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A Deep Dive into the Atheistic Religion - Part 2 ***Modern Secular Religions***

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In part one of this four part series, we looked at the very concept of atheistic secular religions and give a historical look at how Atheism has evolved throughout history. You can read that article at: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2022/03/a-deep-dive-into-the-atheistic-religion-part-1>. In part two of this series, we will take a look at how Atheism has emerged in modern times.

The Emergence of Naturalistic Atheism

Modern naturalistic Atheism is different from what emerged in ancient times as it is, essentially, a rejection of a biblical view of God. This approach only became possible with the advent of modern science.

The Emergence of Atheism from Christian Beliefs

Naturalistic Atheism is the version of Atheism that is the foundation for the various secular religions that are prominent in modern society. This form came out of a completely different environment from the Pantheistic Monism of the Far East or the Animism that existed in the ancient West. Naturalistic Atheism emerged out of a Christian theistic environment.

From the time of Charlemagne in the 400s AD, Christianity came to dominate the Roman world. The emergence of modern science naturally grew out of a biblical worldview, so it is completely understandable that as Christianity grew, the implications of a biblical worldview became increasingly evident in society. Inherent in Christian Theism is the belief that God created the natural

universe in a fashion that was orderly to the degree that it could be studied and understood. For the early modern scientists, science and faith went together. For them the study of God's creation was considered an act of worship. From that belief, the concepts of modern science emerged and flourished.

It was Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who pioneered what is now referred to as the scientific method. Other early Christian scientists whose research formed the very foundation of modern scientific theory included such names as Isaac Newton (1642–1727) , who formulated the laws of gravity and motion, Michael Faraday (1791–1867), who is best remembered for his work on electromagnetism, and James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879), who is credited with unifying physics by bringing together electricity, magnetism, and light.

While the early scientists derived their approach to studying science from a biblical worldview, there was also an emerging dissatisfaction with religion in society in general because of corruption within the religious establishment. During the period of the Renaissance and Reformation (15th and 16th centuries), there came to be a great deal of criticism of the religious establishment because of rampant corruption. The Roman Catholic Church, during that era, was not only a religious institution, but also a political one. Because of the Church's political entanglements, it increasingly needed money to fight a series of wars in Italy, and ultimately in other parts of Europe, as well.

To raise money for its wars, the church began using various efforts that exploited its religious position. In particular, it began selling relics and indulgences, and

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even created a religious tourism trade using pilgrimages to "holy sites" as its draw. Unfortunately, a great deal of corruption developed in these money making efforts, and the common people increasingly recognized it for what it was. This hypocrisy began weakening the moral authority of the Church and caused people to feel less connected to it.

For those who were inclined to hold onto their religious faith, the existence of the corruption spawned various reform movements – the most prominent of which was the Reformation. For others, however, it caused them to reject religious faith altogether. It was from this later group that people started looking for other systems of belief. This growing exodus from the Church became even more prominent and widespread during the Enlightenment period of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Initially, even while criticism of the Roman Catholic Church was growing, Atheism, per se, did not accompany it. There was, though, a gradually growing sense that the natural world could be understood without appealing to God's creative work. This was first manifested in deistic beliefs that were introduced by the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) in the 17th century. He proposed a God who did exist, but one who did not interfere in the running of the world. God was characterized as a "clock-maker" who created the universe, wound it up, then allowed it to run on its own by the natural laws He instituted. As the notion that God was not necessary became more prominent, more and more scientists and educators began to accept Spinoza's point of view.

Perhaps the most significant turning point in the emergence of full

blown Naturalism took place with Darwin's publication of his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Darwin's theory gave those who were inclined toward Atheism what they considered a plausible alternative to belief in God. From that time forward, naturalistic Atheism began to grow exponentially, and, in modern society, has come to dominate nearly all institutions of western culture.

The Current Dominance of Naturalism in Modern Western Society

As mentioned above, naturalistic Atheism, with its accompanying secular religious philosophies, began to emerge during the period of the Enlightenment, then really started picking up speed after Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. It was after that time that committed Naturalists began becoming more prominent in various sectors of society. Early on, it was seen most prominently in higher education where professors were able to educate college students in their atheistic beliefs, and in the arts and entertainment industries where the values and morals of naturalistic Atheism were able to be widely spread throughout popular culture.

It seems to have been around the 1960s and 70s when a tipping point was reached and a majority of those in western society had come to a place of accepting a naturalistic worldview. Since that time, the dominance of naturalistic philosophies has become increasingly evident in every institution of society. For example:

Family

The influence of Naturalism is seen prominently in the family by the increasing rejection of Christian moral values. This is demonstrated by a dramatic increase in broken homes, abortion, and the increasing acceptance of the homosexual agenda (gay marriage, transgender rights, etc.).

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Arts and Entertainment

In the arts and entertainment, the acceptance of naturalistic values is seen in the increasing prevalence, and complete acceptance, of what used to be considered sexual immorality. In addition to that, the more relativistic approach to morals and values in general are further evidence of its cultural dominance.

Education

Early on, the acceptance of naturalistic beliefs and values began to emerge in the institutions of higher learning. Through the years, however, those values have filtered down as far as elementary schools, and in some places even kindergartens. Some of the prominent ways this has been expressed over the years is through such things as inclusion of books in school libraries that contain what is considered immoral beliefs and actions based on Christian values, the teaching of the Theory of Evolution as de facto science, attempts to exclude parents from decisions concerning what is taught in the classroom, and, in some cases, even in whether or not to consult parents regarding an abortion for their child.

News Media

Traditionally, the news media has been considered a source of unbiased news about what is going on in a particular media market. The concept of an objective media seeking to share objective truth is a singularly Christian concept. In recent years, however, political considerations have overtaken truth as the basis for much news reporting based on a relativistic approach to dealing with morality and values. This increasingly conspicuous bias is a reflection of naturalistic worldview beliefs becoming more prominent among the decision makers in news rooms.

Based on naturalistic beliefs, there is no such thing as objective truth. With

that as a foundational belief, some journalists have come to consider the injection of their own personal biases into news stories as a legitimate news practice. This has resulted in such things as journalists actually making up news to promote a particular narrative, networks making intentional decisions to slant the news a particular way, and news people actually getting into arguments with newsmakers, rather than simply reporting what is going on.

Government

There has virtually never been a time when people from different political parties did not have policy disagreements. However, it used to be that, at the very least, they had the same ultimate goals in mind. The differences had more to do with how to accomplish the goals rather than the goals themselves. The reason for the common goals was because pretty much everyone was working off of the same Judeo-Christian worldview platform. In recent times, however, based on the increasing prominence of naturalistic worldview beliefs, in one political party in particular, even the goals are now different.

The concepts underlying the notion of a free-market economy are based on theistic worldview beliefs (more particularly, Judeo-Christian Theism). With the increasing influence of Naturalism, though, an entirely different set of goals have begun to emerge.

The most prominent political and economic expression of Naturalism is Marxism. Besides being atheistic, its moral base is relativism. With that as a foundation, there is considered to be no such thing as objective right and wrong, so the decisions various politicians make must be based on their personal political preferences rather than on anything that might be considered true or right.

Some of the modern expressions of this naturalistic approach to governing include active promotion of policies that place a low priority on human life, promoting various policy mandates through executive order rather than working through the political process involving legislatures, court rulings based on the personal political preferences of judges rather than on the text of the law, and the promotion of collectivist economic policies.

Business

Traditionally, businesses in American society have based their business models on values derived from Christian Theism. Those values included honesty, integrity, and a desire to provide the most value for their customers. This is not to say that no businesses violated those values, but at the very least they considered them to be right.

In more recent times, though, as naturalistic values have become increasingly prominent, those traditional values have given way to a different set of values that produce a different outcome. There are considered to be no objectively right values in naturalistic worldview beliefs. As such, it is regarded that each business person must come up with their own personal value set for doing business.

Because of the natural tendencies of human beings toward selfish behavior, an increasing number of business leaders are choosing business practices that maximize profits using what used to be considered dishonest or immoral means. As such, relativism has increasingly become the guiding business principle over truth and right.

Church

While it may seem counterintuitive, many churches and denominations have also moved away from traditional biblical principles in their underlying theology to follow what is popularly referred to as liberal theology. This would include such theological streams as Higher Criticism, Liberation Theology, and Postmodern Theology.

In its essence, theological liberalism filters its interpretation of the Bible through a naturalistic lens. Many of that stripe view God as more of an abstract concept than an actual transcendent person, and they interpret the Bible using naturalistic philosophy as a foundation rather than traditional biblical hermeneutics.

Some of the more prominent expressions of this kind of naturalistic influence, in some contemporary churches, involves an emphasis on social justice over personal salvation, and a tendency to promote socially liberal political policy using social activism.

The Essential Story of a Naturalistic Worldview

Secular religions are all based on a naturalistic worldview. As was mentioned earlier, Naturalism is the belief that the natural universe, operating by natural laws, is all that exists. As such, there is no acknowledgment of the existence of any god, or any kind of transcendent reality at all.

But to get at the underlying story of secular religions, we have to back up a step and understand how religious beliefs, in general, are identified. Interestingly, EVERY religious belief, regardless of their worldview underpinning, is identified using the same criteria. This criteria exposes the essential beliefs of a belief system that one cannot violate and still be considered within that system.

The way those essential beliefs are exposed is by answering three questions based on the tenets of a given belief system. It is in answering these three questions that we are able to get down to the bottom line belief of a faith system.

The three essential worldview questions are:

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality? (God)
2. What is a human being? (Man)
3. What is the ultimate a person and get from this life? (Salvation)

As we consider how various secular religions answer the three questions, it is first of all helpful to grasp the relationship between a worldview and a belief system. Based on the way we are defining the term here, there are only four basic worldview categories – Naturalism, Animism, Far Eastern Thought, and Theism. Every religion, cult, and philosophy in existence is based on one of these four (though there are some hybrid belief systems that attempt to incorporate more than one). To clarify even further, every belief system that belongs to a particular worldview category answers the three essential worldview questions in the same way as its worldview host.

Thus, since every secular religion is based on a naturalistic worldview, all of them answer the essential questions the same way Naturalism answers them. Let's take a look at those answers:

1. What Is the Nature of Ultimate Reality?

As we deal with the concept of "ultimate reality," what we are really talking about is that which is considered the supreme, final, and fundamental power in all reality. Or put another way, the absolute bottom line of things as they actually exist. Every worldview has its own understanding and definition of what that looks like.

In Naturalism, ultimate reality considers that the natural universe, based on natural laws, is all that exists. There is no God or anything that exists outside of the natural universe. Correspondingly, there are no laws or principles that operate outside of the natural laws of the universe.

Some of the important implications of this belief are that there is no such thing as sin, and no such thing as objective morality. In naturalistic thought, sins are merely acts that do not conform to societal norms. By the same token, the feelings of disconnection that people feel or experience in the course of living life are not seen to be disconnections from God or from anything transcendent. Rather, they are merely feelings of alienation from other people and society. They are considered to be nothing more than personal feelings caused by some psychological or physiological source.

2. What is a human being?

Based on a naturalistic worldview, human beings are nothing more than natural animal creatures that have evolved the most complex brains of any in the animal kingdom. Since the naturalistic belief about ultimate reality is that nothing exists outside of the natural universe, there is no other possibility but that somehow life emerged on earth by some kind of natural means, and naturally evolved into the life forms that now exist on the planet.

3. What is the ultimate a person can get from this life?

Since Naturalism acknowledges only the existence of the natural universe, there can be no meaning derived from a transcendent source. The only possibility for meaning must come from creatures that have the capacity to self-consciously think and reason – and human beings are the only natural creatures that have that capacity. With that as a foundational belief, there are two ultimate conclusions that can be derived concerning meaning for this life.

On a macro level (the level of human society), the ultimate possible meaning for life is the survival of the species. At this level, the highest priority rests with the collective, not the individual.

On a micro level (the level of the individual), the ultimate meaning for life must be the achievement of personal desires. Since human beings are self-conscious creatures and have the ability to consider personal meaning, and since there is no acknowledged existence outside of temporal life on earth, that meaning must be confined to what goes on in one's earthly life.

The Implications of Naturalistic Answers

If you carefully evaluate Naturalism's answers to the three essential worldview questions, it quickly becomes evident that there is no empirical backing to support any of them. That is: 1) there is no science in existence that can show that the natural universe is all that exists, 2) there is no science to show that human beings are naturally evolved animal creatures, and, 3) there is no science to show that survival and achieving personal

desires are the ultimate goals a person can strive for in this life. For a person to believe the answers offered by Naturalism, they must do it based on their faith that naturalistic beliefs represent the way reality is structured. There is no objective science able to back it up.

Furthermore, the answers to these questions also require a particular approach to understanding and expressing morality. Since Naturalism does not allow for the existence of God, there is no possible objective basis for asserting any particular moral point of view. Since there is no person outside of the natural universe to transmit any kind of objective moral knowledge, objective moral belief simply cannot exist. Man, as the only self-conscious sentient being in existence, must make up morality for himself. Morality is necessarily subjective based on the preferences of those in society who have the power to enforce their will, or otherwise influence the moral direction of society.

Thus, when some kind of societal problem is identified, there can be no appeal to what is "true" or "right" to try to solve it. Those with power and influence must come up with their own solutions and somehow persuade those in society to go along. By whatever means, the solution to society's problems must be found in enforced conformity to accepted norms. Those who go along are rewarded, while those who try to push back against the powerful are somehow sanctioned.

Moving On

We have so far explored what Atheism has looked like throughout history, and gone into a bit more depth to look at the worldview beliefs that support atheistic faith. In part three, we will take a look specifically at the more common expressions of atheistic secular religions that have emerged in society.

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