



Advisory Board

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CENTER FOR NATURALISM

About the Center for Naturalism

The Center for Naturalism (CFN) is a 501(c)3 non-profit educational organization devoted to increasing public awareness of scientific naturalism and its significance for personal and social well-being. By means of educational programs, publications, and policy development, the CFN seeks to foster the understanding that human beings and their behavior are entirely natural phenomena, and that human flourishing is best achieved in the light of such understanding.

Guiding Philosophy and Purpose

Based on knowledge from the physical and social sciences, naturalism holds that there is nothing immaterial or supernatural about us which places us above or beyond the natural world. An individual's development and behavior are entirely the result of prior and surrounding conditions, both genetic and environmental; we are not self-made. This crucial insight about causality reveals our intimate connection to the world, leads to a compassionate understanding of human faults and virtues, and gives us more control over our circumstances.

As science increasingly demonstrates that human capacities emerge from fully physical processes, it is vital to show that accepting ourselves as completely natural creatures poses no threat to freedom and dignity. Indeed, naturalism empowers us, while motivating progressive policies in arenas such as criminal law, social justice, behavioral health, education, and environmental sustainability (see *Policy and Applications* below). A thorough-going, consistent naturalism – a true paradigm shift in our self-understanding – is our best long-term hope in countering worldviews that downplay or ignore our causal connections to the world, and that use the myth of the self-made self to justify punitive and counterproductive policies.

Building on materials developed at Naturalism.Org since 1998, the Center for Naturalism was incorporated in Massachusetts in 2003. Since then we've recruited an advisory board of established philosophers and scientists, obtained our federal non-profit status, and made a good start in developing our programs and activities.

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About the Center for Naturalism, continued:

CFN Programs

The CFN applies naturalism to a range of policy issues, encourages critical thinking and respect for evidence, and fosters intellectual inquiry outside the academy. We offer courses, workshops and talks on naturalism, host speakers in collaboration with other secular groups, maintain an extensive and regularly updated website on naturalism and its implications (Naturalism.Org), and produce a bi-monthly newsletter. We develop policy initiatives and curricula, publish background papers, conduct research, and support affinity groups that take naturalism as their guiding philosophy. We also sponsor philosophy cafes in Massachusetts as a public service. For further information about our programs, please visit www.naturalism.org/programs.htm.

CFN Policy and Applications

Criminal justice

The CFN seeks to encourage an empirically-based, comprehensive understanding of the causes of criminality. Knowing the full causal story behind the offender allows us to design effective interventions to prevent crime, abuse, and dysfunction. It also helps to undercut retributive attitudes favoring the death penalty and punitive prison conditions. Realizing that but for the luck of circumstances, any of us could be standing in the criminal's shoes, generates compassion for offenders as well as for victims.

Social and economic inequality

Under naturalism, persons are not self-created, but owe their successes and failures to the conditions into which they were born and developed. Therefore, major social and economic inequalities cannot be justified on the basis that individuals strongly deserve their status. The CFN supports progressive policies that will increase the well-being of those who are unlucky in life, and that reduce extreme disparities in income and opportunity. By challenging the myth of the self-made self, we can help create a more equitable society.

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Behavioral health and psychotherapy

Because mental illness, addiction, obesity, and other behavioral disorders are too often misunderstood as failures of will, the CFN advocates the recognition that dysfunctional behavior is fully caused, both by genetic vulnerabilities and environmental hazards. This will help reduce the stigma associated with behavioral disorders, while pointing the way toward effective treatment. The CFN also supports the development of psychotherapeutic and self-change techniques that apply naturalism to enhance psychological well-being. Properly presented, challenging conventional wisdom about the self can be a powerful means to increase life satisfaction and deepen interpersonal relationships.

Science advocacy and critical thinking

Naturalism as a worldview is based on a scientific, evidence-based understanding of the universe and our place in it. The CFN seeks to promote science and critical thinking in public education and public discourse as a non-ideological alternative to faith-based modes of justifying beliefs. In advocating science, the CFN supports the teaching of cosmology and evolution as essential elements of the epic story of life on earth.

Environmental awareness

Because naturalism shows our deep connection to the world and others, it prompts concern for the natural environment and for those who will succeed us on the planet. Because it discounts the existence of the soul and survival after death, naturalism increases the value we place on this, our only life, and the world we inhabit now. The CFN supports an environmental ethic of wise use, sustainability, and population control that will keep the earth habitable for future generations of all creatures.
