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Why I am Not a Materialist

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Why I am not a Materialist

Bertrand Russell famously lectured a 1927, Battersea Town Hall audience on the topic, “Why I am not a Christian.” The lecture is now a celebrated polemic for atheists, an odd development considering it is a persuasive demonstration that a world class logician can produce claptrap. There may be a place for claptrap but it is not in a defense of one’s world view. It seems to me the best responses are counter-attacks. Russell was a materialist; so, let me, in turn, explain why I am not a materialist.

The Historical Development of Materialism

In the sixth century BC, the city of Miletus on the Ionian coast was the richest of all Greek cities. Its well laid-out streets became the standard pattern for later Roman cities. It was here, in the Milesian School of philosophy that naturalism and materialism first appeared. Thales of Miletus, the founder of the school, also gave mathematics its start as an abstract and deductive discipline. His contribution to materialism was the claim that “all is water.” It began a lengthy assault on the problem of “the one and the many;” how to explain our enormously diverse world in terms of just a few elements (preferably only one). In choosing water as the one thing out of which all is made, Thales founded materialism. All is water and water is matter, *ergo*, all is matter.

This move was a deliberate rejection of mythic explanations of the world. Henceforth, explanations would be naturalistic, in terms of the inherent nature of things without reference or recourse to external entities, particularly, the gods, titans and heroes of Greek myth. It was also materialistic in that it tried to explain materials and the actions of material bodies solely in terms of their own nature and that of other materials. Thus, from the beginning, materialism and naturalism were Siamese twins, different but related ideas joined at the hip.

Even at that time, the two were separable. If there is more to the world than matter, then naturalism must explain the world in terms of natures other than just material entities. The hip that joins the two views is the reductionist assumption that matter is all there is and all that needs explaining. This is *the fundamental tenet of materialism*. It defines materialism; it is its crucial and controlling belief.¹ Thales and his immediate followers did not explicitly make this assumption. Indeed, Frederick Copleston remarks, “they were not materialists in the sense of deliberately denying a distinction between matter and spirit, for the very good reason that the distinction had not been so clearly conceived that its formal denial was possible.”²

A century later however, the atomists made that denial explicit. Leucippus, possibly of Miletus, and his student, Democritus of Abdera, saw everything as “atoms and the void.” They advanced a thorough-going materialism where even “soul” was a material, with its own type of atoms. This early atomism was acausal. As Lucretius explained Epicurean atomism, events in the universe occur through “chance swervings” of atoms.³ To the early atomists, the human mind was a passive receiver of projected thin films of atoms (*simulacra* or *eidola*) which are perceived as thoughts. Their universe was wholly purposeless but also deterministic and mechanical.

Even at that early date, human reasoning was a sticking point and it seems the problem was recognized as far back as Democritus. A mantra of the old atomists was that “nothing comes from nothing.” It seems a corollary that only irrationality comes from irrationality and no atomist wanted to attach any form of rationality to the behavior of the atoms. Indeed, for the early

atomists, all events, especially our thoughts, occur without cause and are necessarily irrational. Materialism thereby undercuts its own claim to be a true description of thought including, of course, all thoughts about how the world really works which sum together to be materialism. There is something very odd about this conclusion. If materialism is true, it makes itself false. Like Jörmungandr, the Norse World Serpent, materialism swallows itself. Unfortunately for materialists, their beliefs and reasoning cannot be taken seriously unless materialism is false. If materialism is true, there are no grounds for believing that any belief at all is true and, hence, there are no grounds for believing materialism is true. This difficulty does not *falsify* materialism,⁴ but it does *eviscerate* it. This, the *fundamental problem of materialism*, is an inherent, and therefore an ineradicable, flaw.

Epicurus tried to ameliorate this difficulty by using atomism to create an ethical view of the world based on the belief that pleasure is the determiner of the good. He made what is now *the classic move of materialism*, “explaining” the human mind in materialistic terms.⁵ His was the first of the many unsuccessful efforts to construct ethics from materialism. The difficulty is that positing that all matter has some measure of mind is simply a return to animism or pantheism, not a panacea but a deadly poison that will destroy the patient. The crux of the matter is the human mind. As Aristotle acutely noted, with special emphasis on the soul (ψυχή) “the difference is greatest between those who make these [elemental principles] corporeal and those who make them incorporeal.”⁶ That is, in fact, where the matter still stands although we might update the language to say that the main difference is between materialists and theists.

Epicurus saw the chance swervings of the atoms as a way of escape from the deterministic bounds of earlier atomism and claimed we can freely choose our views and actions. He was confident an understanding of the world would free men from the fear of death and thus lead them to a life of tranquility. Despite his efforts, the Stoics were more popular and came to dominate the ethical teachings of the late classical era. Both these world views held that understanding and a disciplined mind are the proper anodyne to pain, fear and suffering.

Materialism is a classic monism where being is constructed from only one type of entity or thing. The classical Greeks followed Thales into monism, merely offering variants on the “all is...” theme he began. “All” is a most inclusive word. All monisms are thereby necessarily world views; that is, they are attempts to explain everything whatsoever. Proposing a world view takes courage but proposing a monism takes a special boldness, perhaps hubris.

Naturalism is a less bold view but it does not thereby escape difficulties. *The fundamental problem of naturalism* is that it is inherently circular. In order to explain a thing in terms of its nature, one must already know its nature, a chicken and egg problem that is methodological and, hence, not as serious as *the fundamental problem of materialism*. We may hope to circumvent it by admitting the circularity but claiming we are “spiraling in” on the truth in the process of circling it. We must not be too hard on naturalism here for it may well be that a degree of circularity is an unavoidable feature of any philosophical system, a fly in all ointments. Materialism, on the other hand, has a radical problem, a problem at its very roots. There is then nothing left to do save to “cry ‘havoc’ and let slip the dogs of war.”⁷

Current Difficulties of Materialism - What is Matter?

Since its beginnings, materialism has had to respond to scientific changes every bit as much as has religion. Over the centuries, views of matter and the material world have altered continually

and substantially. Indeed, materialism all but died out with the rise of Christianity only to be resurrected by the Enlightenment.

What matter actually is, Kant's *ding an sich*, has always been a lurking problem. If all is really matter, then, of course, there is no difficulty; whatever you can see or name is an example of matter. Thus, *the fundamental tenet* screens from sight an examination of the critical issue of exactly what identifies matter.

Early materialism had to cope with many suggestions as to the one element from which all is constructed. They resolved the issue by following a pathway already pioneered in dealing with a multiplication of gods, that is, syncretize and call them all matter. The decision seems to have been made effortlessly and without objection.

With the rise Modern Science and Enlightenment came a serious attempt to get at the *ding an sich*. Early chemists like Robert Boyle recognized the importance of conservation of weight (mass) in chemical processes. Isaac Newton then gave mass additional responsibility for both inertia and gravity. Making his new list of elements, Lavoisier could not make mass the defining character of matter because his list still contained the old element "fire/phlogiston" in its renamed form of "caloric." As phlogiston, it had had a tendency to take on negative weight as well as positive weight. Accordingly, he simply required that all matter must obey a conservation law.

Thus, by 1800, two persistent and significant problems for materialism had made their debuts, fields (gravity) and energy (caloric). Einstein made energy and matter equivalent and showed that gravity is an inertial effect but this came at the expense of blurring the definition of matter. Since energy thereby gained a gravitational interaction, it seemed we could simply broaden the definition of matter to be anything that interacts with gravity and, more or less, restore the equilibrium of the mid-seventeenth century emphasis on matter having weight. The only difficulty was where to put gravity. It does not seem to be material. Studies of electric and magnetic forces and fields only served to increase the difficulties.

Quantum Mechanics then arose to sow more confusion. The wave-particle duality of the new Quantum Mechanics further blurred the sense of what matter "is." Is the wave function merely an expression of the probabilities of where a particle will be or is it identified with the very being of the particle? Physicists tend to talk out of both sides of our mouths on this; I think we have to conclude that our understanding here is still uncertain.

Furthermore, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle opened a Pandora's box of "virtual particles." Are they matter too? Maybe not; they are so ephemeral. Unfortunately, ephemeral or not, they cause physical effects like the Casimir Effect and now, with the discovery of the Higgs boson, they create all the mass of all the "real" particles in the universe! Rewriting Quantum Mechanics and Relativity into Quantum Electrodynamics added the difficulty that fields are mediated by exchange particles. Oh, all except gravitational fields but we hope those are mediated by particles called gravitons although they do not fit the Standard Model which is so satisfyingly confirmed with the discovery of the Higgs boson. Gravity is still the odd man out.

To these woes we must now add dark matter and dark energy. Dark matter, which makes up about 27% of the total "matter" of the universe, may eventually prove to be made of Weakly Interacting Massive Particles (WIMP's), whatever they might be. As yet we do not know what dark energy is but it makes up about 68 % of the universe. WIMP's interact with "ordinary" matter only by adding to the total forces of gravity, the weakest of the four forces in the universe. Hence, physicists gravitate to the name WIMP's. Dark energy weakens gravitational affects, possibly by contributing a fifth, repulsive, force to the other four. It would be nice to believe that dark matter and dark energy will be singular entities but the history of our developing

understanding ordinary matter does not encourage that hope. Things may be much more complicated than we can now imagine.

Science has, of late, had great success explaining things about our world from a materialist (or, more precisely, a naturalist) perspective. Since much of what we see of the world is “ordinary” matter, the success leaves us with the impression that materialism is an extremely successful world view. With the recent realization that 95% of the universe is quite unexplained, that perceived success rate seems due for re-evaluation. Despite the success of materialism at explaining ordinary matter, problems of real significance, both old and new, beset it. We can, at least, still hope that the defining characteristic of matter is that it is whatever interacts with gravity.

Perhaps. But, if we overlook the still missing magnetic monopole, there remains yet one more clinker, “inflavons.” I will soon introduce them to make the universe “inflate” immediately after the Big Bang but what they are (or were) and how they interact with each other, let alone with gravity, is quite unknown.

Current Difficulties of Materialism - What about Origins?

How did life arise from non-life and how did the universe and the laws of nature come to be? These are the questions of origins. Complicating and connecting the last two is the question of why our universe is “fine tuned.” Modern science is the source of these problems for materialism. We think science has created challenges for religion but do not realize it has not treated materialism kindly either. Of the two, Alvin Plantinga shows that religion has had the best of it because there is a “superficial conflict” with science but actually a “deep concord.” Materialism, on the other hand, is in “superficial concord” but also “deep conflict” with science.⁸

The Origin of the Universe

It might seem that the Big Bang origin of the universe is good agreement with materialism, provided we ignore the first hundredth of a second or so. Two important things happened in the first hundredth of a second of the Big Bang. The universe exploded and then, about 10^{-34} seconds later, it inflated. The problem is that materialistic science cannot account for either event. The conditions of matter over this hundredth of a second would have been so unlike anything we know about now that physicists like to say the first hundredth of a second is outside the laws of physics, we cannot be confident the known laws hold true for those conditions. Actually, the known laws cause trouble.

Consider the Big Bang. Thanks to the work of Stephen Hawking, we know that tiny black holes explode (with a big bang). Big black holes do not explode. The whole universe has a very great mass and, recombined, definitely qualifies as a big black hole. So what produced the Big Bang? Remember, whatever it was had to throw all the enormous mass of the entire universe apart with such force it could never reassemble under gravity.

The Big Bang must have been hot and chaotic. The present universe is surprisingly “smooth.” We think some sort of phase change might have occurred very early in the life of the universe to make it expand and smoothen. The idea yields testable results that have been confirmed. The problem is that no one has any idea what matter and what phase change could have been involved. The particle involved has been named an “inflaton” but no one knows what sort of thing it might be. The Standard Model in particle physics satisfactorily accounts for almost everything except gravity and the neutrino mass. However, it has no room whatever for dark matter, dark energy or

“inflaton.” It predicts they do not, or possibly cannot, exist.

The origin of Physical Laws and Fine Tuning

The origins and detailed nature of physical laws is in principle connected to the origin of the universe itself and, hence, to Big Bang cosmology. Since we do not, and likely cannot, get to the conditions of the actual origin of the universe and, presumably, its laws, we are largely left to consider the nature of the laws as we see them today. At this point we are projected into the “fine tuning” question because a close study of the laws reveals they meet some startlingly narrow restrictions.

Discussions of fine tuning usually focus on dimensionless quantities in physical laws because the values of such constant are independent of observer defined quantities. For our consideration, the important dimensionless quantities are:

- 1) the fine structure constant - $\alpha = e^2/2\epsilon_0hc = 1/137$
- 2) the gravitational coupling constant - $\alpha_G = 2\pi Gm_p^2/hc = 5.84 \times 10^{-39}$
- 3) the ratio of the proton mass to the electron mass - $\beta = m_p/m_e = 1833$
- 4) the nuclear force constant - $\alpha_S \sim 0.2$

It is now widely acknowledged that all these parameters must lie in a very narrow range of values for the universe to be anything like what it is. Change even one slightly and we would not be here. The physical laws and fundamental constants in them, then, look for all the world as if someone planned the universe. If someone planned the universe, then there is someone or something beyond the matter of the universe and that decisively falsifies materialism.

The materialist has few good choices at this point. The basic materialist answer must be that the fine tuning is really a matter of chance so chance, not planning, is behind fine tuning. There are three ways this might work. Stephen Hawking and Thomas Hertog⁹ suggested that during the Big Bang there were a number of universes possible and our present universe was selected from these by chance. A second line of thinking was proposed by Robert Dicke.¹⁰ His thought was that we live in a sort of “golden era” when the, possibly changing, values of the dimensionless quantities are “just right” for us to be alive and hence to notice how finely tuned the values of the dimensionless quantities are. Lastly, a number of “multiverse” theories have been proposed. All of them hold that our universe is just one out of many universes which actually exist or perhaps only exist potentially. The tuning of these universes is random. By chance, our universe is finely tuned and here we are, living in a finely tuned universe and wondering how we got so lucky.

The Hawking/Hertog proposal is possibly not scientific in the sense that it conflicts with the consensus view that details of the moment of origin of the universe are forever hidden from us by the early conditions. The “golden age” idea was formulated at a time of wide-spread speculation on possible time variations of universal constants. These speculations are out of favor currently. Consequently, the multiverse idea is the only option given much credence. However, it too is unscientific in the sense that we can have no contact with the many universes posited so the idea is not testable.

The fine tuning problem suggests the *fundamental tenet of materialism* is false and the multiverse “fix” is, at best, *close to unverifiable* in principle. Perhaps it is, in fact, unverifiable in principle. This is not a stable position for materialism. The situation is serious enough that quite a few physical scientists have found it necessary to abandon materialism. The late Antony Flew, the most famous and careful thinking twentieth century atheist, is perhaps the most notable defector. His flight from materialism to philosophical theism was, by his own account strongly

driven by this issue and the issue of the origin of life.¹¹

The Origin of Life

The origin of life seems an area of triumph for materialism but this is too simple a summary. As Darwin explicitly noted, evolution *assumes* the pre-existence of species.¹² In the century and a half since the publication of Darwin's great work, considerable very sophisticated scientific work has been expended, but we still have no answer to the question of how life *began*.

For the materialist, the only possibility seems to be that some sort of "emergent" process inherent to matter, some self-organizing" principle, was at work. The Urey/Miller demonstration in 1953 that amino acids can be produced by lightning discharges in reducing atmospheres provided enormous energy and enthusiasm for this line of reasoning. Subsequent successes have been minimal by comparison.

All this is cause for considerable angst, even for rethinking of world views. Antony Flew remarked: "...the only reason which I have for beginning to think of believing in a First Cause god is the impossibility of providing a naturalistic account of the origin of the first reproducing organisms."¹³ There are, of course, a vast number of true believers who are still convinced the materialistic answer will be found. There are even some who will tell you it has been found and will provide references to the appropriate scientific articles. The truth is that their accounts are nothing but speculations, suggestions and bright ideas.

I may surely counter speculation with speculation of my own. I think *hope of finding life on Mars will prove futile*. Mars has never been in the "habitable zone" of our Sun. Yes, some sources disagree with me but, occasional liquid water notwithstanding, Mars has basically been too cold for life. The calculations are not all that difficult and the results are clear. To make it warm enough for life, however briefly, one must assume Venus-like conditions (CO₂ concentrations) that are most unlikely. Those who disagree must stretch the meaning of the term habitable zone beyond what makes good sense. The latest enthusiasm, methane on Mars, is presently dying quietly, slain by accumulating data from the rover Curiosity. Like the all but defunct SETI enterprise, life on Mars enthusiasm is destined to die out eventually. Once that case is clear, hope of finding life elsewhere will deflate and the astrobiology community will lose momentum. Even worse, it will lose funding. What will happen then will not be good for materialism.

The Origin of Species and The Mind

Things may sound bad for materialism but we can make them worse. Since materialism's fundamental problem is centered on the human mind, the modern theory of evolution seems just the ticket for showing that reason has arisen out of unreason. As Alvin Plantinga¹⁴ has been at pains to show, this is greatly mistaken.

Evolution is not a good recourse for the harried materialist because it is about fitness for surviving and reproducing. Note I did not mention reasoning. It is irrelevant. But if reasoning is irrelevant to evolution, why should we expect natural selection to generate a reasoning mind? If the goal of an organism is to reproduce "the selfish gene,"¹⁵ it is highly improbable the organism would apply energy in the direction of creating a mind. With surely at least a billion species on Earth having no mind, we have a probability of mind then of about 10⁻⁹ or perhaps 10⁻¹¹. Your chances of winning "powerball" are better (and I bet you haven't won yet).

It does no good to protest that holding reasonable beliefs enhances survival and will therefore

be selected for by natural selection. Natural selection should select for behavior that favors survival but that is not the same as selecting for true beliefs. For example, a nematode doubtless has behavior that favors survival because of natural selection but will anyone seriously claim that a nematode has beliefs? The problem is that humans not only have adaptive behavior, just as an evolutionist would expect, but also have beliefs. That brings us back to the question, whence came the beliefs? But now the answer cannot be “by natural selection.”

If we still insist that my mind is a product of natural selection, how likely is it that my beliefs are reliable? If materialism and evolution are right, nothing selects beliefs for truth. So, any given belief has a 50% chance of being true (or false). Plantinga settles on the “modest” requirement that a “reliable” mind should be 75% right in its beliefs. Considering a weak mind with only 1000 beliefs, the probability is then just 10^{-60} of meeting the requirement.¹⁶ The probability that 50% of the beliefs are true is just 2.5%, and for 55% correct it is 0.668%. A better mind, capable of holding 10,000 beliefs, has a probability of 10^{-568} of meeting the requirement. Note that the probabilities get worse as the number of beliefs increases. Such minds can hardly be called reliable.

For a materialist, the only way out is to throw chance away and insist that matter has some inherent tendency toward a more reliable mind, some “emergent” property or “self-organizing” principle that greatly alters the probabilities. Quite a large number of such solutions have been proposed. That fact alone shows how unsatisfactory they are. They must all fail because the basic requirement, getting beliefs from states of matter, permits no “solution.” Beliefs and states of matter are in different categories of being. Equating them is a “category mistake.”

Materialism as a World View

I have already noted that materialism is a world view by the nature of its *fundamental tenet* that all is matter. I will now show it has serious deficiencies as a world view. To do that, we must consider what we expect of world views generally.

Prior Considerations - Imagination

Not surprisingly, one’s world view colors one’s view of the world. But, surely, a world view is framed around a view of the world. So which comes first, the world view or the view of the world? This conundrum serves to point out how difficult it can be to “compare and contrast” world views. Competing world views may not even refer to the same world! A world view helps us explain and understand the world but, simultaneously, it often restricts our sense of the world and makes other views of the world harder to imagine and understand.

An example of how views at once restrict and liberate thinking is how the numbers line has changed the way we think of numbers. We think of a horizontal line with zero in the center. To the left are negative numbers; positive numbers are to the right. At spots at equal distances are the counting numbers. Every number has a spot: zero, 1 and -1, and so on. The negative numbers, fractions, decimals and even irrational numbers are all imagined as spots on the numbers line; they seem alike, just numbers on the numbers line.

But these are hard won insights. For thinkers from Pythagoras through Galileo and Newton, zero and one were not numbers. Numbers, for them, were the geometric shapes in which one laid pebbles on the ground. Zero was literally nothing because it had no pebbles, and, therefore, could not be a number (or anything else, for that matter); 1, just a single pebble, had no shape. Negative

numbers were not even conceivable, and legend has it that the poor Pythagorean who proved the existence of irrational numbers was thrown from a boat for his efforts. You cannot believe a thing to be true if you cannot imagine it is true. The imagination controls what can be even considered for belief.

Prior Considerations - Commitment

Another complication is that world views require trust. We expect a world view to provide reasons why things in the world are as they are but this in itself is a commitment that reasoning cannot provide. Any attempt to do so necessarily generates circular reasoning in the form, "I am committed to reasoning by this line of reasoning..." The commitment is necessarily prior and that requires faith in reasoning. Well, so does everything! Yes, but there is more to it than that.

Reasoning cannot show me that the world exists, nor that you exist, nor that my past truly occurred. Worse, it cannot show me that my knowledge is true. That means I have no reason to believe the truth of the premises from which I reason. If there is evidence to warrant accepting a belief, I must trust that it is evidence and that the source is reliable. So, we commit to a belief because we can do no other; we put *faith* in it and *hope* that is the right thing to do. The effort to understand the world, the construction of a world view, demands motivation and that must come from *love*, a passion for understanding that sustains the effort to understand

Commitment and imagination, then, are prior to framing a world view. Their priority may be temporal but I am here speaking of it as primarily epistemic and ontological. They are more basic and fundamental than the world view and they thus will, in ways we cannot predict or fully describe, delimit the world view.

The Structure of World Views

If we have to choose a world view, understanding the nature of world views seems a good starting point. What are the characteristics of world views? How do they function? What do they do for us?

Nicholas Wolterstorff has provided a scheme I find helpful.¹⁷ He calls it a "theory of theories" and it applies to theories great and small. We form theories to make sense of data. What we take to be data he calls "data beliefs" because there is no certain way of getting general agreement on what comprises the "data" appropriate to a theory (competing world views may not even refer to the same world.) Thus, we must also have reasons for picking the data set we actually select. Wolterstorff refers to these reasons as "data-background beliefs." We then set about finding an explanation for the data, that is, we frame a theory about the data (actually, we may have had the theory first and then selected the data). But there may be a number of theories that "fit" the data. To select our theory, we invoke "control beliefs" that serve as filters on the types of theories we can accept. The names of the belief types are descriptions of how they function. A particular belief may function as a control belief in one situation and, say, a data-background belief in another.

Note these are all beliefs, a matter of faith. They cannot be reasoned to, although one will certainly try to show evidence for them. We expect them to be warranted, preferably well warranted. For example, there was no proving the control belief that the stars circle the Earth. As the fourteenth century thinker, Nicole Oresme, saw clearly, it was that or let the Earth rotate, and he explicitly noted the choice was a matter of faith.

Criteria for Weighing World Views

From my world view, how do I make a fair judgment of a different world view? As I have already observed, competing world views may not even refer to the same world. We expect world views to encompass “the world” but the sets of data beliefs involved may not be identical.

The truth of a world view seems too complex to be a criterion for judging world views. Can we calculate a truth batting average for world views? Would we also need a “times at bat” statistic? It seems best to sort world views by clearer criteria and then regard the best world view(s?) as the truer or the most likely to be true.

A number of criteria are used; familiar ones would be rationality, comprehensiveness and coherence. Note that comprehensiveness creates a very heavy burden for a world view. The Greeks had a word for the danger faced by those who defend and teach world views, *hubris* (ὕβρις). In this context it means overconfidence leading to contemptuous treatment of other world views (and the holders of other world views). Anything with “positivism” as part of its name is likely to inspire it; Richard Dawkins, for example, seems to be suffering a severe case. Coherence is a complex idea with a substantial literature.¹⁸ It goes beyond consistency and rationality.

I suggest an additional criterion is what might be called fitness. A world view is not just about the world, whatever that is taken to be. World views are held by people. They guide not just our thinking but our living. So, a world view must be fit for human consumption. Any world view that deserves to be called true must make room for all aspects of being human without denigrating or denying any of them (although disapproving of aspects of human behavior is, perhaps, requisite). Stoicism is an example of a world view that failed to fit human need. I suggest materialism is another.

Fitness is really a consistency requirement with two facets. Because world views guide our lives, we require a world view to fit our needs for living. This must include our emotional and/or spiritual lives, not just the life of thought. Secondly, a world view must fit the reality that only humans hold them. A “world view” that denies this human uniqueness fails the fitness test by being self-contradictory in a fundamental sense. If it denies this human uniqueness, it makes itself unable, in principle, to account for the fact that only humans hold world views. It is self-defeating. As with evolutionary “survival of the fittest,” only a fit world view should survive an encounter with the fitness criterion, others should be “cut off from the earth [and] rooted out of it”.¹⁹ We can translate that last phrase “eradicated.” If Ockham can wield a razor, surely we may wield a hoe.

Fitness of Materialism - Homelessness

Materialism denies human uniqueness but it also has another fitness problem. Materialists are not comfortable in a material world! As Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg says, “the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless.”²⁰ Though pointless, comprehension apparently has some value for he thinks, “the effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy.”²¹ He yearns for a world of purpose but his materialism refuses to validate this need. Weinberg is hardly a lone voice. Perry G. Miller, the Harvard historian has said, “... It is only too clear that man is not at home in this universe, and yet he is not good enough to deserve

a better.”²²

Miller and Weinberg believe reason drives us into accepting a world view that satisfies our reasoning but is emotionally and spiritually disappointing. If they are right, then we are indeed not at home in the universe. It seems we are amphibians, creatures of reasoning, spirit and emotion forced to live in a universe satisfactory only to the emotionless Vulcans of Star Trek.

There is something very odd about this conclusion. Only humans feel homeless in the universe. Neither Miller nor Weinberg seems to recognize the obvious question of what this homelessness might mean. Merely to raise the question suggests the answer that there must be more to the world than just matter.

Summary

We usually suppose that materialism has had great success explaining the world of ordinary matter. This is not quite right. It is its twin brother, naturalism, as embodied in modern science, to which credit belongs. Materialism has severe and embarrassing problems that, as I have argued, are quite intractable because they are inherent to the basic beliefs and structures of the view. Lastly, materialism, as a world view, is unfit for human consumption. It radically undermines reason and denigrates human needs. That is why I am not a materialist.

Notes

¹ There is a tendency today to distinguish “methodological naturalism” from “metaphysical naturalism.” But the latter is identical with materialism and I much prefer the shorter form for its bluntness. As I use the term, “naturalism” is necessarily a method and, hence, equivalent to “methodological naturalism.”

² Frederick Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy: Vol. I Greece and Rome Part I* (Image Books, 1960), 44.

³ Titus Lucretius Carus, *On the Nature of the Universe* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1987), 66.

⁴ It was Dr. Merold Westphal who first pointed this out to me.

⁵ Daniel Dennett’s *Consciousness Explained* (1991) and Francis Crick’s *The Astonishing Hypothesis: the Scientific Search for the Soul* (1995) are two of the most recent (and no more successful) versions of this maneuver.

⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book I, Chapter II; trans. By Kenelm Foster and Silvester Humphries, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1959), p. 76

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 3.1.268.

⁸ Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict really Lies: Science, Religion & Naturalism*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011). This is the entire thesis of his book.

⁹ S.W. Hawking and Thomas Hertog (February 2006). “Populating the Landscape: A Top Down Approach. *Phys. Rev.* **D73** (12): 123527.

¹⁰ R.H. Dicke, "Dirac's Cosmology and Mach's Principle". (1961) *Nature* **192** (4801): 440–441.

¹¹ See especially Antony Flew, “A Pilgrimage of Reason” and also Antony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, (HarperOne 2007).

¹² Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* chapter 14.

¹³ Antony Flew, stated in a letter to Richard Carrier.

¹⁴ See, for example, Plantinga, *ob. cit.*, Part IV in particular.

¹⁵ The reader no doubt realizes we have Richard Dawkins to thank for this felicitous turn of phrase from his book by that title.

¹⁶ Using Stirling's approximation, I get the exponent -56.81 but -59.54 using an improved approximation. In *Where the Conflict really Lies: Science, Religion & Naturalism*, p. 333 Plantinga gives -58 and credits the result to Paul Zwier. The differences are immaterial.

¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1976), 62-66.

¹⁸ To pursue the subject further, research "coherentism."

¹⁹ Pr. 2:22

²⁰ Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory: The Search for the Fundamental Laws of Nature* (1993).

²¹ Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*, updated addition, (Basic Books, New York, 1993), 155.

²² Perry, Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, Ch 1. (Harvard University Press, 1939).