

The Issue of Naturalism

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Abstract

Atheism is becoming more prominent in our culture every day. With this rise in atheism, or maybe even as one of the driving forces in the rise of atheism, comes naturalism. Naturalism is not a new concept; the ideas it rests on have been developing for centuries. This worldview, especially when applied as a way of life, can have drastic effects. It stands in opposition of both religion and scientific theory making claims that are no less philosophical than any other worldview. Modern naturalism, which has fully developed fairly recently, is not only incompatible with science, but also detrimental to both theistic faith and scientific thought.

The Origin of Naturalism

Early Philosophers



- Thomas Aquinas introduced people to two different levels—Grace, The Higher, and Nature, The Lower—forming a distinction between natural and supernatural
- Beginning of naturalism marked by the transition away from myth toward natural, rational explanation

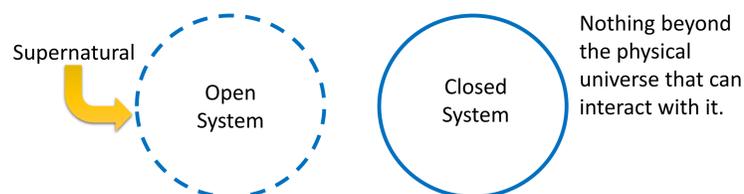


- Thales is known as the grandfather of naturalism
 - First to reject mythological explanations in favor of naturalistic ones
 - Believed the natural world is a self-contained system of matter operated by impersonal laws of nature
- Democritus observed the regularities in nature to be properties of inanimate matter lacking both mind and spiritual essence



Impact of Christianity

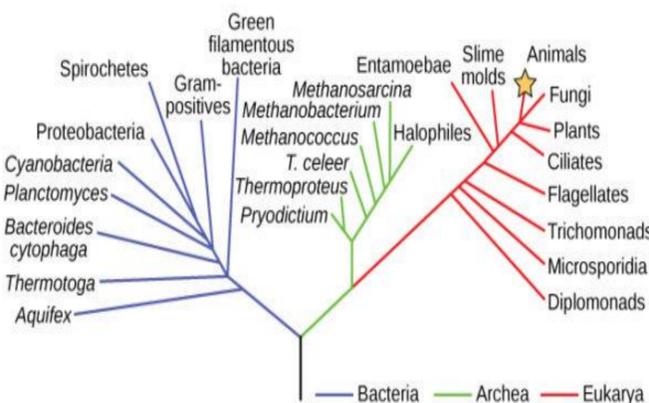
- The Reformation, although a time reiterating that God alone is autonomous, cleared the way for modern naturalism to emerge
 - A separation between secular and clerical authority in the public administration
 - Formation of a rational, impartial judicial system
 - Languages and printing press developed resulting in the rapid distribution of information
- Christian scientists investigated the world believing it was reasonable due to its creation by a reasonable God
- Biblical mentality both gave birth to modern science and gave naturalism the space to take hold
- Modern naturalism truly emerged around the time of the Renaissance and Enlightenment when materialism was fully developed, and the presumption of a closed system was considered



Naturalistic Worldview

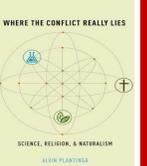
- There is a single, natural world as show by science, and we are completely included in it
- There is nothing special about human life
- The base of understanding is science as it is the best and most reliable way to discover all that exists
- Naturalists begin by recognizing the power of science in studying the natural world and then conclude that all aspects of our existence should be studied using the tools of natural science
- The world is causally closed, so everything can be explained in natural terms
- God is not necessary and does not exist
- Materialism
 - The only kind of substance is physical substance
 - The mind exists but has no substance

Issues Inherent within the Naturalistic Worldview



- Naturalism is in serious conflict with evolution, a fundamental scientific theory
 - Given both naturalism and evolution, it is improbable that our cognitive faculties are reliable
 - Moral perception has little evolutionary advantage, yet we continue to be moral creatures
- Rather than natural science, there is now science rooted in naturalistic philosophy
- Methodological naturalism is an important framework for scientific study, but naturalists wrongfully apply this concept to everything
 - This provides the scientific method more power than it is meant to yield
 - Naturalism turns science into something it is not, a religion, by applying it to things outside of its jurisdiction

Plantinga



Where the Conflict Really Lies - Alvin Plantinga

- Asserts that the big bang necessitates events outside known physics
- Considers naturalism a “quasi-religion” because it acquires many of the same roles as a religion
 - Naturalism is a worldview because it is a total way of looking at both ourselves and our world
 - Naturalism answers many of the big questions surrounding human life
- The “new atheists” are wrong to assume naturalism is an inherent part of the scientific worldview
- There is superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism
 - Superficial concord: science is a supporting pillar of naturalism
 - Deep conflict: naturalism conflicts with the theory of evolution, a fundamental theory within the scientific worldview
- There is superficial conflict but deep concord between science and theistic religion
 - Superficial conflict: theistic religion conflicts with the naturalistic origins thesis that life itself developed from non-living matter without any special creative activity of God which is nothing more than an evolutionary add-on by the new atheists
 - Deep concord: evolutionary theory is compatible with theistic faith

Naturalism is Detrimental to Both Science and Theistic Faith

- When science is portrayed as a religion in and of itself, people belonging to other religions are discouraged from participating
- Naturalism attempts to force people to choose between science and their theistic faith which causes people of faith to attain an attitude of suspicion and mistrust toward science and those who participate in it
- Creates an unnecessary disconnect between people of faith and scientists
- Naturalism denies human life the purpose given it by theistic faith making it detrimental to the faiths themselves

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