

Jeff Lowder's Second Rebuttal

Let's again review my two basic contentions.

1. *The Simplicity of Naturalism*

First, I argued that naturalism is a simpler explanation than Christianity.

Hypothesis of Indifference

What about the hypothesis of indifference? It's the view that "neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth results from benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons."¹ The first point on his slide isn't needed for any of my arguments, while his last five points are *entailed by* naturalism. The upshot is that naturalism is a more modest hypothesis than Christian theism. For that reason alone, naturalism is intrinsically more probable than Christian theism.

The Finite Past of the Universe

Again, he tries to make the intrinsic probability of naturalism irrelevant by claiming that God exists necessarily, for two reasons. First, he says, the universe has an absolute beginning. I asked, "*When* did God decide to create spacetime?" He said, "Maybe God created it in metaphysical time which preceded physical time." But this is (1) *ad hoc*; and (2) incompatible with a *timeless* being.

He says, "Events can be simultaneous with their causes." But (1) the beginning of time can't be simultaneous with a timeless state; and (2) that would mean that God began to exist.

What about the BGV theorem? Two points. First, there are equally well qualified authorities, such as Sean Carroll, who think the BGV theory does *not* show the universe has an *absolute* beginning.² Second, physical reality does not have a beginning. William Lane Craig says, "Out of nothing, nothing comes." This suggests that creation out of nothing is *impossible*. As Philosopher Felipe Leon explains, everything "that begins to exist has a material cause of its existence," which means that "it's made from pre-existing stuff, whether material or immaterial."³ This suggests the following argument:

¹ Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists" in *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 12-29 at 13.

² Sean Carroll, "Opening Speech, "God and Cosmology: The Existence of God in Light of Contemporary Cosmology" Reasonable Faith (2014), <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/god-and-cosmology-the-existence-of-god-in-light-of-contemporary-cosmology>.

³ Personal correspondence with Felipe Leon.

(1) Physical reality was either made out of God, some eternal stuff distinct from God, or it wasn't "made."

(2) But physical reality was not made out of God or some eternal stuff distinct from God.

(3) Therefore, physical reality wasn't made. [From (1) and (2)]

(4) If physical reality wasn't "made," then physical reality is uncaused.

(5) Therefore, physical reality is uncaused. [From (4) and (5)]

Quantum Indeterminacy

Remember Mr. Vandergriff also argued that God exists necessarily because the universe requires an external cause because of quantum indeterminacy. But that argument assumes that (1) a wavefunction collapse happens; and (2) observers play a role. And Mr. Vandergriff hasn't defended either of these assumptions. There are many interpretations of quantum mechanics and most of them do not involve collapsing wavefunctions and observers.⁴ And, as William Lane Craig points out, "no one knows which, if any, of them is the correct interpretation."⁵

2. The Accuracy of Naturalism

Let's move onto my second contention, that naturalism is a more accurate explanation than Christianity.

Naturalistic Theism

First, a general point. What we just heard in the last speech was a bizarre defense of a sectarian version of theism we may call "naturalistic theism," which posits an impotent God with latent deistic tendencies. This view has two parts:

(i) the laws of nature in the *actual* world are the laws of nature in any *possible* world; and

(ii) most physical events are not the result of God's direct intervention.

Almost all of Mr. Vandergriff's objections to the evidence for naturalism presuppose naturalistic theism, so any problems with it are equally problems for those objections. And I think there are three such problems.

First, he's confusing what's *physically* possible with what's *metaphysically* possible; God isn't limited by the laws of nature. Second, if the laws of nature are metaphysically necessary, then this contradicts the assumptions needed for his arguments from the

⁴ I owe this point to Nick Tattersall.

⁵ William Lane Craig, "Question and Answer Session" in William Lane Craig and Sean Carroll, "God and Cosmology: The Existence of God in Light of Contemporary Cosmology" *Reasonable Faith* (2014), <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/god-and-cosmology-the-existence-of-god-in-light-of-contemporary-cosmology>.

discoverability of the universe, self-aware beings, evolution, and embodied moral agency. That would mean it is metaphysically necessary that we have a discoverable life-permitting universe which evolved embodied self-aware beings that are morally responsible for their actions. Third, notice that the factual necessity of these laws isn't probable on theism, but it is virtually *certain* on naturalism.⁶

Physical Matter

Next, what about my evidence from physical matter? He says, "God's existence entails the existence of a value-generating universe." Two objections. First, even if God's goodness requires a value-generating world, it doesn't require a *physical* universe. Second, God's existence is not certain on supernaturalism, so physical matter is still evidence favoring naturalism over theism.

Hostile Universe

Regarding the universe's hostility to life, all his objections assume naturalistic theism. Neither the hostile conditions of the universe nor any interventions are required on theism. God could have designed a universe with different physics which didn't require these hostile conditions.

Success of Naturalistic Explanations

I also pointed out that science has been successful in explaining so much without the supernatural. He says, "this begs the question." Not at all! I'm not claiming there *aren't* or *can't* be scientific explanations which favor theism; rather, the vast majority of correct scientific explanations don't appeal to the supernatural.

Evolution

As for evolution, he grants the fact of evolution, but relies upon naturalistic theism. But God didn't have to create the exact set of animals we have with intrinsic essences.

He says, "Unguided evolution is too slow to produce intelligent life." But (1) it's *ad hoc* to say God would intervene to produce intelligent life but not intervene to prevent hostile conditions in the universe; (2) this problem applies just as much to naturalistic theism as it does to naturalism; and (3) this is based upon an evidentially worthless appeal to authority because I can quote equally well-qualified authorities who disagree.

⁶ Let N stand for naturalism, T for theism, and F for the auxiliary hypothesis that there is no being on which the laws of nature could be causally dependent. Using the symbol " $\Pr(F | H)$ " to stand for the probability that F is true given that H is true, then this sentence claims that $\Pr(F | N) > \Pr(F | T)$. F is virtually certain on N because if N is true, it seems the only way F could be false would be if the laws of nature were somehow causally dependent upon the constants. I am grateful to Paul Draper for making me aware of this possibility.

His argument about the “formational economy of the universe” is pure bluster: the fact that life appeared billions of years after the Big Bang is more probable on naturalism than on theism.⁷

Pain and Pleasure

Moving onto pain and pleasure, his only response was naturalistic theism. Facts about pain and pleasure are very much more probable on naturalism than if an all-powerful God exists.

Flourishing and Languishing

His response to flourishing and languishing also relies upon naturalistic theism. He says, “this is required for ecosystem stability,” but that’s false if an all-powerful God exists.

He says, “But other animals don’t feel as much pain as humans and don’t have a right to life.” But given the facts of evolution and mind-brain dependence, it’s highly likely that humans and closely related animals share very similar mental states.⁸

Triumph and Tragedy

Regarding triumph and tragedy, four points.

First, consider, for example, a mother who lost both of her children on the same day, just a month after her husband died.⁹ Stories like this happen across the globe every day, while it’s rare to find similar cases of triumphs.

Second, while we do seem hard-wired to believe that life has meaning, this evolutionary mechanism can be overridden by horrific suffering, often destroying people.

Third, regarding God comforting people, he says that God made us resilient instead of directly comforting people which would spark resentment. I don’t buy that. That’s like saying that if a five-year-old daughter has to get chemotherapy, a loving father would say, “Well, I raised her to be tough,” rather than *directly* comforting her during chemotherapy because she might resent him.

⁷ Jeffery Jay Lowder, “The Evidential Argument from Scale—Index” *The Secular Outpost* (2011), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/secularoutpost/2011/11/21/the-evidential-argument-from-scale-index/>. See especially “The Argument from Scale (AS) Revisited, Part 4” *The Secular Outpost* (2011), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/secularoutpost/2011/11/the-argument-from-scale-as-revisited-part-4/>.

⁸ Draper 2012, 67.

⁹ David Higgs, “Brother and Sister Found Dead on Same Day in Separate Tragedies,” *Wales Online* (March 14, 2013), <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/brother-sister-found-dead-same-2494256>.

Fourth, we can calculate the probabilities because theism entails whereas naturalism lacks supernatural persons who can intervene in tragedies.

Mind-Brain Dependence

He grants the fact of mind-brain dependence, but he says, again, God couldn't do it differently and, again, I disagree. God doesn't have to create maximally powerful beings in order to create unembodied minds who can act in the physical world.

He asks, "How do you get consciousness on naturalism?" I already said that mental properties are evidence for theism. But given that human consciousness exists, the fact that it's dependent upon brains favors naturalism.

Types and Distribution of Moral Agents

Next, what about the types and distribution of moral agents? His only objection was, "evolution was God's only option," which I've already refuted. An omnipotent being could easily create moral agents much more impressive than humans.

Limitations on Freedom

I also pointed out that the variety and frequency of conditions that severely limit our freedom favors naturalism.

Ethical Disagreement

Next, consider ethical disagreement. He agrees morality doesn't depend on God and he admits genuine ethical disagreement exists, but he tries to explain it away with naturalistic theism. I disagree. If the Bible reported Jesus explicitly taking a stand on, say, abortion, it's very likely that would decrease disagreement about *that* topic among Christians.

He says, "Some ethical questions have intrinsically indeterminate answers." Fine. But then why doesn't God make *that* known? A loving father doesn't let his kids have genuine disagreements about what he wants, especially if his kids start killing each other *because* of these disagreements.

Nonresistant Nonbelief

Finally, let's turn to nonresistant nonbelief. I think Mr. Vandergriff misunderstands the concept. Not all nonbelievers are familiar with his evidence; those who are familiar may *honestly* believe his evidence fails and *that is the case even if God exists* because they could be honestly mistaken. This problem for theism is made even worse by the fact of former believers, people who were on the right track when they lost their belief.¹⁰

¹⁰ J.L. Schellenberg, *The Wisdom to Doubt: A Justification of Religious Skepticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 228-32.

Conclusion

So in sum, I think we've got thirteen lines of evidence for naturalism, plus the Anti-Creation Argument. We have one, maybe two, lines of evidence for theism and inconclusive evidence for Christianity. I think, on balance, that naturalism is much more probable than Christianity.