Chapter 4

THE SILENCE OF FINITE SPACE

NATURALISM

Without warning, David was visited by an exact vision of death:
a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body,
down which you were drawn while the white faces recede.
You try to reach them but your arms are pinned.
Shovels pour dirt in your face.
There you will be forever, in an upright position,
blind and silent, and in time no one will remember you,
and you will never be called. As strata of rock shift, your fingers
elongate, and your teeth are distended sideways in a great
underground grimace indistinguishable from a strip of chalk.
And the earth tumbles on, and the sun expires,
an unaltering darkness reigns where once there were stars.

John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers"

Deism is the isthmus between two great continents—theism and naturalism. To get from the first to the second, deism is the natural route. Perhaps without deism, naturalism would not have come about so readily. Deism in its *warm* eighteenth-century versions has become almost an intellectual curiosity, handy for an explanation of the foundation of American democracy, but not much held today. Other than Christian theists, there are few today who explain our situation as an indication of God's providence. Deism's sophisticated twentieth-

century versions are mostly *cold* and limited to a few scientists and intellectuals and to those who, while they say they believe in God, have only a vague notion of what he, she or it might be. Naturalism, on the other hand, was and is serious business.

In intellectual terms the route is this: 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.

Swing figures in this shift from theism to naturalism are legion, especially between 1600 and 1750. René Descartes (1596-1650), a Christian theist by conscious confession, set the stage by conceiving of the universe as a giant mechanism of "matter" which people comprehended by "mind." He thus split reality into two kinds of being; ever since then the Western world has found it hard to see itself as an integrated whole. The naturalists, taking one route to unification, made mind a subcategory of mechanistic matter.

John Locke, a Christian theist for the most part, believed in a personal God who revealed himself to us; Locke thought, however, that our God-given reason is the judge of what can be taken as true from the "revelation" in the Bible. The naturalists removed the "God-given" from this conception and made "reason" the sole criterion for truth.

One of the most interesting figures in this shift was Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751). In his own day La Mettrie was generally considered an atheist, but he himself says, "Not that I call in question the existence of a supreme being; on the contrary it seems to me that the greatest degree of probability is in favor of this belief." Nonetheless, he continues, "it is a theoretic truth with little practical value."[1] The reason he can conclude that God's existence is of so little practical value is that the God who exists is *only* the maker of the universe. He is not personally interested in it nor in being worshiped by anyone in it. So God's existence can be effectively discounted as being of no importance.[2]

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[1]Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (1747), in *Les Philosophes,* ed. Norman L. Torrey (New York: Capricorn, 1960), p. 176.

[2]Alfred North Whitehead, for example, says, "Of course we find in the eighteenth century Paley's famous argument that mechanism presupposes a God who is the author of nature. But even before Paley put the argument into its final form, Hume had written the retort, that the God whom you will find will be the sort of God who makes that mechanism. In other

It is precisely this feeling, this conclusion, which marks the transition to naturalism. La Mettrie was a theoretical deist but a practical naturalist. It was easy for subsequent generations to make their theory consistent with La Mettrie's practice, so that naturalism was both believed and acted on.[3]

Behavior does indeed fuel intellectual development. In fact, if we take seriously the last phrase of the definition of *worldview* in chapter one ("on which we live and move and have our being"), we could label La Mettrie a full-fledged naturalist.

BASIC NATURALISM

This brings us, then, to the first proposition defining naturalism.

1. Worldview Question 1: *Prime reality is matter. Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.*

As in theism and deism, the prime proposition concerns the nature of basic existence. In the former two the nature of God is the key factor. In naturalism it is the nature of the cosmos that is primary, for now, with an eternal Creator God out of the picture, the cosmos itself becomes eternal—always there though not necessarily in its present form, in fact *certainly* not in its present form.[4] Carl Sagan, astrophysicist and popularizer of science, has said it as clearly as possible: "The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be."[5]

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words, that mechanism can, at most, presuppose a mechanic, and not merely a mechanic but *its* mechanic" (Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* [1925; reprint, New York: Mentor, 1948], p. 77).

[3]The brash, anti-Christian, anticlerical tone of La Mettrie's essay is of a piece with its antitheistic content, exalting, as it does, human reason at the expense of revelation. A sample of this from the conclusion to *Man a Machine* is instructive: "I recognize only scientists as judges of the conclusions which I draw, and I hereby challenge every prejudiced man who is not an anatomist, or acquainted with the only philosophy which is to the purpose, that of the human body. Against such a strong and solid oak, what could the weak reeds of theology, metaphysics and scholasticism, avail; childish weapons, like our foils, which may well afford the pleasure of fencing, but can never wound an adversary. Need I say that I refer to the hollow and trivial notions, to the trite and pitiable arguments that will be urged, as long as the shadow of prejudice or superstition remains on earth, for the supposed incompatibility of two substances which meet and interact unceasingly [La Mettrie is here alluding to Descartes's division of reality into mind and matter]?" (p. 177).

[4]Strictly speaking, there are naturalists who are not materialists—that is, who hold that there may be elements of the universe that are not material—but they have had little impact on Western culture. My definition of naturalism will be limited to those who are materialists.

[5]Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 4. Sagan goes on to say, "Our feeblest

Nothing comes from nothing. Something is. Therefore something always was. But that something, say the naturalists, is not a transcendent Creator but the matter of the cosmos itself. In some form all the matter of the universe has always been. Or so naturalists have traditionally held. Some recent naturalist philosophers and astrophysicists, however, reject the logic that holds that something has always had to be. The universe may rather have originated out of "a *singularity* at which space-time curvature, along with temperature, pressure and density, becomes infinite."[6] Space and time (all we know of reality) come into being together. Moreover, nothing spiritual or transcendent emerged from this cosmic event. It makes no sense to say there was a *before* before the singularity. In short, matter (or mater/energy in a complex interchange) is all there is. Ours is a *natural* cosmos.

The word *matter* is to be understood in a rather general way, for since the eighteenth century, science has refined its understanding. In the eighteenth century scientists had yet to discover either the complexity of matter or its close relationship with energy. They conceived of reality as made up of irreducible "units" existing in mechanical, spatial relationship with each other, a relationship being investigated and unveiled by chemistry and physics and expressible in inexorable "laws." Later scientists were to discover that nature is not so neat, or at least so simple. There seem to be no irreducible "units" as such, and physical laws have only mathematical expression. Physicists like Stephen Hawking may search for nothing less than a "complete description of the universe" and even hope to find it.[7] But confidence about what nature is, or is likely to be discovered to be, has almost vanished.[8]

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contemplations of the cosmos stir us—there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, of falling from a height. We know we are approaching the greatest of mysteries." For Sagan, in this book and the television series of the same name, the cosmos assumes the position of God, creating the same kind of awe in Sagan, who tries to trigger in his readers and television audience the same response. So-called science thus becomes religion, some say the religion of scientism. See Jeffrey Marsh, "The Universe and Dr. Sagan," *Commentary,* May 1981, pp. 64-68.

[6]See J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 477.

[7]Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), p. 13. Hawking's conclusion is guardedly optimistic: "If we do discover a complete theory [of the universe] . . . it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would know the mind of God" (p. 175).

[8]For a recent update written in lay language, see Dennis Overbye, "Dark, Perhaps Forever," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2008, sec. D, pp. 1 and 4.

Still, the proposition expressed above unites naturalists. The cosmos is not composed of two things—matter and mind, or matter and spirit. As La Mettrie says, "In the whole universe there is but a single substance with various modifications."[9] The cosmos is ultimately one thing, without any relation to a Being beyond; there is no "god," no "creator."

2. Worldview Question 2: *The cosmos exists as a uniformity of cause and effect in a closed system.*

This proposition is similar to proposition 2 in deism. The difference is that the universe may or may not be conceived of as a machine or clockwork. Modern scientists have found the relations between the various elements of reality to be far more complex, if not more mysterious, than the clockwork image can account for.

Nonetheless, the universe is a *closed* system. It is not open to reordering from the outside—either by a transcendent Being (for there is none) or, as I shall discuss later at length, by self-transcendent or autonomous human beings (for they are a part of the uniformity). Emil Bréhier, describing this view, says, "Order in nature is but one rigorously necessary arrangement of its parts, founded on the essence of things; for example, the beautiful regularity of the seasons is not the effect of a divine plan but the result of gravitation."[10]

The Humanist Manifesto II (1973), which expresses the views of those who call themselves "secular humanists," puts it this way: "We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of a supernatural."[11] Without God or the supernatural, of course, nothing can happen except within the realm of things themselves. Writing in *The Columbia History of the World,* Rhodes W. Fairbridge says flatly, "We reject the miraculous."[12]

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[9]La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* p. 177. On the other hand, to define a human being as "a field of energies moving inside a larger fluctuating system of energies" is equally naturalistic. In neither case is humankind seen as transcending the cosmos. See Marilyn Ferguson, *The Brain Revolution: The Frontiers of Mind Research* (New York: Taplinger, 1973), p. 22.

[10]Émile Bréhier, *The History of Philosophy,* trans. Wade Baskin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 5:129.

[11]*Humanist Manifestos I and II* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1973), p. 16. These two manifestos, especially the second (which was drafted by Paul Kurtz), are convenient compilations of naturalist assumptions. Paul Kurtz is a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, editor of *Free Inquiry* (a quarterly journal devoted to the propagation of "secular humanism") and editor of Prometheus Books.

[12]John A. Garraty and Peter Gay, eds., *The Columbia History of the World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 14.

Such a statement, coming as it does from a professor of geology at Columbia University, is to be expected.

What is surprising is to find a seminary professor, David Jobling, saying much the same thing: "We [that is, modern people] see the universe as a continuity of space, time, and matter, held together, as it were, from within. . . . God is not 'outside' time and space, nor does he stand apart from matter, communicating with the 'spiritual' part of man. . . . We must find some way of facing the fact that Jesus Christ is the product of the same evolutionary process as the rest of us."[13]

Jobling is attempting to understand Christianity within the naturalistic worldview. Certainly after God is put strictly inside the system—the uniform, closed system of cause and effect—he has been denied sovereignty and much else that Christians have traditionally believed to be true about him. The point here, however, is that naturalism is a pervasive worldview, to be found in the most unlikely places.

What are the central features of this closed system? It might first appear that naturalists, affirming the "continuity of space, time, and matter, held together . . . from within," would be determinists, asserting that the closed system holds together by an inexorable, unbreakable linkage of cause and effect. Most naturalists are indeed determinists, though many would argue that this does not remove our sense of free will or our responsibility for our actions. Is such a freedom really consistent with the conception of a closed system? To answer we must first look more closely at the naturalist conception of human beings.

3. Worldview Question 3: *Human beings are complex "machines"; personality is an interrelation of chemical and physical properties we do not yet fully understand.*

While Descartes recognized that human beings were part machine, he

[13]David Jobling, "How Does Our Twentieth-Century Concept of the Universe Affect Our Understanding of the Bible?" *Enquiry,* September-November 1972, p. 14. Ernest Nagel, in a helpful essay defining naturalism in a midtwentieth-century form, states this position in more rigorously philosophical terms: "The first [proposition central to naturalism] is the existential and causal primacy of organized matter in the executive order of nature. This is the assumption that the occurrence of events, qualities and processes, and the characteristic behaviors of various individuals, are contingent on the organization of spatiotemporally located bodies, whose internal structures and external relations determine and limit the appearance and disappearance of everything that happens" (Ernest Nagel, "Naturalism Reconsidered" [1954], in *Essays in Philosophy,* ed. Houston Peterson [New York: Pocket Library, 1959], p. 486).

also thought they were part mind; and mind was a different substance. A great majority of naturalists, however, see mind as a function of machine. La Mettrie was one of the first to put it bluntly: "Let us conclude boldly then that man is a machine, and that in the whole universe there is but a single substance with various modifications."[14] Putting it more crudely, Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis (1757-1808) wrote that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile."[15] William Barrett, in a fascinating intellectual history of the gradual loss of the notion of the soul or the self in Western thought from Descartes to the present, writes:

> Thus we get in La Mettrie . . . those quaint illustrations of the human body as a system of imaginary gears, cogs, and ratchets. Man, the microcosm, is just another machine within the universal machine that is the cosmos. We smile at these illustrations as quaint and crude, but secretly we may still nourish the notion that they are after all in the right direction, though a little premature. With the advent of the computer, however, this temptation toward mechanism becomes more irresistible, for here we no longer have an obsolete machine of wheels and pulleys but one that seems able to reproduce the processes of the human mind. Can machines think? now becomes a leading question for our time.[16]

In any case, the point is that as human beings we are simply a part of the cosmos. In the cosmos there is one substance: matter. We are that and only that. The laws applying to matter apply to us. We do not transcend the universe in any way.

Of course we are very complex machines, and our mechanism is not yet fully understood. Thus people continue to amaze us and upset our expectations. Still, any mystery that surrounds our understanding is a result not of genuine mystery but of mechanical complexity.[17]

It might be concluded that humanity is not distinct from other objects

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[14]La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* p. 177.

[15]Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961), 6:51. Among proponents of the notion that human beings are machines is John Brierly, *The Thinking Machine* (London: Heinemann, 1973).

[16]William Barrett, *The Death of the Soul: From Descartes to the Computer* (New York: Anchor, 1987), p. 154. Sherry Turkle, who has studied the effect of computers on human self-understanding, says that "people who try to think of themselves as computers have trouble with the notion of the self" (Carl Mitcham reports on her work in "Computer Ethos, Computer Ethics," in *Research in Philosophy and Technology* [Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press], 8:271).

[17]Humanist Manifesto II states the situation generally with reference to the whole of nature: "Nature may indeed be broader and deeper than we now know; any new discoveries, however, will but enlarge our knowledge of the natural" (p. 16).

in the universe, that it is merely one kind of object among many. But naturalists insist this is not so. Julian Huxley, for example, says we are unique among animals because we alone are capable of conceptual thought, employ speech, possess a cumulative tradition (culture) and have had a unique method of evolution.[18] To this most naturalists would add our moral capacity, a topic I will take up separately. All of these characteristics are open and generally obvious. None of them imply any transcendent power or demand any extramaterial basis, say the naturalists.

Ernest Nagel points out the necessity of not stressing the human "continuity" with the nonhuman elements of our makeup: "Without denying that even the most distinctive human traits are dependent on things which are nonhuman, a mature naturalism attempts to assess man's nature in the light of *his* actions and achievements, *his* aspirations and capacities, *his* limitations and tragic failures, and *his* splendid works of ingenuity and imagination."[19] By stressing our humanness (our distinctness from the rest of the cosmos), a naturalist finds a basis for value, for, it is held, intelligence, cultural sophistication, a sense of right and wrong not only are human distinctives but are what make us valuable. This we will see developed further under proposition 6 below.

Finally, while some naturalists are strict determinists with regard to all events in the universe, including human action, thus denying any sense of free will, many naturalists hold that we are free to fashion our own destiny, at least in part. Some, for example, hold that while a closed universe implies determinism, determinism is still compatible with human freedom, or at least a sense of freedom.[20] We can do many things that we want to do; we are not always constrained to act against our wants. I could, for example, stop preparing a new edition of this book if I wanted to. I don't want to.

This, so many naturalists hold, leaves open the possibility for significant human action, and it provides a basis for morality. For unless we are free to do other than we do, we cannot be held responsible for what we do. The co-

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[18]Julian Huxley, "The Uniqueness of Man," in *Man in the Modern World* (New York: Mentor, 1948), pp. 7-28. George Gaylord Simpson lists humanity's "interrelated factors of intelligence, flexibility, individualization and socialization" (*The Meaning of Evolution,* rev. ed. [New York: Mentor, 1951], p. 138).

[19]Nagel, "Naturalism Reconsidered," p. 490.

[20]Physicist Edward Fredkin, for example, believes that even in a completely deterministic universe, human actions may not be predictable and there is left a place for "pseudo-free will" (Robert Wright, *Three Scientists and Their Gods* [New York: Harper & Row, 1988], p. 67).

herence of this view has been challenged, however, and is one of the soft spots in the naturalist's system of thought, as we will see in the following chapter.

4. Worldview Question 4: *Death is extinction of personality and individuality.*

This is, perhaps, the "hardest" proposition of naturalism for people to accept, yet it is absolutely demanded by the naturalists' conception of the universe. Men and women are made of matter and nothing else. When the matter that goes to make up an individual is disorganized at death, then that person disappears.

The Humanist Manifesto II states, "As far as we know, the total personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social

> 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 labors 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.
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> **BERTRAND RUSSELL,** "A Free Man's Worship"

and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body."[21] Bertrand Russell writes, "No fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave."[22] And A. J. Ayer says, "I take it . . . to be fact that one's existence

[21] *Humanist Manifestos I and II,* p. 17.

[22] Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. 107.

ends at death."[23] In a more general sense humankind is likewise seen to be transitory. "Human destiny," Nagel confesses, "[is] an episode between two oblivions."[24]

Such statements are clear and unambiguous. The concept may trigger immense psychological problems, but there is no disputing its precision. The only "immortality," as the Humanist Manifesto II puts it, is to "continue to exist in our progeny and in the way that our lives have influenced others in our culture."[25] In his short story "Pigeon Feathers" John Updike gives this notion a beautifully human dimension as he portrays the young boy David reflecting on his minister's description of heaven as being "like Abraham Lincoln's goodness living after him."[26] Like the seminary professor quoted above, David's pastor is no longer a theist but is simply trying to provide "spiritual" counsel within the framework of naturalism.

5. Worldview Question 5: *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.*

Notice the similarity between the deist and the naturalist notion of how we come to know. Both accept the internal faculty of reason and the thoughts human beings come to have as givens. From a cosmic standpoint, reason developed under the contingencies of natural evolution over a very long period of time.[27] From a human standpoint, a child is born with innate faculties which merely have to develop naturally. These faculties work on their own within the framework of the languages and cultures to which they are exposed. At no time is there any information or interpretation or mental machinery added from outside the ordinary material world. As children grow, they learn which of their thoughts help them understand and enable them to deal with the world around them. The methods of modern science are especially helpful in leading us to more and more profound knowledge of our universe. Human knowledge, then, is the product of natural human reason grounded in its perceived

[23]A. J. Ayer, ed., *The Humanist Outlook* (London: Pemberton, 1968), p. 9.
[24]Nagel, "Naturalism Reconsidered," p. 496.
[25]*Humanist Manifestos I and II,* p. 17.
[26]John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1959), p. 96.
[27]See pp. 81-84 below.

ability to reach the truth about human beings and the world.[28]

We should notice that I have used the word *truth* to describe the end result of human reason when it is successful. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries few would question its propriety. As Aristotle said, "All men desire to know," meaning "All men desire to know the truth, that is, the way reality really is." Naturalists today, especially scientists and ordinarily educated people, may continue to think this way. When most people say that water is hydrogen and oxygen, two parts to one, they think they have accurately described its chemical makeup; that's what water *is*. More philosophically minded modern naturalists are content to say that we can learn to describe what we take to be reality in language that allows us to live successfully in the world, but no one can know what something *is*. There is a rift between words and things that cannot be bridged.[29] We will see how this plays out in chapter nine on postmodernism. What is important to note here is that naturalists ground human reason in human nature itself.

6. Worldview Question 6: *Ethics is related only to human beings.*

Ethical considerations did not play a central role in the rise of naturalism. Naturalism rather came as a logical extension of certain metaphysical notions—notions about the nature of the external world. Most early naturalists continued to hold ethical views similar to those in the surrounding culture, views that in general were indistinguishable from popular Christianity. There was a respect for individual dignity, an affirmation of love, a commitment to truth and basic honesty. Jesus was seen as a teacher of high ethical values.

Though it is becoming less and less so, it is still true to some measure today. With a few recent twists—for example, a permissive attitude to premarital and extramarital sex, a positive response to euthanasia, abortion and the individual's right to suicide—the ethical norms of the Humanist Manifesto II (1973) are similar to traditional morality. Theists

[28]See the essays in *Naturalizing Epistemology*, 2nd ed., ed. Hilary Kornblith (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997) for a presentation and critique of various naturalistic ways to justify our claims to knowledge.

[29]In Christian theism there is no necessary rift between words and things; this is because everything that exists except God himself has been made by the Word (the personal intelligence of God). See chapter 2, page 36. I have also discussed this aspect of theism in *Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), pp. 87-94.

and naturalists can often live side by side in communal harmony on ethical matters. There have always been disagreements between them; these disagreements will, I believe, increase as humanism shifts further and further from its memory of Christian ethics.[30] But whatever the disagreements (or agreements) on ethical norms, the *basis* for these norms is radically different.

For a theist, God is the foundation of values. For a naturalist, values are constructed by human beings. The naturalist's notion follows logically from the previous propositions. If there was no consciousness prior to the existence of humans, then there was no prior sense of right and wrong. And if there were no ability to do other than what one does, any sense of right and wrong would have no practical value. So for ethics to be possible, there must be both consciousness and self-determination. In short, there must be personality.

Naturalists say both consciousness and self-determination came with the appearance of human beings, and so ethics too came then. No ethical system can be derived solely from the nature of "things" outside human consciousness. In other words, no natural law is inscribed in the cosmos. Even La Mettrie, who fudged a bit when he wrote, "Nature created us all [man and beast] solely to be happy," betraying his deistic roots, was a confirmed naturalist in ethics: "You see that natural law is *nothing but* an intimate feeling which belongs to the imagination like all other feelings, thought included."[31] La Mettrie, of course, conceived of the imagination in a totally mechanistic fashion, so that ethics became for him simply people's following out a pattern embedded in them as creatures. Certainly there is nothing whatever transcendent about morality.

The Humanist Manifesto II states the locus of naturalistic ethics in no uncertain terms: "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."[32] Most conscious

[30]This shift in the content of ethical norms can be studied by comparing Humanist Manifesto I (1933) with Humanist Manifesto II (1973). Since 1973, of course, more shifts have occurred, most notably in the ascendance of a plea that homosexuality be considered a normal human condition with attendant moral rights.

[31]La Mettrie, *Man a Machine,* p. 176, emphasis mine.

[32]*Humanist Manifestos I and II,* p. 17.

naturalists would probably agree with this statement. But exactly how value is created out of the human situation is just as much up for grabs as is the way we ought to understand the origin of the universe.

The major question is this: How does *ought* derive from *is?* Traditional ethics, that is, the ethics of Christian theism, affirms the transcendent origin of ethics and locates in the infinite-personal God the measure of

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To discover the true principles of morality, men have no need of theology, of revelation, or of gods; they need only common sense. They have only to commune with themselves, to reflect upon their own nature, to consult their visible interests, to consider the objects of society and the individuals who compose it, and they will easily perceive that virtue is advantageous, and vice disadvantageous, to such beings as themselves. Let us persuade them to be just, beneficent, moderate, sociable, not because such conduct is demanded by the gods, but because it is a pleasure to men. Let us advise them to abstain from vice and crime, not because they will be punished in the other world, but because they will suffer for it in this.

BARON D'HOLBACH (1723-89), "Common Sense"

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the good. Good is what God is, and this has been revealed in many and diverse ways, most fully in the life, teachings and death of Jesus Christ.

Naturalists, however, have no such appeal, nor do they wish to make one. Ethics is solely a human domain. So the question: How does one get from the fact of self-consciousness and self-determination, the realm of *is* and *can,* to the realm of what *ought* to be or to be done?

One observation naturalists make is that all people have a sense of moral values. These derive, G. G. Simpson says, from intuition ("the feeling of rightness, without objective inquiry into the reasons for this feeling and without possible test as to the truth or falseness of the premises involved"[33]), from authority and from convention. No one grows up without picking up values from the environment, and while a person may reject these and pay the consequences of ostracism or martyrdom, seldom does anyone succeed in inventing values totally divorced from culture.

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[33]Simpson, *Meaning of Evolution*, p. 145.

Of course values differ from culture to culture, and none seems absolutely universal. So Simpson argues for an ethic based on objective inquiry and finds it in a harmonious adjustment of people to each other and their environment.[34] Whatever promotes such harmony is good; what does not is bad. John Platt, in an article that attempts to construct an ethic for B. F. Skinner's behaviorism, writes,

> Happiness is having short-run reinforcers congruent with medium-run and long-run ones, and wisdom is knowing how to achieve this. And ethical behavior results when short-run personal reinforcers are congruent with long-run group reinforcers. This makes it easy to "be good," or more exactly to "behave well."[35]

The upshot of this is a definition of good action as group-approved, survival-promoting action. Both Simpson and Platt opt for the continuance of human life as the value above all values. Survival is thus basic, but it is *human survival* that is affirmed as primary.[36]

Both Simpson and Platt are scientists with a consciousness of their responsibility to be fully human and thus to integrate their scientific knowledge and their moral values. From the side of the humanities comes Walter Lippmann. In *A Preface to Morals* (1929) Lippmann assumes the naturalists' stance with regard to the origin and purposelessness of the universe. His tack is to construct an ethic on the basis of what he takes to be the central agreement of the "great religious teachers." For Lippmann, the good turns out to be something that has been recognized so far only by the elite, a "voluntary aristocracy of the spirit."[37] His argument is that this elitist ethic is now becoming mandatory for all people if they are to survive the twentieth-century crisis of values.

The good itself consists of disinterestedness—a way of alleviating the "disorders and frustrations" of the modern world, now that the "acids of modernity" have eaten away the traditional basis for ethical behavior. It is difficult to summarize the content Lippmann pours into the word *disin-*

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[34]Ibid., p. 149.

[35]John Platt in *The Center Magazine,* March-April 1972, p. 48.

[36]Two other naturalists who attempt to build an ethic on an evolutionary foundation are Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), and James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993). Both explain how a moral sense may have developed; neither succeeds in avoiding the naturalistic fallacy—the attempt to derive *ought* from *is.*

[37]Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Morals* (New York: Time, 1964), p. 190.

terested. The final third of his book is addressed to doing that. But it is helpful to notice that his ethic turns out to be based on a personal commitment of each individual who would be moral, and that it is totally divorced from the world of facts—the nature of things in general:

> A religion which rests upon particular conclusions in astronomy, biology and history may be fatally injured by the discovery of new truths. But the religion of the spirit does not depend upon creeds and cosmologies; it has no vested interest in any particular truth. It is concerned not with the organization of matter, but with the quality of human desire.[38]

Lippmann's language must be carefully understood. By *religion* he means morality or moral impulse. By *spirit* he means the moral faculty in human beings, that which exalts people above animals and above others whose "religion" is merely "popular." The language of theism is being employed, but its content is purely naturalistic.

In any case, what remains of ethics is an affirmation of a high vision of right in the face of a universe that is merely there and has no value in itself. Ethics thus are personal and chosen. Lippmann is not, to my knowledge, generally associated with the existentialists, but, as we shall see in chapter six, his version of naturalistic ethics is ultimately theirs.

Naturalists have tried to construct ethical systems in a wide variety of ways. Even Christian theists must admit that many of the naturalists' ethical insights are valid. Indeed theists should not be surprised by the fact that we can learn moral truths by observing human nature and behavior, for if women and men are made in the image of God and if that image is not totally destroyed by the Fall, then they should yet reflect—even if dimly—something of the goodness of God.

7. Worldview Question 7: *History is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.*

First, the word *history,* as used in this proposition, includes both natural history and human history, for naturalists see them as a continuity. The

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[38]Ibid., p. 307. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* could be described as a sustained cry for the maintenance of some other basis for human values than *commitment* or human *decision.* Without seriously contending with an infinite-personal God who acts as the foundation for these values, it is difficult to see just how contemporary values will be able to be grounded in any firm absolute. See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), esp. pp. 194-216. See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1984).

origin of the human family is in nature. We arose out of it and most likely will return to it (not just individually but as a species).

Natural history begins with the origin of the universe. Something happened an incredibly long time ago—a big bang or sudden emergence—that ultimately resulted in the formation of the universe we now inhabit and are conscious of. But exactly how this came to be few are willing to say. Lodewijk Woltjer, astronomer at Columbia University, speaks for many: "The origin of what is—man, the earth, the universe—is shrouded in a mystery we are no closer to solving than was the chronicler of Genesis."[39] A number of theories to explain the process have been advanced, but none have really won the day.[40] Still, among naturalists the premise always is that the process was self-activating; it was not set in motion by a Prime Mover—God or otherwise.

How human beings came to be is generally held to be more certain than how the universe came to be. The theory of evolution, long toyed with by naturalists, was given a "mechanism" by Darwin and has won the day. There is hardly a public school text that does not proclaim the theory as fact. We should be careful, however, not to assume that all forms of evolutionary theory are strictly naturalist. Many theists are also evolutionists. Evolution has, in fact, become a far more vexed issue among both Christians and naturalists than when this book was first written.[41]

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[39]Garraty and Gay, *Columbia History of the World,* p. 3.

[40]One of the most intriguing treatments of the origin of the universe is that presented by Hawking in *A Brief History of Time.*

[41]Most scientists who are naturalists accept some form of evolutionary theory. Daniel C. Dennett is probably correct when he writes that "though there are vigorous controversies swirling around in evolutionary theory," they are family squabbles. The Darwinian idea "is about as secure as any in science"; that "human beings are products of evolution" is an "undisputable fact" (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea,* pp. 19, 481). One scientist, a naturalist, who does not accept Darwinism or neo-Darwinism, however, is Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, Md.: Adler and Adler, 1985). Among Christians many scientists and theologians, especially those associated with the American Scientific Affiliation, accept some form of evolution as both scientifically possible and consistent with Christian theism (see the countless articles in the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* and *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* [the ASA's retitled journal]). Further examples are Charles Hummel, *The Galileo Connection* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985); Howard J. Van Till, *The Fourth Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Howard J. Van Till, Davis A. Young and Clarence Menninga, *Science Held Hostage* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988). Three recent books are especially helpful in sorting out the status of the current variety of judgments Christian scholars are making in regard to evolution: Darrel R. Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006); and Kenneth R. Miller, *Finding Darwin's God:*

A theist sees the infinite-personal God to be in charge of all natural processes. If the biological order has evolved, it has done so by conforming to God's design; it is teleological, directed toward an end personally willed by God. For a naturalist, the process is on its own. George Gaylord Simpson puts this so well he is worth quoting at some length:

> Organic evolution is a process entirely materialistic in its origin and operation. . . . Life is materialistic in nature, but it has properties unique to itself which reside in its organization, not in its materials or mechanics.

A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 2007).

While methodological naturalism is still the reigning presupposition among most scientists—both secular and Christian—it has been seriously challenged by a number of scientists, philosophers and cultural critics. W. Christopher Stewart explains the conflict between Christians in "Religion and Science," in *Reason for the Hope Within,* ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 318-44. For those opposed to methodological naturalism and arguing instead for "design" or "theistic" science, see especially the following: biologist Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Charles B. Thaxton, Walter L. Bradley and Roger L. Olsen, *The Mystery of Life's Origin* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984); mathematician and philosopher William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999); *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001); *No Free Lunch* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); *Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions About Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004); law professor and cultural critic Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993); *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Science, Law and Education* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995); *The Wedge of Truth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000); and *The Right Questions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002); and chemist and historian of science Charles B. Thaxton and writer Nancy Pearcey, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994). Two histories of the birth, development and criticism of the "intelligent design" movement are Thomas Woodward, *Doubts About Darwin: A History of Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003): and *Darwin Strikes Back: Defending the Science of Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006). Critiques of Christian arguments about evolution is found in Del Ratzsch, *The Battle of Beginnings: Why Neither Side Is Winning the Creation-Evolution Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996); *Science and Its Limits,* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000); *Nature, Design, and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

Six collections of essays by a wide variety of scholars also focus on this topic: J. P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994); Jon Buell and Virginia Hearn, eds., *Darwinism: Science or Philosophy?* (Richardson, Tex.: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 1994); William A. Dembski, ed., *Mere Creation: Science, Faith and Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998); J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); Michael Behe with others, *Science and Evidence for Design in the Universe: Papers Presented at a Conference Sponsored by the Wethersfield Institute, September 25, 1999* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000); and Robert T. Pennock, ed., *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

> Man arose as a result of the operation of organic evolution and his being and activities are also materialistic, but the human species has properties unique to itself among all forms of life, superadded to the properties unique to life among all forms of matter and of action. Man's intellectual, social, and spiritual natures are exceptional among animals in degree, but they arose by organic evolution.[42]

This passage is significant for its clear affirmation of both human continuity with the rest of the cosmos and special uniqueness. Yet lest we conclude that our uniqueness, our position as nature's highest creation, was designed by some teleological principle operative in the universe, Simpson adds, "Man was certainly not the goal of evolution, which evidently had no goal."[43]

In some ways the theory of evolution raises as many questions as it solves, for while it offers an explanation for *what* has happened over the eons of time, it does not explain *why.* The notion of a Purposer is not allowed by naturalists. Rather, as Jacques Monod says, humanity's "number came up in the Monte Carlo game," a game of pure chance.[44] And Richard Dawkins, one of the more vocal of recent neo-Darwinian evolutionists, confirms this: "Natural selection is the blind watchmaker, blind because it does not see ahead, does not plan consequences, has no purpose in view."[45] Any intentionality is ruled out as a possibility from the beginning.[46]

In any case, naturalists insist that with the dawn of humanity, evolution suddenly took on a new dimension, for human beings are self-conscious—probably the only self-conscious beings in the universe.[47] Further, as humans we are free consciously to consider, decide and act. Thus while evolution considered strictly on the biological level continues to be

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[42]Simpson, *Meaning of Evolution,* p. 143. Why Simpson should assign human beings a spiritual nature is not clear. We must not, however, take him to mean that they have a dimension that takes them out of the closed universe.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity,* trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 146.

[45]Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), p. 21.

[46]See Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, *Chance or Purpose? Creation, Evolution and a Rational Faith,* trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007) for a Christian perspective on purpose in evolution.

[47]A few naturalists like Carl Sagan believe that given the size and age of the universe, other intelligent beings must have evolved elsewhere in it. But even Sagan admits that there is no hard evidence for this view (Sagan, *Cosmos,* pp. 292, 307-15). That was 1980; the same is true in 2009.

unconscious and accidental, human actions are not. They are not just a part of the "natural" environment. They are human history.

In other words, when human beings appear, meaningful history, human history—the events of self-conscious, self-determining men and women—appears. But like evolution, which has no inherent goal, history has no inherent goal. History is what we make it to be. Human events have only the meaning people give them when they choose them or when they look back on them.

History proceeds in a straight line, as in theism (not in a cycle as in Eastern pantheism), but history has no predetermined goal. Rather than culminating in a second coming of the God-man, it is simply going to last as long as conscious human beings last. When we go, human history disappears, and natural history goes on its way alone.

8. Worldview Question 8: *Naturalism itself implies no particular core commitment on the part of any given naturalist. Rather core commitments are adopted unwittingly or chosen by individuals.*

Each individual is free to choose whatever goal or commitment he or she wishes. Most naturalists are an integral part of a particular cultural community and orient their personal lives within the norms of their commu-

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I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity . . . has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true. . . . [A] secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable; or better, it falls within the range of an imaginable life for masses of people.

CHARLES TAYLOR, *A Secular Society*

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nity. But there is nothing in the naturalist worldview to require this, and rebels to any society-given notion of the good life cannot reasonably be criticized for their rebellion to social norms. Still, while naturalism pro-

vides no rational justification to act selflessly, naturalists often choose to serve their community or promote a purely secular human flourishing. Naturalists will not, of course, choose to live in order to please any God or gods.

NATURALISM IN PRACTICE: SECULAR HUMANISM

Two forms of naturalism deserve special mention. The first is *secular humanism,* a term that has come to be both used and abused by adherents and critics alike. Some clarification of terms is in order here.

First, secular humanism is one form of humanism in general, but not the only form. Humanism itself is the overall attitude that human beings are of special value; their aspirations, their thoughts, their yearnings are significant. There is as well an emphasis on the value of the individual person.

Ever since the Renaissance, thoughtful people of various convictions have called themselves and been called humanists, among them many Christians. John Calvin (1509-1564), Desiderius Erasmus (1456?-1536), Edmund Spenser (1552?-1599), William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and John Milton (1608-1674), all of whom wrote from within a Christian theistic worldview, were humanists, what are sometimes today called Christian humanists. The reason for this designation is that they emphasized human dignity, not as over against God but as deriving from the image of God in each person. Today there are many thoughtful Christians who so want to preserve the word *humanism* from being associated with purely secular forms that they signed a Christian humanist manifesto (1982) declaring that Christians have always affirmed the value of human beings.[48]

The tenets of secular humanism are well expressed in the Humanist Manifesto II.[49] Secular humanism is a form of humanism that is completely framed within a naturalistic worldview. It is fair to say, I believe, that most who would feel comfortable with the label "secular humanist"

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[48]A Christian humanist manifesto was published in *Eternity,* January 1982, pp. 16-18. The signers were Donald Bloesch, George Brushaber, Richard Bube, Arthur Holmes, Bruce Lockerbie, J. I. Packer, Bernard Ramm and me. Then, too, Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmerman promote a form of Christian humanism they call "incarnational humanism" as a foundation for Christian education, especially at the university level; see their *The Passionate Intellect* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

[49]*Humanist Manifestos I and II.* Another, briefer compilation of secular humanist views, "The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles and Values," appears on the back cover of *Free Inquiry,* Summer 1987.

would find their views reflected in propositions 1-6 above. Secular humanists, in other words, are simply naturalists, though not all naturalists are secular humanists.

NATURALISM IN PRACTICE: MARXISM

Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, one of the most historically significant forms of naturalism has been Marxism.[50] The fortunes of Marxism have ebbed and flowed over the years; the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has left only a few "officially" Marxist countries. Nevertheless, for the better part of the twentieth century a huge section of the globe was dominated by ideas that stemmed from the philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883). At the current time, though communism as an ideology seems down and out, many ideas of Marx remain influential among social scientists and other intellectuals in the West. Even in Eastern Europe the former communists, somewhat chastened and professing a commitment to democracy, seem to be making a political comeback.

It is difficult to define or analyze Marxism briefly, for there are many different types of "Marxists."[51] Enormous differences exist between Marxist theories of various kinds, ranging from thinkers who are humanistic and committed to democracy in some form to hard-line "Stalinists" who identify Marxism with totalitarianism. There is another huge difference between Marxist *theories* of all kinds and the reality of Marxist *practice* in the Soviet Union and other places. In theory, Marxism is supposed to benefit working people and enable them to gain economic control over their own lives. In reality, the bureaucratic rigidities of life under communism led to economic stagnation as well as loss of personal freedom.

Although Marxism has generally claimed to be a *scientific* theory (as

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[50]This section on Marxism was written by C. Stephen Evans, University Professor of Philosophy and Humanities, Baylor University.

[51]One of the best introductions to the many sides of Marxism is Richard Schmitt, *Introduction to Marx and Engels: Critical Reconstruction* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987.) A good introduction from a Christian point of view is David Lyon, *Karl Marx: A Christian Assessment of His Life and Thought* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979). There is no substitute, of course, for the actual writings of Marx to really understand him, as well as the writings of Marx's close friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels. Many of the most important writings are in Richard Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader,* 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

in the name "scientific socialism"), this claim has not been generally accepted. It is in many ways more helpful to think of Marxism as a kind of humanism, though of course most humanists are not Marxists. While Marxist humanism has characteristic themes of its own, Marxism and secular humanism, as forms of naturalism, share many assumptions.

All forms of Marxism can of course be traced back to the writings of Karl Marx. The question of who are Marx's "true heirs" is bitterly contested, but the more humanistic Marxists can certainly point to some important themes in Marx's writings. In one of his earliest essays, he says clearly that "man is the supreme being for man."[52] It is from this humanist theme that Marx deduces his revolutionary imperative to "overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being."[53]

Marx arrived at his humanism through an encounter with two important nineteenth-century philosophers: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1830) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Hegel's philosophy was a form of idealism that taught that God or "absolute spirit" is not a being distinct from the world but a reality that is progressively realizing itself in the concrete world. For Hegel this process is *dialectical* in nature; that is, it proceeds through conflicts in which each realization of spirit calls forth its own antagonist or "negation." Out of this conflict a still higher realization of spirit emerges, which in turn calls forth its negation, and so on. This philosophy is in essence a highly speculative philosophy of history. For Hegel the highest vehicle for the expression of spirit was human society, particularly the modern societies that were coming to fruition in the capitalistic states of nineteenth-century western Europe.

Feuerbach was a materialist who was famous for asserting that human beings "are what they eat" and that religion is a human invention. As Feuerbach saw it, God is a projection of human potentiality, an expression of our unrealized ideals. Religion functions perniciously, since as soon as we invent God we devote ourselves to pleasing our imaginary construction instead of working to overcome the shortcomings that led to the invention in the first place. Feuerbach extended his critique of religion to Hegel's philosophical idealism, seeing in Hegel's concept of "spirit"

[52]Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right:* Introduction," in Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader,* p. 60.
[53]Ibid.

yet another human projection, a slightly secularized version of the Christian God.

Marx accepted Feuerbach's critique of religion wholeheartedly, and atheism remains a part of most forms of Marxism to this day. However, he was struck by the fact that if Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel was right, then Hegel's philosophy may still contain truth. If Hegel's concept of spirit is simply a misleading projection of our human reality, then the dialectical process Hegel described may be real, just as a film when projected may give an accurate picture of the reality that was filmed. It is only necessary to "turn Hegel right side up" by translating Hegel's idealistic talk of spirit into materialistic talk of concrete human beings. Once we realize that in Hegel we are seeing a projection or "film," we can interpret his view in a way that makes it true. History *has* proceeded through conflict in which the contending parties create their own antagonists, and this series of historical conflicts is "going somewhere." The goal of history is a perfect or ideal human society, but it is misleading and confusing to call such a society "spirit."

Marx does call himself a "materialist," and in some sense he certainly is one. Despite this, Marx hardly ever talks about matter. His materialism is *historical* and *dialectical;* it is primarily a doctrine about human history, and it sees that history as a series of dialectical struggles. Economic factors are the primary determinants of that history. Since human beings are material, their lives must be understood in terms of the need to work to satisfy their material needs.

Marx believed that human history began with relatively small human communities organized in familylike tribes. Private property is unknown; a kind of primitive or natural communism holds in which individuals identify with the community as a whole, though these communities are poor and unable to allow their members to flourish. As societies develop technology, gradually a division of labor occurs. Some people in a society control the tools or resources the society depends on; this gives them the power to exploit others. Thus out of division of labor and consequent control over the means of production social classes emerge.

For Marx social classes are the dialectical antagonists of history rather than Hegel's spiritual realities. History for Marx is the history of class struggle. Since the demise of primitive societies, societies have always been dominated by the class that controls the means of production. The

process by which the material goods society requires are created is the key to understanding society. This process is termed by Marxists the "base" of society. A particular system for producing material goods, such as feudal agriculture or industrial capitalism, produces a particular class structure. On that class structure depends in turn what Marx calls the "superstructure" of society: art, religion, philosophy, morality and, most important, political institutions.

Social changes occur when one system of production "dialectically" gives rise to a new system. The new economic base comes into being within the womb of the old superstructure. The dominant social classes of the old order of course try to maintain their power as long as possible, relying on the state to maintain their position. Eventually, however, the new economic system and the emerging class become too powerful. The result is a revolution in which the old superstructure is swept away in favor of a new political and social order that better reflects the underlying economic order.

The history of capitalism illustrates these truths clearly, according to Marx. Medieval feudal societies created modern industrial society, which is its dialectical opposite. For a long time the feudal aristocracy tried to hold on to its power, but in the French Revolution Marx saw the triumph of the new middle class, who controlled the means of production in capitalist society. However, the same dialectical forces that led to capitalism will also destroy it. Capitalism requires a large body of propertyless workers, the proletariat, to exploit. As Marx saw it, the economic dynamics of capitalism will necessarily lead to a society in which the proletariat are more and more numerous and more and more exploited. Capitalist societies become more and more productive, but wealth is more and more narrowly distributed. Eventually the concentration of wealth leads to a society in which more is produced than can be purchased; overproduction leads to unemployment and more suffering. At last the proletariat will be forced to revolt.

For Marx the revolt of the proletariat will be different from any previous revolution. In the past, one social class overthrew a rival oppressing class and became in its turn the oppressor. The proletariat will, however, be the majority, not a minority. They have no vested interest in the old order of things, so it will be in their own best interests to abolish the whole system of class oppression. The material abundance created by

modern technology makes this a real possibility for the first time in human history, since without such abundance, struggle, competition and oppression would inevitably break out in new forms.

The new classless society that will emerge will make possible what Marxists call "the new socialist individual." People will supposedly be less individualistic and competitive, more apt to find fulfillment in working for the good of others. The "alienation" of all previous societies will be overcome, and a new and higher form of human life will emerge. This vision in many ways parallels the Christian vision of the coming of the kingdom of God, and it is therefore easy to see why some have characterized Marxism as a Christian heresy.

One can also easily see why this vision of Marx was appealing to so many for so long. Marx had a deep understanding of the human need for genuine community and for fulfillment in work. He was sensitive not merely to the problem of poverty but to the loss of dignity that occurs when human beings are seen merely as cogs in a vast industrial machine. He looked for a society in which people would creatively express themselves in their work and see in their work an opportunity to help others as well as themselves.

It is by no means clear that at some point changing conditions will not rekindle interest in Marx. Some theorists, for example, worry that in the United States there is an increasing gap between an economic elite and the great mass of people who are stagnating economically, and that this increasing inequality may make Marx's theories relevant once more.

However, there are also hard questions that Marx does not convincingly answer. One crucial set of questions deals with the reality of life under communism. How could a theory that seems so committed to humanistic liberation produce the dehumanization and oppression of Stalinism? Part of the answer here surely lies in the changes that Vladimir Lenin introduced into Marxism. Marx had predicted that socialism would develop in the most economically advanced societies, such as England and the United States; and he had little faith that true socialism would be possible in a backward country such as Russia. Lenin believed that if society were rigidly controlled by a monolithic Communist party, this would compensate for economic backwardness. So many Western Marxists committed to "democratic socialism" argue that Leninist-style communism was a heretical form of Marxism and

that Marx's own ideas were never given a fair chance.

Nevertheless, even if one ignores the reality of life under communism and the horrors of the Gulag, there are many respects in which Marx's ideas appear vulnerable. One crucial concern is his faith that human history is moving toward an ideal society. Having abandoned any religious belief in providence, as well as Hegel's belief in absolute spirit as underlying history, Marx has no real basis for this expectation. He bases his own hope on empirical study of history, particularly his analysis of economic forces. However, many of Marx's predictions, such as his claim that workers in advanced capitalist countries will become increasingly impoverished, have been far off the mark. Can any social scientist—Marxist or non-Marxist—accurately predict the future?

A second problem for Marx concerns our motivation for working toward the future society, especially when we recognize that this society is by no means inevitable. Why should I work for a better society and try to end social exploitation? Marx rejects any moral values as a basis for such motivation. As a naturalist, he views morality as simply a product of human culture. There are no transcendent values that can be used as a basis for critically evaluating culture. Yet Marx himself often seems full of moral indignation as he looks at the excesses of capitalism. What is the basis for Marx's condemnation of capitalism if such moral notions as "justice" and "fairness" are just ideological inventions?

Two final grave problems for Marx lie in his vision of human nature and his analysis of the fundamental human problem. For Marx human beings are fundamentally self-creating; we create ourselves through our work. When our work or life activity is alienated, we are alienated, and when our work has become truly human, we will be human as well. Greed, competition and envy all arise because of social divisions and poverty; an ideal society will eliminate these evils.

The question is whether Marx's view of human nature and analysis of the human problem go deep enough. Is it really plausible to think that selfishness and greed are solely a product of scarcity and class division? Is it really possible to make human beings fundamentally good if we have the right environment for them? Whether we look at capitalist or professedly socialist societies, the lesson of history would seem to be that humans are very inventive in finding ways to manipulate any system for their own selfish benefit. Perhaps the problem with human nature lies

deeper than Marx thought. And this problem may expose a problem with his view of human beings: are we purely material beings?

Marx was certainly right to emphasize work and economic factors as crucially important in shaping human society, but there is more to human life than economics. Certainly many young people in the most economically advanced countries struggle with finding meaning and purpose for their lives. Marxism, like all forms of naturalism, has a difficult time providing such meaning and purpose for human beings.

THE PERSISTENCE OF NATURALISM

Naturalism has had great staying power. Born in the eighteenth century, it came of age in the nineteenth and grew to maturity in the twentieth. While signs of age are now appearing and postmodern trumpeters are signaling the death of Enlightenment reason, naturalism is still very much alive. It dominates the universities, colleges and high schools. It provides the framework for most scientific study. It poses the backdrop against which the humanities continue to struggle for human value, as writers, poets, painters and artists in general shudder under its implications.[54] It is seen as the great villain of the postmodern avant-garde. Nonetheless, no rival worldview has yet been able to topple it. Still, it is fair to say that the twentieth century provided some powerful options: Christian theism is experiencing a rebirth at all levels of society and Islamic theism is posing a challenge just off stage.

What makes naturalism so persistent? There are two basic answers. First, it gives the impression of being honest and objective. One is asked to accept only what appears to be based on facts and on the assured results of scientific investigation or scholarship. Second, to a vast number of people it appears to be coherent. To them the implications of its premises are largely worked out and found acceptable. Naturalism assumes no god, no spirit, no life beyond the grave. It sees human beings as the makers of value. While it disallows that we are the center of the universe by virtue of design, it allows us to place ourselves there and to make of ourselves and for ourselves something of value. As Simpson says, "Man *is* the highest animal. The fact that he alone is capable of making such a judgment is in itself part of the evidence that this decision is correct."[55] It is up

[54]An important Christian critique of naturalism is found in Johnson's *Reason in the Balance.*
[55]Simpson, *Meaning of Evolution,* p. 139.

to us then to work out the implications of our special place in nature, controlling and altering, as we find it possible, our own evolution.[56]

All of this is attractive. If naturalism were really as described, it should, perhaps, be called not only attractive or persistent but true. We could then proceed to tout its virtues and turn the argument of this book into a tract for our times.

But long before the twentieth century got under way, cracks began appearing in the edifice. Theistic critics always found fault with it. They could never abandon their conviction that an infinite-personal God is behind the universe. Their criticism might be discounted as unenlightened or merely conservative, as if they were afraid to launch out into the uncharted waters of new truth. But more was afoot than this. As we shall see in more detail in the following chapter and chapter nine on postmodernism, within the camp of the naturalists themselves came rumblings of discontent. The facts on which naturalism was based—the nature of the external universe, its closed continuity of cause and effect—were not at issue. The problem was coherence. Did naturalism give an adequate reason for us to consider ourselves valuable? Unique, maybe. But gorillas are unique. So is every category of nature. Value was the first troublesome issue. Could a being thrown up by chance be worthy?

Second, could a being whose origins were so "iffy" trust his or her own capacity to know? Put it personally: If my mind is conterminous with my brain, if "I" am only a thinking machine, how can I trust my thought? If consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter, perhaps the appearance of human freedom which lays the basis for morality is an epiphenomenon of either chance or inexorable law. Perhaps chance or the nature of things only built into me the "feeling" that I am free but actually I am not.

These and similar questions do not arise from outside the naturalist worldview. They are inherent in it. The fears that these questions raised in some minds led directly to nihilism, which I am tempted to call a worldview but which is actually a denial of all worldviews.

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[56]Ibid., pp. 166-81. From the early days of Darwin and T. H. Huxley, naturalists have placed much hope in human evolution. Some modern optimists are Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future* (New York: Bantam, 1964), pp. 212-27; Peter Medawar, "On Effecting All Things Possible," *The Listener,* October 2, 1969, pp. 437-42; Glenn Seaborg, "The Role of Science and Technology," *Washington University Magazine,* Spring 1972, pp. 31-35; Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism," in *Knowledge, Morality and Destiny* (New York: Mentor, 1960), pp. 13-17.