**ESTABLISHING RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY AGAINST NATURALISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY**

Can humans have meaning in life without any acknowledgement to God? While theists acknowledge God for the meaning of human existence, naturalists believe that man can have meaning in life, if at all any meaning is there, without God. Perhaps there are human purposes, purposes to be found in life, and we can and do have them even in a Godless world, but without God there can be no one overarching purpose, no one basic scheme of existence, in virtue of which we could find a meaning for our grubby lives. An appropriate anthropology culminates in the right understanding of the meaning of life. Hence, plausibility of religious anthropology is established in various facets of human life such as origin, uniqueness, view and value of life, morality, and ultimate concern in this article which will demonstrate the falsification of naturalistic anthropology and the credibility of religious anthropology as navigating to the meaning of life.

**3.1 Origin of Humanity**

In spite of being in the peak of animal kingdom and having reasoning power that lead to the establishment of civilizations, societal conventions, power to subdue all other species, incredible advancement in technologies which culminated in multitudinous discoveries and inventions, and progression to explore the entities of the universe, humanity is still vague on the contemplation on its inception since man is not the author of his own existence or he is unaware of his author. Until the late 1910’s, humans were as ignorant of the cosmic origins as they had ever been. Those who didn’t take Genesis of the Bible literally had no reason to believe there had a beginning. This century has seen an explosion in our exploration of the universe as new instruments and techniques have become available. Now the search for our origin is a very active and advanced field. Findings in science in the contemporary era have made it increasingly unreasonable to take “holy books” seriously- especially those that tell of a personal God. Cosmologists can now explain the origin of the universe without God.[[1]](#footnote-1) While people of this new age have changed drastically to accept new explanation for the existence of life, there are still many theists who hold the conservative scenario of God as the Cause for the existence of life. The present situation clearly depicts the combat between the theists and the atheists for the establishment of their belief in the case for the origin of the humanity. While theists present the life created by God, atheists explain the life as a result of a long process of evolution. The inquiry on the cause of life on this planet Earth is so significant for by this cause only the task and uniqueness of humanity will be determined.

The theory of evolution, an alternative to the theistic concept of creation, has become so familiar even to the popular mind. It is an attempt to account for the human species, as well as all others forms of life, without appealing to a supernatural explanation. Immanent processes within nature have produced humans and all else that exists. There is no involvement by any divine person, either at the beginning or during the process. A combination of atoms, motions, time, and chance has fashioned what we currently have. Our world is the result of chance or random combinations of atoms. Extremely prolific nature produces many more offspring’s of which the strongest and most adaptive survive with the limited necessities of life. As a result, there is a gradual upgrading of the species and mutations occur. At the end of a long process of natural selection and useful mutations humans arrived on the scene.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In spite of increasing contemporary adherents, the evolutionary theory does provide the rationality for its contention. This theory is yet in a hypothetic state, not an established science. The factors such as incompleteness of the fossil record, the intermittent nature of evolutionary change, and the uncertain connection between differences in genes and difference in anatomy and behaviour allow the possibility of other modes of change than a gradual process of natural selection.[[3]](#footnote-3) As stated by evolutionary theory, if man is the last and highest result of the process, still it does not inform whether he is the highest possible evolution. On the principles of the theory, there is no reason why the process should terminate with man.[[4]](#footnote-4) Since evolutionary theory fails to answer such questions, it leaves the question of ultimate origins unanswered.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is what is sometimes termed as fiat creationism. This is the idea that God, by a direct act, brought into being virtually instantaneously everything that is. While there were various stages of creation, one occurring after another, no substantial amount of time elapsed from the beginning to the end of the process. God produced the world and everything in it, not by the use of any indirect means or biological mechanisms, but by direct action and contact. In each case, or at each stage, God did not employ previously existing material. Specifically, God made man in his entirety by a unique, direct creative act; man did not come from any previously existing organism.[[5]](#footnote-5)

A transcendent Being with infinite intelligence seems so appropriate to be the Cause of the life and other entities in the universe. Unwavering mathematical law, resourcefulness of life to accomplish its purpose, infusion of instinct, power of reason for human beings, provision for all living, and human conception of the idea of God are the evident evidences for the manifestation of an all-pervading Intelligence.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, life on the earth is clearly miracle performed by God than a mere statistic.

**3.2 Uniqueness of Humanity**

Human beings are the only creatures on earth that possess a brain developed to such an extent that they can ask this question of themselves: What exactly am I—what is a human being? We can hardly imagine a dog reflecting on its “dogness.” But we, as people, are compelled to ask and answer the significant question of humanness, for the way we live our lives comes, in large part, from the answer that we give.[[7]](#footnote-7) Naturalistic anthropology and religious anthropology present two opposing views on the uniqueness of humanity. In both cases the picture of the humanity will determine the meaning of the human existence, and hence, the better picture will suggest the better meaning for life.

Depiction of human beings in naturalistic anthropology is a physical or material perspective, according to which human beings are the most highly evolved inhabitants of earth’s ecosystem. Like everything else on the planet, we are the product of time and chance, of evolution and survival. Human beings are the only extant beings who use tools to a much higher degree than any other animal, know to build fires and cook their food, as well as to clothe themselves and create and use numerous other technologies and arts. Humans are uniquely adept at utilizing systems of symbolic communication such as language and art for self-expression, the exchange of ideas, and organization. Humans create complex social structures composed of many cooperating and competing groups, from families and kinship networks to states.[[8]](#footnote-8) In this view, human beings have nothing special but our highly evolved brains through which we can do something in a well-organized manner while other species cannot do so.

On the other hand, religious anthropology paints a counter picture of humanity in which human beings are the product of creative work of God. This view is not the mere idea of religious anthropology; for instance, man is spoken of as a part of manifestation of God Himself (Pantheism) rather than the creature of God. Monotheistic religious ideology, which portrays one Supreme God as the reason for every entities that exist in the cosmos, makes a clear cut difference between naturalistic and scientific anthropology, and thus, monotheism is taken into consideration here as the opponent point to the naturalistic notion of humanity.

Religious anthropology depicts man as both material and spiritual being which makes man specific and responsible in both social and spiritual aspects of life. Religiously pictured man is unique from all other species in terms of reason and hope. The only species on the earth with the power of reason and living by the hope of future is human race. While naturalistic anthropology presents man as only rational, religious anthropology does as divinely hopeful and responsible along with rationality. There is a qualitative difference between the religious man and natural man. Primarily man is the best of God’s creatures and hence he possess higher ability. According Christian doctrine, man is created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) which is the finite reflection of what in the God is infinite, and thus, we have intellect, conscience, capacity for moral self-direction, intimation of immortality, rational power, and morality. He is capable of having relationship with God and to fulfill purpose of life as designed by God. The fact that man is created in the image of God means that his basic function is to reflect God. “Man is God’s reflection on the earth and in the cosmos; he is the creaturely repetition of God the Creator.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Since secular man has disengaged himself from what he considers the mammoth myth of revealed religion, he has evicted the God of Creation and repudiates an eternally given order of meaning and worth for creaturely reality, setting all existence, life, truth and value, and identified himself as just highly developed animal for which there is no morality or spiritual responsibility is found through the redefinition of reality without any sacred dimensions, while religious man identify himself as God’s image or reflection which makes him unique in terms of rationality, responsibility, and hope.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**3.3 View and Value of Life**

Life is a mystery. All concede this. Neither the scientist nor the philosopher has any more insight into its inner nature than the rustic. Its energy is great, its activities are intense, and its reality, however, is above question.[[11]](#footnote-11) Such a peculiar life on this earth is conceived from various perspectives, and hence, each of the notions on life suggest a value for life which empirically conditions ones behavior. For every society in general and individual in particular has a particular set of values on the experiences of life, since values are good ends, ideals we ought to pursue. In every sphere of human activity, values are involved: moral values, aesthetic values, psychological values, political values, intellectual values, economic values, religious values, and so forth. Such values shape our lives, society, culture; it is the pursuit of such values that is one of the major distinctions of human being in the world.[[12]](#footnote-12) In such a sense, how the life on the earth is viewed, not just in biological sense but also in the metaphysical sense, would determine its value that would determine the priorities of individuals in particular and society in general. Since this thesis is concerned, the two major categories of worldviews which are atheistic and theistic ideologies are taken into consideration to demonstrate the segregation of both views on the view and value of life.

Naturalistic anthropology pictures life as purely humanistic in every facet. As per the American Humanist Association, such a humanism is defined as “a progressive life stance that, without supernaturalism, affirms human ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Nonetheless, atheistic view of life makes the people no way responsible since man is just an animal in the higher category of the evolution process and he is not accountable for any higher authority over him. It became a burden for naturalistic anthropology to prove the evolution of the whole organic nature of man. No exception can be made in respect to man’s mental and moral nature. Humanity is merely conceived as a higher form of ordinary animal life, the life of a human is of no more intrinsic value than the life of any animal. So, a secularist logically views humans as he views all “other” animals, measuring their worth entirely by their usefulness, actual or potential, to the community. A human life is a commodity, and just as in a cattle market, circumstances dictate the value of the commodity. An evolutionary concept of origins is the first mistake which leads secular humanism to denigrate the human life it claims to prize, and compromise the rights it claims to defend.[[14]](#footnote-14) Hence, the naturalistic view of human life has no more intrinsic value than of animals which makes man no way responsible in any sense, and secularizes the system of values, and ultimately dehumanizes the life itself.

On the other hand, religious anthropology, especially monotheistic worldview which ascribes God as the source of life, views life as the mission commissioned by God. Precisely, in Christian Realism God is the Author of all orderly forms of existence, and not only by original creative act, but by a perpetual providential agency through which such forms are perpetuated. Life is created by God’s word, perpetuated by His grace, commissioned by His authority, and will be fulfilled by His will. God commission man according to His infinite knowledge of goodness and morality since man cannot commission himself for two reasons: (1) Man is not the author of his own life, and (2) he is finite in wisdom and carnal in nature. Human life has a significant value, for God created man for specific purpose that which is not selfish but altruistic in nature. His specific purpose for man looks for the good of entire living creatures on this earth. Hence man is evidently a responsible being and particularly accountable to God, since man is made by God, he should live by the truth of God. Ultimately, man’s being has a significance surviving the glorious climactic end time through its anchorage in divine creation and providence.

**3.4 Morality**

Morality refers to some codes of conduct which are the expected behavior from an individual or community to bring about betterment for both individuals and community in any aspect of life. Socrates says that justice or morality is intrinsically valuable and brings about a healthy soul. If morality is removed the humanity would be in the huge dilemma of the rise and actualization of evil desires and ultimately it would devour the human race. Wrong set of codes are more dangerous than the absence of the codes. If morality is lost in the life, the meaning is also lost. Because even for the normal proper behavior morality is needed, and hence to live the life as a whole in a proper and meaningful manner morality is imperative.

Atheistic concept of morality differs largely from the religious concept of morality. God is the ultimate standard for the morality in religious perspective while atheistic concept is relative in nature. Atheist cannot base their code of conduct on the nature since evolution theory depicts nature as omnipotent but blind. Since there is no standard for codes of conduct in atheism, atheist presumes to be their own standard of conduct and thus culminates in a relative set codes. If codes are relative, then they are no longer made necessarily to be followed. Such a relative set of codes culminates the actualization of the evil desires of man. For instance, some people accept homosexuality as a normal behavior which has no moral problems, for they don’t have any external standard basis for their codes of conduct through which they can assess their ideology. Such an ideology perverts the human behavior which are harmful in individual and communal aspects. If we look at morality with the cold eye of an atheist we will find morality nothing more than the often conflicting mores of the various tribes spread around the globe.[[15]](#footnote-15) Being good without a Supreme Good will not be possible since within man there is no good faculty as a standard that is distinct from his own faculty under his complete control. Such an ideology is clearly stressed Richard Rorty’s comment:

There is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we have not created in the course of creating a practice, no standard of rationality that is not an appeal to such a criterion, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedient to our own conventions.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Religious ethics are not created by man but revelation of God made it possible to be discovered. Good or right codes of conduct are what God wills. One solution to the problem of defining good or right is to proclaim that something is right if God wills it right, and wrong if He wills it wrong. This would solve the problem of determining content in the meaning of good, as well as the difficulty involved in defining well in terms of something not ultimate. Christians claim God’s sovereign will is ultimate and the Bible spells out the content of that will to us.[[17]](#footnote-17) Such a view is alleged that it is a form of authoritarianism. This objection, however, is valid only if the authority is less than ultimate.[[18]](#footnote-18) However, there is nothing wrong with considering the ultimate authority to be the ultimate authority. If an absolutely morally perfect God exists, then by His very nature He is the ultimate authority (or standard) for what is good and what is not.

**3.5 Ultimate Concern**

According to Paul Tillich, ultimate concern is the concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of a meaning of our life. All other concern is materialistic in nature while ultimate concern is metaphysical in nature. Metaphysical concern looks for the reality behind all the materialistic things which is the contemplation of the state of life when we are materialistically dead. Naturalists spurn the idea of life after death by admitting to no alternative whatever to a naturalistic explanation of the whole sweep of reality and hence, it denies to have ultimate concern. On the other hand, religious anthropology concentrates on the metaphysical concern and portrays life after death as of more realistic and desirable; for such a state of life is eternal and the fulfillment of life’s meaning. Most religions have adhered to a belief in personal immortality[[19]](#footnote-19) and number of the great philosophers, including Socrates, Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, and James, have supported this idea.

The question of immortality- whether or not one’s personal consciousness and identity can survive death- is to some people the most important question of all. The prospect of death, the possible dissolution of the self into nothingness is, according to writers like Schopenhauer and Camus, what makes philosophers of us all. Philosophers such as Epicurus, Hume, Schopenhauer, Dewey, and Russell, have denied that the belief in immortality has any rational or empirical basis. Schopenhauer, for instance, considered the belief to spring from a combination of terror over the prospect of annihilation, exploitation of the fear and ignorance of the masses by crafty religious authorities, and plain wishful thinking. And Russell wrote that to expect a personality to survive the dissolution of the brain is like expecting a cricket club to survive when all its members are dead. One of the crucial empirical arguments against immortality is the based on the so-called facts of physiological psychology; for as consciousness depends upon the functioning of the brain, when it is damaged or destroyed consciousness is also destroyed.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Arguments for immortality are also presented plausibly by some philosophers and theologians. The argument for immortality is recorded in the *Phaedo* at length which is the picture of soul’s indestructibility on the basis of its nature as immaterial, incorruptible, indivisible, and as the spiritual animator of the body separable from it. Plato argued that the only things that can suffer destruction are those that are composite, since to destroy something means to disintegrate it into its constituent parts.[[21]](#footnote-21) This argument was adopted by Aquinas and has become standard in Roman Catholic theology. Modern catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain states on immortality of soul as follows:

A spiritual soul cannot be corrupted, since it possesses no matter, it cannot be disintegrated, since it has no substantial parts; it cannot lose its individual unity, since it is self-subsisting, nor its internal energy, since it contains within itself all the sources of its energies. The human soul cannot die. Once it exists, it cannot disappear; it will necessarily exist for ever, endure without end. Thus, philosophic reason, put to work by a great metaphysician like Thomas Aquinas, is able to prove the immortality of human soul in a demonstrative manner.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Another plausible argument is that if naturalism cannot explain adequately the nature of our conscious experience, by what right can it claim that the death of the body affects or destroys this consciousness. Moreover, the idea of immortality is entirely dependent on the existence of God. If an omnipotent God could offer eternal life for human beings, why can’t He facilitate them to receive it? All things are possible with God, and the provision of immortality for human souls is not exceptional.

While naturalists have no fear to commit any evil deeds since there is nothing after death to achieve or nobody to give account of the deeds as per their ideology, religious anthropology holds any person responsible for his/her own deeds and encourages to pursue the meaning of life. As Socrates said if death had only been the end of all, the wicked would have had a good bargain in dying, for they would have been happily quit not only of their body, but of their own evil together with their souls. But inasmuch as the soul is manifestly immortal, there is no release from evil except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom.

1. Fred Heeren, *Show Me God: What the Message from Space is Telling About God*, vol. 1 (Wheeling: Day Star Publications, 2000), xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2ndedn. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John Miley, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 503, 504. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A. Cressy Morrison, "Seven Reasons Why a Scientist Believes in God," http://www.dlshq.org/messages/sciblgod.htm (accessed on 10 February, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. Robert Creech, "What Is a Human Being?" http://www.exploregod.com/what-is-a-human-being (accessed on 17 February, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [n.a.], "Human being," in Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/275376/human-being (accessed on 17 February, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1 (Texas: Word Book Published, 1976), 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Miley, *Systematic Theology,* 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. American Humanist Association, "Definitions of Humanism," http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism/humanismdefinitions.php (accessed on 18 February, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Caleb Colley, "Secular Humanism and the Value of Human Life," http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=9&article=2171 (accessed on 18 February, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Kai Nielsen, “Ethics without Religion” in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991) 546-551. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Richard Rorty, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) xlii cited in James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog,* 3rdedn. (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Norman Geisler and Paul D. Feinburg, Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997) 359. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Norman Geisler, Christian Ethics: Options and Issues (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995) 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Hinayana Buddhism is one of the few religions that does not believe in personal immortality. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Richter, *Philosophy Looks to the Future,* 411,412. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Plato, “Death of Socrates,” in Peyton E. Richter and Walter L. Fogg, *Philosophy Looks to the Future* (Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1985), 414- 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)