

## 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.