

A Case Against Naturalism

As a worldview, Naturalism dominates vast areas of our modern culture, exerting massive influence in the sciences, philosophy, politics, economics and the arts. Despite its place of prominence, Naturalism suffers from spectacular weaknesses, some of which will be exposed in this article. The actor/director Woody Allen once quipped, “If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank!”¹ Allen’s inference that things supernatural are to be shrugged off with skepticism is typical of those who hold to Naturalism, i.e., that the physical universe is all that exists.

What if God had taken Woody Allen seriously and Allen one day found a few extra million dollars in his bank account? Does anyone think that would change Allen’s worldview? Suppose a further check into bank records could not turn up an explanation for how the money got there. Would anyone really believe that it was an act of God that put the money into Allen’s bank account?²

According to the worldview of Naturalism, there would have to be a natural explanation for money appearing unexpectedly in someone’s bank account because a supernatural explanation is impossible. Naturalism rejects anything supernatural, no matter how compelling the evidence.

In matters other than mysterious bank deposits, such as the origin and nature of the universe, Naturalists instantly reject any explanations that contain even the slightest hint of supernaturalism. They have to in order to prevent their entire worldview from collapsing. But what if the Naturalist is right and the universe is comprised only of material things that have no particular reason for being here? The naturalist George Gaylord Simpson puts it this way: “There is neither need nor excuse for postulation of nonmaterial intervention in the origin of life, the rise of man, or any other part of the long history of the material cosmos.”³ This bold claim is not uncommon among Naturalists. Simpson claims that the world is the kind of place where nothing could ever bring us to the conclusion that there is a non-material cause for the existence of the universe. Yet, despite the best efforts of naturalists to explain it away, the universe gives all of the appearance of having been designed.

In order for Naturalism to be valid, it either must *prove* that the universe is infinite (that it has always existed), which is impossible to do since scientific methodologies are inductive, not deductive, or if it is not infinite, that the universe came into existence by some purely natural cause.

In the case of the latter explanation, that natural cause would necessarily have to be something much more complex than elementary physical particles. In claiming that the physical world came into existence by some impersonal, chance, non-supernatural event, i.e., the Big Bang, Naturalists essentially admit to the biggest miracle of all – something coming into existence from *absolutely nothing*, or at the very least, inert matter acting upon itself to create a causal event.⁴ Furthermore, despite their denials of the supernatural, a succession of miracles would be required for there to have emerged human rationality, logic, communication, morality and the notion of individual freedom.

¹ Quoted in *Peter's Quotations*, s.v. "Doubt."

² This scenario is taken from William Dembski’s lecture “*Darwinism: Scientific Inference or Philosophical Preference?*” Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, March 26-28, 1992.

³ Quoted in Johnson, Phillip E. 1991 *Darwin on Trial*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, p. 114)

⁴ Dembski, 1992.

Consider the improbability of the universe having a non-supernatural cause by examining the probability that a purely mechanistic, impersonal universe would ever possess the conditions necessary for the origin of living things. Dembski argues:

Anyone who grapples with the improbabilities inherent in life's origin is quickly confounded. Indeed, the improbabilities are truly staggering. Fred Hoyle, for instance, computes that a single cell might on the basis of chance be expected every 1040000 years if the entire universe were filled with a prebiotic liquidtion (that is incredibly generous). [Hoyle, Fred and Chandra Wickramasinghe. 1981 *Evolution from Space*. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp. 1-33; Bernd-Olaf Küppers, a pupil of Manfred Eigen, commenting on merely a certain subunit of a virus, writes: The RNA sequence that codes for the virus-specific subunit of the replicase complex consists of approximately a thousand nucleotides, . . . so that it already possess $10^4 = 10000 \times 10600$ alternative sequences The spontaneous synthesis [of this system] . . . is therefore extremely improbable. [Küppers, Bernd-Olaf. 1990 *Information and the Origin of Life*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, p. 68]

He concludes that probability theory "does not bring us a single step further as regards the statistical aspect of the origin of life."⁵ Lecomte du Noüy found similarly wild improbabilities back in the 1940s.

Dembski's conclusions, based upon the primary scientific work of multiple researchers and mathematicians, is that the spontaneous emergence of life is very nearly a statistical impossibility if Naturalism is correct that the universe is entirely material. The science upon which the Naturalist worldview is so dependent does not support Naturalism's conclusions. This means that we must look for explanations other than Naturalism to understand the basic make up of the world around us.

If the universe is not entirely material, then there are entities that exhibit non-material properties, e.g., mind, spirit. If the universe did not come into existence from absolutely nothing (and it couldn't), then it is not unreasonable to postulate that the universe is not some entity that emerged by chance, but was placed here by an intelligent designer, and that designer would necessarily possess the attributes (omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, self-existence, eternality) that Christians understand the God of Scripture to be.

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⁵ [See du Noüy, Lecomte. 1947 *Human Destiny*. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, Chapter 3.]