

CHAPTER 1

A Defense of Naturalism as a Defense of Secularism

Barbara Forrest

I.

*S*idney Hook believed that “philosophy is legitimately concerned with large problems of human affairs, that philosophers should have something to say to their fellow citizens.”¹ And indeed, Hook had much to say to his fellow citizens about two very important areas of human affairs: education and public policy. First a teacher, then a philosopher, and always a citizen who celebrated democracy as the necessary foundation of both education and philosophy, he saw education, philosophy, and public policy as organically related. Hook also knew the lessons of history, from which he learned that not only *his* intellectual interests as a pragmatic naturalist but those of his theistically committed opponents, with whom

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

he so loved to argue, were best served by a secular democracy. Arguing that the only reliable way to substantively advance knowledge was through the naturalistic methodology exemplified in science (referred to nowadays as *methodological naturalism*) and rooted in an empiricist epistemology reflecting our natural cognitive capabilities, Hook correspondingly held that a secular democracy was the best political safeguard of the freedom this methodology requires.² I maintain also that the converse is true, specifically, that a naturalistic methodology provides a defense of secularism in public policy. I specifically include here *educational* policy, in which sound cognitive procedures and principles are of paramount importance.

Secularism provides a framework for peaceful coexistence in a religiously pluralistic society. Although religious pluralism can exist, as in England, in a society with a state church, justice and equality demand that the church's political influence be so circumscribed either by law or custom (or both) that the government is functionally secular, that is, neutral with respect to religion. Any attempt to govern by overtly religious (or antireligious) principle leads to political inequities and social unrest, as attested by centuries of European history (and much recent history elsewhere). Robert Audi, in *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, outlines the problem for public policy when the state violates its religious neutrality: "Religion . . . can be a divisive force in democratic politics. . . . A holy cause can sanctify extreme measures. . . . Once the state favors the religious over the non-religious, . . . religious disagreements are likely to polarize government, especially regarding law and policy concerning religion."³ Given the compelling historical reasons for secularism, I see it as less in need of strenuous defense and will devote more time to the discussion of naturalism.

Although, in defending separation of church and state, Audi rightly notes the polarizing effect of religion in politics, the natu-

ralist points to a deeper rationale for separation: the conflicts engendered by religion are, at their deepest level, intractable epistemological conflicts. Humans have no known, common, cognitive faculties for knowing the supernatural. Moreover, of the ways in which people claim to acquire the knowledge of nature and society needed to navigate the problems of practical, social, and moral life, a naturalistic methodology is our only *common, public* way of acquiring this knowledge.⁴ Consequently, the knowledge of nature and society gained through the use of a naturalistic methodology, relying upon our common cognitive capabilities, is the only reliable basis for public policy in a secular democracy. And in no area of public policy is the epistemological aspect of the issue more important than in education.

Furthermore, naturalistic methodology is not intrinsically *anti-supernaturalist*. It actually preserves a metaphysical “neutral zone” while being necessary in a practical sense because of the lack of a methodology for testing supernatural claims. Indeed, we have no choice but to proceed naturalistically if any practical tasks are to be accomplished successfully. (I include making policy as a practical task; I am not speaking merely about solving technological problems.) For exactly the same reason, secularism is not properly understood as *antireligious* but as providing a religious neutral zone in *civic* life. It is necessary to civic life in a practical sense for the same reason that naturalistic methodology is necessary in science and other cognitive tasks: the methodological and epistemological deficiencies of supernaturalism. Since there is neither a methodology for testing supernatural claims nor an epistemology for knowing the supernatural, public policy should not be grounded at any level in theistic belief. The epistemological and methodological constraints within which we must work in order to understand nature and society are the same constraints within which we must construct public policy, especially educational policy.

In making this argument, I am actually resurrecting arguments Hook made over half a century ago.

II.

Hook pointed out that “The history of naturalism . . . has been marked by two main tendencies. The first has interpreted God in the same way as the great historical religions; *viz.*, as an omnipotent personal power who guides the destinies of the world He has created. . . . The second has reinterpreted the conception of God . . . to signify a principle of order in the universe, the totality of all things, the possibility of good in the world, or the object of human allegiance.”⁵ Since the first is the conception governing the religious lives of most theists, in arguing for the superiority of naturalism over theism as a basis for public policy, I use the terms *theism* and *religion* in the first sense, that is, as designating belief in a transcendent, supernatural deity. Audi lists the features of religion as most Westerners understand it:

1. Belief in one or more supernatural beings.
2. A distinction between sacred and profane objects.
3. Ritual acts focused on those objects.
4. A moral code believed to be sanctioned by the god(s).
5. Religious feelings (awe, mystery, etc.) that tend to be aroused by the sacred objects during rituals.
6. Prayer and other communicative forms of conduct concerning the god(s).
7. A worldview according adherents a significant place in the universe.
8. A more or less comprehensive organization of one's life based on the worldview.
9. A social organization bound together by (1)–(8).⁶

(For my purposes, 1, 4, 8, and 9 are especially important.) In addition, Audi lists the sources of religious obligation, which I include because of the role they may play in efforts by theists to shape public policy in light of them: “(1) scripture; (2) non-scriptural religious authority, especially that of the clergy, but including the relevant community, such as the . . . theological community . . . ; (3) tradition . . . ; (4) religious experience; and (5) natural theology,” the latter exemplified by Aquinas’s five arguments for the existence of God.⁷

Next, three descriptive terms must be kept distinct: (1) *religious*, which describes traditional belief in a supernatural deity and behavior consonant with such belief; (2) *secular*, which describes a neutral, or simply nonreligious, position with respect to religious belief; and (3) *antireligious*,” which describes an overtly hostile or antagonistic attitude toward religious belief and behavior consonant with such hostility. Those differences can be highlighted by looking at the respective ways in which they can be and have been manifested in public policy. Overtly religious public policy is openly and unambiguously founded on supernaturalism, that is, the acceptance of a transcendent deity who is the source of values and rules governing human conduct. (Such policy is the goal of many Religious Right political activists in the United States; their views are often unambiguously theocratic. Islamic theocracies provide a current example of overtly theistic public policy.) To the extent that public policy reflects theistic belief, public institutions will almost surely incorporate some body of doctrine considered exclusively true and will require conduct consistent with this doctrine. Such theistic government policy may also manifest itself in the persecution not only of nontheists, but of other *theistic* groups whose doctrinal commitments are unacceptable. Educational policy will reflect government-sanctioned orthodoxies.

On the other hand, *antireligious* public policy actively discour-

ages or prohibits the free exercise of religious belief, even in areas of life that do *not* affect people outside the religious group. Anti-religious policy is openly and unambiguously atheistic, as in the former Soviet Union and, currently, in the People's Republic of China. It is grounded in the outright *rejection* of supernaturalism and, correspondingly, in the rejection of supernatural rules governing human values and conduct. To the extent that public policy reflects state atheism, it, too, will almost certainly include some body of doctrine (e.g., Marxist-Leninist) considered authoritative over public institutions and private life. Institutions will reflect the government's hostility to religion, which can be manifested in the closing of churches, the harassment of believers, the imprisonment of clergy, and so on. In a hypothetical twist based on the current—and perennial—issue of American creationism (about which I shall speak shortly), antireligious public policy might prohibit the teaching of creationism in *religious* institutions, requiring instead that churches and sectarian schools teach evolution, or that they teach evolution along with creationism, or that they teach the controversies surrounding creationism.⁸

Secular democracies, however, refrain from enacting policies dictating the content of religious instruction in churches and sectarian schools. Such coercion would constitute the totalitarianism Hook abominated, though he himself was not religious. Contrary to the increasing tendency of the Religious Right to (mis)construe *secular* as *antireligious*, secular public policy is merely *not religious*, that is, neither justified by nor incorporating theistic belief.⁹ Nothing in the concept of secularism requires the rejection of theism. Properly understood, secularism connotes neutrality toward the content of religious belief and religious practice, though secular policy may properly proscribe certain instances of the latter. (Law and public policy may, for example, restrict religious *practices* that interfere with the rights of other citizens without thereby taking any

position on the beliefs sanctioning those practices.) Neutrality implies the freedom to adopt any religious, nonreligious, or even antireligious view that does not adversely affect one's fellow citizens. Secular public policy maximizes each person's freedom to embrace any preferred view, limited by the right of others not to support it either financially or behaviorally and the right not to live under policies constrained either by theism or atheism. Moreover, the government's disallowance of certain religious *practices* and of the incorporation of religious ideas in public institutions does not constitute *antireligious* policy. Not only are there practical and constitutional reasons for such disallowals, but, as I try to show, methodological and epistemological reasons as well.

The writers of the US Constitution designed such a secular democracy, although in practice it has at various times been *more or less* secular. (I would argue that we are presently experiencing one of the pendular swings away from secularism and that the religious neutrality of the US government is being compromised by the political influence of the Religious Right.¹⁰) In such a system, public policy should be determined by common needs, interests, and values; it should incorporate neither theism nor atheism but should protect an individual's (or a private organization's) right to embrace either. Secular democracy is not a doctrine but a political *methodology* for constructing policy according to constitutional procedures and principles. And insofar as the policy-making process is carried out within the constraints of our shared cognitive capabilities (as opposed to being based on appeals to intuition or religious revelation), it is a distinctly naturalistic process. The secular democratic process is the political analog of the naturalistic methodology employed in understanding the natural and social world and in successfully meeting the practical demands of life in that world.

The next clarification concerns what I mean by "naturalistic

methodology.” A methodology is a systematic procedure or set of procedures for answering a question and/or accomplishing a task, such procedure(s) reflecting a basic pattern of inquiry that is a unified response both to the objective features of a problematic situation and to the cognitive faculties and technical capabilities we bring to its resolution. By *naturalistic* methodology, I mean what is done generally, *but not exclusively*, in science: the search for natural explanations of what we experience in the world, using the common cognitive faculties that we know humans to have and that therefore make experience intersubjective. Most simply stated, these faculties are the ability to detect phenomena accessible to sense experience and the ability to reflect critically upon that experience, drawing conclusions using the well-established rules of logic and evidence. There are no known, common faculties for detecting anything that may lie beyond the reach of experience and of inferences grounded in experience.

Naturalistic methodology, in short, is *any* way of doing things that does not call upon or require the invocation of supernaturalist beliefs in order to get them done. Such methodology is employed in everyone's daily tasks, and it was in use long before the advent of modern science. Law enforcement officers, for example, whether theist or nontheist, if they are to do their jobs effectively, must conduct investigations by considering the features of the crime scene. Any hypotheses they construct regarding the identity of the perpetrator(s) must be consistent with these features and must adhere to accepted standards of evidence and reasoning. They do not rely upon their capacities for religious experience to find criminals, nor do lawyers in the prosecution and defense of those accused. Many such examples could be added to this one, but all would reveal a common (because successful) approach to carrying out such tasks: people assess the problems they face, draw from the information they have or gather more as they need

it, construct explanations of their situations and potential solutions to their problems, and then test their explanations and proposed solutions—that is, they try them out to see if they work. If they do, then these explanations and solutions are used to anticipate and forestall future problems. In short, naturalistic methodology is nothing other than what *both theists and nontheists already commonly do* in the course of daily life. Hook points out several features of naturalism that are relevant here:

[D]espite all the basic conflicts over the first principles of thinking or evidence, there are working truths on the level of practical living which are everywhere recognized and which everywhere determine the pattern of reasonable conduct in secular affairs, viz., the effective use of means to achieve ends. Rationality on this level is . . . so using the means and materials of the situation in which final causes are pursued as to achieve a maximum of functional adaptation between means and ends. . . . [S]cientific method is the *refinement* of the canons of rationality and intelligibility exhibited by the techniques of behavior and habits of inference involved in the arts and crafts of men; its pattern is everywhere discernible even when overlaid with myth and ritual.¹¹

Hook adds “that there is only one reliable method of reaching the truth about the nature of things anywhere and at any time, that this reliable method comes to full fruition in the methods of science, and that a man’s normal behavior in adapting means to ends belies his words whenever he denies it.”¹²

So is naturalistic methodology the application of *laboratory-like* procedures to vexing, complicated social and moral problems, devoid of any consideration of the uniqueness and complexity of human experience? Is it scientism? To answer affirmatively would be to misunderstand Hook, who would say that this is too rigid an

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

understanding even of science (since science also comprises more than just laboratory procedures). Naturalistic methodology assumes a more conscious, systematic, and stepwise form in science than in nonscientific contexts, but it is simply the *extension into* science, with appropriate adaptations, of ways of solving problems and constructing explanations already proven successful *outside* science. The rules of logic and evidence are the same in either context.

Naturalism has proven its mettle by making possible extraordinary advances in human knowledge. Secularism has made possible an extraordinary degree of civic harmony in the midst of great religious variety. But one hundred years after Hook's birth, both are under strenuous attack by people who, despite being their beneficiaries, are trying to derail them.

III.

When Hook wrote his essay "The New Failure of Nerve" in 1943, during World War II, he was apprehensive about the future of secular democracy. He feared for "liberalism as an intellectual temper, as faith in intelligence."¹³ He was worried not only about the war itself but about the response to it by some US intellectuals—a response he called the "new failure of nerve," that is, the failure of confidence in intelligence and the power of reason to resolve problems that lead to wars and the consequent turn to religion as the only sure salvation of society. As diagnosed by Hook, this failure manifested itself in many intellectuals' "abandoning the hard-won critical positions of the last few centuries."¹⁴ Hook saw the implications of the view that public policy must be buttressed by divine sanction and moral absolutes, namely, "that our children cannot be properly educated unless they are inoculated with 'proper' religious beliefs; that theology and metaphysics must be given a dominant

place in the curriculum of our universities; that churchmen should cultivate sacred theology before applying the social gospel; that business needs an inspired church that speaks authoritatively about absolutes . . . [and] that what is basically at stake in this war is Christian civilization.”¹⁵

If Hook were here now, he would no doubt be providing a similar analysis of the current “culture war” that has become the mantra of the Religious Right. Noting the latter’s rising influence on public policy, he would recall the prescient statement he made almost sixty years ago: “Fundamentalism is no longer beyond the pale; it has donned a top hat and gone high church.”¹⁶ He would point now to signs of what he saw in 1943 as “intellectual panic, heralded as portents of spiritual revival,” manifested in “the recrudescence of beliefs in the original depravity of human nature; prophecies of doom for western culture, . . . the frenzied search for a center of value that transcends human interests; . . . posturing about the cultivation of spiritual purity; . . . and a veritable campaign to ‘prove’ that without a belief in God and immortality, democracy—or even plain moral decency—cannot be reasonably justified.”¹⁷ Hook would today be sharpening his formidable polemical skills in response.

In 1943, Hook located most of such intellectual panic in the Protestant response to “Catholic agitation,” leading these panicked Protestants to “call for a society organized on [Protestant] Christian foundations.”¹⁸ According to Hook, if history and the internal characteristics of this response were reliable indications of the nature of a society thus organized, the state’s neutrality toward religion would be destroyed, and “Education would have to be purged of all freethinkers to prevent them from examining the ‘truths’ of religion as critically as the truths of other branches of knowledge. . . . The new orthodoxy . . . would require the contraction, if not the proscriptioin, of the scientific temper in order to diminish the hazards

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

of belief. The social usefulness of ideas to those who possessed power, and their comfort and consolation to those who did not, would become the criteria of accepted truth."¹⁹

The "new currents of Protestantism" that Hook then saw washing over the intellectual landscape were strikingly similar to conservative Christians' call today for the United States' return to its putatively Christian foundations: "These new currents of Protestantism which profess sincere acceptance of present day democracy employ arguments . . . [assuming] that modern democracy has been derived from, and can only be justified by, the theological dogmas of Hebraic-Christianity according to which all men are created by God and equal before Him."²⁰ Hook saw then, as he would see now, that some "religious groups are seeking, as they always have, to make of God an instrument of national policy."²¹

In 1949, when Hook wrote "Nature and the Human Spirit," his earlier concern was still active, but he observed that the "anti-naturalist movement" that in 1943 he had called "the new failure of nerve" had since "taken on the proportions of a tidal wave in philosophy, theology, literature and the philosophy of history":

Characteristic of . . . [the] views [of this antinaturalistic movement] are two beliefs: (1) that our time of troubles is primarily an historical and logical consequence of the abandonment of the religious and metaphysical foundations of Western civilization and of a shift to secular life; and (2) that what gives genuine happiness to man, and relief from the multiple alienations which fragmentize both personality and society, in the words of St. Augustine "is something which does not proceed from human nature but which is above human nature." And from these beliefs the criticism follows that naturalism in any form is incapable of doing justice to the actually experienced qualities of human life, particularly the nature of man's moral experience.²²

In the aftermath of the war, antinaturalism had not subsided but, according to Hook, had worsened, accompanied by a correspondingly stronger antiseccularism.

The intellectual panic Hook highlighted then is virtually identical to that now coming from similarly panicked people. Therefore, my defense of naturalism as a defense of secularism is rooted in a *new new* failure of nerve. It is today the failure of moderate and progressive, but also some conservative, intellectuals who, comfortable in the religious and political freedom of a secular, constitutional democracy, are paying insufficient attention to the panic of the Religious Right and its influence on public policy. The panic is coming from mostly, but not exclusively, Protestant evangelicals and fundamentalists (although there are examples from the Catholic right as well). It takes the form of an explicit rejection of both naturalism and secularism, typified but not exhausted by Religious Right leaders such as James Dobson, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and D. James Kennedy; by such organizations as the Family Research Council and the American Family Association; and by other cultural movements ideologically aligned with them.²³

Among the latter is the Discovery Institute–sponsored intelligent design (ID) movement, the newest manifestation of creationism, which has joined the Religious Right’s project of making naturalism and secularism the bogeymen of modern culture. Headquartered in the Center for Science and Culture, the Discovery Institute’s creationist subsidiary, ID has two primary goals: (1) to create in the public mind the idea that science (and, by extension, science education) is better governed by the principle of theistic rather than naturalistic explanation; and (2) to have this view incorporated into policy governing public education. To this end, ID proponents are urging boards of education to permit teachers to “teach the controversy” surrounding the theory of evolution (a cultural controversy that is nonexistent within science itself). More-

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

over, the movement's antinaturalism reflects its antiseccularism. One of its advisers, George Gilder, explicitly rejects secularism: "Secular culture is in general corrupt, degraded, and depraved. . . . I don't believe in secular culture."²⁴ (In rejecting secular culture, Gilder was specifically rejecting public education, sanctioning parochial schools as the only genuine educational system.) The movement's founder, Phillip E. Johnson, has written extensively about the spiritual dangers of sending American youth into secular universities doctrinally unequipped to deal with what he sees as the pervasive naturalism that threatens their religious faith.²⁵ Proponents of ID and the Religious Right in general are deeply distrustful of both science and secular culture. And it is this distrust that threatens ultimately to undermine not only the scientific underpinnings of American education but the secular underpinnings of democracy as well.²⁶

Many current antinaturalists are seeking influence over public policy by cultivating political connections. But I speak with special reference to the ID movement because it targets two institutions about which Hook cared deeply—public education and science, both of which thrive most effectively in a secular democracy. Intelligent design is not a scientific program but a political and religious movement; it cultivates followers among conservative Christians, whom its tactical document, "The Wedge Strategy," specifies as its chief constituency.²⁷ Its political goal is made explicit by Johnson: "[I]t is nearly inevitable that 'teach the controversy' will become public policy."²⁸ Its religious essence is expressed by the movement's leading apologist, William Dembski: "Indeed, intelligent design is just the Logos of John's Gospel restated in the idiom of information theory."²⁹ But ID proponents are also advancing their cause through the use of the secular media. And like other soldiers in the "culture war" (as they see themselves), ID has sought to influence one of democracy's most important secular processes: the

drafting of federal legislation concerning public education; and it urgently desires a chance to test its claims in a vital secular institution—the federal courts.³⁰

IV.

The ID movement's charges against naturalism boil down to two: (1) that its methodology rules out the supernatural, that is, God, a priori and (2) that having ruled out God, naturalism dismisses the need for transcendent, absolute moral truths, leading to moral relativism. The antinaturalism of the ID movement, which it shares with segments of the evangelical community (though not all evangelicals support either its aims or its message), is exactly the kind of antinaturalism Hook recognized in 1956, when he published "Naturalism and First Principles," prompted by "recent criticisms of naturalism which charge that it arbitrarily imposes its own canons of rationality or intelligibility on human behavior and therefore denies certain important truths about the world and human experience on a priori grounds."³¹ He specifies the truths that naturalism supposedly eliminates at the outset: "The most powerful opposition to naturalism comes . . . from those who fear that it arbitrarily excludes from the realm of existence and knowledge something which we actually have good reason to believe in, viz., God and man's immortal soul . . . because its first principles and categories of explanation are such as to make the very assertion of their existence meaningless. If true this charge would be serious indeed, for the naturalist professes to be open-minded about the possibilities of existence in a world in which his greatest efforts seem so modest in the cosmic scale."³²

Almost fifty years after Hook wrote "Naturalism and First Principles," this charge is precisely the one that Phillip Johnson,

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

founder of the intelligent design movement, today makes against naturalism in his effort to equate evolutionary theory with atheism: "The neo-Darwinian theory was discovered by a science that was committed a priori to methodological naturalism."³³ Johnson sees the latter as pervasive in American academia:

The domination of the intellectual world by naturalism has important consequences for the popular culture, where theism remains prevalent. The United States is formally a democracy, but on matters involving "religion" the Constitution is supreme, and the judges have the authority to say what the Constitution means. . . . The judges . . . get their education at the universities, and they normally interpret events in the light of what they have been taught. To the extent that they have learned to take a naturalistic understanding of reality for granted, they will tend to assume that persons who base their thinking on the premise that God is real are irrational and hence dangerous when they influence public policy.

Suppose that parents in a particular public school district want their children to be exposed to the arguments against the theory of evolution. . . . Those parents are unlikely ever to get their way. . . . The educational bureaucracies, backed by the courts, will make sure that "rationality" prevails. . . .

. . . Rational beliefs are . . . consonant . . . with reality, and in the intellectual world of today, reality means naturalism.³⁴

Johnson considers the secular educational process to be the seedbed of naturalism and the judicial system to be its culmination, from whence naturalism pervades US culture. In his view, the exclusive teaching of evolutionary theory, the product of science's naturalistic methodology, discriminates against religious believers because it excludes intelligent design. The clear implication of his antinaturalism is that he favors allowing *supernaturalism*, that is, theistic religion, a voice in the determination of both educational

and judicial policy; there *is* no other alternative to naturalism. Johnson persistently refuses to recognize the distinction between *methodological* naturalism and *ontological* or *philosophical* naturalism, the latter being a comprehensive, nontheistic worldview that, as Hook says, “generalize[s] the cumulative evidence won by the results of this method.”³⁵ For Johnson, however, the two are without any substantive distinction. He maintains that in teaching only the naturalistic *methodology* of science, without even mentioning *philosophical* naturalism, public schools in effect are promoting atheism. This charge is exactly the one Hook was concerned to address: “Are naturalists guilty of this kind of dogmatism?”³⁶

How is this issue as raised by the intelligent design movement related to the question of public policy? It is related in that precisely the fear that Hook described, which Johnson so persistently enunciates, is now fueling the Religious Right’s attempt to ground public policy in a “transcendent truth.” But Hook’s answer to the question he posed shows that when ID proponents charge that teaching only evolution is equivalent to government sanction of atheism, they make a significant mistake: they label a *secular* way of knowing as an *atheistic* way.

V.

Hook’s response to the antinaturalists’ charge that naturalism dogmatically excludes God reveals that a naturalistic *methodology*, which he pointed out was unavoidable even for theists, does not require the a priori assumption of *philosophical* naturalism, that is, naturalism as an ontology. The use of naturalistic methodology does not bind the philosophical naturalist a priori to any ontological category:

Naturalism is not committed to any theory concerning which categorical *terms* are irreducible or basic in explanation. Naturalists

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

differ among themselves about this in the same way that scientists may differ among themselves as to what terms in the language of science should be taken as primary. What all naturalists agree on is “the irreducibility” of a certain method by which new knowledge is achieved and tested. . . . It is a complete non sequitur to assume that because one asserts that the fundamental categories of description are X and Y and Z, and that they hold universally, he is therefore asserting that the world cannot be significantly described *except* in terms of X, Y, and Z, or as so many critics assume, that the world consists of “nothing but” X and Y and Z.³⁷

To the extent that naturalistic methodology is “irreducible,” Hook means it is the only workable methodology we *currently possess* for addressing questions of existential fact; some other methodology could certainly supplant it if the new methodology were equally or more successful at what the naturalistic one does. This is hardly dogmatism.

Indeed, according to Hook, such dogmatism would “remove the sting” from philosophical naturalism, in which criticism of theistic belief rests on the “weight of scientific discovery,” that is, the weight of evidence relevant to questions of existential fact. The metaphysical viability of theism (or any other ontological commitment) rests on its facticity; God’s existence is as much a question of existential fact as the existence of any natural entity. Thus the a priori denial of the possibility of theism would require ignoring the very thing upon which philosophical naturalism depends—evidence. The naturalist treats God’s existence as an important factual question rather than a question of mere semantics in which various definitions of God must compete for acceptance.³⁸ And since God’s existence is as meaningful and serious as any other factual question, the philosophical naturalist maintains that it must pass the same test as any other existential fact: the empirical test.

Intelligent design proponents recognize the legitimacy of this requirement by claiming that “intelligent design theory” *can* pass this test, thereby earning it entry into the public school science class. Dembski claims that the handiwork of a transcendent intelligent designer can be detected empirically.³⁹ (Ironically, if this were true, it would make the designer a *natural* entity, not the transcendent entity Dembski claims it is.) To Dembski and his creationist fellows, Hook would say, “If you have a workable methodology for detecting the supernatural, please produce it. And we must all be able to use your *supernaturalistic* methodology as successfully as we have used the naturalistic methodology in science.” Any uncertainty about whether theism can function as a principle of scientific explanation, warranting its inclusion in science instruction, would be instantly dispelled by producing a workable methodology for it and an intersubjective epistemology that enables us to justify supernaturalist truth claims.

But supernaturalism/theism has never been able to pass this test. As I remarked in an earlier essay, “Supernatural claims are existential claims . . . and so are subject to the same evidentiary requirements as claims about the natural order. . . . Yet despite this, . . . supernatural claims are beyond the reach of these requirements. *Paradoxically, supernatural claims are the kind of propositions for which empirical evidence is required, but impossible to obtain.*”⁴⁰ No methodology for resolving questions of existential fact is available other than the naturalistic one, which even theists must—and do—employ without protest in areas where the questions are less momentous. Since a supernatural designer by its nature is beyond the reach of scientific, that is, naturalistic, methodology, there is no possibility of doing the “theistic science” of intelligent design. Proponents of ID must produce a genuinely *scientific* methodology (and a corresponding epistemology) that are adequate to the verification of the designer’s existence. Until they do, neither intelligent design

nor any other antinaturalist position has any claim upon public policy, especially educational policy, in which the methodology and epistemology of cognition are of fundamental importance.

And in any case, antinaturalists' wholesale rejection of naturalistic methodology is logically inconsistent: the supernaturalist who invokes a transcendent, nonmaterial entity as an agent in natural processes cannot explain how such an entity can either instigate or influence these processes—the familiar supernaturalist dilemma of dualism. This dilemma forces even supernaturalists to explain physical processes by appealing to other physical processes—if they are concerned to *verify* their explanations. Moreover, a total rejection of naturalistic methodology is *practically* inconsistent because those who claim to reject it have no choice but to use it, even when, as Hook says, they punctuate its use with religious ritual and understand it conceptually within a wider, supernaturalist framework. Such necessity effectively *mandates* at least tacit acknowledgment of naturalism. When the theist wishes to find out why his lights have gone dark, he must employ a naturalistic methodology. He might pray or light a candle instead, but he would only delay the necessity of finding the problem. However, if he wishes to read the Bible by electric light rather than candlelight, he must inspect the breaker box and flip the switch. So even a thoroughgoing supernaturalist is, in a methodological sense, a naturalist, at least where such routine practical problems are concerned. The only difference between the philosophical naturalist and the theist lies in the way their paths diverge once they move beyond methodology to ontology.

Although the philosophical naturalist does not do so, the theist can consistently view (and implement) a naturalistic methodology as a way of understanding what he views as a divinely created universe. The philosophical naturalist's reasons for *not* seeing the world this way do not stem merely from reliance upon a naturalistic

methodology but from other considerations, such as the *absence* of any methodology for detecting the supernatural, the problem of evil, etc. Hook points out, “Naturalism, as a philosophy, is a systematic *reflection upon, and elaboration of*, the procedures man employs in the successful resolution of the problems and difficulties of human experience” (emphasis added).⁴¹ So philosophical naturalism is a product not of the mere employment of naturalistic methodology but of inferences based on the knowledge it yields *in combination with* other considerations. Reflecting *philosophically* upon what naturalistic methodology yields, the believer may indeed conclude that the universe is the product of a creator, or an “intelligent designer.” The philosophical naturalist will view this conclusion not as a logical inconsistency but as simply the acceptance of a superfluous, evidentially unsupported *ontological* category.

The naturalist realizes, however, that failure to pass the existential tests, that is, the methodological and epistemological ones, does not thereby eliminate the *logical* possibility of God, even if the naturalist also believes that the *existential* possibility is negligible (note: “negligible” does not mean null). And because it does not nullify the logical possibility of theism, according to Hook, naturalist methodology actually preserves for theism an ontological category unavailable to atheism—the supernatural—which may be embraced, albeit without the benefit of scientific evidence. And it is both an existentially and semantically meaningful category, even if the naturalist does not consider it an evidentially supportable one. Atheism, on the other hand, has no categories beyond nature to which to appeal. Atheists must find existential meaning in the natural realm (a task that atheists affirm they can and do meet).⁴²

The point, however, is that naturalistic methodology leaves the theistic question on the table, and this point absolves the naturalist of the antinaturalist’s charge that the supernatural is ruled out a priori. The naturalist is in no position to deny theistic claims, as I

have pointed out elsewhere: “Methodological naturalism does not disallow the logical possibility that the supernatural exists. To assert categorically that there is no dimension that transcends the natural order is to assert that human cognitive capabilities are sufficient to survey the whole of what there is; such a claim would amount to epistemological arrogance.”⁴³ So not only are theists within their *political* rights in choosing to situate their secular lives conceptually within the framework of theistic belief, but naturalistic methodology also preserves rather than destroys the logical space within which they include the sacred above the mundane.

Correspondingly, functioning as citizens in the secular sphere does not require people to suspend their theism, which Robert Audi properly points out: “The relevant kind of thinking in secular terms does not require suspending one’s theism, at least for any kind of theism of major importance in the world today. Even if one thinks of everything as created by God or under God’s sovereignty, one will have ways of referring to people and (non-religious) things without mentioning God, and one can appeal to moral principles—including the ethical imperatives among the Ten Commandments—without depending on religious descriptions. This is entirely compatible with taking those principles to depend on God as much as anything in the Creation.”⁴⁴ Audi is referring specifically to theists’ obligation as citizens to provide adequate secular reasons for public policies they propose even when they also have religious reasons. (This, in effect, is what ID proponents purport to be doing when they claim that their pedagogical proposals are based on science.) Fulfilling this obligation need not jeopardize religious belief, since it is possible for a policy to be simultaneously justifiable on *both* secular and religious grounds. For example, one might support an aid program for the poor for both secular and religious reasons. However, offering secular reasons has the advantage of making a proposal attractive to people outside one’s religious group by

giving them reasons they can accept, whereas using religious reasons tends to alienate them. Audi affirms, “As the Commandments themselves illustrate, one can take a standard having secular content to be theologically grounded without its cogency as providing a secular reason being undermined in the least.”⁴⁵ Naturalistic methodology, therefore, is not an *antireligious* or atheistic methodology but a *nonreligious*, that is, a *secular*, methodology. Indeed, far from spelling the a priori negation of religious belief, both naturalistic methodology and secular public policy function as preservatives of it by leaving a space for it to exist: naturalism leaves a logical space, and secularism a civic space.

Another advantage of determining secular public policy according to the operating principles of a naturalistic methodology is the latter’s intrinsic fallibilism. Public policy thereby incorporates the same process of self-correction as science. Moreover, secularism requires as a *civic* virtue the kind of justification for public policy that naturalistic methodology requires in science as an *epistemic* virtue: publicly accessible, evidentially adequate reasons.⁴⁶ Audi, having argued for the obligation to present such reasons, believes that once “mature, rational, religious” people recognize the potential for conflict stemming from religious belief, they will surely become fallibilists, open to the need for possible revision in their religious views.⁴⁷ Although Audi is generally correct, fallibilism is not a notable feature of the Religious Right or, indeed, of theocratic movements in general. And it is this unwillingness to consider their own fallibility, along with their insistence on founding government on religious absolutes, that produces the intolerance so characteristic of such movements and the resulting need for secular methods of making public policy.⁴⁸

Naturalistic methodology, with its emphasis on experience as the epistemological touchstone for framing judgments about the world, must therefore be the working methodology of secular democracy.

We have no way of adjudicating the claims of discordant religious voices when those claims emanate from purportedly transcendent sources. We cannot base public policy on a foundation that produces discord that, by its very nature, is beyond resolution. A naturalistic operational approach to making public policy therefore precludes relying, either openly or covertly, upon supernatural sanction. A secular democracy requires a naturalistic methodology as its procedural protocol in the construction of public, including educational, policy.

VI.

As we have seen, the reliance upon a naturalistic methodology does not logically entail the acceptance of philosophical naturalism; it therefore need not nullify or prohibit the theist's functioning as a citizen in secular society while remaining a theist. Correspondingly, living in a secular society does not entail living every aspect of one's life in a secular way (for example, it does not logically preclude church attendance, the observance of religious ritual, or prayer). The use of naturalistic methodology in the public, secular sphere leaves one free to pursue whatever putative alternative methodologies, values, and ultimate explanations one wishes (though Hook argued that there are only *penultimate* explanations)⁴⁹ provided the lives of one's fellow citizens are not thereby constrained. Just as theistic religion may complement naturalistic methodology by addressing areas of concern beyond the reach of that methodology, so theistic religion may complement secular life by offering guidance in areas that lie beyond the proper reach of public policy. It may also incorporate a code of moral conduct that the believer sees as integral to religious life. However, antinaturalists insist upon the much stronger view that morality *must* have a theistic foundation, that naturalism is incapable of providing a foundation for anything except moral relativism.

Hook's remarks point again to the parallelism between the criticism of naturalism a half-century ago and that coming from the Religious Right today: "The most common objection to naturalistic humanism is not that it has no place for moral experience but that it has no place for an *authoritative* moral experience except one which rests merely on arbitrary preference, habit or force. In consequence, it is accused of lapsing into the morass of relativism despite its desire to discover inclusive and enduring ends which will enable human beings to live harmoniously together."⁵⁰

So after the epistemological and methodological issues surrounding naturalism have been dealt with, the question arises of how naturalists propose to ground the moral principles that they agree are as important as the epistemological and methodological ones. Indeed, Phillip Johnson sees naturalism in education as the *source* of moral relativism:

The combination of [naturalism's] absolutism in evolutionary science and relativism . . . in morals perfectly reflects the established religious philosophy of late-twentieth-century America. [Johnson views naturalism as a government-sanctioned religion.] Naturalism in science provides the foundation for liberal rationalism in morals, by keeping the possibility of divine authority effectively out of the picture. Belief in naturalistic evolution is foundational to a great deal else, and so it can hardly be presented as open to doubt. The schools accordingly teach that humans discover the profound truth of evolution but they *invent* moral standards and can change them as human needs change.⁵¹

Hook's response to the charge of relativism is that the principles and values guiding human conduct are grounded in their consequences; they are not self-justifying. This does indeed make them relative rather than absolute, but to say that moral values are relative means neither that they are subjective nor that they are arbitrary.⁵²

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

Rather, it means simply that they are “related to” or “dependent upon” relevant, significant features of a moral situation. As a pragmatist, Hook argues that the value of any idea, whether a hypothesis guiding scientific research or a moral principle guiding human conduct, must be measured against its consequences. And as a naturalistic humanist, he used human well-being as the criterion against which consequences must be weighed. This criterion requires that moral principles be judged by whether they are *humane* rather than whether they are *doctrinally* acceptable under a governing religious orthodoxy. If the goal of moral conduct is to enhance the quality of human interaction, then human welfare is a better standard than religious orthodoxy, which has a significantly worse historical track record. If the antinaturalists who insist that public policy be grounded in transcendent moral absolutes disagree, then, as a pragmatist, Hook would suggest that the strength of their disagreement be tested by their willingness to allow other theists who insist on the very same point, for example, the Taliban, to determine the moral values under which they themselves must live.

But may not moral values be founded upon religious belief? They may indeed, but they may not be the basis for public policy on the basis of an exclusively religious justification. Although they may have strong religious justification, they must coincide with humane values for which, as Robert Audi stipulates, one can offer adequate, secular reasons that recommend themselves just as strongly to people of deep religious conviction:

As important as civic virtue is in motivating citizen participation of any kind, it is needed above all where one is advocating or otherwise supporting coercive laws or public policies. Much of human life does not involve such conduct; much that does can be guided by cooperating religious and secular motives, motives that, like secular compassion and religious benevolence, urge one to roughly the same conduct. It is often noted how powerful reli-

gious considerations were in motivating the civil rights movement. Their prominence should not lead to underplaying the force of moral convictions entirely compatible with them, nor to thinking that those whose motivation might have been entirely religious would have been incapable of seeing and being adequately motivated by a moral case for the same social changes.⁵³

This is not to deny that religion has made valuable contributions to the moral advancements of human society. But when it has done so, it has been because the values it recommended were those of inclusion rather than exclusion, desirable regardless of the doctrinal loyalties of its adherents. Catholics made admirable contributions to the civil rights struggle, but so did Jews, and so did atheists. In addition to the fact that racial harmony is a value embraced by enlightened theists, it is also a humane *secular* value that has advanced the well-being of a significant number of Americans. But there was no intrinsic connection between these values and the supernatural commitments of the religious believers who advanced them. Indeed, many theists, for example, Southern Baptists, invoked the same God as the Catholics but on behalf of continued segregation.

Antinaturalists who charge that naturalism has generated the worst of the world's evils must confront the record of history, which reveals an unflattering frequency of religious atrocity. To those who argue that secular government cannot embody the moral principles constitutive of a just society, one can point out that there is no more reason to consider a secular government *prone* to injustice and evil than there is to consider a theocracy *immune* from injustice and evil. Both are *logical* possibilities, but while there actually occurred a glaring historical example of the former, one is hard-pressed to find a historical example of the latter. To the extent that a government—or even a church—incorporates principles of justice, there are perfectly sound reasons to do so that have nothing to do with theology. Hook cited the example of Reinhold Niebuhr.

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

Speaking in 1943 of the fact that various religious groups had reached opposite positions on the war on the basis of the *same* religious premises, Hook cited the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr as an example of the irrelevance of religious belief when used as a “universal coefficient” of other beliefs. Saying that Niebuhr combined a “scientific attitude and rare courage” on social issues with a “rather reactionary theology,” Hook pointed out that “not a single one of the positions that Niebuhr takes on the momentous issues of social and political life is dependent on his theology.”⁵⁴ He highlighted this irrelevance by observing that Niebuhr seemed to appeal to his theology only “in situations where values and partial interests are locked in mortal combat.”⁵⁵ Hook offered instead the naturalistic methodology on which even theists must rely, both in the solution of practical problems and in the civic space outside their faith:

[I]n the history of thought it has been the naturalists who have exposed the pretensions of final truths and who have uncovered the nerve of interest behind the absolute values of church, state, and conscience. Science has known its dogmatism, too. But the cure of bad science is better science, not theology. . . .

. . . Against Niebuhr's myth of a private and mysterious absolute, we counterpose the public and self-critical absolute of reflective intelligence or *scientific method in its most comprehensive sense*. By evaluating claims in light of their causes and consequences, it makes clear the interests from which they spring, and the meaning of what they propose. By guiding us to the construction of a social order whose institutions provide for the negotiation and compromise of claims on the basis of the completest knowledge available, it promises not absolute security but greater security. It does not pretend to make men gods but to treat more intelligently the problem always at hand. . . . How to get men to accept this absolute method—and to test it by its fruits, not only in the realm of nature but of human affairs—is a specific problem of scientific politics and education concerning which theology can tell us nothing.⁵⁶ (emphasis added)

The central fact for which the antinaturalist must account is that millions of people who *reject* supernatural religion live in as moral and meaningful a fashion as most of those who embrace it. Conversely, countless people, despite declaring moral values to be rooted in transcendent absolutes, have been quite willing to violate those absolutes in the most inhumane ways. Religion alone has never been a sufficient condition of humane behavior.⁵⁷ And it has not been true historically, nor does it follow logically, that understanding values to have a nontheistic origin in itself leads to immoral behavior. The truth in such matters is far more complex. There is no logical, and therefore no epistemological, connection between the acceptance of any particular supernaturalist belief and any particular moral position.

The agnostic Hook also pointed out what the theistic Kant recognized: that “the position that the validity of moral judgments rests upon transcendental truths of a metaphysical or theological nature” destroys the autonomy, and therefore the moral responsibility, of human moral agency.⁵⁸ Moreover, this recognition comes in addition to the historical and logical obstacles faced by theists who contend that both history and logic support the superiority of an absolutist, theistic foundation for public policy. Hook correctly points out that there is no guarantee that transcendent, absolute moral principles will in any way address the temporal situations humans face: “Any attempt to find a basis to improve the human estate by resort to a principle ‘above human nature’ is doomed to failure. . . . Ideals and ends that are out of time and so lack a natural basis can never be brought into logical and causal continuity with the means recommended to achieve them, for all such means are temporal acts with temporal consequences.”⁵⁹ This observation would still be true even if the epistemological problem of knowing what these transcendent absolutes are could be overcome.

Hook thus recommends naturalistic humanism as a foundation

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

for moral conduct for the same reason he recommends naturalistic methodology and secular democracy: there is a greater chance of reaching consensus when we rely on common ways of knowing and of shared values, whereas there is no chance of doing so when moral values are rooted in contrary absolutes for which people are prepared to die—or to kill. Reflecting upon the strident admonitions of the Religious Right that the United States must retrieve its lost moral moorings by restoring the Christian foundations of government, I think Hook would today compare the advances of the sciences, both natural and social, to those of the various supernatural religions, making the same point he made in 1942:

The social principles of Christianity have had almost two thousand years in which to order the world on a moral basis. It is not likely that anything new can be discovered from its principles or that its social gospel will succeed better in eliminating war, social distress, and intense factional strife, than it did during the historical periods in which religious institutions enjoyed chief authority. And when we examine the behavior and doctrines of different religious groups as they meet the trials of our world today, the impression is reinforced that there is no more unity of purpose among them, no more agreement in program and direction of effort, than among their secular brethren. But whereas the latter may rely upon a method by which to limit, adjudicate and negotiate the differences among them, the former must absolutize their differences if they are consistent.⁶⁰

One might wonder *why* the various religious factions are still in the same place they were when Hook thus described them sixty years ago, when other areas of human inquiry are so far beyond where they were sixty years ago. The answer lies precisely in the fact that science, and all other naturalistic areas of inquiry, rely upon a methodology and epistemology that have no rivals in

enabling us to answer the questions and solve the problems of human experience. The fact that naturalistic methodology cannot answer supernatural religious questions does not thereby obviate the need for it in *secular* life and practice. It simply highlights further the continuing lack of any comparable methodology and epistemology to answer the questions inevitably generated by supernatural belief systems—whether Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or any others. The most radical sects and the most mainstream, to the extent that they both rely on supernatural sources of authority, are in exactly the same epistemological position. Western theists, for example, may argue that however strongly the Taliban asserted supernatural sanction for their brutality, their assertions cannot be true: God cannot be on the side of people who resort to cruel punishments for the most trivial of social violations. However, when Western theists try to ground morality in supernaturalist religion, they can only appeal to the same sources as the Taliban for justification: scripture, tradition, divine revelation, clerical authority, and religious experience.

This common feature leads only to stalemate—and sometimes to violence—when religion is incorporated into public policy, a predicament that is not difficult for policy makers to understand, although other considerations may lead them to ignore it. But we should not build public policy on any beliefs regarding which there can be no epistemological consensus. And if policy makers fail to be impressed by the epistemological arguments, we may point to more pragmatic concerns expressed by Thomas Clark in “Faith, Science, and the Soul: On the Pragmatic Virtues of Naturalism”: “[F]or many there are fundamental ‘facts’ about what exists that have nothing to do with observation, and there is nothing I can say that would convince them otherwise. The prospect looms, therefore, of two distinct cultures fighting over the same bit of ontological turf—but without enough in common ever to decide the con-

test. Such a picture has its own sort of melancholy appeal, if one likes perpetual combat.”⁶¹

It is at the epistemological level, at which supernaturalists must show *how they know* what they insist must ground public policy, that the insufficiency of supernatural religion as this grounding becomes quite clear. And Hook points us once more to the advantages of relying upon the epistemology and the methodology of naturalism: “What is common to all forms of empiricism is the belief that truth is an affair of observational consequences. Although the hypothesis may turn out to be false, it is not unreasonable to assume that where men are willing to test their beliefs not by their alleged presuppositions, but by their observable consequences, they will probably be more willing to compromise their demands, to negotiate differences, to take the standpoint of the other, to live together and help each other to live rather than to fight and die together.”⁶²

But although the naturalist advocates that we continue in the moral context to abide by the rules of reasoning and evidence that we use in nonmoral contexts, these provide only the methodological framework for moral agency. Its content must always come from the factors relevant to the situation from which a moral problem springs and from the needs and interests of the human beings who stand to be affected by whatever decisions are made. And if naturalists lack supernal absolutes to support their moral judgments, they have a rich fund of philosophical resources from which to construct a conceptual moral framework. The naturalist can point to many good and honorable traditions from which to draw guidance in ways that are entirely secular. There is the utilitarian tradition, which requires that we consider the effects of our actions on others. Naturalists may also call upon the Kantian tradition, which requires that we treat our fellow humans as ends rather than means and that we accord them the dignity rooted in their own moral agency as rational beings. They can invoke pre-

Christian moral traditions such as Plato's belief that moral value is integrally related to knowledge and Aristotle's instruction in how to live with moral equilibrium and equanimity. All are compatible with theism. And naturalists may certainly adopt the best ethical teachings of the great religions, for they are entirely consonant with the best secular teachings and require no divisive doctrinal commitments: the Christian exhortation to love one's neighbor as oneself; the Jewish emphasis on active goodness, the *mitzvah*; the Islamic pillar of concern for the needy; and the Buddhist way of speaking truthfully and compassionately.

VII.

So what does all this mean regarding the methodology appropriate to the construction of public policy? The fact that there is (so far) no epistemology that explains how one acquires knowledge of the supernatural and no known methodology for testing supernatural claims implies that theists cannot justifiably demand that others be constrained by policies grounded in their theism. It also means that the *philosophical* naturalist has every right to demand an epistemological accounting for the theist's beliefs when such demands are made. In a secular democracy, it may well be true that theists who desire that public policy reflect their beliefs are asked to exercise more restraint than others in the arguments they offer for their policy positions. But for all the reasons cited above, this is altogether proper. The respect that any religion demands is directly proportional to the humility with which it asserts the truth of its doctrines. Although theism is entitled to the political respect accorded by the Constitution, it is not entitled to automatic epistemological respect in the absence of any method for verifying its foundational commitments. Hook rightly asserted, "Religion can

escape showing its credentials concerning the inspiration of its knowledge but not concerning its validity. For the reliability of any knowledge is tested in the necessities of intelligent action. That test, together with the varying counsel of the Churches on specific social policies, is sufficient to indicate that there is no unique religious knowledge or religious guidance.”⁶³ The lack of epistemological grounding for the supernatural therefore explains why it would be both bad pedagogical policy and bad public policy to teach as science intelligent design proponents' view that biological complexity requires a transcendent designer—whose existence cannot be *scientifically* established.

To the extent that theists ground their reasoning on public policy in their theism, they bear the ontological burden of proof; this burden compounds their civic responsibilities with an epistemological responsibility that no theist has ever been able to discharge. But their inability heretofore to meet this burden is not a reason to make secular democracy *less* secular in order to accommodate their theistic preferences, but rather to maintain its secularity in order to protect the rights of those who are under no obligation to live under theistically grounded policies that ignore the theist's burden of proof.

Theists who have not reached what Audi calls a state of “reflective equilibrium” will undoubtedly find this too restrictive. But the feeling of excessive constraint is the product of the theist's own supernaturalist commitments, to which no one is under any obligation to give any consideration until the theistic burden of proof is met. (But even if the burden of proof *could* be met, this would not mean that theism should be institutionalized in public policy.) However, *theism* per se is not being singled out for such constraint; anyone else whose public-policy positions depend on unverifiable claims reaching beyond common experience should receive the same response. Hence, paranormal claims would be subject to the same

constraints where public policy is concerned. We do not incorporate into school science curricula the assertions of psychics for the simple reason that their claims remain resistant to scientific scrutiny; theistic claims have exactly the same epistemological status, even though they are accorded more social respect than those of psychics. Grounding public policy in overt atheism is also off limits for exactly the same reason: atheism cannot meet its epistemological burden of proof, a predicament that helps to explain why government-sponsored atheism such as existed in the former Soviet Union had to be implemented through enforced curtailment of religious practice.

To the extent that one does *not* inject one's religious beliefs into public-policy debates, one is less likely to feel restricted and therefore less likely to complain about the secularity of public policy. Among religious believers, those who understand that naturalistic methodology is not intrinsically antireligious and who have consequently achieved some equilibrium between their religious beliefs and their public-policy positions are less likely to feel constrained by secular public policies than are believers who reject naturalistic methodology as inherently antireligious. Secular public policy does *not* mean that religious voices should be silenced in the "public square," but it *does* mean that theism should *not* be incorporated into public policy. If the methodological naturalist is in no position to deny theistic claims, the theist is in no position to insist on them, that is, to insist that they be privileged in matters of public policy. By the same token, because we must limit the use of naturalistic methodology to the world of common experience, thus preserving a logical space for theism, we must limit the breadth of secular policy, preserving a zone of religious belief and practice.

The *philosophical* naturalist should find this completely agreeable. The methodology and epistemology of naturalism establish both the limits and the necessity of its employment as the methodology of democratic policy-making in a religiously pluralistic society.

VIII.

I am not proposing a societal conversion to philosophical naturalism (although it is an honest and eminently respectable point of view, despite the charges of antinaturalists). Not only will that never happen, but American and international life would lose much of the interest and cultural richness that come from religious variety. However, some attempt must be made to rehabilitate in the public mind the reputation of the naturalistic methodology upon which humans—even naturalism's detractors—have *always* relied and still rely, despite the current campaign to make “naturalism” a term of reprobation. Contrary to the Religious Right's theocratic rhetoric, the Founding Fathers had compelling historical reasons—indeed, life or death reasons—for adopting a secular constitution. But as I have argued, there are also compelling epistemological and methodological reasons for maintaining the secular foundation of public policy. The methodology of naturalism has advanced human knowledge in a way that religion has not (it is useful here to compare the knowledge yielded by this methodology in the sixty years since Hook wrote “The New Failure of Nerve” to the knowledge yielded by supernaturalism). Everyone can use it, and it leaves theists the option to make whatever additional, logically coherent ontological commitments they choose (though they also have the *political* freedom to make even logically *incoherent* commitments). Likewise, secular life is something that can be shared by theist and nontheist alike, in which each may function with broad, but not absolute, freedom. But we must restore our nerve, with Hook's prescient admonitions to guide us: “The new failure of nerve in contemporary culture is compounded of unwarranted hopes and unfounded beliefs. It is a desperate quest for a quick and all-inclusive faith that will save us from the trouble of thinking about difficult problems. These hopes, beliefs and faiths pretend to a knowl-

edge which is not knowledge and to a superior insight not responsible to the checks of intelligence. The more fervently they are held the more complete will be their failure.”⁶⁴

NOTES

1. Sidney Hook, *Philosophy and Public Policy* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), p. 5.

2. Instead of *methodological naturalism*, which has become associated with scientific procedure in the strict sense, I shall use the term *naturalistic methodology*, which captures the broad connotation of the term Hook intended.

3. Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 3–4, 39. Audi himself is a Christian; he is currently the president of the Society of Christian Philosophers. (See the list of officers at www.siu.edu/departments/cola/philos/SCP/officers-committees.htm; accessed on March 22, 2004.) He acknowledges that “secular disputes can also polarize” but says that “other things [being] equal they have less tendency to do this or at least to produce irreconcilable differences” (p. 39). A notable example of how divisive religion can be when it is entangled with government is the reaction by the Family Research Council, a prominent US Religious Right organization, when a Hindu priest was invited to give the prayer at a September 2000 session of Congress. The September 21, 2000, FRC newsletter *Culture Facts* conveyed this reaction to readers (and was quickly taken offline after it prompted criticism): “[W]hile it is true that the United States of America was founded on the sacred principle of religious freedom for all, that liberty was never intended to exalt other religions to the level that Christianity holds in our country’s heritage. Our Founders expected that Christianity—and no other religion—would receive support from the government as long as that support did not violate peoples’ consciences and their right to worship. They would have found utterly incredible the idea that all religions . . . be treated with equal

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

deference. . . . As for our Hindu priest friend, the United States is a nation that has historically honored the One True God. Woe be to us on that day when we relegate Him to being merely one among countless other deities in the pantheon of theologies." Quoted in Steve Benen, "Invocation Intolerance," *Church and State*, November 2000, available at the Internet Archive at <http://web.archive.org/web/20030624181657/http://www.au.org/churchstate/cs11001.htm> (accessed April 5, 2004). An example of intragovernmental divisiveness stemming from the government's sponsorship of the congressional chaplaincy itself occurred only the previous year, when a Protestant minister was selected over a Catholic priest to fill the vacant position. See Rep. J. Dennis Hastert and Rep. Dick Armey, "Joint Letter to Republican Members Regarding Selection of the House Chaplain," Speaker of the House Web page, <http://speaker.house.gov/library/misc/991210chaplainlr.asp> (accessed March 22, 2004). See Juliet Eilperin, "Appointment of Chaplain Splits House," *Washington Post*, December 3, 1999.

4. Moral questions, though necessarily requiring us to work also from evaluative premises that are not statements of existential fact, nonetheless are related in important ways to the factual information we have at a given time. An example is the status of homosexuality: is it a moral choice, or is it an unchosen identity that some people—often against their will and upbringing—find themselves to have? If science establishes a genetic basis for homosexuality, such findings will have profound implications for how we view it morally. It would be no more acceptable to condemn homosexuals for their sexual identity than it is to condemn people of color for their racial identity.

5. Sidney Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," in *The Quest for Being* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), p. 190.

6. Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, p. 35.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 117. I am not immediately concerned with religions that fall outside these parameters. Audi says, "Non-theistic religions (if indeed there are such in any full-blooded sense of 'religion') pose—other things being equal—far less serious church-state problems. This is in good part because theistic religions tend to be in certain ways authoritarian" (p. 34).

8. This hypothetical example reflects in reverse the history of US

creationism, which evolved from attempts to outlaw the teaching of evolution in public schools to attempts to require the teaching of creationism along with evolution to the current attempt by the “intelligent design” movement to persuade school officials to allow teachers to “teach the controversy” surrounding evolutionary theory. See Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1992). For background on the most recent form of creationism, “intelligent design theory,” see Steve Benen, “The Discovery Institute: Genesis of Intelligent Design,” *Church and State*, May 2002, http://www.au.org/site/PageServer?pagename=cs_2002_05 (accessed April 5, 2002). See also Eugenie C. Scott, “Anti-evolutionists Form, Fund Think Tank,” *Reports of the National Center for Science Education* 17, no. 1 (January–February 1997): 25–26, http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/rncse_content/vol17/3209_antievolutionists_form_fund__12_30_1899.asp (accessed April 5, 2004). See also Barbara Forrest, “The Wedge at Work: How Intelligent Design Creationism Is Wedging Its Way into the Cultural and Academic Mainstream,” in Robert T. Pennock, *Intelligent Design and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), and available at <http://www.talkreason.org/articles/Wedge.cfm> (accessed April 6, 2004).

9. See “secular,” in *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://dictionary.oed.com>. One interesting facet of the OED definition is the ecclesiastical meaning, i.e., “secular clergy,” who lived “in the world and not in monastic seclusion, as distinguished from ‘regular’ and ‘religious’” clergy.

10. A current example is President George W. Bush’s support of “faith-based” programs, in which public funds are being used to support overtly sectarian programs. The Religious Right’s influence on Bush’s domestic policy is detailed in Jim Whittle, “All in the Family: Top Bush Administration Leaders, Religious Right Lieutenants Plot Strategy in Culture ‘War,’” *Church and State*, May 2002, http://www.au.org/site/PageServer?pagename=cs_2002_05 (accessed April 6, 2004). For an example of how Bush’s foreign policy is being influenced by the Religious Right, see Steve Benen, “Strange Bedfellows,” *Church and State*, September 2002, http://www.au.org/site/PageServer?pagename=cs_2002_09 (accessed April 5, 2004).

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

11. Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," p. 173; emphasis added.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 185. Hook cited anthropological data about primitive people pointing to their de facto recognition of the difference between the mundane and the supernatural, e.g., the use of technology to sow and cultivate crops and the use of religious ritual to ensure a good harvest. He argued that such recognition, even if only implicit, shows that religion arose not in competition with technology (which is the practical employment of naturalistic methodology) but as a complement to it. Hook also recognized religion's role in easing the pain and uncertainty that are an inevitable part of life (*ibid.*, pp. 179–80). If Hook is right that technology and religion have always existed as complements rather than competitors, the argument that naturalistic methodology is not inherently antireligious is strengthened.

13. Sidney Hook, "The New Failure of Nerve," in *The Quest for Being*, p. 74. Hook originally published this article in *Partisan Review* 10 (January–February 1943): 2–23. Stephen Weldon writes that the "failure of nerve" concept was first expressed by Gilbert Murray in 1910 and was introduced to Americans in Murray's Columbia University lectures on ancient Greek religion. Murray contended that Greek culture declined because of a loss of confidence in scientific thinking and a consequent turn toward mystery religions. Stephen Weldon, "In Defense of Science: Secular Intellectuals and the Failure of Nerve Thesis," *Religious Humanism* 30, nos. 1–2 (Winter–Spring 1996), <http://www.americanhumanist.org/hsfamily/rh/weldon.html> (accessed March 22, 2004), refers to Hook's making *Partisan Review* the setting of a 1943 symposium entitled "A New Failure of Nerve."

14. *Ibid.*, p. 74. The constitutional separation of church and state is clearly one such position.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 82. Frederick Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle*

Between Theocracy and Democracy (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1997), documents the effort by various factions of the Religious Right to shape public policy.

22. Sidney Hook, "Nature and the Human Spirit," in *The Quest for Being*, pp. 197–98. This article was originally published in *Proceedings: 10th International Congress of Philosophy* (Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing, 1949).

23. James Dobson's panic shows in his spring 1998 remarks to the Council for National Policy, a secretive, hard-right organization that makes policy recommendations to conservative politicians. After reciting a litany of societal evils such as "moral relativism," Dobson begged the group to exert their influence on the Republican Party: "I came here today to . . . beg you shamelessly, to use your influence on the party at this critical stage of our history. You have a lot of influence on the party. A lot of you are politicians." See "James Dobson's CNP Address," Building Equality Web site, <http://www.ifas.org/cnp/dobson/html> (accessed April 13, 2004). Peter Kreeft, "How to Win the Culture War," *Crisis* 16, no. 6 (June 1998): 12–15, <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/civilization//cc0076.html> (accessed March 22, 2004), provides an example from the Catholic side: "We are engaged in the most serious war that the world has ever known. . . . America is the center of the culture of death. . . . Who is our enemy? Not Protestants. . . . Not Jews. . . . Not Muslims, . . . not the 'liberals.' . . . Not anti-Catholic bigots . . . not even the media of the culture of death, . . . not heretics within the Church. . . . Our enemies are demons. Fallen angels. Evil spirits." Seeing Satan at the heart of the world's evil, Kreeft proposes that Catholics give "A blank check to God. Complete submission." Both Dobson and Kreeft see religion as the key to cultural renewal. Although it is not clear that Kreeft is advising the direct influence of public policy (Dobson *is* urging this), his remarks reflect the kind of intellectual panic to which Hook referred.

24. "Freedom from Welfare Dependency," interview with George Gilder, *Religion and Liberty* 4, no. 2 (March–April 1994), <http://www.acton.org/publicat/randl/interview.php?id=109> (accessed March 22, 2004).

25. See "Philip Wentworth Goes to Harvard," in Phillip E. Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), pp. 19–38. William Dembski and Jay Richards, fellows of the Center for Sci-

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

ence and Culture, also see secularism as an *antireligious* concept in their introduction to *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001): “Anything that hints at a Christian worldview is routinely discarded within our secular society. . . . The great fault of secularism—and there’s plenty of secularism at our seminaries—is that it actively hinders us from coming to . . . a belief in the unqualified goodness, wisdom and trustworthiness of God” (pp. 19, 21).

26. Phillip Johnson, the founder of the intelligent design movement, shows his disdain for secularism in “What (If Anything) Hath God Wrought? Academic Freedom and the Religious Professor,” *Academe* (September–October 1995), <http://www.arn.org/docs/johnson/aaup.htm> (accessed March 22, 2004). See also Phillip E. Johnson, “How the Universities Were Lost,” chapter 12 in *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, and Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998). For an example of antiseccularism in the broader Religious Right, see Greg A. King, “Though the Heavens Fall: Standing Tall in a World of Secularism, Relativism, and Moral Inconsistency,” *College and University Dialogue*, <http://education.gc.adventist.org/dialogue/essays/King.htm> (accessed March 22, 2004). King cites Johnson, reiterating the latter’s dual indictment of naturalism and secularism: “As Phillip Johnson and others have capably documented, philosophical naturalism, with its concomitant materialist ideology, dominates the leading institutions of modern society. . . . This philosophy precludes the supernatural and therefore denies the reality of a transcendent creator God. Naturalism is a fundamentalist religion in its own right, for it is a closed system, and its adherents have a tendency to denigrate and demean anyone who questions the established orthodoxy. The crown jewel plundered by those committed to this religion of secularism is the educational system.”

27. “[W]e also seek to build up a popular base of support among our natural constituency, namely, Christians.” See “The Wedge Strategy,” *Antievolution: The Critic’s Resource Web site*, <http://www.antievolution.org/features/wedge.html> (accessed March 22, 2004). See also my discussion of the authenticity of this document and the religious nature of the Wedge Strategy in “The Wedge at Work: How Intelligent Design Creationism Is Wedging Its Way into the Cultural and Academic Mainstream,” pp. 13–14.

28. Phillip E. Johnson, "Wells Hits a Home Run at Harvard," *Weekly Wedge Update*, December 2, 2001, http://www.arn.org/docs/pjweekly/pj_weekly_011202.htm (accessed March 22, 2004).

29. William A. Dembski, "Signs of Intelligence: A Primer on the Discernment of Intelligent Design," *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 12, no. 4 (July–August 1999): p. 84.

30. See David Applegate, "Federal Challenges to the Teaching of Evolution (6-17-02)," American Geological Institute: Governmental Affairs Program, http://www.agiweb.org/gap/legis107/evolution_congress.html (accessed April 13, 2004). See also Dembski's assertion that "the challenge of Intelligent Design to the evolutionary naturalism of Darwin is not the latest flash in the pan of the culture war but in fact constitutes ground zero of the culture war," in his foreword to Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), Design Inference Web site, http://www.designinference.com/documents/2002.06.foreword_ben_wiker.htm (accessed March 22, 2004). See the Wedge's legal strategy for defending intelligent design in an eventual court case in David K. DeWolf, Stephen C. Meyer, and Mark Edward DeForrest, "Teaching the Origins Controversy: Science, or Religion, or Speech?" *Utah Law Review* 39 (2000), <http://www.arn.org/docs/dewolf/utah.pdf> (accessed March 22, 2004).

31. Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," p. 172.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 188–89.

33. Phillip E. Johnson, review of Robert Pennock, *Tower of Babel: The Evidence against the New Creationism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), for "Books and Culture," in *Christianity Today* (September–October 1999), <http://www.ctlibrary.com/bc/1999/septoct/9b5030a.html> (accessed March 22, 2004).

34. Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), pp. 9–10. Johnson desires that public school science instruction include the use of the supernatural as an explanatory principle so that it will become part of the cognitive equipment of the young, equal in importance and validity to naturalism. This desire is evident in his objection in an interview to what he sees as the public educational

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

system's "indoctrination" of students in naturalism: "[My] . . . book, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*, is specifically addressed to . . . high-school students, beginning college students and their parents and teachers. It is . . . intended to prepare these students for the . . . indoctrination they will receive in college, not only in . . . science . . . but throughout the curriculum. They will be presented material that presupposes that nature is all there is, that there has never been any supernatural influence from the ultimate beginning to the present and that God belongs in the category of what they call religious belief, which is to say subjective fantasy." See Jerry Aust, "Creation and Evolution," interview with Phillip Johnson, *The Good News Magazine* (July–August 1998), <http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn17/interview.html> (accessed March 22, 2004).

35. Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," pp. 173–74. William Dembski, "Naturalism's Argument from Invincible Ignorance: A Response to Howard Van Till," Design Inference Web site, http://www.designinference.com/documents/2002.09.Van_Till_Response.htm (accessed March 22, 2004), likewise ignores this distinction: "Naturalism, whether of the metaphysical or merely methodological varieties, treats nature as complete in terms of the causal principles inherent in it."

36. Hook, "Naturalism and First Principles," p. 189.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

38. "[Naturalism's] criticisms of the belief in Deity have not been based on semantic considerations but on what it presumed to be the weight of scientific discovery." *Ibid.*, p. 189.

39. Dembski makes this assertion in "Intelligent Design Coming Clean," Counterbalance Meta Library Web site, www.meta-library.net/id-wd/index-frame.html (accessed March 22, 2004): "I believe that nature points to a transcendent reality, and that that reality is simultaneously reflected in a different idiom by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. . . . [I argue that] when science points to a transcendent reality, it can do so as science and not merely as religion. In particular, I argue that design in nature is empirically detectable and that the claim that natural systems exhibit design can have empirical content."

40. Barbara Forrest, "Methodological Naturalism and Philosophical

Naturalism: Clarifying the Connection,” *Philo* 3, no. 2 (Fall–Winter 2000): 16.

41. Hook, “Naturalism and First Principles,” p. 195.

42. “Such a view is more devastating to atheism than to theism.” *Ibid.*, p. 189.

43. Forrest, “Methodological Naturalism and Philosophical Naturalism,” pp. 15–16.

44. Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, pp. 94–95.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

46. See Audi, “Religious Convictions and Secular Reasons,” chapter 4 in *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

48. The earlier citation from the Family Research Council’s September 21, 2000, newsletter is a prime example of this.

49. Sidney Hook, “Scientific Knowledge and Philosophical ‘Knowledge,’” in *The Quest for Being*, p. 226.

50. Hook, “Nature and the Human Spirit,” p. 206.

51. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, p. 166.

52. Hook, “Nature and the Human Spirit,” p. 206. A number of problems beset the supernaturalist’s moral absolutism: (1) From a practical standpoint, no one can truly abide by moral absolutes; the push and pull of material conditions and of pressing situational circumstances make this impossible. (2) Absolutism makes *rules* more important than the *people* who are expected to abide by them. Attempting to live by a system of moral absolutes can be done only at the risk of the most inhumane consequences. (3) It produces irresolvable conflicts between equally binding rules. (4) It makes what to reasoned judgment is a relatively trivial, because reversible, offense (e.g., stealing) as wrong as a much more serious, because irreversible, offense (e.g., killing). And (5) it makes morality robotic and reflexive, rather than thoughtful and deliberative, thus depriving the moral agent of the autonomy requisite to both commendation for goodness and condemnation for evil.

53. Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, pp. 167–68.

54. Hook, “The New Failure of Nerve,” p. 84.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Part 1: Sidney Hook's Place in the American Philosophical Tradition

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88. Asserting absolutes, such as “this absolute method,” is not typical of Hook. His use of the term here should be interpreted charitably, as meaning a *provisional* absolute: until someone invents a different methodology that is successful at enabling us to achieve the same advances in human knowledge that naturalistic methodology has, then the latter is the only reliable methodology. As always, the naturalist is open to being persuaded otherwise by the introduction of an equally successful alternative methodology. The same would be true if someone were to produce a methodology that enabled us to successfully verify the existence of the supernatural.

57. The Catholic Church's recent, well-publicized troubles with pedophile priests and ecclesiastical cover-ups of their misdeeds is proof of this. But the Church's moral failings in this regard do not address the truth or falsity of its theology, e.g., the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Rather, they point all the more vividly to the irrelevance of theological doctrine to human conduct.

58. Hook, “Nature and the Human Spirit,” p. 199.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

60. Hook, “The New Failure of Nerve,” pp. 81–82.

61. Thomas Clark, “Faith, Science, and the Soul: On the Pragmatic Virtues of Naturalism,” *The Humanist* 53 (May–June 1993): 10. The conflict between the naturalist and theist is essentially the conflict that arises between science and religion when religion is taken to be a way of *knowing* the world rather than a framework within which one chooses to *experience* the world. Clark provides the best assessment I have seen of the unlikelihood of resolving this standoff:

Given the disparity in goals and cognitive strategies, it is no wonder that science and religion, although they exist in and make claims about the same world, have difficulty finding common ground. Each must justify itself . . . by success in its particular projects; *for there is not, I think, a larger cognitive perspective which could demonstrate that one is the ‘best’ approach to every problem or show, as a matter of principle, where we should apply*

*one and not the other. . . . [P]hilosophy . . . is not an agreed-upon platform that provides ready-made criteria to judge such issues; . . . like science, it is a process of open-ended inquiry. . . . Since science cannot categorically *disprove* the existence of the soul but . . . only cite lack of evidence for it, those unimpressed by the demand for evidence will happily take advantage of this apparent failing and postulate whatever they please; after all, part of the culture of faith is the gut feeling that revelation and authority alone *are* sufficient grounds for belief, that we need *not* consider what science has to say. Thus, there is no obvious point within science (or philosophy) from which to justify, to the true believer, the epistemic austerity of naturalism. (emphasis added)*

62. Sidney Hook, "Philosophy and Human Conduct," in *The Quest for Being*, p. 24.

63. Hook, "The New Failure of Nerve," p. 83. Hook's denial that there is anything that qualifies uniquely as religious knowledge is not mere partisanship. He also denies this of his own discipline when he asserts that philosophy is not privileged with special knowledge or insights. See "Scientific Knowledge and Philosophical 'Knowledge,'" in *The Quest for Being*.

64. Hook, "The New Failure of Nerve," pp. 93–94.