A Christian Response to Naturalistic Atheism

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Introduction

When man seeks to explain the existence and nature of the world he inhabits, he does so from the framework of beliefs. Given man’s entrapment in the time/space continuum and the inability to experience the universe outside of our time/space circumstances, this is perfectly reasonable as we cannot experience history prior to our existence and even within the period of history in which we live we experience only that part that our physical bodies are confined to. Therefore, only as we begin with assumptions about what we know can we begin to build a functional framework of how we got here. Our initial assumptions differ from one person to another as our understanding of the world is shaped by a variety of propositions and experiences we often don’t have any control over, yet are formative in our conceptualization of the world around us.

With this in mind, the dominant worldview throughout time has been of a theistic nature, whether polytheistic, monotheistic or pantheistic. From a biblical perspective, this can be traced to the creation and fall of man. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness…” (Gen 1:26) and preceded to create man, place him in the ideal environment, provide a companion and establish a creator/creature relationship. Soon after, man disobeyed God, breaking his relationship with his environment, companion and God, and fell into sin. Sin by nature is the exchange of the true God, our Creator, for a god of our own choosing. This “god” is generally another element of creation (Rom 1:25), even man himself (Rom 1:23), but regardless of that what God is given up for, the consequence of the exchange is the darkening of the understanding of the individual (Rom 1:22) and a degrading of desires (Rom 1:26-27).
Atheism is the logical consequence of this exchange, the full conclusion of rebellion against God. Paul summarized this at the beginning of his conclusion regarding man's descent into sin, “since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind…” (Rom 1:28). From the perspective of worship, Man was made to worship God, but in his sin, exchanged the glory of God for images (Rom 1:23), then exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). The object of man's sinful exchanges is first of all the glory of God (v23) or the rejection of “the Holy Creator for creature”1 followed by the truth of God (v25). The first swaps the object of glory and the associated glory, the second prefers a lie rather than the truth. This prepares the way for a wholesale rejection of God.

We see this in the fall of man in the garden. It began with an exchange of God's glory for man's (seen in Genesis 3 as a preference for what is perceived to be good for man, rather than God) and was followed by a failure to believe God's truth and the decision to believe the lie propagated by the serpent. From this point in history, unbelief spread through a variety of theistic and non-theistic forms. Various religious perspectives throughout time have recognized different deities, generally represented by elements already in creation, sometimes monotheistic, but often polytheistic. With these have come various interpretations of how we got here.

The atheist is one who is no longer willing to acknowledge God, or even acknowledge the existence of the supernatural. His worldview becomes the ultimate license for a nihilistic living, and results in a philosophical system that is inconsistent with itself, both theoretically and practically. Yet because it appeals to the sinful nature by granting it moral license, it

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continues to propagate itself.

The goal of this paper is to demonstrate the incoherence of the naturalistic worldview by examining its “intellectual” foundations and demonstrating its philosophical and practical incoherence, and will provide questions and discussion points to help “take the roof off” naturalistic atheism in order to present the gospel clearly to the unbeliever.

**Atheism, Naturalism, Science and Scientism**

Atheism is a rejection of theism; that is a rejection of the belief in a personal God, but also often a rejection of belief in the divine in general. Naturalism as a philosophical position states that all that exists is the natural world. Modern atheists are almost always naturalists. Indeed, Richard Dawkins, himself known as perhaps the world’s most famous atheist and certainly one of the most influential, explicitly equates atheism and philosophical naturalism when he says, “An atheist in this sense of philosophical naturalist is somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no supernatural creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, no soul that outlasts the body and no miracles – except in the sense of natural phenomena that we don’t yet understand.”

In the above quotation, Dawkins also exposes the foundational presuppositions behind atheistic naturalism – there is no God nor is there anything supernatural, these are apriori excluded from his worldview. Therefore, if a defeater for his presuppositions can be found,

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5 While Dawkins is often regarded as a famous atheist, he himself denies being an atheist and considers himself an agnostic, or a de facto atheist. On this point there is room for debate, for further details of Dawkins’ position see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 73.

his atheism will also be defeated.

For Dawkins, himself a scientist, science simply is not science if it appeals to anything, or posits anything beyond the material world. This is the presuppositional foundation of atheism and the modern institution of secular science. The National Academy of Sciences insists that “creation-science” is not science because, “it fails to display the most basic characteristic of science: reliance upon naturalistic explanations.” In other words, according to the National Academy of Sciences, science is only science if it is conducted with naturalistic presuppositions.

In reality, Dawkins and the National Academy of Sciences are both functioning from a philosophical position called scientism. Scientism “refers to the belief that the only reality that exists is the material universe, which is at least potentially analyzable by science. Followers of this perspective therefore deny the existence of a spiritual universe.” Defining science in this manner locks out alternative presuppositional starting points for scientific enquiry. Philip E. Johnson agrees, “The Academy thus defined ‘science’ in such a way that advocates of supernatural creation may neither argue for their own position nor dispute the claims of the scientific establishment.”

Evolution itself is not a modern invention. Carl F. H. Henry noted that, “Evolution is a very ancient theory, one that has existed in many forms. Even today many scholars disagree over evolutionary explanations, and their divergencies continue to widen.” Henry goes on to explain Asian views of evolution from the fifth century B.C. and adds, “Evolutionary

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naturalism was impeded and in fact arrested in the West for 2000 years, first by the Greek idealistic emphasis of Plato on the logical priority of the mind and of Aristotle on the continuity of species, and then by Judeo-Christian theology which stressed supernatural creation *ex nihilo.*”¹¹ Given Henry’s concession that Buddhism (historically rooted in the polytheism of Hinduism)¹² provided a context for pre-Greco-Christian evolution, it is unlikely that evolutionary theory has always been naturalistic, and therefore evolution itself cannot be said to be inherently naturalistic.

The modern assertion that evolution is naturalistic can be traced back to the manner in which Charles Darwin argued his theory of evolution. Darwin positioned his theory, not only to oppose competing positions but also to “offer a positive alternative in his own terms.” In doing this, he made [competing] positions seem superfluous – and not only superfluous but unscientific… ” He put forward Mechanistic, naturalistic forces, “not only as superior scientific causes but as the *only* causes admissible in science.”¹³ This resulted in a new epistemology in science, one that presupposes the absence of God. Unlike previous conceptions of mechanistic processes that implied a cosmic engineer, Darwin made the machine “one generating its own power.”¹⁴ In our own day, the scientific continues to rest on this foundation, and is inherently naturalistic, and atheistic. However, this is also its Achilles heel, because by requiring that scientific arguments are only naturalistic, scientists have only

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¹¹ Ibid.


this theory to explain how we got here\textsuperscript{15}.

Because evolution is the only naturalistic explanation of origins open to atheism, the scientific establishment is protective of this foundation (see the statement by the National Academies of Science above). Recently scientists whose presuppositions differ to the naturalistic establishment (such as Intelligent Design or Biblical Creation) have begun to encounter career difficulties.\textsuperscript{16} This intolerance of competition is advocated on the premise that alternatives are not “science,” a term conceived to preclude alternatives.

The fact remains, without the theory of evolution atheism is a belief system without any evidence to support it, and therefore, without atheism is an irrational belief. Richard Dawkins confirms this when he says, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”\textsuperscript{17} Or, to rephrase Dawkins, without evolution, one cannot hold to an atheistic worldview and be “intellectually fulfilled.”

Because modern atheism is intellectually founded on naturalistic evolution, if naturalistic evolution can be shown to be false, then the atheism it supports can be demonstrated to be incoherent, or in Dawkins’ terminology, “intellectually unfulfilling.”

**Approaching the problem**

Part of the purpose of this paper is to present a method of approaching atheists. Because naturalistic science forms the cornerstone of their presuppositional position, arguments based on science are easily dismissed by atheists using the strategies noted above. Specifically, any evidence that may be scientifically plausible to a Christian is invalid to a

\textsuperscript{15} Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist*, 58

\textsuperscript{16} Perhaps one of the best known examples is that of Guillermo Gonzalez who was denied tenure at Iowa State University. See http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/february/4.15.html (accessed November 8, 2014).

naturalist, as the Christian presupposes their theism when they come to the discussion. This doesn’t make the Christian unscientific (except in the eyes of the naturalist), but it makes any scientific “proof” based on theistic presuppositions inadmissible to the naturalist.

Further, because the pace of scientific discovery, the broad dissemination of naturalistically saturated sound-bites (probably better considered propaganda) and the vast breadth of scientific research available, the militant atheist will likely be better versed with science than the average Christian. Therefore, whatever “arguments” from science a Christian can bring to bear (e.g. moon dust, sedimentary layers, etc.) are likely to be met with scientific refutation (even if flimsy) or rejection or a long argument that nobody will win.

Another reason to avoid approaching atheism from the perspective of science is that both Christians and non-believers appeal to the same discipline to support their positions. Kurt Wise has suggested that God has intentionally built ambiguity into the world. “Why is it impossible to prove that God exists? It is because of intentional, inherent ambiguity – thus the failure for anyone to prove God’s existence definitively in spite of the many and varied ‘proofs’ that have surfaced through the centuries.”18 Why would God do this? Again Wise answers, in order “to encourage man to come to Him, yet not enough for him to get there without faith.”19 After all, salvation is not by reason, but by faith (Eph 2:7-8).

For these reasons, this paper moves in the direction of arguments that are unchanging and easy to remember, but demonstrate that evolution is a self-refuting epistemic position, and self-refuting even in its practice. This paper is not intended as a tool to convert the unbeliever through clever reasoning, but to provide an opportunity for the gospel to be proclaimed.

19 Ibid.
A philosophical refutation of evolution

We can begin by demonstrating that scientism (naturalistic science) is dependent assumptions that it cannot support under its own terms. J. P. Moreland has noted that scientism, “does not adequately allow for the task of stating and defending the necessary presuppositions for science itself to be practiced… science itself rests on a number of substantive philosophical theses that must be assumed if science is even going to get off the runway. Each of these assumptions has been challenged, and the task of stating and defending these assumptions is a task of philosophy, not science.”\(^{20}\) In other words, science doesn’t have the ability to explain things that cannot be scientifically and empirically tested. Moreland explains, “Strong scientism [which disallows any truth not scientifically verifiable] rules out these presuppositions altogether, because neither the presuppositions themselves nor their defense is a scientific matter. Weak scientism [‘which requires non-scientific assertions be initially supported only by scientific arguments’] misconstrues their strength in its view that scientific propositions have greater rational authority than those of other fields like philosophy. This would mean that the conclusions of science are more certain than the philosophical presuppositions used to justify and reach those conclusions, and that is absurd.”\(^{21}\)

What are the presuppositions Moreland is referring to? He lists a sampling of ten:

- the existence of a theory independent, external [to our mind] world
- the orderly nature of the external world

\(^{20}\) J. P. Moreland, *Love your God with All Your Mind: The Role of Reason in the Life of the Soul*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 146. Note that the second edition published in 2012 omits this (chapter 7) and the two following chapters.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., Note that the definitions of strong and weak scientism come from Moreland’s own definitions on page 145 of the same book.
• the knowability of the external world
• the existence of truth
• the laws of logic
• the reliability of our cognitive and sensory faculties to serve as truth gatherers and as a source of justified beliefs in our intellectual environment
• the adequacy of language to describe the world
• the existence of values used in science (for example, “test theories fairly and report test results honestly.”)
• the uniformity of nature and induction
• the existence of numbers and mathematical truths.\(^\text{22}\)

Many atheists who have followed in Dawkins’ footprints believe that there is a conflict between science and religion. However, Moreland’s point is that in order to conduct science at all, every scientist (and adherent of scientism) must reckon first with philosophical questions which science does not and cannot address. If science cannot support these positions, then the atheist has two options. They either deny the reality of scientific discoveries, or they borrow from an alternative worldview in order to support their thesis.

If the naturalistic atheist cannot provides justification for an objective world, or the laws by which we may discover and describe this world, then any discoveries in this so-called world are at best debatable, and at worst a fabrication of his own mind. On the other hand, to borrow from an alternative worldview means to accept the presuppositions of that worldview are necessary to support the objective realities of the world and the ability to discover and describe it. Given non-naturalistic worldviews hold to some form of supernaturalism, to adopt

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 147.
such a position begs the question about the nature of that supernaturalism and how we can know anything about it. The irony is that “naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics.” Either of these options is anathema to the atheist, leaving them in a predicament that should be pressed firmly by the Christian.

Alvin Plantinga has provided a second refutation of naturalism in his book *Warrant and Proper Function*. His arguments are summarized by James Speigel in *The Making of an Atheist* and will be summarized below.

Given naturalism is dependent on evolution for its explanation of the origin of man, man is the product of the survival of the fittest. Survival of the fittest means the propagation of genes that, “are preserved only if they provide a distinct competitive advantage in the struggle to reach reproductive maturity.” This means that if a trait is not necessary to reproductive maturity, then its propagation is not guaranteed; fitness – the ability to reproduce – is the sole determinant of whether a trait is propagated. Everything that constitutes man is a consequence of this process. This includes our ability to think, reason and remember, i.e. our cognitive abilities.

This introduces a problem when we ask how necessary to reproduction is concern for and comprehension of truth, particularly metaphysical truth? Speigel points out “so long as an organism’s cognitive apparatus enables it to stay alive, its beliefs need not be true or even reasonable. There is no necessary connection between the survival potential of a cognitive

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25 Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 39-40. Johnson notes that the notion of survival of the fittest can be reduced to a tautology: “the fittest organisms will produce the most offspring, and the fittest organisms can be defined as the ones which produce the most offspring.”
system and the truth of the beliefs it produces.” Speigel goes on to demonstrate this by showing the practical usefulness in the belief in things demonstrably false, geocentrism and belief that the federal government will arrest citizens with credit card debt. His point is that “practicality of belief does not imply its truth.”

Because practicality of belief doesn’t imply its truth, then neither does it necessitate mans cognitive ability is reliable. Just because a belief system aids procreation doesn’t make it accurate, nor guarantee the outcome of its reasoning process. Plantinga writes, “The naturalist can be reasonably sure that the neurophysiology underlying belief formation is adaptive, but nothing follows about the truth of the beliefs depending on that neurophysiology.” In other words if naturalism is true, then we cannot be sure that naturalism is true, because we cannot be sure of the reliability of our cognitive abilities. Speigel concludes that, “Atheism is a sort of suicide of the mind.” This sort of thinking demonstrates clearly the futility of the mind that Paul writes about in Romans 1:21, “they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

There are, in summary, two philosophical defeaters to naturalistic atheism. Firstly atheism denies “there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world,” but yet relies on non-physical, scientifically unprovable assumptions in order to come to this conclusion. Secondly because atheism is dependent on evolution, and evolution can be summarized as “survival of the fittest” or the ability to reproduce, and this doesn’t guarantee the epistemological

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26 Speigel, The Making of an Atheist, 58.
27 Ibid., 59.
29 Speigel, The Making of an Atheist, 60.
30 Dawkins, The God Delusion, 35.
reliability of our cognitive facilities, naturalists have no guarantee to the reality of truth, much less metaphysical truth, and therefore naturalism is intellectually self-refuting.

**A practical refutation of evolution**

Continuing to lean on the evolutionary concept of the survival of the fittest yields an interesting practical problem for atheism. Again, if naturalism is true, then reproduction is crucial to the survival of the species. Reproduction rates are measured by the total fertility rate (or TFR). The TFR is defined as “the number of babies the average woman would bear over the course of her life if she were to survive until the end of her reproductive years and the age-specific birth rate were to remain constant.”

Given the calls today that the earth is overpopulated and that people should reduce their populations is evidence that indeed we are a surviving species, and demonstrates the veracity of the theory. However, when we look at TFR numbers we find reality is not what we are always told.

Demographers consider a TFR of 2.1 to be the birth rate necessary for a people to replace itself. This means that every woman in that society needs to bear an average of 2.1 children in order for the population to not shrink. Conversely, a birth rate above 2.1 results in population growth. Around 1750 the world population was around 800 million. However long one calculates the human race to have been around for, the indication is that the growth rate until then was relatively tame. All that changed quickly from the eighteenth century. The earth’s population reached 1 billion in 1825 and then 2 billion just one hundred years later and 3 billion just 35 years later in 1960. This acceleration was primarily the result of a decline in infant mortality rate. This supports the notion of survival of the fittest.

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32 Last, *What to Expect*, 264 Kindle.
However, there is strong evidence that the global population is about to reverse itself. The United Nations expects that by 2050 only three of the European Union will not be in population decline. Many countries of the EU are already in decline; Germany is declining by 100,000 people per year, Latvia has already lost 13 percent of its population, and Poland is likely to at least halve in population before the end of the 21st century. In fact, “today only 3 percent of the world’s population lives in a country whose fertility rate is not declining.”

What has caused this reversal?

While there are a variety of contributing factors such as capitalism, individualism, education and the erosion of the family unit, there is one thing that is common to a reduced fertility rate. Jonathan Last summarizes, “Look around the list of wealthy, first-world nations with plummeting birth rates and you see that, from Japan to Russia to Singapore to Spain, they all have one thing in common: an increasing tendency toward secularization.” In other words, the decrease in religious beliefs can be directly mapped to a decrease (of varying proportions) of the fertility rate.

Last lays out the reason why this is so, “Religion helps marriage and marriage helps fertility – the end result being that religiosity winds up being an even better predictor of fertility than either education or income. And as Americans have become more secular, they’ve cut back on having children.” The story this tells us is clear; those who generally

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33 Ibid., 629.
34 Ibid., 357.
35 Ibid., 1759.
36 Last points out the fertility rate among women drops dramatically as their education increases. The fertility rate for a woman without a high school diploma is 2.45, while it is 1.95 for a woman who completes high school, and 1.63 for a woman who graduates from college (Last, What to Expect, 1020).
37 Ibid., 3072.
38 Ibid., 1680.
reject the notion of the fittest are the ones who are having the most babies. This creates a conundrum for liberal demographers, the possibility that “the devout will inherit the earth.”

But there is another core issue to consider here. If survival of the fittest means having children, and those who embrace evolutionary doctrine do not reproduce at a rate sufficient for replacement, then it seems that those nature selects for survival don’t believe in the notion of survival of the fittest. To put it more bluntly, those who believe natural selection (and hence evolution) are evidentially not the fittest and will not survive.

In this sense, atheism itself is pragmatically self-refuting. Those who believe it naturally remove their genes from the gene pool by not reproducing in sufficient numbers to replace themselves. However, does this mean that unbelievers will ultimately die out after a few generations? Last cites Kaufmann and Skirbekk who suggest that this might occur. “They go as far as to suggest that if secularism doesn’t increase the pace at which it pulls believers from their path, the mere increase in numbers of religious Americans could actually push our fertility rate upward - to between 2.10 and 2.16 by 2043.”  Last doesn’t affirm this conclusion, and nor should we. However the liberal agenda to legitimate homosexuality, liberate sexuality (while suppressing the natural results of sexual intercourse) and increase access to abortion all help make their point.

Thus in addition the philosophical incoherence of atheism, those who believe in the survival of the fittest are evidentially not the fittest themselves as they cannot maintain their replacement rate.

39 Ibid., 3108.

How to approach an atheist.

So how should we approach an atheist or an atheist pretending to be agnostic? As previously noted, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate the foolishness of the atheistic worldview in order to provide an opportunity to present the gospel to the unbeliever, trusting that the Lord will use it to bring conviction of sin and grant repentance to the unbeliever.

As the discussion opens with the unbeliever it is always wise to clarify their position by asking a series of questions. The first question is to ask about their understanding of their own position. Do they believe there is a God? Do they believe there is anything supernatural? If the answer to these two questions is negative, then this may be followed about whether they hold to naturalistic evolution and their understanding of it.\(^{41}\)

The modern understanding of naturalistic evolution will vary. Prior to the 1970’s Darwinian evolution was giving way to neo-Darwinian evolution. In the 70’s naturalist Stephen Jay Gould acknowledged that “gradualism” was a failed evolutionary theory and presented “punctuated equilibria”\(^{42}\) as its alternative. Since then evolutionists have embraced this speculative form of evolution, however, knowledge of this new process has not saturated the school systems, nor the minds of those who believe in evolution. This doesn’t significantly alter the argumentation that follows, however, as the only difference between “punctuated equilibria” and gradualism is the amount of time required for new forms to evolve.

Both gradualism and punctuated equilibria rely on the survival of the fittest, but

\(^{41}\) The discussion presented here takes the approach of the second philosophical refutation of naturalism presented above. It is equally plausible to use the first refutation, and in many cases it may be desirable to do so. Which approach is used is up to the believer.

\(^{42}\) Norman L. Geisler, and Frank Turek. *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist.* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 152.
punctuated equilibria needs to explain why so much mutation happened in such a small amount of time while long periods then passed before another series of changes.

The next question to ask is whether they understand how the survival of the fittest works. Here it would be helpful to simply ask them to explain how evolution occurs. In some cases atheists will be under the false impression that survival of the fittest means the strong dominate and even kill the weak, but this is a caricature that should be corrected. A short explanation is suitable, such as: the propagation of genes that “are preserved only if they provide a distinct competitive advantage in the struggle to reach reproductive maturity.”

Having agreed on the process of natural selection the next step is to make plain that mutations occur randomly by chance and are propagated only if they assist in the reproductive process.

With this done, the stage is set to ask the questions that ought to make the atheist think. “What do you need to believe about God in order to reproduce?” The likely answer is (or should be) “nothing.” The appropriate response to this is to clarify, “so you are saying that any belief about metaphysical reality is unnecessary to evolutionary biology?” If they say that some belief about metaphysical reality is necessary (and they don’t mean “it is necessary to not believe in metaphysical reality”) then they are denying that they are naturalists. However if they affirm this, then it should be pushed further. “So, how does evolution equip a human being to make truth claims about metaphysical realities?” At this point it is likely the atheist is stuck, so further explanation is warranted. “If natural selection doesn’t require us to have reliable thoughts about metaphysics or truth generally, then we cannot trust our cognitive abilities. If we cannot trust our cognitive abilities, then how can you, an atheist, know that there is or is not a God? If naturalism is true then you can’t be sure that naturalism is true, and

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you have no guarantee that any of your knowledge is accurate.”

From this point, there are a variety of responses that may follow. The next step is not to deal with the objections that he puts up, but rather to point out that God created us, and He created us in order to know and worship Him. Because of this, He created us with cognitive faculties that are reliable, and provided His Word in order that we would know Him. It is written in His Word that we chose to reject Him and worship anything else, normally ourselves, and that for this we are justly condemned, because we have become defiled and polluted by our sin and unfit for the purpose He created us for.

The only reason we can continue to live is because of His mercy and grace, and this grace is extended to us to the point of salvation through His only Son, Jesus who He sent to earth to live a perfect life and die on a cross so that we could be united with Him, receiving forgiveness of, and repenting from our sin so that we can live for the purpose He created us for.

**Conclusion**

As Speigel says, Atheism is a form of intellectual suicide.\(^{44}\) Atheism is at its core a naturalistic belief system that denies anything that cannot be established scientifically. Yet, it relies on non-scientific foundations in order to make these assertions. As Plantinga aptly stated, “naturalistic epistemology flourishes best in the garden of supernaturalistic metaphysics.”\(^{45}\) Further, because atheism relies on naturalistic evolutionary processes that work through blind chance but which are propagated only if they are helpful for reproduction, it cannot provide man with any certainty about the reliability of his cognitive capacities since these are not necessary for the reproductive process to take place. Therefore, any beliefs the

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\(^{44}\) Speigel, *The Making of an Atheist*, 60.

atheist may hold are entirely subjective and may or may not be true. Further, if natural selection is true, then the declining birth rate seen among the non-religious proves that belief in evolution is evidence of a lack of fitness, and accordingly the non-religious will bred themselves out of the gene pool, while the religious will propagate their genes in order to survive.

All of this demonstrates that atheism is a self-refuting worldview concocted by minds that are darkened because of their rejection of the one true God. Its true purpose is to eliminate any knowledge of God to free the human mind from guilt because of sin and to elevate man as being the sole object of worship, not collective worship as in former ages, but worship by the individual to himself at the altar of his lusts.
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