

Naturalism As a Viable World-view

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Introduction

Over the last three years, I have conducted courses on *Atheism and Agnosticism* at the Council of Adult Education in Melbourne within the Lifestyles department. Given the diversity of participants, we would spend the first night clarifying the usage of both terms, a controversial discussion even within Atheist communities.

We typically would reduce *atheism* to the usual 'disbelief or rejection of the god' of society. In past times, that meant accusing Socrates of atheism for not believing in the gods of Athens and, even, early Christians for rejecting the gods of Rome. For us, it usually refers to the Christian god as the dominant form of worship. So atheism is a statement about our claims about reality or **Metaphysics** in philosophical terms.

Most saw *agnosticism* as a gentle form of atheism, the sort of atheism that can be declared in polite company. This is a far-cry from Thomas Huxley's coining of the word in the 1860s to curtail any claims of certainty about rejecting god. 'God is inherently un-knowable' is closer to his conception of agnosticism. Again in philosophical terms, it is an **epistemological** claim, one about the nature of knowledge.

So, atheism and agnosticism are dealing with only limited aspects of our perspectives of the world. Therefore, neither of the concepts is an opposite of Christianity, which makes many more claims about the nature of reality and ourselves, and even on how we should behave. Enter **Naturalism**. Unlike atheism, Naturalism seeks to address a broader range of significant issues about life rather than be restricted to the existence or non-existence of god.

World-views

Before speaking specifically about Naturalism, let me introduce a useful way of discussing and comparing different perspectives, the *world-view*, a literal translation of the German *Weltanschauung*. Not surprisingly different writers interpret the concept in different ways. For me, world-view is an **intellectual framing of our experiences**, including our intuitions, perceptions, ideas, and beliefs about ourselves in the world. While acknowledging that deeply held emotions underlie our reactions to the world, I see that verbalising a perspective as a world-view makes it an intellectual process at rationalisation, similar to retelling of a dream. So a world-view provides a person and his or her community with a verbal tool set to describe, interpret, and explain experiences, emotions, and thoughts and in many cases to prescribe appropriate behaviours to be consistent with that world-view.

I would like to mention two risks when analysing world-views. I am drawing from 'A New Science of Morality', a talk¹ given by Jonathan Haidt, Professor of Psychology at University of Virginia, at a recent Edge seminar. Firstly, we need to be aware of being WEIRDs, people from *Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic* societies. We are a minority in the world and need to be careful not to see ourselves as the norm. Secondly, we need to be aware that human reasoning evolved to win arguments and not to pursue the truth. Using reason to justify our actions and beliefs leads to the well-known confirmation bias.

An example of misunderstandings from seeing things as a WEIRD is our concept of self. We emphasise the individual - personal rights, personal goals, and personal ownership. When doing historical research or examining other societies, we bring an individualistic sense of self with us. However many communities interpret 'self' in a vastly different way, as a collective self of group identity. Jesus scholars regularly face this problem with their studies

1 URL: http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/morality10/morality10_index.html

of first century Middle-Eastern societies. According to Bruce Malina², '*Who do people [others] say that I am?*' was and is a commonly thought of question, though rarely asked. In collectivist communities people see themselves as defined by the opinions of significant others.³ This is something similar to the behaviourist quip: 'You seem okay. How am I?'

I should mention that many writers even dispute the concept of world-view, as it implies some sort of consistency of our intuitions, beliefs, and ideas. It may be more accurate to characterise our verbalisations about life as trying to normalise a changing, contradictory, patchy, and often inaccessible 'mishmash' of emotions and thoughts. Simple honest reflections of our attitudes seem to confirm these concerns.

Despite this caveat, the concept of world-view provides a useful way of talking about fundamental perspectives and, particularly, for contrasting religious with non-religious ones. We need to remember that in reality a person's perspective is based on deeply held beliefs or assumptions developed from his or her familial and cultural backgrounds. So someone growing up in an Islamic tradition, especially if educated in a Madrassa, will hold a perspective dominated by an Islamic world-view. He or she may later question aspects of that view although it is hard to imagine any fundamental change. Similarly, my view developed in a very secular household where religious practices were seen as cultural artefacts. Christian concepts like God, Christ, and The Trinity hold little real meaning for me and are empty of feelings. In summary, my approach is to see a world-view as an intellectual rationalisation of our attitudes and a way of enabling discussion and some possible change

Perhaps more controversially, each world-view is underpinned by foundational beliefs or truth claims that, I suggest, we are unable to prove or disprove. Within a world-view itself the language tool-sets are built from those very assumptions, which cannot be then used to verify them. Similarly, the tool-sets of other world-views are based on different sets of assumptions and are again problematic for challenging the assumptions of others, in any independent way. None of us have a god's eye view. Or as **Albert Einstein** once put it, '*Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods.*' So is the only alternative a Post-modernist 'free-for-all', where all world-views are of equal value? No, I believe there are ways of comparing the efficacy of world-views, but more on that later.

What are those fundamental questions? We even have to be careful about what questions we pose, as questions themselves include and exclude issues. Framing the question controls the nature of the dialogue.⁴

So, not surprisingly, Evangelical Christian world-views always include questions about a personal-style god, which would be meaningless to those from many Eastern religions without personal gods. So here are some questions:

2 Bruce Malina, "Understanding New Testament Persons", ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 44.

3 Malina emphasises that (1) self was interpreted by a group understanding; (2) there was little sense of self-reflection, no associated concept of internal psychological processing; (3) complete separation of sexes with vastly different roles and responsibilities; (4) personality characteristics were seen as expressed behavioural terms only e.g. knowing a women is have had sexual intercourse with her; (5) physical characteristics and deformities were signs of permanent personal qualities.

4 Susan Johnston audio lecture Religion, Myth & Magic <http://www.audible.com/pd?asin=B0031UCWWA>
...religion is a system of beliefs and behaviors that formulates and answers questions that are important, recurrent, and must be answered. (Page 8 for accompanying guide)

1. *What is our reality and what does our 'world' consist of? (Metaphysics)*
Possibly where has it come from and where is it going to?
What am I and what is my position in the world?
2. *How do I know? How can I know truth? What is knowledge and truth? (Epistemology)*
3. *Why do I behave as I do? How should I behave? (Ethics)*
4. And, possibly more specific questions like: *what is the nature of history?* (events linked for causes and effects only or linked by some grand narrative – reoccurring cycles, pre-Christian or linear progress to a greater goal, Christian)?

Unfortunately the term world-view has been usurped by Christian writers. Just check the Internet or books at the Amazon site. So these writers' categorise world-views in Christian's terms with the underlying questions being Christian questions, such as 'Is there a personal God?' Then the assessments are from an Evangelical Christian perspective. For example, *The Universe Next Door*⁵ by James W. Sire presents a catalogue such as Naturalism, Christianity, Existentialism, Nihilism, Post-modernism, and so on with the Christian world-view being shown to be more comprehensive and fulfilling. No surprises there.

Previously I mentioned a possibility of comparing world-views, even though we are inevitably within our own view. We can consider three aspects:

- **Coherence or internal consistency** (internal conflicts of explanation?) Are there some parts of the world-view that is inconsistent with other aspects? Often these differences are rejected by supporters or patched over by apologetic arguments. **Note:** internal consistency is often an adequate measure of truth for post-modernists.
- **Correspondence to experience** (explanatory powerful?) How well does the world-view account for the range of our experiences? Of course, the confirmation bias haunts any analysis about explanatory power. Does a materialist view of the human being provide explanations that meet our needs? Does a loving, all-powerful God reconcile with the death of a young baby?
- **Comprehensiveness** (any gaps?). Here atheism or theism falls short of a comprehensive world-view. Science may similarly do so.

Every world-view has short-comings. For example, the 'Problem of evil' - presence of gratuitous suffering with an all-powerful, all-loving god – presents an Achilles' heel for an **Evangelical Christian** world-view. Reconciling our inner-world of consciousness with a strictly **materialistic** view of the world is perhaps another one.

Naturalism

Let us look at some foundational beliefs or truth claims of Naturalism.

Firstly, like most people, naturalists are **realists**, believing that there is an external reality independent of our thoughts and perceptions. So if we see a chair in a room, not believed to be an illusion, we assume the chair will still be in the room even after we have left. All this is uncontroversial as, overwhelmingly, most people hold the same view. It is worth noting that philosophers often distinguish between *naïve* and *critical* realism with the former accepting perceptions 'as is' and the latter seeing our perceptions as heavily interpreted.

Interestingly, the opposite position of *idealism* sees our reality as a human (social)

5 Sire James M., *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th Edn. (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2009)

construction. Of course, this will be a more challenging concept for most. Before scoffing at even mentioning this alternative view, we need to recognise that without a god-eye's view, independent of any particular world-view, we have no simple way of proving the truth of one view over another. That is why philosophical scepticism can so effectively question our fundamental assumptions about life, even something as fundamental as an independent external reality. However, perhaps, that discussion is better left for another time.

Secondly, naturalists believe we are part of a single reality that is both **orderly** and **knowable**, at least potentially. Unlike most religious world-views, Naturalism has no sense of the reality being inherently mysterious. Naturalists envision a single connected physical reality of mass and energy, existing in time and space (at least according to today's best understandings), all derived from the same ontological 'stuff'. This reality is often referred to as 'nature'. I should note that the connections of nature are seen as strictly non-conscious in any sense we understand that term. Therefore, for consistency, naturalists reject any sense of a design, purpose, or meaning coming from some cosmic consciousness. Naturalists would see this as wishful thinking, a concern about being unloved in an unloving (and unlovable) universe, the well-known absurdity of existentialism. I am happy to explore that idea further during later discussion.

Therefore all causes and explanations of our existence and our experiences - behaviour, aspirations, feelings, self-conceptions, spirituality, and so on – are ultimately attributed back to physical causes, even if we do not yet understand those connections or associations. As soon as the body and brain stop processing, so does our self-awareness.

So how do we know about this physical world? We do this through **human perception** supported by **human reason**. It can be *immediate* – I see or hear now – or from *memory* – I perceived those things yesterday – or from the *testimony of others* – they told me of their perceptions. Of course the vast bulk of our knowledge is from the testimony of others as part of our shared social knowledge. Similarly our perceptions can be *direct* or through specially *constructed instruments* to enhance our perceptions. As an aside, we need to recognise that all perceptions are sense experiences, interpreted within our respective social and cultural contexts. No observation is made uninterpreted. Therefore, in philosophical terms, I would expect most naturalists to be *empiricists* with knowledge coming from those interpreted sense experiences of the external world. To quote a famous television series “the truth is out there”.

Therefore it is not surprising naturalists look towards the **empirically-based sciences**, like natural sciences and most social sciences, as primary sources of information about the world. And why should this not be so? Of all our human projects, the modern sciences have provided the most reliable information about the world - much more reliable, for example, than the revelations of self-declared mystics over the years. And this is despite failings throughout its history. The success of the sciences over the last few hundred years has been, to no small measure, in using methods to reduce human bias, wishful thinking, and perceptual errors. Combining controlled experimentation, well-supported consistent reasoning methods, and open discussion with peer criticism, the sciences gather, analyse, and explain data very effectively about our world. Put simply, the sciences define the external reality for a naturalist, and the rest they consider to be human wishful thinking.

As the sciences are a foundational part of a naturalist's world-view, let us look at the nature of science, even briefly. Science develops models to explain and understand the world we inhabit. Some areas of science require specialised mathematical languages to express concepts, where our everyday human languages are inadequate. This often leads to confusion when scientists use everyday terms metaphorically to explain their research areas. Religious terms, without their theological meanings, become popular metaphors to express their awe and wonderment. It becomes amusing when religious apologists then seize these opportunities to claim a scientist's belief in god. In this context, another Einstein

quotation comes to mind: '*I am convinced that He (God) does not play dice.*' And just for the record, Einstein wrote in a private letter to philosopher Eric Gutkind, '*The word god is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honourable, but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation no matter how subtle can (for me) change this.*'

Although on-going scientific research leads to the questioning and adjusting of models, Thomas Kuhn famously showed that this model-making is itself set within and defined by the prevailing *paradigm* of the time, and that paradigm both frames the questions asked and guides research along particular pathways. So it is probably more realistic to see science as socially-based intellectual activities and to treat "objective" knowledge as something more akin to commonly accepted **social knowledge**, arrived through agreed observational methods supported by special reasoning techniques. Do not get me wrong. The social nature of science does not reduce its efficacy and the force of science's explanatory work. We just need to recognise that science is a part of our social enterprise rather than some sort of independent fact-driven objective process. Sometimes these two conflicting views of science are contrasted it as **archaeology**, uncovering facts, versus **human construal**, making human-constructed models. Finally, another way of considering this is to see science as dealing with transitory scientific objects rather than the more enduring external objects themselves. So, over time, the 'sun' as a scientific object varies as our understanding of the sun varies, but the 'sun' as an external object is still essentially the same sun. All this could be summarised with the aphorism, '*the map is not the territory*'; often associated with Alfred Korzybski, founder of General Semantics.

Today science is almost unquestioned in its knowledge-making about the external world. But how does it deal with our inner world – the world of consciousness, free-will, the self, and sensed spirituality? The explanations of neuroscience, for example, involving neurons and synapses seem unsatisfying to most and fail to capture the essential human qualities we associate with them. Though naturalists believe that all human experiences have physical causes, they too often want to describe and explain consciousness, for example, in terms other than its underlying physical processes.

It is worth here drawing a distinction between *reductive materialism* and *Naturalism*. **Reductionism** is the process of understanding the whole by examining its parts, and this methodology has been and continues to be a very successful analytical approach for most sciences. Therefore a radical reductionist would seek to reduce all human experiences to physical descriptions and explanations, such as body-brain processes. In their world, mind states and mental processes do not exist. Patricia Churchland, a philosopher at the University of California who promotes eliminative materialism - a radical form of reductionism, is famous for describing and explaining consciousness and other 'I' aspects of ourselves as brain processes to rid us of myths like the 'mind' and the 'soul'.

Many naturalists are comfortable describing our inner world in language not directly linked to physical causes. They will even entertain such concepts as *emergent properties* to acknowledge that there may be higher-level properties not directly attributable to, but still dependent on, specific physical processes. Perhaps, this is analogous to discussing the aesthetics of a chair without referring to its sub-atomic particle structure. However, it should be stressed that ultimately naturalists still regard all human experiences as having necessary underlying physical causes and nothing else. So a naturalist may be comfortable attending a yoga class for health benefits but would reject any talk of extra-physical explanations with mysterious energy forces and universal connections.

So what are some implications for a commitment to an empirical understanding of the world, especially from that of science?

Truth is out there: whatever it is. A naturalist sees a **single physical** reality, best understood by our empirically-based intellectual endeavours - natural sciences, most social

sciences, historical research, and so on. The resulting knowledge-base - ever-growing, critically-evaluated (and re-evaluated) - is then the best bulwark we have against human wishful thinking, religious delusions, and wild shamanistic claims. (Of course, we are familiar with now famous semi-religious claims of Steve Jobs for his *iPad* that, obviously, got through this guard.) This knowledge-base can and will change regularly both at the margins and sometimes in fundamental ways from the on-going research and, perhaps surprisingly, from changing social contexts.

Critics of Naturalism see its weakness as depending on something so changeable and provisional as scientific understanding. It is true that speculations, questioning, and changes are significant at the frontiers of science – the very small of Quantum Physics, and the very large and very distant of Cosmology. Fortunately the vast majority of scientific knowledge is highly stable and usable. Even though this is so, we still need to leave claims of certainty and absolute truth to the imaginings of Evangelical pastors. Again, Einstein said, ‘...shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods.’

What about me? Appealing to our empirically-based knowledge seems least satisfying for relating the perceived significance and reality of our inner worlds. An aside is useful here. We can see our relationships with others in ‘person’ perspectives. I am my *first person*; you are my *second person*; and he, she, they or it are my *third person*. (Some theologians argue that religions are about second-person relationships with god, while naturalists see all of religions meeting strictly first-person needs.) The empirical sciences describe the world in strictly *third-person* terms to retain independence of any particular view. On the other hand, our inner worlds are strictly first-person with only us having privileged access. We assume others have similar inner worlds by analogy from their behaviour - they sound and act as we do. As I have said, naturalists are committed the inner world coming from physical causes – it ends with the expiration of our physical bodies. Incidentally, our ability to simulate our inner-world feelings on demand with drugs and electrical stimulations supports this view.

However naturalists have no easy way of addressing people’s desire for some grand purpose, for feeling significant in a larger indifferent world. Naturalists have no mysterious beings, forces, and essences to evoke for placating our sensibilities. Religions grew out of that need with complex practices, beliefs, and creeds. On the other hand naturalists, unlike their eliminative cousins, will engage in emotion talk to access and enjoy those feelings in their own terms to give some inner purpose and happiness. By subscribing to physical causes, naturalists treat an empirically-based physical view as a "reality check" against extravagant extra-physical claims.

Morality is a social business. Unlike traditional religious people, naturalists see morality as a strictly human social affair having derived from biological evolution (giving us the common things), enculturation (giving us the multiple variations), and genetic inheritance. My handout, *Naturalist Morality*, [to discuss] shows some of the extensive inter-disciplinary work being done by philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists today to describe and understand naturalistically the intuitions we call morality. The bottom line is that there are no absolute moral injunctions or laws given to us from outside our physical world. Ultimately, I would expect that there will be less ‘shoulds’ from Naturalists than many religionists. Hopefully, they would be less prescriptive about human behaviour than their religious counterparts.

Naturalist uncertainty versus Christian mystery. Both Naturalists and Christians recognise the finite nature of humans and, therefore, our inability to see the reality ‘as it is.’ (A question for discussion: should even talk about reality ‘as it is’, as our reliance on perceptions, ideas, and revelations make reality somewhat problematic?)

For Naturalists, using science as a primary source of knowledge, it is the recognition that all our perceptions are interpreted by physical processes, set within our personal, familial, and cultural histories. Scientific research is based on uncertainties and probabilities through

the use of measuring instruments, observer involvement, and deriving generalisations through induction from the particulars. This is well-known and accepted in science and, even, celebrated by some.

For Christians and people of most religious traditions, the 'mystery' represents a permanent gap between claims of human understanding (knowledge derived from people) and claims of religious revelation (knowledge revealed from god through tradition). Faith is the acceptance of this mystery as a necessary part of the religious world-view. Christian claims of Jesus' physical resurrection after his execution is seen a mystery, unquestioned and accepted by the faithful, but inexplicable by human knowledge and reason.

Perhaps, whereas the Naturalist sees uncertainty as a limitation of process and one to be continually tackled and questioned, a Christian would see the mystery as an inevitable part of belief in their religious traditions.

Seeking Happiness for a Naturalist

Finally, Naturalism offers no simple directions of how to achieve happiness, or even whether or not that is at all possible. Perhaps, one can do no better than look back to a very early Naturalist, Epicurus of fourth century BCE Athens, who had the following advice:

1. Keep close contact with family and friends over your lifetime. Epicurus essentially started a friendship cult.
2. Live a moderate, debt-free life (to reduce your worries).
3. Leave time for personal reflection and contemplation.

Thank you.

Naturalist Morality

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|---|---|
| What is morality? | "Consensual hallucination?" (Haidt Edge seminar 2010). Most important individual (in groups) intuitions, emotions, rules, and beliefs – informal, non-adjudicated - associated with human social interactions. | | | | |
| Moral Foundations (Jonathan Haidt) | Social receptors: (1) Care/harm; (2) fairness/reciprocity; (3) loyalty/in-group; (4) respect/authority; (5) purity/sanctity <i>Suggested that positions (1) & (2) held by socially liberal while (3) to (5) emphasised by conservatives</i> | | | | |
| Moral obligations | Concentric circles of concern: (1) obligations to special people – relatives and prior commitments; (2) general obligations to others with whom we interact; (3) broader obligations to humanity | | | | |
| Three moral 'ethics' (Richard Shweder) | (1) Ethic of <i>autonomy</i> (protect individuals); (2) ethic of <i>community</i> (protect group entities); (3) ethic of the <i>divinity</i> (protect 'souls' from physical degradation) | | | | |
| Moral realism? | Does moral truth exist independent of human reactions to things, in the nature of things? | | Moral relativism? | Is moral truth relative to a cultural group or, even, the individual or are there universal truths? | |
| Normative Formulations | | Virtue Ethics | Utilitarianism | Deontology | "Golden Rule" |
| | Principle | Consistency with virtues of a good person seen as primary to moral decision-making | Concern with consequences of action assessed on maximising happiness; applies to human and non-human animals; alternatives are: preference (satisfaction of desires or preferences) & rule (consequences of rule applications) | Concern with duties or rules regardless of consequences. Duties/rules can be derived from religious faith, societal norms, or reason. | Popular aphorism for the ethic of reciprocity; prevalent in most cultural and religious traditions. |
| | Typical question(s) | What would a virtuous person do? | Will this maximise human happiness? | Which act is most consistent with my duties? | How would I want to be treated in the same situation? |
| | Adverse case(s)/problems | Ascertaining what a virtuous person thinks without referring to duties and consequences; very non-specific in nature | Sacrificing the individual for the group e.g. body parts harvesting; difficult to determine who is affected and what measure of desirable outcome | Maintaining a duty or rule can lead to harmful consequences e.g. avoid lying even to save an innocent life | Assuming the intentions and preferences of another; may not allow for circumstances (e.g. convicted criminal does not want to be jailed, as I would not want) |
| | Free-will implications | Assumes some free-will | Free-will not necessary | Assumes free-will | Assumes free-will |
| Supporter(s) | Ancient Greece, Rome, and Middle Ages; Aristotle | Enlightenment; John Stuart Mill, Peter Singer | Enlightenment; Immanuel Kant | Most traditions | |

| World-views | Naturalism | Evangelical Christianity |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Foundational beliefs ('truth claims') | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a single orderly and knowable 'physical' reality – not consciously designed. • Mass and energy (best understanding to date) are interconnected causally in time and space. This reality is commonly known as 'nature' • We can understand this reality only through human perception supported by human reason. • People are solely part of this reality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a single reality controlled by God. Only part is accessible by human perception, equivalent to Naturalism's 'physical' world. • The non-physical aspect, including God, is only accessible through God's revelation from acceptance of Christian doctrine and traditions about God and Christ. Scripture is foundational to this process. • People are the only living things who are both physical ('body') and non-physical ('soul'). • We are born sinful and can be redeemed through God's grace only. |
| Metaphysics | | |
| What is there? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single physical reality of mass and energy, as best seen as interconnected through causes and effects. All of reality exists in time and space. • Knowledge drawn from our empirical sciences provides the most reliable information that we have about this reality. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single reality, currently consists of (1) a superior, controlling, non-physical, eternal & infinite reality of God (as revealed through Jesus Christ) and (2) a lesser, finite physical world, perceivable by people. God create the physical world <i>ex nihilo</i>. |
| What are we? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are living physical bodies subjected to the same processes as the rest of the reality. • Our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions have physical causes and evolved biologically and culturally. They will cease on the cessation of our bodies. • People evolved (biologically and culturally) to balance resource competition with strong social needs. • The majority of our interactions with the world are managed at a sub-conscious level, below our level of awareness. • We experience an inner conscious world that can influence our living. Though from physical causes, it can be understood in non-reductionist terms. People can develop their understandings from literature, philosophy, and psychology. • Progressively, the empirical sciences are contributing meaningfully to our self-understanding. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though physical, we are made in the image of God. Therefore we are both physical with a decaying, corruptible body and non-physical with a redeemable soul. • Our non-physical selves will continue to exist after the cessation of our bodies. • Our acceptance or rejection of God (through Christian beliefs) will determine our non-physical futures. |
| What happened in the past? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical, biological, and cultural changes as described by the sciences. • History is a series of causally connected events with no particular grand narrative. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God created the physical aspects of reality, our physical world, <i>ex nihilo</i>. • Human history is seen as purposefully progressing towards an end-time for reconciliation with God. • Understanding of Earth history varies from strict scriptural interpretation of 6000 years to some limited acceptance of scientific theories. |
| What will happen in the future? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical, biological, and cultural changes as predicted by the sciences with no special meaning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human history is seen as purposefully progressing towards an end-time for reconciliation with God. |

| World-views | Naturalism | Evangelical Christianity |
|---|---|--|
| Epistemology | | |
| How do we know things? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through human perception – immediate, remembered, and described - supported by reason. • Therefore all types of empirically-based research are considered central (like natural sciences, social sciences and, history). • Human reasoning that presupposes physical causes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Divine revelation through scripture and Christian tradition, through individuals and groups. • Perception with reason is used through scriptural interpretation to understand the physical world. There are highly-qualified natural scientists, who are also Evangelical Christians, e.g. Kenneth Miller. |
| What is objective knowledge? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on personal attitudes toward our capacity to know; one approach is to see objective knowledge as really shared social knowledge, and knowledge as a provisional truth. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certainty about the truthfulness of their religious beliefs. Their beliefs are seen as objectively true. |
| Ethics/morality | | |
| What explains people's behaviour? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philosophy, sociology, and cognitive sciences can describe and explain people's behaviour. Cross-disciplinary work increases their effectiveness. • Shared attitudes and behaviour across groups from biological (over long time-frames) and cultural (over shorter time-frames) evolution. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comes from on-going conflict between persons's inherent sinfulness (wanting to do evil) and the desire to know God (seeking to do good). |
| How should I behave? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditionally, philosophy has presented models of ethical systems. • Unlike many religions, Naturalism describes more than prescribes human behaviour. Therefore expect fewer 'shoulds' from naturalist world-views as such. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As interpreted from scriptures. Groups vary on some social issues, although all are very conservative regarding marriage, family, and sexual issues. • They see their Christian beliefs and practices as only way to achieve redemption. |
| Do we have free-will? And what does that mean for crime & punishment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sceptical about the existence of uncaused¹ free-will. This type of free-will seems inconsistent with our very effective causal understanding of the physical world. Even Quantum Theory offers no clear-cut challenge to a causal view of the world. • Less emphasis on freely chosen decision-making rather than actions, resulting from personal history and character make-up - cultural, familial, genetic backgrounds including previous personal reflection. • Questioning of punishment systems based uncaused free-will responsibility; need to be based on other reasons. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God gives people fully uncaused free-will. This is necessary for people to overcome their inherent sinfulness to seek redemption from God. • More willing to hold people directly accountable for their transgressions. They are comfortable with punishment, although balanced with compassion as interpreted from scripture. • Generally, support punishment programs, including incarceration, in response to holding people accountable for their choices. Little allowance for social influences. |
| Other Comments | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeness to evangelise – promote and convert people to their beliefs. • Unlike Fundamentalists, Evangelical Christians are not sectarian and will engage with the wider community. |

¹ Contra-causal is an alternate term