

6B Naturalism: Varieties of Non-Religious Experience

(with apologies to William James)

Atheism and Naturalism

Although sometimes used interchangeably, atheism and naturalism are not strictly identical. Naturalism is a worldview, while atheism is a religious (or, actually, non-religious) position. Since they deny any supernatural, whether personal or impersonal, atheists will always hold to a naturalistic worldview. While many atheists quietly go about their lives, a handful (“the New Atheists”) are very vocal and hostile to religion, particularly Christianity. Among these are Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and the late Christopher Hitchens.

Some of the main tenets of atheism, in general, are as follows:

- *GOD – He does not exist; only the universe exists.*
- *UNIVERSE – It is eternal; or it randomly came to be.*
- *HUMANITY (origin) – We have evolved, are made of molecules, and are not immortal*
- *HUMANITY (destiny) – We have no eternal destiny and will be annihilated.*
- *EVIL (origin) – It is real, caused by human ignorance.*
- *EVIL (destiny) – It can be defeated by man through education.*
- *ETHICS (basis) – They are created by, and grounded in, humanity.*
- *ETHICS (nature) – They are relative, determined by the situation. [1]*

Since the naturalistic worldview specifically omits God, by default atheism will always be the religious (or, technically, non-religious) aspect of that worldview.

A variety of philosophical positions flow out of naturalism. If you say there is no God, then what do you live for?

Lifestyle:

- Stoicism – live for self-examination and self-mastery (apart from God)
- Hedonism –live to maximize personal pleasure.

- Lifestyle Existentialism –live for experience, activism, and non-conformity

Meaning:

- Nihilism -nothing ultimately has meaning
- Pluralism – Everything is equally valid and “true”
- Secular humanism – live to advance humanity (and deliberately remove God from all considerations)
- Existentialism - find a personal reason for living (by doing some thing)
- Scientism (scientific humanism) –live to advance humanity and explain all things using science and scientific methods
- Militant Atheism (Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens) - live to destroy belief in God

Politics:

- Anarchism – live for the abolition of government
- Marxism - live for the ideal society- a classless worker’s paradise
- Fascism - live for the state

References

1. Geisler, N. L., and Bocchino, P., *Unshakable Foundations*, Bethany House, 2001, p.59.