



Does challenging superstition or faith protect people?
 Is it mistaken to support organised religion in membership or donations?

If people do good because they are human, not because God prompts them,
 is it right to risk giving God any credit when they alone own their good?



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SUPERNATURAL EQUALS ABSURD & SPECULATION

NATURALISM IS?

Naturalism is the belief that all things have natural causes. It assumes that there is no supernatural and even if there is we should not even consider it. It says if the natural will explain something then forget the supernatural. Naturalism says nothing non-natural ever happens.

WHY RELIGIONISTS HATE NATURALISM

They hate the idea that whatever happens is natural and there is nothing really unnatural for that makes murder natural. They fear the notion that all is run by blind forces. They are not telling the whole truth. It does not matter so much that nature is self-sufficient. It does not matter so much if there is or isn't a supernatural. The issue is, "Do blind forces run all things?" These forces could be supernatural or natural. If they are blind then it does not matter if they are supernatural or natural. Belief in the supernatural does not mean that the supernatural is intelligent or non-random. It can be even worse than the natural for being blind and aimless. If you don't want to see nature as being blind then don't hand somebody a key that opens the door to more blind laws - supernatural ones. Many laws force us so how do we know that spirits and gods are not forced as well so that if they have free will it is no good to them? The supernatural is totally anti-science for there is no way to test if it is blind or otherwise.

THE CONTRAST DOCTRINE

Christian Randal Rauser alleges that naturalism cannot be defined unless you assume you know what the supernatural is. His point is that unless you contrast it with the supernatural you will never really know what it is or what you mean by it. He thinks that even if you reject the supernatural in favour of the natural this is cosmetic. You have assumed the supernatural - you have sneaked it in the back door.

But you could easily say that you cannot define the supernatural unless you have the natural to contrast it with. That is the other way around.

So you could put it either way around. Does it matter which way? Why not say the supernatural is what is not natural and what is natural is what is not supernatural?

John Loftus says that we should define naturalism as the notion that all that exists is matter in motion. See his book, How to Defend the Christian Faith.

We can test and experience the natural. If you experience something supernatural you cannot really know what you have experienced apart from it being magical. For example, if you see a vision of the Virgin Mary you don't know if some person with psychic powers is making you miraculously hallucinate the appearance. Even if science eliminates hallucinations in your case, you could be having a kind it cannot detect. And experiencing something magical means you only believe or feel it is magical. You cannot really know for the natural can simulate the magical at times. Believers in the supernatural are not really about the supernatural but about what they think is supernatural.

The testable comes first. The natural comes first. Its safer. The supernatural has the handprints of biased people all over it.

Is Rauser right to think that the naturalist is guilty of secretly bringing the supernatural in while pretending to reject it?

No. If there is no supernatural, you could use it as a hypothetical tool with which to work out what is natural and how nature will behave. The naturalist is treating the supernatural as a hypothesis and is not sneaking belief in the supernatural in the back door.

THE FEAR

Religionists fear that if we are just here by chance and have evolved then there is no reason to take morals seriously or believe in them. It follows that if all is natural then there is nothing non-natural including suffering or evil.

They seem to think that we would then just be things and not people. Morality does not apply if we are just things. We know we are not just things. They choose to ignore that.

It is very odd how they ignore the fact that we are people to tell us that if we do not believe that God made us then we should discard morality. That is deranged thinking.

Also, the basis for morality or what morality is or is not has nothing to do with the evidence for evolution. It is irrelevant.

ART AND BEAUTY

We are told that music and the beautiful statue and the beautiful human being do not seem as pleasing if you see them as products of chemical forces and luck. But it is analysing them too clinically and too much that takes away the pleasure. It does not matter if you think God is their ultimate creator or not. You will not appreciate anything you overanalyse for while you are analysing you are not enjoying. Since when God making things mean that something cannot be the product of chemical forces?

IS IT REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN THE SUPERNATURAL?

CS Lewis was one person who argued that if we are programmed by natural causes then we cannot know if our reason is any good. He means that blind forces cannot program reliably or be trusted. If you are ultimately a pile of atoms, because atoms don't reason that means that because you depend on them you don't really reason either but you only imagine you do.

This is the fallacy of composition. Just because a loaf is made up of atoms that are not flour in themselves it does not mean that there is no flour used. Just because no part of the clock is no good on its own does not mean that the different parts cannot compose a working clock.

Lewis thinks that it is not enough to say that reason is useful because it is. Reason is best seen as a sense. He wants you to say reason is useful ONLY for some other reason perhaps because a trustworthy God set it up. But to argue that it works because you have figured out that God is to be trusted means you are still saying reason is useful just because it is useful. You assume reason works before you use it with God. The logic is, "Reason is useful just because it is useful and after that it is useful for telling me God can be trusted." The biggest believer in reason just senses that it works. If you need God as a crutch to believe in reason then you are not much of a believer in it or yourself.

Suppose Lewis had a point. Then perhaps $2 + 2 = 5$ not 4. Perhaps evil disproves God though some philosophical reasoning says no. But the answer to that is simple. Reason is all we have got. We are at the centre not God even if there is a God. Reason presupposes that we gauge things on the human level and ignore claims of divine revelation for they claim we should suspend judgement and just trust. Even if our reason is wrong and badly programmed let us have the arrogance to embrace it as it is all we have. Any god we worship will simply be our own creation for we follow our reason how it turns out. If we think our way to God we make God.

LOOKING FOR A MIRACLE

We assume and believe that miracles do not happen unless we see evidence to the contrary. Hume said the evidence is never good enough. He was not saying that miracles don't happen or do happen but only that they are not believable.

Believers say he is saying they are not believable when he has not examined all the reported miracles to check this out. They say that is unfair. He is accused of making assumptions about miracles when he hasn't looked at the evidence. He is supposedly begging the question. It seems you would have to examine all possible miracles before you can say all miracles are not real miracles - but that is humanly impossible.

Whether or not we believe in miracles depends on what assumptions we make. If we guess that the magical can happen we may interpret a miracle claim as authentic. If we guess that the magical cannot happen we will say the alleged miracle has a normal and mundane explanation even if the exact explanation is unknown. Clearly it is wiser to assume the latter. Hume had to assume something. It is not unfair to pick the best which in this case is the most familiar - the natural.

Hume said that a miracle is a violation of past experience. This experience tells us that princes do not turn into toads. A miracle is an event that violates this experience. Thus it is always more likely that past experience is right and that a miracle

claim is wrong or based on error. For Hume a prince in scorching India who has never seen ice and does not believe in it is actually right not to believe. He is being logical but he is wrong. Hume here is acknowledging the principle that it is rational to try and believe only what you have evidence for but as belief is not certainty it can be wrong.

A natural explanation as long as it does not contradict the evidence is always preferable to a supernatural explanation. If I see my Bible levitating I must assume that somebody is tricking me no matter how unlikely it seems. If I tested and found there were no wires then it was done some other way. So I should not contradict the evidence by saying that wires must have been used. It is unfair and dishonest to assume wires were used when they could not have been. Skeptics must be careful to respect evidence and never to contradict it unless there is other evidence that sufficiently shows that the evidence is dubious. What I must assume then is that some unknown mundane technique was used to make the Bible levitate. And why would people go to such trouble to fool me? I know that human nature is often irrational and that some are more irrational than others.

That aside, let us think some more about why it might be best to assume alleged miracles are really natural events.

People often lie, and they have good reasons to lie about miracles occurring either because they believe they are doing so for the benefit of their religion or because of the fame that results.

It is natural for people to find entertainment by relating miracle stories they have heard. They care little for their veracity and thus miracle tales are easily transmitted and promoted when the tales are untrue.

Hume observed that most miracle tales emerge in superstitious and barbaric nations. He thinks we don't hear about them so much in civilised societies as they are seen for what they are: natural events.

When a religion cites its miracles as evidence that God has created it and that it is the only right religion or at least the best religion the problem is that most religions disagree with one another fundamentally and yet each faith reports miracles. A miracle cannot verify Islam and verify a religion as contrary to Islam as say Mormonism.

A real miracle involves an event being created out of nothing. It is something that only a creator could do. Anything using what is already created in a seemingly unnatural way is not the same. Blood coming from a statues eyes that already existed is not the same as God directly creating the blood. The miracle believers usually confuse miracles with what look like miracles. Nobody can witness a miracle but only the results so there is no way to tell and thus it is not biased to disbelieve. Believing is biased.

LEWIS AND THE EXPLICABLE

CS Lewis wrote in his book, *Miracles*, "If Naturalism is true, every finite thing or event must be (in principle) explicable in terms of the Total System."

He speaks as if that is always necessarily the case. But it overlooks the fact that something can be unexplained or inexplicable and still be natural. It could be natural for events to be caused by something probabilistic. It could happen because it probably should happen and is not happening because it has to happen. The weather forecast is an example of something that even with all the facts you cannot predict with complete certainty what will happen but only what is most likely to happen.

Lewis wants to define naturalism as something mechanical in which there are no probabilities because he wants to make naturalism look silly. But there is no reason why naturalism cannot be partly both.

CONSPIRACY

If a miracle occurs that tells us to believe in a particular religion or a God, it is more rational to assume then that there is a conspiracy. A conspiracy that is ideologically driven is more likely than one that is not. Even religions that claim to be the true religion are well aware of the problem of pious fraud - people who will stoop low to manufacture evidence for the religion. There are few religious books that do not contain examples of deliberate covering up of problems and outright lying. For example, Catholic priests, more often than not, produce books these days to teach their own ideas even though they are paid by the Church and have committed themselves to teach the Vatican's doctrines which they either water down or ignore or distort or contradict.

A religion that has enough sanity may hear of a "plausible" miracle report. It will get experts to defend this. Then it will also get experts to try and explain it naturally (Devil's Advocates) . It will take years of thorough investigation. If it finds that it cannot be explained naturally, it will say this is evidence that the cause may be indeed miraculous or supernatural. If I see water turning into blood in my glass is that evidence that the event is supernatural? There could be a conspiracy to make me think this happened.

Conspiracy theories are based on very unlikely ideas. We cannot live if we take them seriously. They are dangerous for they try to immunise themselves against evidence that can discount them. They are dangerous also because they lead to deluded people and deluded people are often aggressive if others tell them they disagree with them. Contrary evidence may be threatened for the deluded person just throws it away. The Professor of Psychology Rob Brotherton talks about the "intentionality bias." This comes from our tendency to think that everything that happens is intended by someone or something. He says this is inborn. It is clearly put into us by the people around us too. He notes how children when they see something random, assign purpose to it. They come up for a why for it. People should read Brotherton's book, *Suspicious Minds: Why we believe Conspiracy Theories* which was published in 2015.

The notion of a divine higher plan is a conspiracy theory itself. It easily becomes a reason for avoiding ethical and psychological growth. Looking for purpose in the wrong place is not good.

We might think our water has been laced with some drug that makes us easily hypnotised without our knowledge and that the scientist who find nothing wrong with the water are covering it up. But nevertheless it is more rational to be a conspiracy theorist than a believer in miracles. At least the conspiracy theory is based on mundane and natural premises. The miracle believer abandons such premises. If the conspiracy theory is silly then the miracle theory is worse.

NOT NECESSARILY IRRELIGIOUS

Naturalism is not necessarily irreligious for pagan put their gods or God in nature as a part of it. The god was as much part of nature as the horse. You can say that is is not real religion. But some will say differently. Go and debate that one!

Conclusion

If an event looks supernatural that does not mean it is. It means we should assume it is natural. It is not biased to do this because we should. It is not our fault that we should assume.