

James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*
Chapter Four: Naturalism
The Silence of Finite Space

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Introduction:

John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers"

1. Deism is the conceptual bridge between theism and naturalism:

In theism, God is the infinite-personal creator and sustainer of the universe.

In deism, God is the absentee creator, transcendent, but no longer immanent.

In naturalism, God is totally reduced, and disappears altogether.

2. Swing figures in the shift from theism to naturalism via deism:

René Descartes (1596-1650): his mechanistic view of the universe comprehended by mind, but his "Cartesian dualism" or the separating of mind and body led to the absorption of the former by the latter (nature begins to "eat up" grace).

John Locke (1632-1714): a committed theist who believed that God-given reason was the final judge on the Scriptures, leading to the elevation of reason as the sole criterion of truth.

Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1709-1751): he didn't deny God's existence, but did deny the practical value of his existence because of his deism, leading to a practical atheism.

II. The Essential Tenets of Naturalism [Atheism/Humanism]

A. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.

1. Nothing comes from nothing. Something is. Therefore something [matter] always was.

2. "The cosmos is all there is, ever was or ever will be." —Carl Sagan

For Sagan, the universe assumes the position of God, and science becomes religion.

3. Naturalism, therefore, is atheism. "Man is the supreme being for man."
—K. Marx.
4. "Religion is a human invention, a projection of the human potentiality"
—L. Feuerbach.

B. The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.

1. Nature is indeed the "whole show," but it need not be conceived as a "machine" or "clock" as in deism; in naturalism, the universe may be far more mysterious and complex, esp. at the subatomic level.
2. Naturalism is determinism since all things occur from within by natural causes and their effects. though human beings may still possess a (false) sense of freedom.
3. Naturalism is a closed system in that it is not open to reordering from the outside either by God or human beings.

C. Human beings are complex "machines"; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.

1. Human beings, the product of evolution, are simply a part of the machinery of the cosmos in which there is only one substance: matter. We possess no truly transcendent dimension (like a soul or self).

"Man is a machine, and in the whole universe there is but one single substance [matter] with various modifications."—J. LaMettrie

"Man, the microcosm, is just another machine within the universal machine that is the cosmos." —W. Barrett.

2. Mind is a function of matter and the machine and is only the result of a highly misunderstood mechanical complexity.

"The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile." —P. Cabanis.

Human beings "are what they eat." —L. Feuerbach.

3. Nonetheless, most naturalists will insist on human uniqueness and value; the basis for this distinction is the human capability for

conceptual thought, speech, tradition, a unique evolution, moral behavior, culture, etc.

4. Some naturalists even insist on human freedom, arguing along compatibilist lines that a closed and determined physical universe is compatible with human freedom, since it is clear that we can always do what we want, and other than we do.

D. Death is extinction of personality and individuality.

1. "As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body."
—Humanist Manifesto II
2. "No fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave." —B. Russell.
3. "I take it to be fact that one's existence ends at death." —A. J. Ayer.
4. "Human destiny is an episode between two oblivions." E. Nagel
5. Immortality is limited to one's progeny, and the way our lives have influenced others in culture (Abraham Lincoln's goodness enduring after him).

E. History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.

1. History as used here includes both natural and human history since for the naturalist, these are in continuity, and human beings arose out of and will return to nature.
2. The beginning of life and the process of history were self-activating, that is, via evolution; it was not set in motion by an Unmoved Mover or by God.
 - a. Darwinian evolution, frequently presented as fact, provided the mechanism to explain life without God.

"Organic evolution is a process entirely materialistic in its origin and operation. . . . Life is materialistic in nature...."

—G. G. Simpson

b. Not all evolutionists are naturalists; some attempt to combine belief in God with evolution (theistic or deistic evolution). For the latest literature and discussion, see the following:

- Daniel Dennet, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 1995.
- Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, 1985.
- Charles Hummel, *The Galileo Connection*, 1985.
- Howard J. Van Till, *The Fourth Day*, 1986.
- Howard J. Van Till, Davis A. Young, Clarence Menninga, *Science Held Hostage*, 1988.
- Phillip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 1993.
- Phillip Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, 1995.
- Charles B. Thaxton, Walter L. Bradley, and Roger Olsen, *The Mystery of Life's Origin*, 1984.
- J. P. Moreland, ed. *The Creation Hypothesis*, 1994.
- Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, 1996
- Del Ratzsch, *The Battle of Beginnings: Why Neither Side is Winning the Creation-Evolution Debate*, 1996.

3. When in the evolutionary process human beings appeared, so too did human history. But just as evolution itself has no inherent or pre-determined goal, so neither does human history. It just goes and will last as long as human beings last.

Man's "number came up in the Monte Carlo game, a game of pure chance." Jacques Monod

"Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view." Richard Dawkins

F. Ethics is related only to human beings.

1. For a theist, God is the foundation for morals which are revealed in His Word; for a naturalist, however, values are entirely man made. "Man is the measure [determiner] of all things," including ethics.
2. No natural law is inscribed in the universe, or in the consciousness of human beings; whatever moral imagination or sentiment human beings have they have acquired from cultural convention, authority, or intuition. Hence, there are no objective moral ideals to order human life or to discipline human conduct.
3. "We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no

theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest." —Humanist Manifesto II.

4. The problem arises if humans create ethics: how do you move from what is done to what should be done: is/ought fallacy.

For more on naturalism, see C. S. Lewis's *Miracles*, esp. part one.

III. Comparing Christian Theism and Naturalism

	Christian Theism	Naturalism
1. Reality/metaphysics	God exists; Creator/creation God is personal/moral God upholds creation/very good; open system	Universe is self-existent; no God; God is illusion/superstition projection; matter/energy closed system/determinism
2. Knowledge/epistemology	Truth exists in God, revealed in creation, Christ, Scripture science	Man is the measure of all things/ Homo mensura; reason, experience
3. Ethics	Determined by God; disclosed in Revelation (natural/special) Discovered by man	Determined by man; disclosed by reason and experience; autonomous, situational, relative
4. Nature of human beings	Imago Dei (whole person is image of God); now fallen; redeemed by Christ	Evolved from lower primates; advanced, complex, conscious animal
5. Human predicament	Sin-rebellion against God leading to separations from self, others, creation	Superstition/ignorance; environment genetics; economics; unconscious mind; etc.
6. Solution to human pred.	Salvation in Jesus Christ restoration to God, self, others, world	Science, reason, technology, education robust economy, genome project, psycho-analysis/therapy, etc.
7. History	Creation/fall/redemption already/not yet; linear/purposeful	Big bang until????? Linear, no final purpose
8. Death	Eternal life with God; eternal damnation w/o God	Extinction; end of existence
9. Jesus Christ	Son of God/Son of Man 2d person of Trinity; Lord/Savior; God incarnate	Moral teacher, prophet, entirely human (not God)

III. Two Important Varieties of Naturalism: Secular Humanism and Marxism

A. Secular Humanism

1. Definition of humanism (generically): human beings are unique and of special value; their aspirations, thoughts, and yearnings are significant.
2. Two types of humanism
 - a. Christian humanism: Asserts that human dignity and value is derived from the image of God in each person. In this sense, Christianity is the true humanism! Men such as Calvin, Erasmus, Shakespeare, and Milton fall into this camp.
 - b. Secular humanism: Asserts the value and dignity of human beings within the context of a naturalistic world view. See the Secular Humanist Declaration, and the Humanist Manifesto's I, II.

B. Marxism

1. Karl Marx (1818-83)
2. Philosophical influence
 - a. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1830): dialectical idealism of the Absolute Spirit
 - b. Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72): atheistic materialism
3. Marxist dialectical/historical materialism
 - a. History is the history of class struggle.
 - b. Economic factors are the primary determinants of that history.
 - c. Revolution of the proletariat establishes a new economic order.
 - d. The new classless society will emerge producing the "new socialist individual" overcoming alienation and establishing an ideal state or utopia.
4. Critique
 - a. Is human history moving toward an ideal society? Atheistic Marx had no real basis for this belief.
 - b. Are human beings really motivated to work toward this future society? With no transcendent reason for doing so, the motivation is at best minimal.

- c. Is Marx view of human nature realistic? Is it plausible to think that selfishness and greed are solely the product of scarcity and class division? Will the right environment produce "good" human beings? Unlikely on both counts.

IV. The Persistence of Naturalism and a Critique

A. Its persists for two reasons

1. It gives the impression of being honest and objective.
2. It gives the impression of being coherent.

B. Critique

1. Does naturalism give adequate reason to consider human beings unique? Naturalism is optimistic about man but without an adequate basis.
2. Does naturalism give adequate reason to trust the human ability to know? How can you trust your thought if thought is just result of chemical properties? Maybe I am totally deceived.