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The Elephants in the Naturalist's Living Room

By Tal Davis

When I was about six years old, I went with a friend's family to a circus. Before the show began, we went into a tent where you could feed peanuts to the elephants. I was so intrigued as I held out a peanut and the huge elephant would reach out with her long trunk and, using it like a hand, take it from me and put it in her mouth. Since then I have loved elephants, as I think most people do.

Yes, elephants are great in circuses (though many are no longer using them in their shows), zoos, and wildlife reserves. However, as we all know, they do not belong in people's living rooms. So, whenever something is an obvious problem for someone, or a group, that they may try to ignore or deflect, we often say, "They have an elephant in their living room."

If you read the materials from our website and newsletters you probably know that one of the most prominent modern worldviews is Naturalism. Naturalism asserts that all that really exists is what is seen in the natural universe of time, space, matter, and energy. Its promoters generally reject any form of the supernatural (especially a god), and contend that everything can be, or will be, explained by the fixed laws of nature and physics. They regard humans as just the highest animal species that has evolved by a mindless process of natural selection over millions of years. When this physical life ends, that is all there is – with nothing beyond.

But for all their self-confidence, adherents of Naturalism have elephants in their living room! In other words, there are some facts of science that they cannot explain. So, in many cases they simply choose to ignore them or deflect them by saying science hasn't had enough time to figure them out (which in some cases is not true – time has already run out).

So what are these proverbial elephants in the room of Naturalism? In this article we will examine three of them. Appropriately, we will call them "JUMBOS".

Jumbo #1 - The Origin of the Universe

Perhaps the greatest discovery of the 20th Century took place in June of 1964. Two scientists at Bell Laboratories, Robert Wilson and Arno Penzias, using a somewhat rustic radio telescope, were listening for microwave transmissions from far away stars. In the process, they noticed that they kept receiving a very low level of continuous background microwave energy no matter where they pointed the telescope. At first they

thought it was caused by some flaw in the equipment, or even bird droppings in the telescope itself. After checking out all the possible problems and seeing that the background noise still remained, they did some investigation and realized that years before Albert Einstein had predicted just such a phenomena if the universe had begun at single moment of time. The two men had discovered what has become known as Cosmic Background Microwave (CBM) radiation.

That discovery, along with many others since then, has virtually proven that the universe had a beginning from nothing. That is to say, all time, space, matter, and energy existing in the natural universe came into being in an instant from nothing before. That fact presents a major problem for the Naturalistic worldview. How could everything that exists come from absolutely nothing? (And when we say "nothing" we mean nothing in the sense of no time, no space, no matter, no energy at all. What I call "nothing nothing.")

Of course Christian Theism says that God created the universe Ex nihilo (from nothing). Only a supernatural conscious being existing outside of time and space with infinite power could cause the universe to come into being. But for the Naturalist it is an elephant in the living room!

Jumbo #2 - The Origin of the Laws of Nature

So while the origin of the universe poses an inexplicable problem for Naturalism, another related issue is just as problematic. Naturalists like to talk about the fixed Laws of Nature. They point to the amazing way that mathematics and physics can explain the way the physical universe works, even to the smallest degree of atomic and subatomic particles. As Galileo once said, perhaps a bit sarcastically, "Mathematics is the language in which God has written the universe."

It is certainly true that science has been able to find rational explanations for many phenomena in nature. But not all. There are some physical phenomena that defy logical explanation, such as Quantum Particle Entanglements, which Einstein called "Spooky action at a distance." In any case, Naturalism is at a loss to explain why the laws of nature are as they are and why they are as finely tuned so that the universe can exist the way it does. If those laws were different by even the smallest percentages, the balance of physics would not allow the universe as we know it to exist. It would either collapse on itself or expand so rapidly as to destroy itself.

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Christian Theists assert that God designed the laws of nature and fine tuned them to just the right degree for the universe to develop, and for humanity to live and thrive on earth. But, for Naturalism, it remains an elephant in the living room.

Jumbo #3 - The Origin of Life

When Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, he claimed to have discovered how the various forms of life evolved and diversified into different species by the random process of natural selection. He argued that all life had originated from a single, one celled organism. Then over millions of years, by natural selection and survival of the fittest, life developed into higher and higher forms of life culminating in humanity.

The only thing Darwin did not try to explain was how that first organism was formed to start with. He, like many after him, probably believed in the primordial soup theory. That is, that some where a warm pool of random chemicals settled together, and by some unknown natural force generated the first living cell. Of course Darwin did not understand just how complex are even the simplest forms of life. In the years since Darwin, biologists have learned enormous amounts of information about the chemical components of living things. They have also tried many times to synthesize those chemical components to create simple life in a laboratory. And while they have been able to synthesize some biological chemicals and enzymes, they have yet to even come close to actually creating a living cell. As time goes on, they learn how life is even more complex than they ever imagined.

Christian Theism looks at the amazing design of life and sees the handy work of a mind and engineer far beyond the scope of human ability. God designed and made life in all its complexity, and we are just beginning to understand His infinite genius.

Perhaps someday scientists will synthesize a living cell. But even if they do it will not alleviate the elephant in the room that plagues the Naturalist concerning the origin of life. In fact, it may even exacerbate it. If all the most brilliant biologists and scientists in the world, working for over a hundred years, have not been able to unlock the secret to making life, then how can they possibly claim that it happened completely by chance? Scientists have set up laboratory systems containing precisely what they think is necessary to bring about wanted results. But even with that they have not succeeded. Can pure chance do better? That is an elephant too big for the living room of Naturalism!

Yes, elephants are wonderful animals. But they need to stay where they belong. They just don't fit in people's houses. The same can be said for ideas that don't fit people's

ideologies, yet they can't explain them away. In this article we have looked at three such concepts that challenge the naturalistic worldview, yet fit very well into Christian Theism.

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