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## *NATURAL THEISM, PART ONE*

As we have seen, the primary struggle for men's souls in our country today is between Christianity and secular humanism. Atheism, agnosticism, and pantheism, while claiming to be different, all lead to a secular humanistic religion that denies God, or at least, denies any responsibility to Him. This chapter and Chapter Four, present evidence from Natural Theism for proof of God's existence and for the reality of the spiritual realm and for the truth of supernatural events. The terms "atheism", "unbelief", and "secular humanism" are used interchangeably.

Natural Theism is the science which treats of the existence and character of God in the light of nature and reason. This study will deal with proofs apart from

the Bible and apart from historical and archaeological records. Can we find evidence of God and of spiritual things just by observing the universe and by using our own powers of reason? David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world (Psa. 19:1-4).

Certainly, as David said, the creation does declare the existence of a Creator, and this knowledge is available in all languages and in all parts of the earth.

Paul declared that the physical universe not only shows the existence of God, but also His eternal power and divine nature, and he said that men who ignore this and turn away from God are without excuse.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).

In his speech to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, Paul appealed to their reason to show that God, who created the world, is Lord over all and is a spiritual Being who does not dwell in temples built by men, and does not need men to take care of Him.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in tem-

ples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else (Acts 17:24-25).

Thus, not only is it proper to seek knowledge of God from nature and reason, it is clear that God expects us to do so. This chapter will be a study of the evidence we can see outside ourselves, that is from the universe around us. Chapter Four will deal with the evidence we can see within ourselves and from recent human experience.

### *CAUSE AND EFFECT*

The principle of cause and effect is basic to our way of thinking. We cannot conceive of anything happening without being caused. When we see a brick wall we know that someone made the bricks, someone made the mortar, someone transported them to the work site, someone laid the bricks, and that someone had planned the whole project. Even if the wall just fell out of the sky, we would know that something caused it to fall. We would never believe the wall was just there without being caused by anyone or anything.

Furthermore, the cause must be an adequate cause. The effect cannot be greater than its cause. A wall containing 400 bricks cannot be built using only 200 bricks, nor can a creature having intelligence be made by a creator having no intelligence. And the cause must precede the effect. A brick wall cannot be built by a bricklayer who is not yet born, nor could the universe be created by one who did not exist before the universe.

With these principles in mind, we ask, "What caused the universe?" Three answers have been suggested: 1. The universe has in itself some natural process by which the universe has created itself. 2. The universe has always existed and thus was not created. 3. The universe was created by a supernatural power. What light can reason and nature shed on these suggested answers?

Reason tells us that answer number 1. is wrong, the universe did not create itself. To create is to cause to come into existence, that is, to make something from nothing. If, as secular humanism claims, nothing exists but the physical universe, then before the universe existed there was nothing, not even empty space, just non-existence. A natural law or process which is itself a part of the physical universe, could not have created the universe because before the universe existed the natural law did not exist either. A brick wall cannot be built by a bricklayer who is not yet born, nor can a universe be created by a natural law that is part of the universe and thus itself has not yet been created. The cause must precede the effect. Our reason and common sense tell us the universe did not create itself.

Nature also says that answer number 1 is wrong. Scientists tell us that the physical universe consists of energy and matter and that the two are interchangeable. In other words, the universe consists of vast amounts of energy in one form or another. Wherever any process is taking place, energy is being transformed but none of it is being created or destroyed. Scientists call this the first law of thermodynamics. No one has ever discovered an exception to this law. No one has ever found any natural law or process that can either create

or destroy even the smallest part of the physical universe. Man has never been able to breach that mysterious barrier between existence and non-existence. Nature, as expressed in the first law of thermodynamics, tells us that the universe did not create itself. There is nothing in nature, no natural law or process, that can create an atom, let alone an universe.

Now what can Natural Theism, that is, reason and nature, tell us about suggested answer number two? Reason tells us that answer number 2 is wrong also, the universe has not always existed. Atheists claim there is no such thing as the supernatural, but that everything operates according to natural laws, which human beings are capable of understanding. They claim the universe evolved from some eternal substance, such as "cosmic dust" or hydrogen gas, to its present state. But how could any such substance have neither beginning or ending? A math teacher was asked, "What is the largest number there is?" Her answer was, "I do not know. Only God could answer that." The teacher answered correctly. No natural law or human mind can solve the mysteries of eternity and infinity.

The story is told of an ancient Greek boy who asked his mother, "What is holding the earth up?" The mother replied, "There is a great strong man named Atlas and he holds the earth safely on his back." After a moment the boy asked, "What is Mr. Atlas standing on?" "Well son you have seen elephants in the victory parades. Atlas is standing on the back of a great strong elephant." Again after a moment the boy asked, "What is the elephant standing on?" "Son you have seen turtles and know they have hard shells and strong legs. Well the elephant stands safely on the back of the

biggest turtle you can imagine." "But mother what is the turtle standing on?" "Well son it is just turtles all the way down. Now run out and play."

Obviously, cosmic dust or hydrogen gas all the way back is no more satisfying than turtles all the way down. Reason tells us there must have been a beginning. The universe is not eternal; it has not been here "all the way back." It is inconsistent to deny the existence of anything supernatural, and yet to claim that the universe has always been here. Anything that has always existed is not natural, it is supernatural. Only the supernatural God has always existed.

It is significant that Harvard University's world famous evolutionary astronomer, Dr. Harlow Shapley, effectively admitted that every effect must have a cause, that the cause must be antecedent, that is, must precede the effect, and that anything that has always existed is beyond natural explanation and thus is supernatural. In *The View From a Distant Star*, © 1963 by Basic Books, Inc. New York, Dr. Shapley stated:

In the beginning was the Word, it has been piously recorded, and I might venture that modern astrophysics suggests that the Word was hydrogen gas. In the very beginning, we say, were hydrogen atoms; of course there must have been something antecedent, but we are not wise enough to know what. Whence came these atoms of hydrogen, these atoms, 20,000,000,000,000 (and 66 additional zeros) in number — atoms that we now believe have been forged into the material make-up of the universe? What preceded their appearance, if anything? That is perhaps a question for metaphysics. The origin of origins is beyond astronomy. It is perhaps beyond philosophy, in the realm of the to us Unknowable.

Thus, reason tells us that the physical or natural universe has not always existed. Anything that has always existed is beyond natural explanation. It is supernatural. Only God is eternal.

Nature also speaks against the eternal existence of the universe. Whereas the first law of thermodynamics says that energy is being neither created nor destroyed, the second law of thermodynamics says that energy is being degraded. The universe is running down. Energy is constantly being dissipated into space and becoming unavailable. This is a one-way process. Had the universe always existed, the running down process would be complete, and the universe would be cold and dead. Thus, there was a beginning. Nature says the universe has not always existed.

We are left with answer number 3, that the universe was created by a supernatural power. What can reason and nature tell about this? Reason says the universe is a great effect that had a cause. Reason also says that cause had to precede the universe and had to be greater than the universe. A natural law or process that is itself a part of the universe could neither precede the universe nor be greater than the universe. Thus the great cause of the universe must be something above and beyond the natural, it must be something supernatural. Since this great, supernatural cause has created creatures possessing intelligence, personality, self-consciousness, and free will, as well as sight, hearing, touch, and smell, this cause cannot be a blind, impersonal force. The great cause of the universe is a Person possessing all of the attributes found in the universe and much more, working in supernatural ways, and dwelling outside the physical universe in the spiritual realm. Reason says that God

exists, that supernatural events do occur, and that the spirit world is real.

The great laws of nature also speak powerfully of a supernatural beginning for the universe. Creation is not a natural process. Man has never discovered any natural means for turning nothing into something, or even for turning something into nothing. Nature says that creation is a supernatural process. Nature also points to a definite beginning for the universe, a time when all the vast reaches of the universe, all the matter, energy, space, and even time itself, were brought into existence from non-existence. All of the one-way processes that men find in nature were set in motion, like a great clock, wound up and running down, and speaking clearly of a beginning and an ending. Truly, the heavens do declare the work of His hands, and He is clearly seen from the things that He has made. Nature tells us that the cause of the universe is a supernatural power; that the cause is God.

Unbelievers sometimes admit that they cannot explain where the universe came from, but argue that Christians are no better off because they cannot explain where God came from. But it is unbelievers who claim to have natural explanations for all things – a claim which they cannot back up. Christians believe the universe had a supernatural beginning – created by a supernatural God. Supernatural means above the natural and thus beyond our power to explain. Part of being a Christian is accepting the fact that man is not the greatest thing in the universe and that some things are beyond human understanding.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and



his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:33-34).

The universe is a great effect. The principles of cause and effect tell us that such an effect demands a cause and that cause had to precede the effect and be greater than the effect. Both reason and nature offer convincing proof that only a supernatural God could have been an adequate cause. It cannot be better said than this: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

### DESIGN

Everywhere we look, from the vast universe itself to the tiny atom, we see intricate design. Design is evidence of intelligence, and intelligence is an attribute of personality. Thus, design not only tells us there is a Designer but also tells us something about the Designer – that He is a person possessing infinite intelligence and that He wants order and harmony. The evidence of design points not to some blind, impersonal force, but to God.

The great philosopher, Thomas Aquinas, saw proof of God's existence in the design of natural bodies. He is quoted as follows by Peter Kreeft in *A Summa of the Summa*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1990, at page 69:

We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that

not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

The unbeliever will object that given the vast expanse of space with billions of stars and planets, and given billions of years of time, all that we see in the universe came about by accident, by trial and error. A typical expression of this view is found in *The View From a Distant Star*, cited above. After theorizing that the universe began with a vast amount of hydrogen gas, Dr. Shapley wrote:

Ordinary physics and astronomy suggest that if several billions of our years ago we had all that hydrogen and the natural physical laws, what we now see would have followed without the intervention of miracles, and without supernatural intercession. Gravitation, radiation, and eventually photosynthesis, genetics, and so forth – with operators such as these and the widely dispersed hydrogen atoms, the universe of galaxies, stars, planets, life, and man would have emerged – nothing supernatural required.

Of course Dr. Shapley cannot explain where the hydrogen atoms and all the natural physical laws came from, nor does he explain the obvious conflict of his theory with the second law of thermodynamics. He imagines a universe winding itself up instead of running down, as all observations show to be the fact. But passing over these problems for now, does Dr. Shapley's theory eliminate all evidence of design? Consider

his tiny hydrogen atom. Programed into it had to be all the information and material needed to produce everything in the universe. Stars, oceans, mountains, light, electricity, plants, animals, hope, love — all this and billions more had to be packed into that tiny atom. What marvelous design that would have been.

And what about the “natural physical laws” which are Dr. Shapley’s “operators?” What marvelous operators indeed that could take nothing but hydrogen and construct every thing in the universe — again everything from galaxies to human love. In such laws as these, cannot even an unbeliever see evidence of intelligent design — evidence of a supernatural Lawgiver? No matter where the unbeliever starts, be it hydrogen gas or cosmic dust or anything else, he still cannot escape the evidence for design and the need for a Designer.

Furthermore, when we look at specific examples of design, it is hard to believe they are the accidental result of trial and error. Everywhere we look are found examples of design so intricate and so interdependent that they could have been produced only by supernatural intelligence and only according to a marvelous, overall plan. Specific examples of this, which will make this point abundantly clear, will be considered in the chapters on evolution. Certainly, the evidence of design speaks clearly of God, the all knowing, all powerful, supernatural Designer.

### *BEAUTY*

There is a great deal of beauty in the universe. Human beings have the ability to appreciate and enjoy

this beauty. It is reasonable to believe this was planned. But who could have placed this beauty here and placed within us the corresponding ability to enjoy it? Certainly not a blind impersonal force, but an intelligent God who can enjoy beauty Himself. And this tells us something more about God – that He a good God who could look at His creation and see that it was good.

The unbeliever will object that beauty is in the eye of the beholder – that the universe ended up as it is accidentally, and humans just look at what is and think it is beautiful. But how did humans develop this sense of beauty? How did it evolve? It would seem to have no survival value. Just the opposite – it would seem to distract from the business of survival. What place does the appreciation of beauty have in the dog eat dog world of evolution? It is much more logical to believe that beauty is a gift from a good God.

When we are confronted by scenes of great beauty that thrill our very souls, we know instinctively that such a scene, and our reaction to it, are not just meaningless accidents. Dr. Floyd E. Hamilton in his book *The Basis of Christian Faith*, Harper & Row, New York, 1964, expressed this as follows, at page 43:

The beauty and grandeur of the world arouse feelings of pleasure and appreciation in our souls. A beautiful sunset does not seem like a chance happening. The separation of the different colors of the rainbow through refracted light, the harmony of natural colors, the music of birds, the tinkling and rushing of the waterfall, the majesty of a storm at sea, the bursting of the petals of the rose, the delicate beauty of the African violet, the scent of the English violet – all point to a Cause who planned such things for the enjoyment of mankind and a manifestation of His own glory.

Paul declared to the pagan people of Lystra, people who had no knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, that even to them God “has not left Himself without testimony.” By looking at the universe around them they could see evidence of God and of His goodness. That is what we have done in this chapter. We have looked at the evidence we can see outside ourselves – evidence from the physical universe – and have seen that the most reasonable explanation of all we see is this – In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1).

### Study Questions

1. What is Natural Theism?
2. What evidence do we have that God approves of a study of Natural Theism?
3. Explain the principle of cause and effect.
4. Why must a cause precede and be greater than its effect?
5. Without using the Bible, explain why the universe could not have created itself.
6. Without using the Bible, explain why the universe could not have always existed.
7. Apart from the Bible, what evidence can you give that the universe was created by a supernatural God?
8. Even if the universe evolved from hydrogen gas or cosmic dust, as unbelievers claim, why does this not eliminate the need for a supernatural Designer?
9. Explain why the beauty we see in the world around us is evidence of God.
10. Why are pagan peoples who have never heard of God, still not excused for worshiping idols?

