

***The Recalcitrant Imago Dei***

Human Persons and the Failure of  
Naturalism

By J. P. Moreland

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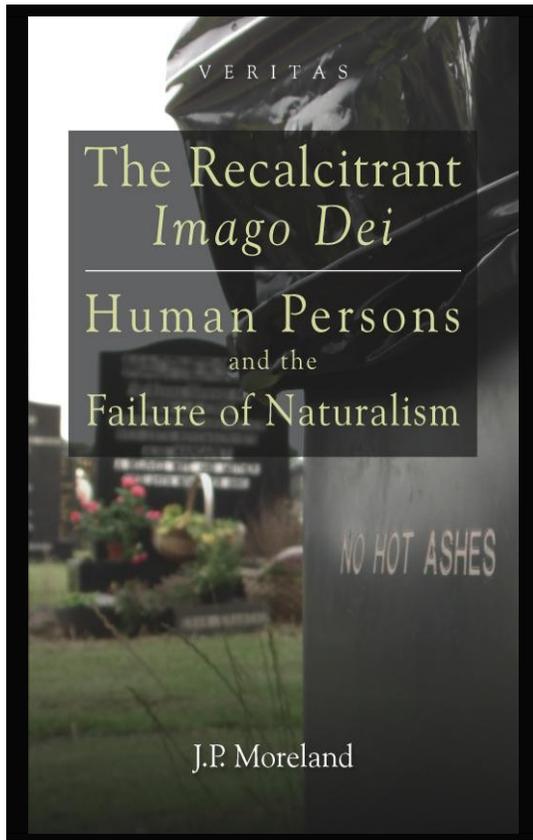
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# ***The Recalcitrant Imago Dei***

Human Persons and the Failure of Naturalism

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***The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*** is a compelling indictment of the worldview of naturalism concerning its failure to successfully account for the meaning and significance of human persons.

Written by one of the most distinguished philosophers of religion in North America, award-winning author J.P. Moreland harnesses the past twenty-five years of his scholarly work to bear upon the tenuous character of naturalism's incapacity to account for the basics of human existence and life, including the indispensable fact of human consciousness, libertarian freedom, rationality, a unified/simple self, equal and intrinsic value, and moral action.

In six well-researched chapters, Moreland shows that these facts falsify and do not support the worldview of naturalism, which has sown a devastating crisis in Western cultures. Theism, specifically Christian theism, argues Moreland, is a more compelling, truthful and explanatorily enriching vision about the human person.

**J. P. Moreland (Ph.D, Th.M.)** is the distinguished professor of philosophy at Biola University and a popular conference speaker in areas of Christian philosophy, theology, apologetics and spiritual formation. He has authored or co-authored over forty books, including *Christian Perspectives on Being Human, Body & Soul*, and *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, and *The God Question*.

His ideas have been covered from both popular religious and non-religious outlets, including the *New Scientist* and PBS's "Closer to Truth," *Christianity Today* and *WORLD* magazine. His scholarly offerings have frequently appeared in *Religious Studies*, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophia Christi* and dozens of other religious and philosophical journal outlets.

"J.P. Moreland's new book is a **tour de force**. . . . All open-minded-metaphysicians, philosophers of mind and philosophical theologians should read this book."

— **E. J. Lowe**, Professor of Philosophy, Durham University

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***The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* by J. P. Moreland  
is part of the Veritas Series from SCM Press**

The Veritas Series brings to market original volumes all engaging in critical questions of pressing concern to both philosophers, theologians, biologists, economists and more.

The series aims to illustrate that without theology, something essential is lost in our account of such categories – not only in an abstract way but in the way in which we inhabit the world.

The Veritas Series refuses to accept disciplinary isolation: both for theology and for other disciplines.

***The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*** offers a critical discussion of naturalism, the idea that all phenomena can be explained by the physical sciences.

## ENDORSEMENTS

### *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*

“Materialistic naturalism has, for some years, been the received wisdom in philosophy, as well as amongst much of the educated public. Many serious philosophical arguments have been brought against this ideology, but usually in a series of separate controversies. Professor Moreland's great service is to bring all these objections together, whilst adding his own original contributions, in a very effective anti-naturalist polemic. He shows us that the materialist world picture cannot accommodate the most basic phenomena of human life: It has no place for consciousness, free will, rationality, the human subject or any kind of intrinsic value. Materialism does not disprove these human realities, it is simply incapable of accounting for them in any remotely plausible way. I would add to the list of its failures that naturalism lacks even a coherent account of the physical world itself. Professor Moreland makes a very good case for saying that, as a serious world view, naturalism is a non-starter: more traditional, theistic philosophies fare much better in the face both of the phenomena and of argument.

— **Howard Robinson**, University Professor in Philosophy, Central European University, Budapest.

“J.P. Moreland's new book is a *tour de force*. In six clear, concise and tightly argued chapters, he raises profound objections to the attempts of modern naturalistic philosophers to accommodate human consciousness, free will, rationality, selfhood and morality within a purely physical world-view. He thereby significantly enhances the intellectual appeal of a theistic alternative. All open-minded-metaphysicians, philosophers of mind and philosophical theologians should read this book.”

— **E. J. Lowe**, Professor of Philosophy, Durham University

“*The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* is a wonderful read. Chapter by chapter, Moreland systematically sets forth how naturalism denies what is so obvious about ourselves, which is that we are conscious, rational souls that have the power to make undetermined choices for purposes. The power of the book lies in the way that it makes clear how human beings become unrecognizable once naturalism has worked them over. Through page after page of careful argument, Moreland shows all of us how deeply unnatural the naturalist account of ourselves is. “

— **Stewart Goetz**, St Ursinus College

“Moreland's book is a masterpiece of clear, compelling, accessible arguments against naturalism, and a powerful defense of a Christian understanding of persons. This should be required reading for anyone interested in the philosophy of human nature and the debate between theism and naturalism today.”

— **Charles Taliaferro**, St Olaf College

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*J. P. Moreland*

**J. P. Moreland (Ph.D, Th.M)** is an award-winning author, a distinguished professor at Biola University, and a popular conference speaker in Christian philosophy, theology and apologetics. He has authored or co-authored over forty books, including *Christian Perspectives on Being Human, Body & Soul*, and *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. His ideas have been covered from both religious and non-religious outlets, including the *New Scientist* and PBS's "Closer to Truth," *Christianity Today* and *WORLD* magazine. Moreland frequently writes and interviews on what it means to be a human person, the integration of science and religion, Darwinian evolution, and the worldview of naturalism.

### ***What J.P. Moreland says about***

#### **Worldview and Recalcitrant Facts**

"One of the roles of a worldview is to provide an explanation of facts, of reality the way it actually is ... In this sense, we call a worldview an explanatory hypothesis" (3)

A recalcitrant fact is one that is obstinately unco-operative in light of attempts to handle it by some theory. A theory may explain some facts quite nicely. But a recalcitrant fact doggedly resists explanation by a theory. No matter what a theory's advocate does, the recalcitrant fact just sits there and is not easily incorporated into the theory. In this case, the recalcitrant fact provides falsifying evidence for the theory" (4)

#### **The image of God**

"The Bible teaches that human beings are made in the image of God. This implies that there are things about our make-up that are like God ... As image-bearers, human beings have all those endowments necessary to re-present and be representative of God, and to accomplish the tasks placed before them and exhibit the relationality into which they were meant to live, such as endowments of reason, self-determination, moral action, personality and relational formation" (4)

#### **Recalcitrant Facts, the Image of God and Naturalism**

"Given the ontological nature of the image of God, among other things, this implies that the makeup of human beings should provide a set of recalcitrant facts for other worldviews. The reason behind this claim goes like this: If Christianity is true, then certain features should characterize human beings. Those features do, in fact, characterize human beings. Thus, these features provide a degree of confirmation for Christianity. They characterize God and, moreover, come from Him. He made us to have them. The Christian offers a challenge to other worldviews – particularly, naturalism: Show that you have a better explanation for these features than Christianity does (with its doctrine of the image of God), or show that these features are not actually real, even though they seem to be" (5)

#### **Consciousness and the Existence of God**

"A major burden in the pages to follow is to present and defend an argument that the existence of God is the best explanation for finite examples of consciousness in creatures such as human and various animals." (16)

“[Given scientific naturalism], if you begin with matter and simply rearrange it according to physical laws by means of strictly physical causes and processes, then you will end up with increasingly different arrangements of – you guessed it – matter. Start with matter and tweak it physically and all you will get is tweaked matter. This is especially true if the tweaking amounts to the rearrangement of the same entities into new external relations. There is no need or room for mind and consciousness to enter the picture. However, if you begin with the Logos, then Mind is the fundamental reality and its appearance in cosmic history is not an ontological problem as it is for the scientific naturalist” (17)

### **Libertarian Freedom and Naturalism**

“It is widely acknowledged that worldwide, the commonsense, spontaneously formed understanding of human free will is what philosophers call libertarian freedom: one acts freely only if one’s action was not determined – directly or indirectly – by forces outside one’s control, and one must be free to act or refrain from acting; one’s choice is ‘spontaneous’, it originates with and only with the actor” (41)

“[The theist] takes the fundamental being not to be particles, but a Person who is Himself a libertarian agent. Given that the theist starts with a Being who exhibits the ontological features of a libertarian free agent, it is not difficult to see how such features could be exhibited again at an appropriate time in the development of God’s created order. But the naturalist has to pull a rabbit out of a hat with no rabbit in it and without a Magician. That’s a pretty tall and dismal order” (52)

### **God, Rationality and Naturalism**

“Human persons are capable of acts of rational deliberation in which they reason through a chain of inductive or deductive premises and draw the proper conclusion. Whether it’s deliberating about the most reasonable way to invest money, function as a juror, or view the ontological argument for God, we engage in rational processes regularly and successfully. Given the ontology of such acts, it is easy to see how they could obtain in a theistic world because the fundamental level of being – God – exhibits this ontology himself. Since they are fundamental to reality, it is not hard to see how they could obtain at certain points in the creation, especially when those allegedly made in God’s image appear” (68)

### **The Existence of the Soul and Naturalism**

“Most philosophers agree that the vast majority of people throughout history have believed in a substantial, immaterial self/soul. Some form of dualism [compared to naturalism] appears to be the natural response to what we seem to know about ourselves through introspection and in other ways ... People don’t have to be taught to be dualists like they must if they are to be physicalists” (104)

### **Objective Morality, Intrinsic Value and Naturalism**

“These three features of the moral order

1. objective, intrinsic value and an objective moral law;
2. the reality of human moral action;
3. intrinsic human value and rights.

are very much at home in a biblical theistic worldview to say the least. But things aren’t so good for a naturalist worldview, and thoughtful naturalists have concluded that naturalism has its work cut out for it in accommodating these features. And many thinkers – naturalists and non-naturalists – have concluded that naturalism cannot, in fact, provide the epistemic and ontological resources for them. Indeed, for these thinkers, naturalism actually provides defeaters for these features” (143)

## FOR THE CLASSROOM

### *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*

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1. It is a resourceful text for upper undergraduate and graduate courses about
  - Philosophy of religion
  - Philosophical anthropology
  - Philosophy of mind
  - Dualism and naturalism
  - Metaphysics of human persons
  - Christian physicalism and theological anthropology
  - Comparative world religion approach to what it means to be human
  - Philosophy of consciousness
  - Philosophical ethics and naturalism
  - Libertarian freedom and determinism
2. It provides a well-researched, comprehensive guide and index into the contemporary criticism of the naturalistic view of human persons.
3. It is written by a Distinguished Professor of Philosophy with more than a couple decades of classroom experience and lecturing on the book's topics at universities, colleges and seminaries throughout North America
4. Each chapter stands on its own merit and so the book can be useful for select course readings on a specific topic or read together as a single presentation.
5. It reliably interacts with the major influencers on the topic of naturalism and the human person and it provides a handsome model of research on these matters.

## INTERVIEW

With J.P. Moreland

**In roughly 200 pages, you try to clarify, if not recapture, an emphasis on the *recalcitrant imago Deo*? Why this emphasis?**

In its doctrine of the image of God, the Bible teaches that the human constitution has features in common with God; we are like God in important respects. Namely, we have a will, consciousness, reason, etc. If Christianity is true, one would predict that alternative worldviews whose basic entity or entities are not spiritual would find these features of the human person recalcitrant, that is, hard to explain or explain away. And that is exactly what one finds, especially in connection with philosophical naturalism. If, in the beginning was the Logos, then, I claim, it is easy to see how six features of human persons could obtain—consciousness, libertarian freedom, rationality, a unified/simple self, equal and intrinsic value, and moral action of a certain sort. But if, in the beginning were the particles, then one cannot adequately account for these features, and reductive or eliminative strategies must be employed. I argue that these strategies are a failure, and, therefore, these six features provide rebutting defeaters for naturalism and confirmation (to a degree I specify) for biblical theism.

**What is the worldview of naturalism? Briefly state what it advocates.**

Naturalism has many incarnations, but if it is taken to be explanatorily superior to rival worldviews, then it may be fairly characterized according to a majority construal of it, which would be (1) a scientific attitude, which says that all that is real is physical and that knowledge is only that which can be detected by the sciences; (2) an origins account constituted by an event-causal story explains how everything has come-to-be as a result of combinatorial processes and rearrangements of micro-physical entities to form various structurally different macro-objects, and centered on the atomic theory of matter and evolutionary biology; (3) a strictly physicalist ontology that quantifies over and only over those entities that conform to (1) and (2). I argue in the book that the naturalist ontology cannot account for real substances (besides atomic simples if such there be) or genuinely emergent, *sui generis* properties, especially those constitutive of the six features mentioned above.

**Most public policy and pop cultural discussions about what it means to be human are largely shaped by the offerings of the hard or soft sciences. How is your approach different and why does that matter?**

The fundamental questions about the nature of human beings are these: Is consciousness real and is it non-physical? Do I have free will and, if so, what is it? How could human rationality be possible, and if it is, what does that tell us about the nature of the human person? Do I have a unified self that remains the same through change, or am I just an aggregate of parts? Do human persons have equal and high moral value, and if so, how could such a thing be the case? What is a moral action, and can human persons engage in such? None of these questions is capable of being formulated or answered by the hard and social sciences, because they are, one and all, descriptive and not prescriptive disciplines. They have nothing to say about what must be the case or what ought to be the case. The questions

listed above are all philosophical and theological questions. That is how I treat them in *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, and the answers I provide require philosophical and theological evaluation.

**Philosopher Howard Robinson (from Budapest’s Central European University) says that the “great service” of your book is that you cumulatively demonstrate *how* naturalism fails to give us an accurate account of some of the most basic fundamentals of human existence. Can you further unpack the failure of naturalism?**

I argue that the worldview of naturalism denies the objectivity of value, meaning in and to life, free will and responsibility, normative rationality, sameness of self through various changes, and the possibility of a ground for equal rights and moral action.

With an overreliance on the hard sciences, secularism reduces us to our brains, our wills to nerve reactions to inputs, our value to the dictates of the herd. In the process, we lose what is so special to us—our consciousness, freedom, rationality, self and value.

Naturalism has singularly failed to provide a plausible, deep analysis of human persons sufficient to account for who they are, how they can have value and purpose in life, and how they can flourish in a robust social and ethical way. As naturalist views of human persons proliferate, people turn to sex and entertainment, all centered on the satisfaction of immediate desire, as the rails upon which they run their lives. In turn, this generates passivity and all kinds of addictions.

**Does one have to buy into Christianity in order to buy into your view of the human person?**

One does not need to be a Christian theist to accept the analysis of human persons I defend in *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*. But if that analysis is accepted, then one is obligated to tell a story concerning how human persons could be this way. In other words, one does not get a free pass in their ontology of the human person. One has to tell a broad worldview story, including a creation account, within which that ontology is intelligible and plausible.

**In your book, you draw an important distinction between a “sensate culture” vs. an “ideational culture.” Can you expand upon what that distinction means and why it is significant?**

A sensate culture is one that believes only in the physical world that can be seen and touched. An ideational culture accepts the physical world but also believes in an unseen realm that can be known in other ways. Sensate cultures don’t last very long because they do not have the intellectual resources to sustain a vibrant cultural form of human flourishing. Sensate cultures degenerate into greed, dishonesty and conflicts over power. For example, it is not wide of the mark to locate the fundamental intellectual cause of our current economic crisis in the ubiquitous presence of a sensate culture in the contemporary West. By contrast, an ideational culture, especially a Judeo-Christian one, allows questions like these to be asked and provides a robust answer to them: Is there meaning to life and, if so, what it is? What is right and wrong? Is God real and is there life after death? What ought the state, public education, and other key institutions do and what role ought they play in a culture conducive to human

flourishing? What role ought wealth play in such a culture? None of these questions can even be asked, much less answered, from within a scientific, sensible perspective.

**Dominant worldviews – like naturalism and postmodernism – seem to have a significant footing in the culture at large (through the news media, entertainment, politics, and public policy) as a result of first being introduced in academic institutions. Is this correct?**

Yes. The universities and media are outposts for (and in the latter case, rumor mills on behalf of) naturalism. These institutions of power are overwhelmingly secular, and the worldview that dominates them is the naturalist one. I believe the sociological reason for this is that for too long Christians have been anti-intellectual and compartmentalized regarding their Christianity. But that is changing, especially in philosophy, New Testament studies and psychology.

**How can a robust view of the image of God positively shape public policy discussions in a society that increasingly views human being in ethnic and economic reductionistic ways?**

In a reductionist culture, human persons will be identified with things such as being an animal, sexual orientation, ethnicity, which are not the most important thing about us—that we are made in the image of God, or so I argue in my book. In a reductionist culture, free will and rationality disappear, and are replaced with biological and sociological determinism. Along the way, personal responsibility vanishes and social engineering at the hands of cultural elites achieves hegemony. My book stands against these trends.

**There appear to be noticeable examples of how the homogeneous supremacy of naturalism is actually starting to crack-up and break for some in Western academic circles. If that is the case, what is going on?**

For twenty years there has been an explosion of Christian philosophy in the academy, and the overwhelming majority of Christian philosophers are theistic realists in the sense that they take their Christian theism to have ontological and epistemological implications that do intellectual work in their field. In the next decade, the prominence of Christians in philosophy will expand even more, and a backlash is sure to precipitate. Scholars in other fields, especially theology and religious studies, would do well to take note of what is happening in philosophy and seek to learn from this phenomenon. *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* would be a good place to go to see an example of theistic realism at work.

**There is a constant theme in a lot of your writing: Christianity is a knowledge tradition. What is the significance of this claim for how Christianity is perceived in the culture?**

If Christianity were regarded as an alleged source of knowledge of reality, then its ideas would be taken seriously, put to the test, and evaluated rationally just like other alleged sources of knowledge. Knowledge, not faith, is what gives people the right to act responsibly in culture. Religious knowledge gives theological claims authority. In *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei*, I seek to re-establish theological claims about human persons as a reliable source of knowledge about their actual nature.

# Library Recommendation Form

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This book would be a valuable addition to the library's collection because

- It is written by one of the top cited philosophers of religion writing on naturalism, human personhood, Christian theism, and the interaction between science and religion
- It provides useful textbook material for courses in philosophy and religion
- It is well-researched and helpfully organized

Thus, I personally recommend *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* because

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