

Mr. Lowder's Opening Statement

Introduction

In this speech, I would like to review those two basic contentions that I have offered to defend and see how they fared in light of Mr. Vandergriff's opening statement.

1. The Simplicity of Naturalism

First, I argued that naturalism is a simpler explanation than Christian theism. In his speech, Mr. Vandergriff agrees that intrinsic probability is determined by scope, modesty, and nothing else. He also agrees that what he calls "generic" naturalism and supernaturalism have *equal* intrinsic probabilities. And, I think, he even agrees that "generic" naturalism is intrinsically much more probable than Christian theism.

But, he says, four of my arguments depend upon a more specific version of naturalism, what he calls "specified naturalism," and Christian theism is not significantly less simple than specified naturalism. But this is false.

First, what about the universe being eternal? Generic naturalism says *nothing* about the age of physical reality. For example, it's compatible with both an *eternal* universe and with a universe that is finitely old *but which has existed for all of time*.

Second, what about the universe being uncaused? Generic naturalism entails this.¹

Third, what about the "hypothesis of indifference"?² If you look at the diagram on my slide, what you'll see is that the "naturalism" circle is completely inside the bigger "hypothesis of indifference" circle.³ What that means is this: if generic naturalism is true, the hypothesis of indifference has to be true.

So none of my arguments need a more specific version of naturalism; they all use generic naturalism. And so my first contention stands. Christian theism makes more claims and significantly more *specific* claims than naturalism and so there are significantly more ways for Christian theism to be false than for naturalism to be false. But this means that, before we examine the evidence, naturalism is *much* more likely to be true than Christian theism.

¹ To be precise, naturalism entails that physical reality is uncaused. If there is just a single universe, then naturalism entails that the universe is uncaused. If there is a multiverse, then naturalism entails the multiverse is uncaused.

² Paul Draper defines the hypothesis of indifference (HI) as the hypothesis that "neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth results from benevolent or malevolent actions performed by nonhuman persons." See 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.

³ In fact, as Draper notes, although HI is logically incompatible with theism, it is logically compatible with other versions of supernaturalism, including another version of *personal* supernaturalism: deism. See Draper 1996, 13.

He says, "But the simplicity of naturalism doesn't matter because it's a necessary truth that God exists." But his two arguments for God's necessity fail, so the simplicity of naturalism *does* matter.

2. The Accuracy of Naturalism

Let's move on, then, to my second basic contention: *naturalism is a more accurate explanation than Christian theism for many facts*. Mr. Vandergriff argued that Christian theism is more accurate than naturalism for ten facts.

Origin of the Universe

First, what about the origin of the universe?

This can be a very confusing and counterintuitive subject. On the one hand, besides the universe, virtually everything with a beginning *has a cause*. This seems to support the idea that the universe has a cause. On the other hand, besides the universe, virtually everything with a beginning *comes from pre-existing materials*. This seems to support the idea that the universe *cannot* have a cause.⁴ And if Mr. Vandergriff argues that the universe is different and didn't need to come from pre-existing materials, then I can argue that the universe is different and didn't need a cause.

But there's another point which I think breaks the tie: Mr. Vandergriff's explanation leads to self-contradiction. For example, *when* did God decide to create spacetime? As philosopher Keith Parsons points out, "To create implies an act. An act must be initiated. This implies a time *before, of, and after* initiation."⁵ In other words, Mr. Vandergriff's position entails that, 'before' spacetime existed, God decided to create spacetime. But there cannot be a time "before spacetime existed" just like you can't go north of the North Pole.⁶

So the fact that spacetime exists at all is evidence favoring naturalism over theism.

Something Physical Rather Than Nothing

His next argument is that God is the best explanation for why spacetime exists rather than nothing. Let me give three responses to this.

First, this was refuted by my first argument for naturalism. Again, if supernaturalism is true, it's a very real possibility that spacetime doesn't exist.⁷ But if naturalism is true,

⁴ Wesley Morriston, "Must the Beginning of the Universe Have a Personal Cause? A Critical Examination of the Kalam Cosmological Argument" *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000): 149-169 at 155-56.

⁵ Keith Parsons to Jeffery Jay Lowder, February 6, 2013.

⁶ While some philosophers have suggested that we make a distinction between (metaphysical?) time and physical time, this option isn't available to a proponent of the kalām cosmological argument who holds that 'God is timeless sans creation.'

⁷ As Nick Trakakis explains, "According to orthodox theism, God was free *not* to create a world. In other words, there is at least one possible world in which God creates nothing at all. But then God is a creator only contingently, not necessarily." See Nick Trakakis, "The Evidential Problem of Evil," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (n.d.), <http://www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/#SH1a>.

something physical has to exist. Since spacetime is physical, the fact that it exists is evidence for naturalism and against supernaturalism.

Second, he mentions quantum indeterminacy. But since Mr. Vandergriff has given us no reason to believe that an actual infinite cannot exist, there's no reason to reject an infinite regress on naturalism. But if theism is true, why should there be quantum indeterminacy at all?

Third, he argues spacetime needs an explanation because it's contingent. Philosopher Felipe Leon has identified two naturalistic options. First, there could be an infinite regress of contingent universes, where each contingent universe is explained by another one. Second, our universe could be *factually necessary*, so that its existence is partially explained by its own nature (which is uncaused, beginningless, independent, and free-standing) and partially explained by virtue of other things that happen to exist (which is that, on naturalism, there's nothing to knock spacetime out of existence).⁸

Discoverability of the Universe

Next, let's turn to his evidence about the discoverability of the universe. This is a brand new argument and I think the jury is still out,⁹ but let's assume that this *is* evidence favoring theism over naturalism. The fact that the universe is discoverable, however, hardly exhausts what we know about our ability to understand it. We also know that so much of our universe is intelligible without any appeal to supernatural agency. Given that our universe is discoverable, this is much more probable if naturalism is true (and all supernaturalistic explanations are false) than it is if theism is true (and supernatural explanations could be true).¹⁰ This evidence for naturalism *outweighs* the discoverability evidence for theism.

Mathematics

Next, what about the applicability of mathematics to the world? Three comments. First, this argument adds nothing to the last one: I think that Mr. Vandergriff has *double-counted* the evidence: part of what it means for the universe to be discoverable is the applicability of mathematics, and so this argument adds nothing to the last one.¹¹

⁸ Felipe Leon to Jeffery Jay Lowder, October 25, 2012.

⁹ See, e.g., Robin Collins, "Fine-Tuning for Discoverability," *Robin Collins* (March 22, 2014), <http://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/Fine-tuning/Greer-Heard%20Forum%20paper%20draft%20for%20posting.pdf>.

¹⁰ As persuasively argued by Paul Draper in "'God, Science, and Naturalism" *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (ed. William Wainwright, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), at 38-39.

¹¹ This much is clear by reading what the author of what we might call the "broader" discoverability argument, Robin Collins, says about his inspiration for that argument. He writes, "Many scientists and others have commented on the seemingly 'miraculous' intelligibility and discoverability of physical reality, most famously Albert Einstein and Eugene Wigner. Recently this idea has been developed more carefully by Mark Steiner in his 1998 book *Mathematics as a Philosophical Problem* (Harvard University Press). Steiner presents an array of examples where, in their attempts to discover the underlying laws of physics, physicists successively used lines of reasoning that only make sense if they were implicitly assuming that the world was structured for discoverability. He concludes that the world "looks 'user friendly.' This is a

Second, as philosopher Evan Fales points out, “mathematical entities are applicable to anything that is countable or extensive, like space and time, mass, and so forth *precisely because they are abstract*.”¹² Third, if Mr. Vandergriff thinks this is just a happy coincidence on naturalism, I would simply challenge him to describe what a world would look like where mathematics was not applicable. For example, can he describe what a world would look like if, say, set theory didn't apply?¹³ If he can't do that, then there's no reason to take this argument seriously.

Self-Aware Beings

He next argued that the existence of self-aware beings is some evidence for theism. I agree.¹⁴ This is a parallel argument with my argument about the existence of physical matter. They cancel each other out.¹⁵

Embodied Moral Agency

Next, he argues that embodied moral agents are strong evidence for theism over naturalism. I have four objections.

First, this argument requires that we have libertarian free will. I don't know if we have it or not, and he hasn't shown that we do.

Second, we're not in a position to assess the probability of a life-permitting universe on naturalism.¹⁶ In order to justify the claim that our universe is fine-tuned for life, this argument depends upon counting the number of possible universes with different values for the anthropic constants *but with the same laws of physics*. But why restrict the set of possible universes to only those with the same laws of physics? Why not *also* include possible universes with different physics? Here's the problem. If we can vary *both* the constants *and* the laws of physics themselves, then our probability calculations need to consider all possible combinations. Not only has no one yet done that, but it's hard to see how that *could* be done, since the number of combinations is infinite. The upshot is that we have no good reason to believe that a life-permitting universe is improbable on naturalism.

challenge to naturalism” (p. 176). *In a project I am near completing, I have attempted to quantitatively test this idea...*” Steiner is a defender of the argument from the applicability of mathematics. See Collins 2014, p. 2. Italics mine.

¹² Evan Fales to Jeffery Jay Lowder, February 14, 2013. Italics are mine.

¹³ I owe this objection to Evan Fales in Evan Fales to Jeffery Jay Lowder, February 14, 2013.

¹⁴ Jeffery Jay Lowder, “A Good F-Inductive Argument for Theism based on Consciousness,” *Secular Outpost* (March 22, 2014), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/secularoutpost/2014/03/22/a-good-f-inductive-argument-for-theism-based-on-consciousness/>.

¹⁵ To be precise, they have equal evidential strength.

¹⁶ Bradley Monton, “God, Fine-Tuning, and the Problem of Old Evidence,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 57 (2006): 405-24 at 420-21.

Third, even if we do, this theistic evidence is offset by naturalistic evidence. Given that there are embodied moral agents, the following facts are more probable on naturalism than on theism:

- (a) So much of the universe is hostile to life.
- (b) Embodied moral agents are the result of evolution.
- (c) The only known moral agents are embodied; their minds are dependent on their brains.
- (d) Our universe is not teeming with embodied moral agents, including moral agents much more impressive than humans.¹⁷
- (e) The variety and frequency of conditions that severely limit our freedom.¹⁸

The upshot is that once the evidence about moral agency is fully stated, it's far from obvious it favors theism.

Moral Perception and Moral Flourishing

As for his next two arguments, the ones about moral perception and moral flourishing, I'm going to reply to both at the same time. In his book, *Darwinian Natural Right*, Larry Arnhart argues that human morality is rooted in the biological nature of human beings. This biological nature leads to over 20 universal human desires, including parental care, sexual identity and mating, and justice. Whatever satisfies these desires is naturally good for humans.¹⁹

Arnhart's ethical naturalism predicts *both* (1) that people know that satisfying these desires is good; and (2) that doing so contributes to our flourishing, so these facts don't add to the case for theism.

Also, given that people can perceive moral truths, the fact that people often disagree about those truths is much more probable on naturalism than on theism.

Worthwhile Lives

Next, what about the fact human life is worthwhile? This isn't evidence for theism because, given that humans are the products of evolution, our resilience is just as likely on naturalism as it is on theism.

¹⁷ Paul Draper, "Cumulative Cases," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (ed. Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, Philip L. Quinn; New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 414-24 at 421.

¹⁸ Draper 2010, 421.

¹⁹ Larry Arnhart, *Darwinian Natural Right* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Resurrection

Finally, let's turn to the Resurrection.

We can show this is false using a formula known as Bayes's Theorem. Bayes's Theorem says that the probability of a hypothesis like the Resurrection is equal to its prior probability multiplied by its explanatory power.²⁰

So let's start with prior probability. Even if God exists and even if we know *with certainty* that God exists, the Resurrection is an extraordinary claim. In fact, it is so extraordinary that, before we look at the historical evidence, the probability of the Resurrection is virtually *zero*. All of our evidence *for* the laws of statistical mechanics is evidence *for* the complete post-mortem decomposition of Jesus' body and hence evidence *against* Jesus' resurrection.²¹ The argument goes like this.

- (1) 99.999,...,999% of our observations relevant to dead bodies shows that *God wills* that they do *not* rise from the dead.
- (2) Jesus was dead.
- (3) Therefore, prior to investigation, it is 99.999,...,999% probable that *God wills* that Jesus does *not* rise from the dead.

Let's move onto explanatory power: *the alleged evidence for the Resurrection is not extraordinary*. Two comments. First, *the evidence we have is not the evidence we need*. Contrary to what my opponent claims, the Resurrection can't be the *best* explanation because it *isn't* an explanation. It says *nothing* about his four facts. For example, if we knew nothing about Jesus except that he rose from the dead, we would never predict an empty tomb or postmortem appearances because the resurrection hypothesis, *by itself*, tells us nothing about what Jesus did after his death.²²

Second, *the evidence we need is not the evidence we have*. The Resurrection hypothesis is the claim that God took Jesus' corpse and transformed it into a living, powerful, incorruptible, and glorious body which can never again suffer illness, injury or death.²³ But Mr. Vandergriff has given no evidence that Jesus' body was transformed into a supernatural body which can never again suffer illness, injury or death.

To sum up: Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.²⁴ The claim that God raised Jesus from the dead is an extraordinary claim. We don't have extraordinary evidence for the Resurrection. Therefore, Jesus stayed dead.

²⁰ For a helpful introduction, see Brian Skyrms, *Choice & Chance: An Introduction to Inductive Logic* (4th ed., Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000). Also, note that, by "hypothesis," I mean simply a proposition we do not know with certainty to be true or false.

²¹ Robert Greg Cavin and Carlos Colombetti, "The Great Mars Hill Resurrection Debate" *The Secular Web* (2013), http://infidels.org/images/media/library/modern/greg_cavin/resurrection-debate.pdf, 316-21.

²² Robert Greg Cavin, "" in *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (ed. Robert M. Price and Jeffery Jay Lowder, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 2005), 19-41.

²³ Cavin 2005, 30-31.

²⁴ For a Bayesian interpretation and defense of the principle, "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," see Jeffery Jay Lowder, "Extraordinary Claims Require Extraordinary Evidence (ECREE), Part 1:

Let's move on, then, to my other evidence for naturalism which hasn't already been mentioned.

Pain and Pleasure

One was pain and pleasure, which I think is one of the most powerful lines of evidence for naturalism. This clearly plays a biological role, but from a moral point view it looks quite random. Mr. Vandergriff hasn't said anything about that argument yet.

Flourishing and Languishing

Next was flourishing and languishing. More than 99% of all species that have ever lived are now extinct. While alive, most languish much more than they flourish. This hasn't been yet addressed.

Triumph and Tragedy

Another argument was about the distribution of triumph and tragedy. Again as Paul Draper points out, "triumph is the exception and tragedy the rule."²⁵ This hasn't yet been addressed.

Nonresistant Nonbelief

Finally, we have the fact of nonresistant nonbelief. In fact, this debate is a good case study in how nonresistant nonbelief is possible. It's not just that the evidence *doesn't* unambiguously point towards Christian theism; it's that we also have clear evidence *against* it. This is very much more probable on naturalism than on Christianity, which teaches that our *eternal* destiny hinges on what we believe in *this* life. This argument hasn't yet been addressed.

Also, notice that some of my other arguments are *also* related to divine hiddenness. (1) Ethical disagreement just is *ethical* hiddenness. (2) The success of naturalistic explanations just is *scientific* hiddenness.²⁶ (3) The fact that many people do not seem to feel God's comforting presence during tragedies we can call "*suffering* hiddenness."

Conclusion

So, on balance, when you weigh the evidence, I think the evidence is clearly on the side of naturalism and therefore think naturalism is much more likely to be true than Christian theism.

The Bayesian Interpretation" *The Secular Outpost* (June 20, 2012), <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/secularoutpost/2012/06/20/extraordinary-claims-require-extraordinary-evidence-ecree-part-1-the-bayesian-interpretation-of-ecree/>.

²⁵ Paul Draper in Paul Draper and Trent Dougherty, "Explanation and the Problem of Evil," *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (ed. Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder, Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 67-82 at 73.

²⁶ Paul Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (ed. William J. Wainwright, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 272-303 at 299.