recent pronouncements of science simply because in the past science has so often overreached and promised more than it could produce.

Perhaps no place is this more obvious than in what Berlinski refers to as the "creation myth of our time:"

If Darwin's theory of evolution has little to contribute to the content of the sciences, it has much to offer their ideology. It serves as the creation myth of our time, assigning properties to nature previously assigned to God. ...The greater part of the debate over Darwin's theory is not in service to the facts. Nor to the theory. The facts are what they have always been: They are unforthcoming. And the theory is what it always was: It is unpersuasive. Among evolutionary biologists, these matters are well known. In the privacy of the Susan B. Anthony faculty lounge, they often tell one another with relief that it is a very good thing the public has no idea what the research literature *really* suggests.

"Darwin?" a Nobel laureate in biology once remarked to me over his bifocals. "That's just the party line."<sup>92</sup> (emphasis his)

Is it any wonder that, after nearly a century of having Darwinian evolution (the creation "myth" of naturalism) taught nearly exclusively in all of our public institutions and most of our private ones, that a full forty-six percent of Americans still believe God

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<sup>91</sup> Moreland and Craig, 184, 185

<sup>92</sup> Berlinski, 191, 192

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created mankind in its present form within the past 10,000 years, and another 32 percent believe humans evolved over time by divine guidance. Only 15 percent believe that man evolved without God in the manner fundamental to naturalism.<sup>93</sup> There is something patently unpersuasive, as Berlinski says, about naturalism's creation myth.

How then does one account for the persistence of Darwinian evolution within the scientific and academic worlds? I suspect that metaphysical naturalists will continue to cling to Darwinian evolution long after it has been largely discredited, simply because they must have a creation myth to buttress their metaphysical worldview.

### *The Emperor's Clothes*

But more fundamental even than science's failure to answer the big metaphysical questions, is its failure to recognize its own profoundly metaphysical nature. As Moreland and Craig point out,

Science cannot be practiced in thin air. In fact, science itself presupposes a number of substantive philosophical theses which must be assumed if science is even going to get off the runway. ... The conclusions of science cannot be more certain than the presuppositions it rests on and uses to reach those conclusions.<sup>94</sup>

Among those presuppositions which Moreland and Craig list that science *must* make to operate are: 1) the existence of a theory-independent, external world; 2) the orderly nature of the external world; 3) the existence of truth; 4) the knowability of the external world; 5) the laws of logic; 6) the reliability of our cognitive and sensory faculties; 7) the adequacy of language to describe the world; 8) the existence of the values used in science (such as testing theories fairly and reporting results honestly); 9) the uniformity of nature and induction; 10) the existence of numbers.<sup>95</sup>

Most of these presuppositions, if not all, have been challenged, particularly with the onset of postmodernism. It is the task of philosophy, not science, to defend them.

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<sup>93</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/21814/evolution-creationism-intelligent-design.aspx> last accessed 1/10/13

<sup>94</sup> Moreland and Craig, 348

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

And, as has already been noted, the conclusions of science are only as valid as the metaphysical presuppositions upon which they rest.

Unfortunately for naturalism, it has shot itself in the foot. It begins, theoretically, to rest upon the twin pillars of science and philosophy. But as we have seen, the pillar of science is really only scientism, which is a philosophy, not science. So naturalism has lost its appeal to science as a foundational pillar. But naturalism has never wanted to admit that it required a metaphysical pillar. In fact, given scientism's dismissal of all non-scientific enquiry, it is rather embarrassing now to be left with nothing but a philosophical underpinning, and a very weak one at that. It is beginning to look a lot like the emperor has no clothes.

One of the paradoxes of naturalism is what I referred to as its "overweening confidence" in the powers of human reason. This is a byproduct of the Enlightenment Era's enthusiasm for man's ability to learn about his physical environment. This confidence of naturalism is a paradox because naturalism's other tenant, in addition to the power of human reasoning, is that all reality is merely physical. This, of course, necessitates the theory of the human mind resulting from completely random processes, which undermines any confidence in the human mind's ability to know anything truly or for certain. Groothuis puts it this way:

Naturalistic science deconstructs the mind such that it becomes nothing more than biologically determined biochemical processes. Nature is mindless and purposeless, and nature is the only objective reality. ... The notion that with our minds we can transcend these forces and discover the truth about reality that exists apart from our perception of it is, therefore, nonsense. If we have no immaterial mind that exists independently of our material brains, and if natural reality is all there is, then there is no basis for affirming or comprehending immaterial, abstract principles such as truth, beauty, goodness and meaning. The truth vacuum created by naturalism siphons out of objective existence not only religious concepts, but philosophical and even scientific concepts as well.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, what the naturalist endeavor has managed to do is to erase not only all reality outside of the material universe, but it has managed, as well, to eliminate even itself as a coherent philosophy. Is it any wonder that postmodernism has arisen to

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<sup>96</sup> Groothuis, 42, 43

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address the crisis of knowing created by naturalistic philosophy? This leads us to our next consideration: What are the implications of adopting a naturalistic worldview?

## IS GOD WATCHING?

*“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher,*

*“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”*

*-Solomon-*

In the words of the late University of Chicago professor, Richard M. Weaver, ideas have consequences. Naturalism is, of course, no exception. It is not as though naturalists did not intend their ideas to have consequences. Indeed they did. But the question is not what consequences did naturalists hope or expect would result from naturalism, but, rather, what were the consequences that did, in fact, result?

Surely, profound discoveries and technological and social developments have followed on the heels of the Enlightenment Project of modernism. To the degree that naturalism played a role in encouraging enquiry, investigation, and discovery, it should be acknowledged. This is not to concede the validity of naturalism as a worldview. But any prominent worldview contains elements of reality, or else it would fail to win any believers. It must at least appear to fit with the reality which people experience.

During the late Enlightenment period, naturalistic assumptions were leading to profound sociological/political developments. With the American revolution and the birth of the United States, founded on the ideals of freedom and reason, as well as on strong Christian and theistic elements, the Enlightenment project seemed off to a roaring start. Alan Bloom pointed out in his best selling critique of American higher education, *The Closing of the American Mind*, “And not only Dewey, but everyone from the beginning of our regime, especially those who said, ‘We hold these truths to be self evident,’ shared the rationalist dream.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Bloom, 195

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But before the decade of the 1780's was over, another revolution across the Atlantic actually hastened an end to the Enlightenment era, though not to naturalism as a worldview or to the project of modernism. The French revolution, fueled by the same Enlightenment ideals, but not nearly as influenced by Christian theism, ignited a reign of terror and revolutionary ugliness that made the American revolution look like the proverbial Sunday School picnic. The Enlightenment era was essentially over.

Nevertheless, to the degree that naturalist optimism regarding human reason and enquiry played a role in the American Experiment, it can be credited with contributing to the spread of democracy and freedom around the world. Os Guinness shows that modernity, as well as faith and democratic ideals, are at work in the ongoing worldwide democratic phenomenon.<sup>98</sup>

It should be observed, however, that Enlightenment influences on the American Experiment are often over stated. As the Catholic theologian George Weigel reminds us:

The rule of law (as distinguished from the rule of divine-right monarchs) and the principle of consent in governance find their deepest roots not in Enlightenment political theorizing but in ideas, ideals, and moral commitments first nurtured in European Christian culture. . . . It takes a deliberate act of willfulness—an act of Christophobia, to borrow from Joseph Weiler—to dismiss the notion that this rich civilizational soil contains the nutrients that nourished the democratic possibility in Europe and throughout the Western world.<sup>99</sup>

As was so graphically demonstrated in the contrast between the American and French revolutions, naturalism's overthrow of revelation as the supreme authority, and its replacement with unchallenged human reason, is a recipe for disaster. We can recall how we observed earlier the degree to which the Christian faith had lost influence in France in the years just preceding the Revolution.

Many of the weaknesses of the Enlightenment project of modernism, as well as those of its intellectual base of naturalism, have been ruthlessly exposed by postmodernism. This is, of course, ironic, since postmodernism is rooted in the same

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<sup>98</sup> Guinness, 6

<sup>99</sup> George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral*, (New York, NY, Basic Books, member of Perseus Books Group, 2005), 105

ideology of naturalism.<sup>100</sup> A discussion of postmodernism's critique of modernism must be left for another time. Presumably, Randy Presley will address those issues in his upcoming presentation.

But we can at this point consider several of the most obvious dismal implications of naturalism.

A glaring and ironic implication of naturalism, and one that became the fodder of the whole new subsequent philosophy, postmodernism, is the way that the naturalist dogma of physicalism undercuts the whole naturalist idea. Johnson states,

...that a theory that is the product of a mind can never adequately explain the mind that produced the theory. The story of the great scientific mind that discovers absolute truth is satisfying only so long as we accept the mind itself as a given. Once we try to explain the mind as a product of its own discoveries, we are in a hall of mirrors with no exit.<sup>101</sup>

The most consequential idea of naturalism and the Enlightenment was the eventual removal of God from the belief system. Modern day militant atheists such as Hitchens and Dawkins think this is a good thing. It is anything but good. As Groothuis says, "The end of theism brought with it the end of objective value, meaning and significance; altruism had no basis in universal moral law; the will to power was the essential fact in the struggle to thrive, and only a few specimens of humanity were worthy of existence."<sup>102</sup> Or, as Nietzsche asks, "Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the horizon?"<sup>103</sup>

Sire illustrates the naturalist's predicament with a poem from Stephen Crane:

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;  
Round and round they sped.  
I was disturbed at this;  
I accosted the man.  
"It is futile," I said,  
"You can never —"  
"You lie," he cried,  
And ran on.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Groothuis, 38

<sup>101</sup> Johnson, 62

<sup>102</sup> Groothuis, 37

<sup>103</sup> Cited by Groothuis, 37

<sup>104</sup> Cited by Sire, 106

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I am, of course, speaking with reference to nihilism, and this is because, as Nietzsche so effectively demonstrated, the Enlightenment leads ultimately to meaninglessness. But no one can live in nihilism and remain sane, hence every major worldview to emerge in the twentieth century has had the goal to transcend nihilism.<sup>105</sup>

And so, we have observed a progression. The exaltation of human reason in the Enlightenment led away from theism to deism. Eventually deism was found superfluous, and jettisoned for naturalism. Naturalistic modernism has then given rise to postmodernism, nihilism, and existentialism. In Sire's words, "Thus does naturalism lead to nihilism. If we take seriously the implications of the death of God, the disappearance of the transcendent, the closedness of the universe, we end right there."<sup>106</sup> In another place he says, "Nihilism came about not because theists and deists picked away at naturalism from the outside. Nihilism is the natural child of naturalism."<sup>107</sup>

The resultant meaninglessness of naturalism is tied inexorably to loss of significance. As R. C. Sproul observes, "Man's present dignity is inseparably bound up with his past and future, with his origin and destiny."<sup>108</sup> As we have seen, naturalism tells us bluntly that we came quite by accident from the primordial soup, and that when we die, that's it. In spite of the claims of many naturalists that we are significant merely due to how much more advanced we are than the rest of evolved life, what difference does that make? We still end up in seventy or eighty years as no more than random atoms ricocheting around inside a coffin six feet down. There is no mind or soul, we are told, to live on. There is no heaven or hell. There is no God, and you are not like Him.

Such a view of humanity not only alters how I look at myself, and how I make decisions about the course of my own life, but also how I view others, and whether or not I truly value them as more than an economic asset or pleasure provider. We can be thankful that most naturalists, responding to something deep within themselves, do not live completely consistent with their worldview. In fact, most naturalists are probably good people who love their kids and show up at work on time. Sire observes, "The

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<sup>105</sup> Sire, 117

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 112

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 97

<sup>108</sup> Sproul, 188

problem is not that moral values are not recognized but that they have no basis.”<sup>109</sup> Allan Bloom, referring to the German sociologist and philosopher Max Weber’s assessment, remarks, “Reason cannot establish values, and the belief that it can is the stupidest and most pernicious illusion.”<sup>110</sup>

Sire asks:

Why then, aren’t most naturalists nihilists? The obvious answer is the best one: Most naturalists do not take their naturalism seriously. They are inconsistent. They affirm a set of values. . . . They appear to know and don’t ask how they know they know. They seem to be able to choose and don’t ask themselves whether their apparent freedom is really caprice or determinism. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, but for a naturalist it is the examined life that is not worth living.<sup>111</sup>

If, as Bloom says, reason cannot establish values, then all values are relative. It does, in fact, become a question of Nietzsche’s “will to power.” Whoever has the power has the right to set the values. If Hitler has the power, then he has the right to kill all the Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals he wants. What criteria do I possess to say that he is wrong. If a woman is inconvenienced by the small life growing inside her womb, she has the power to terminate it, and who is to say otherwise?

Berlinski illustrates:

On one such occasion somewhere in Eastern Europe, an SS officer watched languidly, his machine gun cradled, as an elderly and bearded Hasidic Jew laboriously dug what he knew to be his grave.

Standing up straight, he addressed his executioner. “God is watching what you are doing,” he said.

And then he was shot dead.

What Hitler did *not* believe and what Stalin did *not* believe and what Mao did *not* believe and what the SS did *not* believe and what the Gestapo did *not* believe and what the NKVD did *not* believe and what the commissars, functionaries, swaggering executioners, Nazi doctors, Communist Party theoreticians, intellectuals, Brown Shirts, Black Shirts, gauleiters, and a thousand party hacks did *not* believe was that God was watching what they were doing.

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<sup>109</sup> Sire, 109

<sup>110</sup> Bloom, 194

<sup>111</sup> Sire, 112, 113

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And as far as we can tell, very few of those carrying out the horrors of the twentieth century worried overmuch that God was watching what they were doing either.

That is, after all, the *meaning* of a secular society.<sup>112</sup> (all emphasis his)

Most modern naturalists dismiss such things as an aberration of the twentieth century, and imagine that we are now too sophisticated for such conspicuous brutality. The evidence shows otherwise. As Berlinski says, “What moral philosophers have called the slippery slope has proven in recent decades to be slippery enough to seem waxed. It is, if anything, more slippery than ever.”<sup>113</sup> To maintain such a Pollyanna view of our sophistication requires the insistent denial of what is scientifically now beyond question, the humanness of life in the womb. That the current president of the United States could have been elected not once, but twice, given his support in the Illinois senate for the killing of infants who survived abortion, says more about our modern society than it does about him.

The loss of significance, with its attendant woes, that naturalism fosters, is exacerbated by the loss of a future implied by the loss of faith. The Catholic theologian, George Weigel, a Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., refers to an article by the Orthodox theologian David Hart regarding the loss of a future in the post-Christian Europe:

...it seemed to him “fairly obvious that there is some direct indissoluble bond between faith and the will to a future, or between the desire for a future and the imagination of eternity.” No faith, no future: “This is why post-Christian Europe seems to lack not only the moral and imaginative resources for sustaining its civilization, but even any good reason for continuing to reproduce.”<sup>114</sup>

The loss of faith implied in naturalism and its descendant philosophies, therefore, has important consequences for how a people regards its future.

In addition to the implications of naturalism already mentioned, it should be noted, that physicalism implies determinism. If all the processes within my brain, that govern all my actions, are the product of chemical and electrical interactions mindlessly

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<sup>112</sup> Berlinski, 26, 27

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 32

<sup>114</sup> Weigel, 163

following the physical laws of the universe, then the illusion of freedom is merely that, an illusion. It may be a comforting illusion, although even the emotional comfort itself is merely a material/electrical interaction, but the freedom is an illusion nevertheless.

Berlinski again:

The most unwelcome conclusion of evolutionary psychology is also the most obvious: If evolutionary psychology is true, some form of genetic determinism must be true as well. ...How could it be otherwise? On current views, it is the gene that is selected by evolution, and if we are not controlled by our genes, we are not controlled by evolution. If we are not controlled by evolution, *evolutionary* psychology has no relevance to the origin and nature of the human mind.<sup>115</sup> (emphasis his)

It should be pointed out that many naturalists are both determinist and believe in free will. However, those who do believe in free will generally hold to some form of compatibilist free will, as opposed to libertarian freedom.<sup>116</sup> A discussion of libertarian vs. compatibilist freedom is beyond the scope of this paper. Let it suffice to say at this point that since compatibilist freedom is considered to be “compatible” with determinism, a compatibilistically free action is still, in the ultimate sense, determined.

With all due regard to Berlinski, even the troubling implication of determinism, which he astutely identifies, does not constitute, in my assessment, the “most unwelcome” conclusion of physicalism’s evolutionary psychology. Rather, the most unwelcome is that humankind, in spite of the protestations of naturalists to the contrary, is reduced to a brute beast. If we learned anything from the twentieth century, we should have learned this.

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<sup>115</sup> Berlinski, 177

<sup>116</sup> Moreland and Craig, 280

## NATURALISM IN THE CULTURE

*If the foundations are destroyed,  
what can the righteous do?  
—King David—*

Though the Enlightenment era faded long ago, and the Enlightenment project of modernism has morphed into postmodernism, the naturalistic worldview upon which both rested has endured and shows no signs of an imminent demise.

One paradox, however, of naturalism's presence within the culture is how it exhibits at once both a level of dominant influence within the culture, and encounters at the same time a level of contempt and disregard. On the second point, it is striking, as I pointed out earlier, that a strong majority of Americans reject naturalism's creation myth of evolution, either wholly or in part. Clearly, the materialists themselves sense this remarkable resistance to their outlook. "The same materialists are frustrated however, because so many people are perversely unwilling to accept conclusions that a reductionist science necessarily implies."<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, it would be a grave mistake to regard such resistance as evidence that naturalism is not a major, perhaps *the* major worldview influencing the direction of our culture and our chief institutions, excluding, perhaps (and I stress *perhaps*) the church.

Phillip Johnson's 1995 book, *Reason in the Balance*, describes in considerable detail how naturalism has permeated Western institutions of science, law, and education. A decade earlier, Allan Bloom's best selling bombshell, *The Closing of the American Mind*, a critique of higher education in America, exposed the gutting of the concept of right and wrong, good and evil, with the concept of relativistic "values." This evisceration of good and evil is a direct consequence of naturalism's insistence that our

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<sup>117</sup> Johnson, 65

universe is a closed system, especially closed to God, and that all moral values are merely shaped by the will of man.

Johnson describes what he calls the shift in America's religious philosophy during the last half of the twentieth century. Prior to the shift, Americans assumed, at least to some level, that the Protestant version of Christianity was true. There was a general agreement that the Christian, or Judeo-Christian, morality was the legitimate norm to be observed throughout the social fabric. When Utah joined the union, Mormons were not required to alter their theology, but they did have to foreswear polygamy. Differences on divorce existed among Americans, but there was, as Johnson points out, "an overwhelming consensus that divorce was a great evil that should be legally and socially discouraged."<sup>118</sup>

But things have changed, as the most casual observer can easily note. "What has really happened is that a new established religious philosophy has replaced the old one." That new religious philosophy Johnson calls "scientific naturalism and liberal rationalism," or more succinctly, "naturalism" or "modernism." He says, "Modernism as an intellectual condition begins when people realize that God is really dead and that humankind is therefore on its own."<sup>119</sup> In most arenas of our public institutions, this new religious philosophy has gained the upper hand, and endeavors to silence the old religion. "Modernist discourse accordingly incorporates semantic devices—such as labeling of theism as 'religion' and naturalism as 'science'—that work to prevent a dangerous debate over fundamental assumptions from breaking out in the open."<sup>120</sup>

### Avoid Debates

Johnson devotes several chapters of his book to illustrate how the grand metaphysical story of science dominates within the scientific community, even to the extent that theists who do not accept the narrative nevertheless tacitly operate within its parameters just to get along.

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<sup>118</sup> Johnson, 37

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 37

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 45

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However, not only does naturalism and its creation story of Darwinian evolution hold the privileged position within the sciences, but it seeks to become the exclusive metaphysical view of reality by shutting out all consideration of a possible theistic alternative. As Johnson says, “But maybe naturalism is false. It seems that the rulers of science are terrified at the prospect of having to address the possibility.”<sup>121</sup> The political and economic commentator, writer, actor, and lawyer Ben Stein, in his 2008 documentary, *Expelled, No Intelligence Allowed*, tells in powerful detail the story of science’s overt efforts to preclude the consideration of anything that might jeopardize naturalistic and godless accounts for the origin of life.

Berlinski, in his book, relates the following anecdote:

Under these circumstances, freedom of thought very often appears as an inconvenience to those... with a position to protect and enemies on all sides. A paper published recently in the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington DC* concluded that the so-called Cambrian explosion, the sudden appearance of new life forms about 530 million years ago, could best be understood in terms of an intelligent design—hardly a position unknown in Western thought. The paper was, of course, peer-reviewed by three prominent evolutionary biologists. ...but in the case of Stephen Myer’s “The Origin of Biological Information and the Higher Taxonomic Categories,” the Board of Editors was at once given to understand that they had done a bad thing. Their indecent capitulation followed at once.

Publication of the paper, they confessed, was a mistake. It would never happen again. It had barely happened at all.<sup>122</sup>

Berlinski then goes on to critique the overt effort by the director of the National Center for Science Education to prevent any debate whatsoever regarding naturalism’s sacrosanct creation story:

“If scientists do not oppose antievolutionism,” remarked Eugenie Scott, the executive director of the National Center for Science Education, “it will reach more people with the mistaken idea that evolution is scientifically weak.” Scott’s understanding of “opposition” had nothing to do with reasoned discussion. It had nothing to do with reason at all. *Discussing* the issue was out of the question. Her advice to her colleagues was considerably more to the point: “Avoid debates.”

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<sup>121</sup> Johnson, 192

<sup>122</sup> Berlinski, 219, 220

There is nothing surprising in any of this. I myself believe that the world would be suitably improved if those with whom I disagree were to lapse into silence.<sup>123</sup>

### Shaping Minds

The scientific community is not the only place within the culture where naturalism has made its presence felt. Education at all levels has encountered the omnipresence of naturalism.

A primary mechanism for naturalism's virtually exclusive consideration within education is its pretension that naturalism is science while any talk about God is religion. Since the government is required, in this view, to stay completely out of religion, public educational institutions at all levels are prohibited from allowing the consideration of any alternate account of origins other than the naturalistic one, which, of course, by their definition is not religion, but science. However, we have already seen how naturalism is in fact, rooted in scientism, and is, in fact, a metaphysical belief, or, as Ronnie Rogers calls it, a "non-supernatural religion."<sup>124</sup>

But naturalism's influence in education goes far beyond simply achieving monolithic hegemony in the classroom over the origins issue. Naturalistic views of man, as well as its moral relativism, permeate the academic culture and curriculum. For example, naturalism's inevitable relativistic moral implications find their way into how we teach children values. Johnson observes:

In moral-reasoning or values-clarification classes, students are encouraged to reason their way to a personal moral philosophy after a critical consideration of alternatives, including alternatives of which their parents might heartily disapprove—like lying or drug use or sexual experimentation.<sup>125</sup>

This approach is fraught with a host of problems, not the least of which, as Johnson points out, is that "training children in good moral habits is possible only if there is some way to determine which habits are good."<sup>126</sup> With some notable exceptions, such

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<sup>123</sup> Berlinski, 220

<sup>124</sup> Rogers, 8

<sup>125</sup> Johnson, 163

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 164

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as bullying and drug use, educators flee from any dogmatic assertions about right and wrong because naturalistic relativism, and its heir postmodernism, preclude the ability to define for others what is right and wrong.

Johnson points out an interesting paradox. Whereas students are encouraged to explore and find their own set of values (with the exception of a few favored and arbitrary absolutes such as those mentioned above), they are not afforded the same liberty when it comes to the subject of naturalism's creation story. As Johnson notes:

When it comes to evolution, however, the same students must be protected from spurious notions that may seem valid to their untutored judgment. [Martin] Eger observes that a great many parents think it would be much wiser to do the reverse: to tell the adolescents firmly what limits on behavior they must observe and to encourage them to practice their critical thinking on more theoretical subjects like evolution...<sup>127</sup>

On this paradoxical inconsistency between morals and evolution in the public education system, Johnson remarks:

Naturalism in science provides the foundation for liberal rationalism in morals, by keeping the possibility of divine authority effectively out of the picture. Belief in naturalistic evolution is foundational to a great deal else, and so it can hardly be presented as open to doubt. The schools accordingly teach that humans *discover* the profound truth of evolution but they *invent* moral standards and can change them as human needs change.<sup>128</sup>

### The Lawgiver And The Judge

Leaving the subject of education, we can also observe naturalism's influence within the field of law. Traditionally, the law was rooted in a moral order independent of human rulers. To the degree that human laws were just they coincided with that moral order.

Johnson, himself a professor of law at the University of California for thirty-three years, shows how "traditionalist and modernist conceptions of law differ... in their basic understanding of what morality is and how it influences law."<sup>129</sup> Referring to one of the

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<sup>127</sup> Johnson, 166

<sup>128</sup> Ibid

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 138

most influential American jurists, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935), Johnson illustrates the impact of naturalistic relativism: “Holmes urged lawmakers to put aside considerations of morality and tradition and to base law squarely on rational policy, informed by scientific disciplines such as economics and psychology.”<sup>130</sup> This is clearly a naturalist agenda. But, Johnson argues, “To read morality out of the law, as Holmes aspired to do, is impossible. What this program means in practice is to enlist the law on behalf of a new morality, based on relativism.”<sup>131</sup>

What is important to note about Holmes was that he did not dismiss the idea that there was such a thing as morality. But, according to Johnson, Holmes’ view of morality was a modernist view. Johnson observes regarding Holmes’ view:

That people have moral notions is a fact about people, and hence it is also a fact about the law and about how the law has developed over time as moral notions have changed. Morality is entirely a human creation, however, and it is based on emotions or feelings rather than knowledge.<sup>132</sup>

This is, of course, naturalism pure and simple in the service of the law.

Naturalism views all morals and values as a product of random evolutionary change over time. They have no transcendence because they do not originate from Transcendence. While they may “work” for a time because most people are similarly evolved with similar values, ultimately there is nothing binding about them. So, whenever someone not similarly evolved, someone who does not possess the same set of morals or values comes along, say a Hitler or a Pol Pot, we are left with no means by which to judge.

Related to this matter of naturalism in the practice of law is the issue of the influence of naturalism in the making of law. Ronnie Rogers, in his book *The Death Of Man As Man*, gives the example of President Barak Obama’s explanation for the lifting of the federal ban on funding for embryonic stem-cell research. Quoting the president, “It is about ensuring that scientific data is never distorted or concealed to serve a political agenda – and that we make scientific decisions based on fact, not ideology.”<sup>133</sup> As Rogers observes, “He has allowed science and science alone to define human life, which is the

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<sup>130</sup> Johnson, 141

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 142

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 143

<sup>133</sup> Cited by Rogers, 3

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quintessential characteristic of a scientific liberal.”<sup>134</sup> It is also, of course, naturalism in full bloom.

Further remarking about the influence of this naturalistic mindset, what he calls the “scientific liberal culture,” within the culture at large, Rogers says:

Therefore, by scientific liberal culture, I mean that meaning, truth, morality, definition and understanding of life, what is normal and what is abnormal, what is good and what is not good, and what is suitable for politics, education, and public policy is ostensibly determined by science; and scientific thinking is the process for objective knowing. Scientific liberal culture seeks to explain or justify everything scientifically, which necessarily results in culture operating according to naturalism...<sup>135</sup>

These observations regarding the influence of naturalism throughout the culture are not intended as a hand-wringing exercise. Nor do I offer them as some kind of obituary on America. I have no tea leaves to read the future, and though I believe in a transcendent God who stands outside of time, He has not revealed to me how things will turn out. Rather, the purpose in reflecting on naturalism’s current influence within the culture is to demonstrate that the project of understanding naturalism is not merely some ivory tower exercise in philosophy. These ideas matter precisely because they do influence, and are influencing, our everyday lives. They matter to us, to our children, and to our children’s children. If, in fact, there is a God, and if, in fact, we are not the result of random processes but were intentionally created by Him in His likeness and for fellowship with Him, then to live under an illusion that things are otherwise will have dire consequences in our lives, our relationships, our societies, and our futures, both temporal and eternal. If, as I have argued in the previous chapter, naturalism has a set of very troubling implications, then the extent to which it has influenced the culture in which we live matters a great deal.

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<sup>134</sup> Rogers, 3

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 5

## CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

*All creation had a language  
Words to say what must be said  
All day long the heavens whispered  
Signing words in scarlet red  
—Gloria Gaither—*

So, what's a Christian to do?

We have examined the long history that led up to the current cultural climate in which naturalism thrives. In some senses that progression seems like it was inevitable. We have also considered what naturalism is, its presupposition of no deity and random physical process, its claims to be the only true way of knowing, its pretension at being truly scientific, and its destruction of what it means to be human. We have reflected on the implications of naturalism and that it ultimately leaves us adrift in a sea of relativistic “values,” exposing us to the “slippery slope” that eventually destroys humanity psychologically, spiritually, and perhaps ultimately. Finally, we have observed that this worldview is not some remote ideology of a few isolated philosophers or scientists in an obscure ivory tower or laboratory, but is, in fact, probably the most dominant worldview in key segments of our culture.

The prospects for naturalism at the present time appear to be strong indeed. Those scientists who propose a naturalistic mindset have not grown cautious or deferential to theism, but have, on the contrary, grown more vocal and militant. As David Berlinski remarks, “With the rise of what the Wall Street Journal calls ‘militant atheism’ both the terms of the debate and the climate of opinion have changed. ...Religious men and women, having long accommodated the village idiot, have long accommodated the village atheist. The order of battle is now different.”<sup>136</sup> Invoking science, the likes of

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<sup>136</sup> Berlinski, 3

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Dawkins, Hitchens, and Stenger militantly evangelize for naturalism. Their works have been eagerly received by the media, if for no other reason than that they are controversial.

The response of the Christian scriptures to the assertions and claims of naturalism are forceful and unambiguous. It begins with the first four words of Genesis, “In the beginning, God...” (Genesis 1:1). Contrary to the claims of some naturalists, naturalism’s scientism will never be able to prove that God does not exist for at least two reasons: 1) God is spirit (John 4:24) and therefore lies outside science’s world of the material and physical. Science has no knowledge or means by which to prove or disprove God. 2) God does exist, and hence He can never be disproved.

On the other hand, it should come as no surprise to the Christian that many wish to discount the existence of God. The Apostle Paul observed this phenomenon as a trait of humankind since the beginning. He said:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).

Two things are clear from Paul’s words. First, God has in some way made himself known to man, and second, man, wanting no part of God, has always sought to suppress that knowledge.

How does man have this knowledge? Paul goes on to explain that God has made certain things about Himself obvious to all men through the world He created. These include His eternal power and His divine nature. This is what theologians refer to as general revelation, because it is a revelation about God that is available to all humankind. So, while important things about God and His purposes require a supernatural revelation, God has provided within the natural world sufficient evidence to disclose important things about His power and divinity.

Just one example of this general revelation is provided for us by the immeasurably great theologian of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in his grand masterwork, *Summa Theologica*. Berlinski represents it:

If a series of causes does not start, it cannot get going, and if it does not get going, then there will be no intermediate causes, and if there are no intermediate causes, then over here, where we have just noticed that a blow has caused a bruise, there is no explanation for what is before our eyes. Either there is a first cause or there is no cause at all, and since there are causes at work in nature, there must be a first. The first cause, Aquinas identified with God, because in at least one respect, a first cause exhibits an important property of the divine: *It is uncaused*.<sup>137</sup> (emphasis his)

Notice Berlinski's use of the phrase "property of the divine." Is this not just what the Apostle Paul told us, that the "divine nature" could be discerned in the creation? Even ancient minds were surely able to comprehend that at some point there must be an uncaused Cause.

So, we should expect that the more that true science discovers about the natural world, the more it should reveal the footprints of God. This is, of course, the argument of Intelligent Design (ID). While ID as a scientific hypothesis does not suggest anything more than an intelligence behind the natural world, or specify that it is the Christian God or any god, it nevertheless points in the direction of some intelligence outside the natural world that establishes the natural laws and directs the irreducible complexity we clearly observe throughout nature.

It is for this reason that many within the scientific community so strongly resist ID. They do so for the same reasons they diligently search for something beyond Big Bang singularity. Both have inherently theistic implications which the Apostle Paul says man is dead set against.

Given the profound way in which the natural world points to its divine source, for any Christian who is led into the profession of the sciences, it is a high calling indeed—even more so due to the scientific establishment's efforts to preclude the consideration of either ID or creationism. By engaging in the exploration and understanding of the creation, such a Christian can make a significant contribution to mankind's understanding of the general revelation of Himself which God has provided.

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<sup>137</sup> Berlinski, 68

## Only A Universe, Or A World Too?

In these closing pages I wish to recall the eight elements of a naturalistic worldview which I detailed earlier from James Sire's work, and consider briefly what is the biblical response to those points.

1. Naturalism argues that prime reality is matter and only matter, or in the terminology we explored earlier, the universe is all there is. The Scripture teaches us, however, that the prime reality is God Himself, the infinite, personal, transcendent God. The first four words of scripture state it clearly, "In the beginning, God..." (Genesis 1:1). Without apology, the bible declares the uncaused Cause. It presents to us the source of all the universe as one who precedes and is beyond or outside that reality. His transcendence is repeatedly asserted throughout the scriptures. In dialogue with the Jewish leaders Jesus makes clear to them in words they can easily understand, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). The phrase, "I am" was to the Jews the most sacred name of God, dating from Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. As is seen in the words of Jesus, it reflects the timelessness, the transcendence of God. The Apostle Paul says of the incarnate God, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Through Isaiah the prophet He declares, "I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 46:9).

2. Naturalism teaches that the cosmos is a closed system, that there is nothing outside or transcendent to the universe. The Bible, however teaches quite clearly that God created the entire cosmos *ex nihilo*, and that apart from Him nothing came into being that exists. The verses we just considered show that, in fact, God is beyond the created universe. All of time and space are the creation of God, and He upholds it all by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). The writer John tells us: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3). All that exists other than God has begun to exist, and has done so through Him. In God's rebuke of Job He asserts that the entire universe is his doing:

<b>Ex nihilo:</b> Out of nothing.
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"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell Me, if you have understanding,  
Who set its measurements? Since you know.  
Or who stretched the line on it?  
On what were its bases sunk?  
Or who laid its cornerstone,

When the morning stars sang together  
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?  
Or who enclosed the sea with doors  
When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;  
When I made a cloud its garment  
And thick darkness its swaddling band,  
And I placed boundaries on it  
And set a bolt and doors,  
And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther;  
And here shall your proud waves stop?'" (Job 38:4-10)

3. Naturalism holds to some form of physicalism, insisting that man is merely matter and that the mind is nothing more than the human brain. The Scriptures however clearly teach a dualistic view of human nature, that humans are both body and mind/soul, and that though these operate as a unity, they are distinct and ultimately separable. John Stott, the protestant British theologian says, "The biblical doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection all give us a high view of our body as the God-intended vehicle through which we express ourselves."<sup>138</sup> The Bible speaks repeatedly of the human soul. Jesus says, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). In another place He talks about the possibility of killing the body but not the soul (Matthew 10:28). The apostle Paul distinguishes between the body and the "inner man" when he says, "...though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (I Corinthians 6:16). At another point he considers whether or not he had been apart from his body (II Corinthians 12:1-4), clearly considering that it was possible to for his soul to be "disembodied." Jesus instructed his disciples, " For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing" (Luke 12:22-23). Clearly Christ wanted his disciples to understand there was much more to life than the material and physical.

4. Naturalism asserts that the death of the human being is extinction. There is no existence after death. The Bible, however, affirms not only that there is life after death, but that life after death is really one of the most important issues we as humans face. This is perhaps no clearer than in Jesus' account about the rich man and Lazarus. In this

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<sup>138</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1994), 175

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account both the rich man and Lazarus die. But following their death each finds himself in another place, the rich man in hades, and the poor man Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. Both are conscious, and the rich man particularly carries on a conversation with Abraham (Luke 16:19-30). The Apostle Paul speaks of the biblical aspect of dualism when he talks of being "present" in the body, but being "absent" from the Lord, and then vice versa (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). He then goes on to speak of appearing before the judgment seat of Christ after death to receive a recompense for things done "in the body" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

5. Naturalism tells us that the universe is knowable to us by innate and autonomous human reason, and furthermore that the universe is all there is to know. The Scriptures, on the other hand, while affirming human reason and its grasp of the universe, and even affirming that it is such reason and knowledge that provides us with some knowledge of God, also makes clear that human reason is corrupted by fall, and that apart from supernatural divine revelation is incapable of providing us with all we need to know regarding ourselves and our Creator. Paul is clear in the passage in Romans cited above, that there is a knowledge about God that is clearly available to human reason as it observes the natural world. The Lord Himself urges the people of Israel to employ reason in considering His provision of forgiveness: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool'" (Isaiah 1:18). Yet man's reason is impacted by sin, and so it is corrupted. In addition, it is finite, and so there are things it cannot know without what theologians refer to as special revelation from God. Paul speaks of men's minds being "depraved" (Romans 1:28). The words of God to Israel through Isaiah speak of the difference between human and divine reason: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Hence, in the Christian view, reason is highly regarded, but its limitations are acknowledged.

6. Naturalism would have us believe that ethics are a naturalist construct developed by human beings following the evolution of consciousness and self-determination. As such, they are relativistic and vary from time to time, place to place, and person to person. The Bible, however, reveals that ethics are absolute and

transcendent, since they originate from the character of the absolute and transcendent God. Human ethics find their source and standard in the divine character. God says to Israel, “Be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44). According to the Bible, we have two sources of knowledge of right and wrong. The first is the human conscience instilled in every person by his or her creator. Paul writes to the Romans about the “...Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness...” (Romans 2:15). As an element of humanness, this conscience is affected by the fall of man into sin, and therefore is useful but not infallible. In Romans Paul explains how, during the age of conscience (between Adam and Moses), men’s consciences did not disclose to them fully their sin (Romans 5:12-21). Second, the knowledge of right and wrong comes to us by special revelation from God through His Word, such as through the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount (Exodus 20:1-17 and Matthew 5-7).

7. Naturalism views history as moving in a linear, cause and effect trajectory, but possessing no inherent purpose. It is merely the accident of natural processes. The bible teaches that history is indeed linear, and that there are causes and effects which influence its trajectory. However, as is often said, history is His Story. While it moves in a cause and effect linear manner, it does so according to the will and purpose of the Creator. Ultimately, His purposes for history will be fulfilled. God says through Isaiah,

“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:9, 10).

Job confesses to God, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). The writer of Proverbs states, “The Lord has made everything for its purpose” (Proverbs 16:3). Paul writes to the believers in the city of Ephesus about God’s will, speaking of His “kind intention” and “purpose” of summing all things up in Christ (Ephesians 1:9, 10).

8. Naturalism implies no particular core commitment on the part of any person. Such commitments are either unwittingly embraced or chosen by the individual. There is nothing in naturalism to call for any specific commitment. The Scriptures, in contrast, require that human beings, as their highest priority, seek to know, love, and obey God,

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and fellowship with Him. Apart from such a core commitment, humans are alienated from their Creator, and the consequence is death. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, completed by the Westminster Assembly in England in 1647, asks, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer it provides: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”<sup>139</sup> As Paul declares, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36). To the Corinthian church he instructs that they are to do “all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). When a lawyer came to Jesus to enquire as to which of God’s commandments was the greatest, Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment” (Matthew 22:37, 38).

Clearly, naturalism and Christian theism provide us with a stark contrast. While naturalism rests on soft metaphysical claims and the pretensions of scientism, the Christian worldview displays strong metaphysical foundations and consistency with the wide range of human experience and observations, both internal and external. Even more profoundly, the implied commitments of the two worldviews are diametrically opposed. Naturalism is essentially oriented towards nature, and man’s significance is found only in his fortuitous evolutionary advantage over the lesser animals. But God says that such a view is worshipping and serving the creature (Romans 1:25). Christianity, on the other hand, is essentially oriented towards God, and man’s significance is found in the fact of his being made in God’s likeness, and in his being the object of God’s affections and desires.

Why then do so many choose to adhere to a naturalistic worldview? The words of Jesus reveal that our perceptions of reality are ultimately influenced more by moral issues than intellectual ones. Time and again Jesus confronted those who, in spite of the evidence available, chose to believe contrary to the evidence because, quite simply, they did not want to submit to God.

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<sup>139</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, [http://www.creeds.net/Westminster/shorter\\_catechism.html](http://www.creeds.net/Westminster/shorter_catechism.html) Last accessed 1/20/13

The task of the Christian, when confronting those influenced by naturalism, should, therefore, be two fold. First is to provide the intellectually compelling case for the Christian worldview, while calling on the naturalist to defend his or her own case. Second, the Christian should continue to point out the ultimately moral issues that are at stake and the need of all of us to be reconciled to God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Former atheist then theist, Anthony Flew, is an example of the hopeful prospects of this Christian project. In his book, *There Is A God*, he explains how he came to theism (though not yet Christianity) after life-long atheism. At one point, wishing to ask his “former fellow-atheists” what might cause them to consider the possibility of a God, he uses as an example a “parable” in which a satellite phone washes ashore on a remote island inhabited by a tribe that has never before had contact with modern civilization. In his parable he ends with the tribal sage, who believes the voices on the phone to be those of some other humans “out there,” and he urges the tribal “scientists,” the really clever members of the tribe, to investigate to see if this device indicates that there are “others” out there, whose voices, though in a different language, can be heard on the phone. The scientists conclude, after considerable investigation, that the sounds emanating from the device are generated only by the device, and not by other people “out there” somewhere.

In the concluding chapter in his book Flew, who at this writing had become a theist seriously considering the claims of Christianity, returns to his parable:

I want to return now to the parable with which I began this part. ...The parable ended with the tribal sage being ridiculed and ignored by the scientists.

But let’s imagine it ending differently. The scientists adopt as a working hypothesis the sage’s suggestion that the phone is a medium of contact with other humans. After further study they confirm the conclusion that the phone is connected to a network that transmits the voices of real people. They now accept the theory that intelligent beings exist “out there.”

Some of the more intrepid scientists go even farther. They work to decipher the sounds they hear on the phone. They recognize patterns and rhythms that enable them to understand what is being said. Their whole world changes. They know they are not alone. And at a certain point they make contact.

The analogy is easy to apply. The discovery of phenomena like the laws of nature—the communications network of the parable—has led scientists,

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philosophers, and others to accept the existence of an infinitely intelligent Mind. Some claim to have made contact with this Mind. I have not—yet. But who knows what could happen next?

Someday I might hear a Voice that says, “Can you hear me now?”<sup>140</sup>

It is our task, fellow believers, to assist the Anthony Flews of this world to perceive the Voice saying, “Can you hear me now?” To accomplish this we must know the obstacles that deaden their ears and their hearts to their creator, and assist them in hearing His voice. It is my prayer that this presentation will serve to that end.

*“The God who made the world and all things in it,  
since He is Lord of heaven and earth,  
does not dwell in temples made with hands;  
neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything,  
since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things;  
and He made from one, every nation of mankind  
to live on all the face of the earth,  
having determined their appointed times,  
and the boundaries of their habitation,  
that they should seek God,  
if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him,  
though He is not far from each one of us;  
for in Him we live and move and exist.”*

*Acts 17:24-28*

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<sup>140</sup> Flew, 157, 158