Naturalism

Search For Answers

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The Universe Next Door: 
A Basic Worldview Catalog (5th Ed.), by James W. Sire
Worldviews Revisited Series

- Introduction to Worldviews (10/25/15)
- Christian Theism, Deism, Islamic Theism (11/01/15)
- Naturalism, Nihilism (11/08/15)
- Existentialism, Eastern Pantheistic Monism (11/15/15)
- The New Age, Postmodernism (11/22/15)
- How Shall We Then Live? (11/29/15)
What is a Worldview?

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”

“Seven” Basic Questions

“If a worldview can be expressed by propositions, what might they be? Essentially, they are our basic, rock-bottom answers to the following seven questions:”

Eight Basic Questions

1. What is the prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person after death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

Christian Theism

A Universe Charged with the Grandeur of God
What is the prime reality – the really real?

(CT) Prime reality is the infinite, personal God revealed in the Holy Scriptures. This God is triune, transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign, and good.

Question #2

What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

*(CT)* External reality is the cosmos God created *ex nihilo* to operate with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system.

*Source: James Sire, p. 31, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)*
What is a human being?

(CT) Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity.

Question #3

What is a human being?

*(CT)* Human beings were created good, but through the Fall the image of God became defaced, though not so ruined as not to be capable of restoration; through the work of Christ, God redeemed humanity and began the process of restoring people to goodness, though any given person may choose to reject that redemption.

Question #4

What happens to a person after death?

(CT) For each person death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the gate to eternal separation from the only thing that will ultimately fulfill human aspirations.

Question #5

Why is it possible to know anything at all?

(CT) Human beings can know both the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.

Question #6

How do we know what is right and wrong?

(CT) Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving).

Question #7

What is the meaning of human history?

*(CT)* History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity.

*Source: James Sire, p. 43, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)*
Question #8

What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

*(CT) Christian theists live to seek first the kingdom of God, that is, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.*

*Source: James Sire, p. 23, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)*
Naturalism

The Silence of Finite Space
God of the Gaps?

“I think you should be more explicit here in step two.”

Source: Sidney Harris, http://www.sciencecartoonsplus.com/gallery/math/math07.gif
Two Types of Naturalism

Methodological Naturalism

*God may or may not exist, but the God hypothesis is unnecessary for comprehending the universe.*

Metaphysical Naturalism

*There is no God and it doesn’t matter.*
“The Slide”

In **theism** God is the infinite-personal Creator and sustainer of the cosmos. In **deism** God is reduced; he begins to lose his personality, though he remains Creator and (by implication) sustainer of the cosmos. In **naturalism** God is further reduced; he loses his very existence.

“The Slide”

- Christian Theism
- Deism
- Naturalism
- Nihilism
Question #1

What is the prime reality – the really real?

(N) Prime reality is matter. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.

Source: James Sire, p. 69, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
Question #2

What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?

(N) The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.

What is a human being?

(N) Human beings are complex "machines"; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.

Source: James Sire, p. 72, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
Question #4

What happens to a person after death?

(N) Death is extinction of personality and individuality.

Question #5

Why is it possible to know anything at all?

(N) Through our innate and autonomous human reason, including the methods of science, we can know the universe. The cosmos, including this world, is understood to be in its normal state.

Question #6

How do we know what is right and wrong?

(N) Ethics is related only to human beings.

Question #7

What is the meaning of human history?

(N) History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.

Question #8

What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

(N) Naturalism itself implies no particular core commitment on the part of any given naturalist. Rather core commitments are adopted unwittingly or chosen by individuals.

Source: James Sire, p. 84, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
“Nothing-buttery”

“Nothing-buttery is characterized by the notion that by reducing any phenomenon to its components you not only explain it, but you *explain it away*.”

*Source: Donald Mackay, p. 42, The Clockwork Image (1974)*
Nihilism

Zero Point
Bridges from Naturalism to Nihilism

1. Necessity and Chance
2. The Great Cloud of Unknowing
3. Is and Ought

Source: James Sire, p. 84, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)
Necessity and Chance

*Human beings are conscious machines without the ability to affect their own destiny or do anything significant; therefore, human beings as valuable beings are dead.*

*Source: James Sire, p. 102, The Universe Next Door, 5th Ed. (2009)*
Russell’s Resignation

"That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius,
are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins -- all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.”

Source: Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship” (First published December, 1903)
The Great Cloud of Unknowing

Naturalism places us as human beings in a box. But for us to have any confidence that our knowledge that we are in a box is true, we need to stand outside the box or to have some other being outside the box provide us with information (theologians call this "revelation"). But there is nothing or no one outside the box to give us revelation, and we cannot ourselves transcend the box.

Darwin’s Doubt

"Nevertheless you have expressed my inward conviction, though far more vividly and clearly than I could have done, that the Universe is not the result of chance. But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?“

- Charles Darwin in private correspondence, dated 3 July, 1881, with William Graham, author of The Creed of Science: Religious, Moral and Social (1881)

Source: Darwin Correspondence Project, letter: 13230, https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/entry-13230/
Is and Ought

Naturalism places us as human beings in an ethically relative box. For us to know what values within that box are true values, we need a measure imposed on us from outside the box; we need a moral plumb line by which we can evaluate the conflicting moral values we observe in ourselves and others. But there is nothing outside the box; there is no moral plumb line, no ultimate, nonchanging standard of value.

Bridge #3 (Ethics)

THIRD: We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life, here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces of vulgarization, commercialization, and dehumanization.

The Loss of Meaning

1. Necessity and Chance
   – impotent, insignificant

2. The Great Cloud of Unknowing
   – no word from outside

3. Is and Ought
   – no absolutes
