

What is Naturalism?

How do we relate to it?

Leonard Brand, PhD

Department of Earth and Biological Sciences

Loma Linda University

Goals of this talk - Define:

Worldview

Naturalism (with a critique)

A response to naturalism

Worldview



Worldview



Worldview



What influences our worldview?

Evidence

Insights

Information

Experience

Critical thinking



What influences our worldview?

Evidence

Insights

Information

Experience

Critical thinking

Revelation



Worldviews

Worldview – an important influence affecting the search for truth.

All worldviews are based on one or more assumptions that are accepted by faith

Epistemology and worldviews

How do we acquire and evaluate knowledge?

How do we decide our worldview?

Epistemology and worldviews

An important step:

Differentiate between **data** and **interpretations**.

Example of worldview influence

Jerry Coyne 2009, Why Evolution is True:

“all of us – you, me, the elephant, and the potted cactus – share some fundamental traits.” These include biochemistry, DNA etc. “This tells us that every species goes back to a single common ancestor.”

Example of worldview influence

Jerry Coyne 2009, Why Evolution is True:

“all of us – you, me, the elephant, and the potted cactus – **share some fundamental traits.**”
These include biochemistry, DNA etc. “This tells us that every species goes back to a single common ancestor.”

Data – we share those traits.

Interpretation – we evolved from a common ancestor

Example of worldview influence

Jerry Coyne 2009, Why Evolution is True:

“all of us – you, me, the elephant, and the potted cactus – share some fundamental traits.” These include biochemistry, DNA etc. “This tells us that **every species goes back to a single common ancestor.**”

Data – we share those traits.

Interpretation – we evolved from a common ancestor

Example of worldview influence

Jerry Coyne 2009, Why Evolution is True:

“all of us – you, me, the elephant, and the potted cactus – share some fundamental traits.” These include biochemistry, DNA etc. “This tells us that every species goes back to a single common ancestor.”

Data – we share those traits.

Interpretation – we evolved from a common ancestor (based on an assumption)

Example of worldview influence

Jerry Coyne 2009, Why Evolution is True:

“The most commonly suggested alternative (creation) takes us into the realm of the supernatural.”

He rejects that alternative, because his worldview does not allow it

Naturalism

The ruling worldview for many scientists

Naturalism: all interpretations in science must be based on:

- Natural law only

- Matter and energy only

Naturalism

The ruling worldview for many scientists

Naturalism: all interpretations in science must be based on:

Natural law only

Matter and energy only

No Creator or Intelligent Design is allowed

Cannot consider miracles as an explanation

Jerry Coyne 2009, Why Evolution is True:

“The most commonly suggested alternative (creation) takes us into the realm of the supernatural.”

*His worldview – **Naturalism** - does not allow it,
No matter what the evidence*

A common response:

But it is only Methodological naturalism (MN)

Just a **method** of science

It doesn't say whether God exists or not

A common response:

But it is only Methodological naturalism (MN)

Just a **method** of science

It doesn't say whether God exists or not

Even so, MN does not allow explanations that imply miracles in the lab, *or in history*

MN in Different parts of science

1. Experimental/observational study of processes in nature

PROCESSES

How do things work

2. Study of history – origins

EVENTS, WHAT HAPPENED

What caused that event

Experimental/observational study processes in nature

PROCESSES

How do things work



Experimental/observational study processes in nature

PROCESSES

How do things work



We don't assume that God is tinkering with our experiments

We have learned that God doesn't work that way

Experimental/observational study processes in nature

PROCESSES

How do things work



We don't assume that God is tinkering with our experiments

We have learned that God doesn't work that way

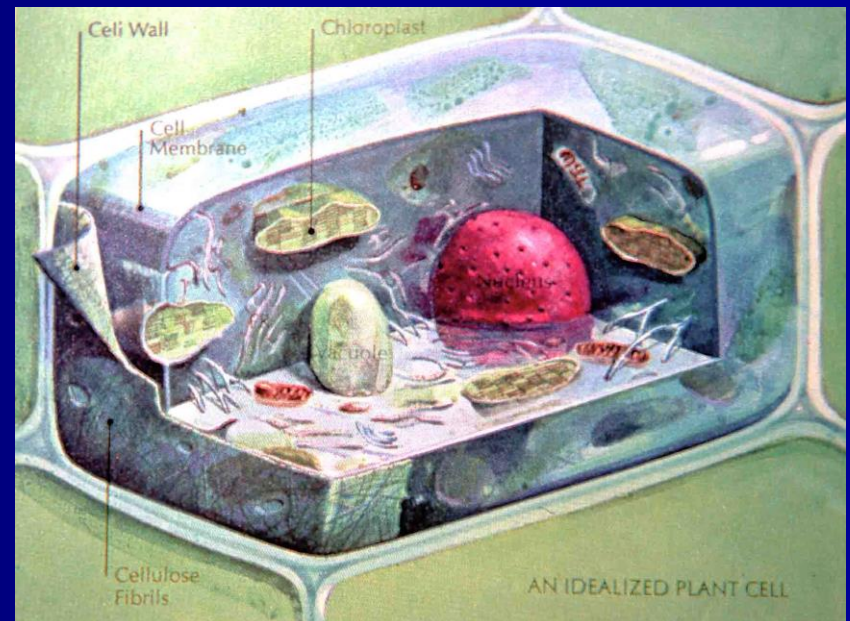
So, in the lab, why is MN necessary?

Study of history – origins

EVENTS, WHAT HAPPENED

What caused that event

How did life begin?



History

We cannot go back in time and see what happened.

In scientific study, **history** will always be interpretation, not a fact

A parable

- If I assume nobody likes me, what will happen?
- I will interpret everyone's actions to mean they don't like me.
- I will not be open to recognize evidence to the contrary.

Deeply held assumptions can put blinders
on our eyes

Deeply held assumptions can put blinders
on our eyes

This is also true in science

History

We cannot go back in time and see what happened.

In scientific study, **history** will always be interpretation, not a fact

Study of ancient history, e.g., origin of life, will be deeply affected by worldviews

Examples of worldviews

Christianity; the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan

God is real and is the Creator of life and the universe

Naturalism; Universe and life arose through natural law alone. There has never been any intelligent, supernatural intervention

Worldview influence on choosing an interpretation

Am I willing to ask – could there be a Creator?

Naturalism – cannot ask or answer that question

Why does any of this matter?

MN applied to experimental study of ongoing processes could be relatively harmless (although unnecessary).

BUT: science as practiced today is rigidly committed to the application of MN in

1. laboratory study **AND** in
2. the study of history.

Why does any of this matter?

This means that mainline science rejects the following, no matter what the evidence:

It denies the reality of: (Genesis 1-11)

- Creation

- Biblical time frame

- Global flood and its results

Why does any of this matter?

The assumption of naturalism brings a **severe bias** in study of history.

Resolution

- We can use research based on evidence, not based on assumptions (as in MN).
- Be aware of naturalism, but don't assume it.
- The assumption of naturalism brings a severe bias in study of history.

Resolution

An important observation:

Most advocates of naturalism have no incentive to seek a deep understanding of the Christian worldview.

They know one perspective - naturalism.

The well informed creationist can know and understand both perspectives.

Resolution

That gives the creationist an advantage in seeking to be objective.

It also gives opportunity to notice things that the convinced naturalist does not see.

Wisdom

One more step in the search for truth:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of **wisdom**,
and **knowledge** of the Holy One is understanding.”

Proverbs 9:10

Conclusions

1. Naturalism is a worldview or philosophy that will not accept the possibility of a Creator
2. Naturalism is not needed in study of natural processes (how the world works)
3. The assumption of naturalism is not appropriate in study of history – origins
It introduces a severe **bias**
4. The fear of the Lord brings **wisdom**