

Comparing Christianity and Naturalism in the Health Care Setting

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Naturalism is a philosophical worldview that maintains a stance in explaining the world strictly through science and natural laws. In this philosophical worldview, there is no belief in the supernatural, or any deity. Essentially, what is physically present is all that it will ever be. Individuals who hold the naturalism worldview believe solely in scientific matter and energy, and that all events that ever occur can be explained by the natural laws. The root of naturalism's worldview began with ancient Greek philosophers, Enlightenment thinkers, and modern scientific materialists, and since then there have been many branches of the naturalism worldview. Through these concrete pillars of naturalism, its philosophies hold far-reaching implications for understanding different aspects of life.

At the foundation of naturalism, there are rigid views that individuals wholly believe in when it comes to explaining God and a person. Naturalism essentially rejects the existence of any supernatural entities or phenomena, therefore “there is no God, no heaven, hell or any form of spiritual reality” (Davis, 2007). Although one’s actions could have consequences according to the natural laws, there are simply no spiritual consequences. In addition, because they do not believe in any supernatural entities or phenomena, creation of the universe and humans have certain implications as well. With no deity creator, they believe that “human life and every aspect of material reality are just enormous cosmic accidents. The essence of reality is nothing more than material substances which, over the eons, have evolved into what exists today.” (Davis, 2007). Ultimately, the creation of human beings are a result of a long history of biological evolution that allowed humans to get to a point of self-awareness. The worldview asserts that there is no innate purpose that humans are born with, but it does not mean they do not seek purpose in their life. They may derive meaning from the pursuit of knowledge, personal growth, relationships with others, or positive contributions to society.

In terms of the world and the environment, it is believed that it is a complex, interconnected system that is affected by human activity. They also believe that it is from a generation of evolutionary processes, and that it is important to preserve and protect the environment. With a worldview that's strong in natural laws and the scientific method, it is also a world that they continuously strive to discover more of in terms of its scientific phenomena or concepts. In health and wellbeing, naturalists take on a more holistic approach. Furthermore, in line with the evolutionary aspect of naturalism, "survival of the species is the highest belief, it is considered a bad thing to participate in activities which would destroy the self" (Davis, 2007). In essence, they will prioritize preventative measures like healthy lifestyle choices over solely relying on medical interventions.

On the other hand, Christianity presents a whole different worldview and perception with the same concepts. Christianity strongly contrasts with naturalism, as Christianity is built on the foundation of having a relationship with the "supernatural". In terms of explaining God, Christians believe that there is one and only God. God is the sole creator of all things, including the universe and the humans in it. The Lord takes three forms but is also one – taking the form of God, human, and spirit. As Christians, God is the one and only to worship as well. For the concept of humans, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Gen. 1:27). In that way, the purpose of humans is innate – and they're given by God. Additionally, it is desirable for Christians that God and the person have an intimate relationship. In this intimate relationship, it is essential that the human on free will submits to God – surrendering that the body they have is not their own. The acknowledgement that they themselves are God's creation is the key to the

connection to God. Unlike naturalism, there is constant faith and interaction with the spiritual aspect.

In terms of the environment and health, Christianity retains this perspective of stewarding God's creations. From the beginning, the Lord gave Adam and Eve the responsibility to steward the environment and the creations in it. Thus, Christians and Naturalists have the common goal to protect the environment – but have different reasons to pursue the goal. In health, it is the similar concept of stewardship. Christians are called to steward the body of its entirety, physically, spiritually, and mentally. As mentioned earlier, since the body is God's creation – maintaining a good healthy lifestyle is practice of glorifying the Lord that created the body. “That your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Again, there is a common goal within Christianity and Naturalism to maintain the environment and health. However, there is a fundamental difference in the reason and intention to achieve and honor that goal.

In the perspective of a Christian nurse, it is the utmost priority that we can be that bridge between God's will and the well-being of patients. As the person is perceived in the image of God, “holistic caring is made possible by the Christian nurse's belief in God, as revealed in the Bible, who regards all human life as innately valuable” (Rieg, 2018). The dedication to the patient is notably different, as it taps into a power that is beyond human strength. In a more statistical sense, a survey study showed that spiritual care interventions benefited both the patient and the nurse. On the side of the patient, they felt more “feelings of support, comfort, peace and a sense of “being cared for” by their nurses”, and nurses “perceived diminished emotional

distress and higher levels of strength and ability to cope with illness and suffering in their patients.” (Hawthorne, 2020).

Patients who believe in naturalism will differ in the way that they will not believe in the supernatural healing that Christians believe in. Therefore, they will make decisions that neglect spiritual care because they do not believe that such exists. It is the Christian nurse’s utmost duty to still maintain care, professionalism, integrity, and respect to the patients that differ in understanding. In addition, it is all people created in the image of God – no matter how they may identify themselves.

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