

## **The Naturalists Are Declaring the Glory of God: How Atheists Help Make the Case for God**

Naturalism—whose three fundamental tenets are materialism, determinism, and scientism—tends to be the default worldview in the academy. Yet when it comes to accounting for key features of the universe and human experience itself (the universe’s beginning and fine-tuning, consciousness, rationality, moral responsibility, etc.), it simply lacks the kind of resources that theism has in much greater measure. Furthermore, this inadequacy is reinforced by leading naturalists themselves, who actually contribute weighty reasons for God’s existence.

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### **1. CREEDS: The tenets of naturalism are unsupportable.**

#### *a. Tenets of Theism*

- Being of Maximal Greatness
  
- Bestower of the Divine Image
  
- Creator of All Other Reality:

#### *Implications:*

- CREATION’S BEGINNING
  
- COSMOS’S DESIGN
  
- CREATOR’S PERSONHOOD
  
- CREATURES’ DIGNITY

#### *b. Tenets of Naturalism*

- METAPHYSICS: *View of Reality*: Matter is all that exists. Materialism

- ETIOLOGY: View of Causation: All events are physically determined by prior physical events going all the way back to the Big Bang. Determinism
- EPISTEMOLOGY : View of Knowledge: Knowledge is only (or best) acquired through the scientific method. Scientism

**Implications:** No supernatural (God, angels), signs and wonders (miracles), soul, self-determination (free will), survival after death, significance to humans, solution to prob. of evil.

### *c. Initial Problems with Naturalism*

#### **PROBLEM #1: INCOHERENCE**

- Materialism: How can one *show* that matter/nature is *all* that exists?
- Determinism: Isn't the naturalist's conclusion something she *couldn't help believing*?
- Scientism: How do you *scientifically prove* that all knowledge must be *scientifically provable*?

**PROBLEM #2: COUNTER-INTUITIVENESS:** Naturalism ultimately denies what is so obvious and fundamental to us as human beings. **Philosopher Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989): The “scientific image” vs. the “manifest image.”**

- “NOTHING MORE THAN”: Strict naturalism (“scientific image”): humans are *nothing more than* valueless, deterministically-driven molecules in motion.
- “MUCH MORE THAN”: Broad naturalism (“manifest image”): humans are much more than molecules in motion: we are self-conscious, valuable, morally responsible, duty-bound, purpose-seeking. (But according to strict naturalists, these features are “illusory” and not “scientific.”)

**\*\*THE UNNATURALNESS OF NATURALISM: Problems of Its “Three-Self Movement”:**

- SELF-EVIDENCE PROBLEM: WHY DENY WHAT SEEMS SO OBVIOUS TO US? The burden of proof would be on the denier of the obvious.

- SELF-DELUSION PROBLEM: HOW WOULD WE KNOW IT'S ILLUSORY? How would we even know to detect the “illusions” of morality, free will, beauty, purpose, consciousness, duty, value unless we could “step outside” of them?
- SELF-EXCEPTION PROBLEM: “EVERYONE EXCEPT ME”! Those who call these features illusory make themselves the exception to their own rules. *They are somehow* able to see that others are deluded by the appearance of design, purpose, rationality, morality, etc.

## 2. CONTOURS: The worldview landscape or vision of naturalism supports belief in God.

a. Criteria: How do we assess which worldview or theory to prefer? *Which worldview picture (metaphysical context) is more NATURAL? UNIFYING? BASIC?*

#1. “NATURAL”: Given naturalism and theism, which features of the universe and human experience will more naturally, least surprisingly, more probably emerge?

#2: UNIFYING: Does the theory or worldview in question bring greater coherence, interconnection, or unity? Which theory—naturalism or theism—brings together a range of phenomena like the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe, consciousness, rationality, beauty, free will, human dignity, etc.? Example: E. Wielenberg: Eternal, necessary moral facts pre-exist the emergence of moral values (e.g., intrinsically valuable human beings, moral duties).

- ANTICIPATION: These moral facts “anticipate” the emergence of human beings.
- ACCIDENTAL: This is a cosmic accident—a lucky convergence of mindless processes resulting in human beings, who must attend to those eternal moral facts!
- ABNORMAL: Wielenberg must move in the direction of the transcendent. He himself acknowledges that the strictly natural is abnormal (non-natural atheism).
- APPARENTNESS: Theism is the more apparent option (unity of a valuable Being creating valuable humans), resolving this theism-evading “dance.”

#3: BASIC: Is the feature in question “just there” (a brute fact), or can one worldview offer a deeper explanation than others?

b. Context: Which context—naturalism or theism—makes the best sense of the features in question? God makes better sense: The existence of consciousness, beauty, free will, personhood, rationality, duties, and human value—not to mention the beginning and fine-tuning of the universe—is hardly surprising if a good, personal, rational, creative, powerful, and wise God exists. However, these phenomena are quite startling if they are the result of deterministic, valueless, non-conscious, non-rational material processes.

### **3. CLAIMS: Naturalists' affirmations reinforce belief in God:**

*Existence/the beginning of the universe*

*Consciousness*

*Free will/moral responsibility*

*Rationality*

*Objective Moral Values*

*Evidence of teleology (purposiveness) in nature—in the universe & biological organisms*

*Beauty in the universe; Human uniqueness*

#### ***Further Reading:***

Goetz, Stewart, and Charles Taliaferro. *Naturalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Copan, Paul, and Charles Taliaferro, eds. *The Naturalness of Theistic Belief*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019.