

## Inductive Reasoning in Naturalism and Supernaturalism

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12/30/2015

**ABSTRACT:** In “God, Science, and Naturalism,” Paul Draper argues on behalf of a modest methodological naturalism. Additionally, Draper thinks that the success of the natural sciences supports metaphysical naturalism. I contend that similar inductive reasoning can be used to argue for the first premise of the Kalām cosmological argument (i.e. everything that began to exist was caused to exist). Any who think that such reasoning is problematic for the Kalām should also think that such reasoning is problematic for a similarly constructed naturalistic argument. If the remaining premises of the Kalām are true, then there is good reason for thinking that supernaturalism is true. Thus if Draper’s use of inductive reasoning is permitted, similar reasoning can be used to argue for supernaturalism. Furthermore, the argument for supernaturalism undermines the support for naturalism.

In “God, Science, and Naturalism,” Paul Draper argues on behalf of a modest methodological naturalism.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Draper thinks that the success of the natural sciences supports metaphysical naturalism.<sup>2</sup> I contend that similar inductive reasoning can be used to argue for the first premise of the Kalām cosmological argument (i.e. everything that began to exist was caused to exist). Any who think that such reasoning is problematic for the Kalām should also think that such reasoning is problematic for a similarly constructed naturalistic argument. If the remaining premises of the Kalām are true, then there is good reason for thinking that supernaturalism is true. Thus if Draper’s use of inductive reasoning is permitted, similar reasoning can be used to argue for supernaturalism. Furthermore, the argument for supernaturalism undermines the support for naturalism. The argument for naturalism will be presented before considering the argument for supernaturalism.

One preliminary point should be made about the discussion to follow. The argument for supernaturalism is not an argument for God’s existence or theism. That being said, God’s existence and the various forms of theism each entail supernaturalism. So while theism is at odds with naturalism, arguments for supernaturalism can be used to support theism. Dallas Willard’s “Three-Stage Argument for the Existence of God” uses a similar strategy.<sup>3</sup> The first stage is to argue for supernaturalism. From there, the second and third stages focus more specifically on arriving at theistic conclusions. The following argument could be used as a springboard for theistic discussion, however, the focus of this paper will be on the clash between supernaturalism and naturalism. Terms and definitions will first be established.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Draper, “God, Science, and Naturalism,” In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, Ed. William J. Wainwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 297-298.

<sup>2</sup> Draper, 299-300.

<sup>3</sup> Dallas Willard, “The Three-Stage Argument for the Existence of God,” In *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, Ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 212-224.

### Terminology and Definitions

Draper first defines the supernatural in terms of the natural:

x is supernatural =df. x is not part of nature and x can affect nature<sup>4</sup>

Being able to affect nature is a significant part of this definition, though it is not completely clear what “can affect” actually means. It seems that Draper means it to be taken as “being able to causally interact with” nature. This is important, because non-natural objects such as numbers, universals, etc. would not be considered supernatural by Draper’s definition since they do not causally interact with nature. This allows us to distinguish between natural, non-natural, and supernatural. Keeping this in mind, there are two forms of supernaturalism that should be clarified, one weak and one strong:

Weak supernaturalism =df. supernatural entities exist but never affect nature

Strong supernaturalism =df. supernatural entities exist and do/did affect nature

Draper does not explicitly make these distinctions, but such will be useful in this paper. Weak supernaturalism states that there are non-natural entities which can, but do not, affect nature.

This is not what is typically thought of when discussing the supernatural. I am not sure how one could construct a convincing philosophical argument for weak supernaturalism. How would one infer the existence of non-natural entities that could affect nature but never do? On the other hand, strong supernaturalism affirms that non-natural entities exist and they do affect nature.

This does not necessarily mean that such entities are always at work in nature, only that there have been times when those entities did affect nature. For example, Draper makes the distinction

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<sup>4</sup> Draper, 277.

between God acting directly or indirectly in nature, with any indirect action ultimately tracing back to some direct action (e.g. God's act of creation).<sup>5</sup> Given all this, we will focus on the strong form of supernaturalism and use the following general definitions in this paper:

x is supernatural =df. x is non-natural and x does/did affect nature, either directly or indirectly

Supernaturalism =df. supernatural entities exist

These definitions seem to fully capture Draper's meaning and will be used in this paper.

Given that the supernatural is defined in terms of the natural, some concept of nature must be established. Draper notes that defining nature is not an easy task, but he settles on the following definition:

Nature =df. the spatiotemporal universe of physical entities together with any entities that are ontologically or causally reducible to those entities<sup>6</sup>

While this definition may not satisfy everyone, it does allow us to appreciate the differences between what would be considered natural and what would be considered supernatural, at least according to Draper.

Using these definitions of the natural and the supernatural, Draper moves on to define two forms of naturalism:

Methodological naturalism =df. scientists should not appeal to supernatural entities when they explain natural phenomena<sup>7</sup>

Metaphysical naturalism =df. supernatural entities do not exist<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Draper, 281

<sup>6</sup> Draper, 278.

<sup>7</sup> Draper, 279.

<sup>8</sup> Draper, 279.

Methodological naturalism concerns the practices that we use in scientific research and discovery. Metaphysical naturalism is an all-encompassing claim about reality. Draper offers arguments in favor of both. This paper is not particularly concerned with methodological naturalism, thus the term “naturalism” will be used specifically in reference to metaphysical naturalism.

### The Inductive Argument for Naturalism

Naturalism entails the following:

(N) Every causally explicable thing has a naturalistic explanation

If something has an explanation, naturalism demands that explanation be naturalistic. If supernaturalism were true, then there would be at least one thing which cannot be explained naturalistically. So not only is N a necessary condition for naturalism, N is a sufficient condition for naturalism as well. Thus:

Naturalism iff N

Either naturalism or supernaturalism must be true. Thus the negation of N is a necessary and sufficient condition for supernaturalism:

Supernaturalism iff  $\neg N$

The truth or falsity of N is vital to the discussion at hand, however, one must ask what support there is for belief in N.

Draper thinks that scientific success provides good inductive reason for believing N to be true. Consider the following:

- (N') We (i) have identified a vast and continually growing number of things that can be explained naturalistically and (ii) have not positively identified any causally explicable thing that cannot be explained naturalistically

Both naturalists and supernaturalists tend to agree that science offers good naturalistic explanations for numerous things. Furthermore, the number of things explained by science is always growing, which leads to the second point. That which people historically attributed to the supernatural (e.g. actions of God, spirits, etc.) has largely been explained by the natural sciences. Whatever remains unexplained may well be explained by future scientific discovery. Draper notes that it remains to be seen if there is anything that cannot be explained naturalistically.<sup>9</sup> For the time being, it appears reasonable to affirm N'.

N entails N'. If N is false, then N' may or may not follow. Thus N' provides more inductive support for N rather than  $\neg N$ . Put another way, N is more probable than  $\neg N$  on N'. Given that either N or its negation must be true, we can construct the following argument:

- (1)  $P(N/N') > P(\neg N/N')$
- (2)  $N \vee \neg N$
- (3)  $\therefore P(N/N') > 0.5$

This argument states that one who affirms N' has reason to believe that N is probably true. Thus N' supports naturalism over supernaturalism.

While this inductive argument for naturalism appears fairly convincing, I think a similar argument can be constructed which supports supernaturalism over naturalism. This involves introducing discussion on the Kalām cosmological argument.

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<sup>9</sup> Draper, 300.

### The Kalām Cosmological Argument

The Kalām can be stated as follows:

- (4) Everything that began to exist was caused to exist
- (5) The universe began to exist
- (6)  $\therefore$  The universe was caused to exist

In effort to keep with the terminology already established by Draper, the Kalām will be slightly restated as follows:

- (4) Everything that began to exist was caused to exist
- (7) Nature began to exist
- (8)  $\therefore$  Nature was caused to exist

Given the definitions herein, the following also seems to be true:

- (9) Any cause of nature must be supernatural
- (10)  $\therefore$  Something supernatural caused nature to exist

This is a valid argument as the conclusion of 10 follows from 8 and 9, and 8 follows from 4 and 7. One who seeks to undercut this argument must argue that 4, 7, or 9 is false.

Premise 9 simply affirms that nothing can be prior to itself. Nature by Draper's definition is the spatiotemporal universe of physical entities. If there was a natural cause to nature, then nature as a whole would be preceded by something natural, which is impossible. Thus any cause of nature must be supernatural.

Premise 7 is based upon scientific and philosophical support. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland offer several reasons for believing 7 to be true, including the inability to complete an infinite set by successive addition, Big Bang cosmology, and the second law of

thermodynamics.<sup>10</sup> While these are good reasons for believing that nature had a beginning, not everyone is convinced. Without delving too deeply into these positions and for the sake of further argument, 7 and 9 will be taken as true for the time being. Thus the following evaluation will focus primarily on 4.

At first glance, 4 seems obviously true – perhaps even self-evident. That being said, a common objection to 4 involves its apparent reliance on inductive reasoning. Specifically, we do not know enough about the way things work to confidently assert 4. Perhaps there are some entities which began to exist and yet were uncaused. We may not know of any such entities at this time, but that does not make 4 true. Those who object to the Kalām along these lines advocate suspending judgment and thus the argument should not be used as support for supernaturalism. I think there is at least as much support for 4 as the inductive argument for naturalism has for N.

### Similar Inductive Reasoning

Premise 4 will be relabeled here as follows:

(C) Everything that began to exist was caused to exist

As N is a universal claim about causally explicable things, C is a universal claim about things that begin to exist. Now consider the following:

(C') We (i) have identified a vast and continually growing number of things that began to exist and were caused to exist and (ii) have not positively identified anything that began to exist and was not caused to exist

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<sup>10</sup> J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 470-480.



The first part of C' is obviously true. The second part is more controversial. Some argue that quantum indeterminacy provides examples of things that begin to exist and were uncaused. A few things must be said about this. First, C and C' are meant to involve the entities/objects/"stuff" that constitute a state, not the state itself. Quantum indeterminacy is often cited when discussing the location, direction, spin, etc. of subatomic particles. Most do not think that the substances themselves pop in and out of existence for no reason. Even if someone were to affirm that, they would need to demonstrate it as such, which brings us to the next point. Not all scientists agree on the interpretations and implications of the scientific theories that lead to quantum indeterminacy. Echoing Draper, perhaps in time we will have more refined scientific theories that better explain the phenomena.<sup>11</sup> At the present time, we cannot with certainty claim to know of things that began to exist and were not caused to exist. Thus it is reasonable to affirm C'.

As N entails N', C entails C'. If C is false, then C' may or may not follow. So if N' provides more inductive support for N than ¬N, C' provides more inductive support for C than ¬C. Given that either C or its negation must be true, we can construct the following similar argument:

$$(11) \quad P(C/C') > P(\neg C/C')$$

$$(12) \quad C \vee \neg C$$

$$(13) \quad \therefore P(C/C') > 0.5$$

Like the inductive argument for naturalism, this argument states that one who affirms the truth of C' has reason to believe that C is probably true. We can plug this into the cosmological argument as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> Draper, 300.

- (14) It is probable that everything that begins to exist was caused to exist
- (7) Nature began to exist
- (15)  $\therefore$  It is probable that nature was caused to exist
- (9) Any cause of nature must be supernatural
- (16)  $\therefore$  It is probable that something supernatural caused nature to exist

If 7 and 9 are true, one who affirms  $C'$  also has reason to believe that supernaturalism is probably true.  $C'$  not only provides more inductive support for  $C$  than  $\neg C$ , it also seems to provide more inductive support for  $\neg N$  than  $N$ .

### Implications

The inductive argument for supernaturalism just presented is divided into two parts: 1) the probability of  $C$  on  $C'$  and 2) the probability of  $\neg N$  on  $C'$ . Each of these parts can be evaluated separately. First, the inductive inference of  $C$  from  $C'$  mirrors the inductive inference of  $N$  from  $N'$ . Any who argue for naturalism on an inductive basis like  $N'$  should have no problem using  $C'$  to argue for  $C$ . Likewise, any who think that we should suspend judgment of the Kalām because of  $C$  should also advocate suspending judgment of naturalism because of  $N$ . After all, both  $N$  and  $C$  enjoy similar inductive support. If one fails because such support is taken to be too weak, the other should fail for the same reason.

The proponent of naturalism can affirm  $C$  on the basis of  $C'$  because this alone does not conflict with naturalism. Conflict arises when  $C$  is used alongside premises 7 and 9 of the cosmological argument. This brings us to the second part of this evaluation. If the other premises of the Kalām are true, then there is reason to think that supernaturalism is probably

true, given that C is probably true on C'. I think the naturalist must respond to this argument as it undermines the inductive support for naturalism. Conclusion 16 means that we have probably identified at least one causally explicable thing that cannot be explained naturalistically, and that is nature itself. There is a great deal of tension between this supernatural claim and N'. Granted, one may not know with certainty that N' is false, but it seems that there is good reason to think that N' is probably false. Note that while 16 clashes with N', naturalism does not clash with C', 7, or 9 (at least individually). I think that this asymmetry places the onus on the naturalist to provide a response.

### Potential Objections

Before concluding, it is worthwhile to consider potential objections. As already noted, one can argue against 7 or 9. Based on the fact that nothing can be prior to itself, it seems that 9 must be true. Additionally, current scientific findings affirm 7. There are certain theories that would render 7 false (e.g. an eternally oscillating universe), however, these are mostly speculative with little or no scientific backing. Future scientific discovery may provide new insight that gives us reason to doubt these premises, but until then, it seems more reasonable to accept them. Once again echoing Draper<sup>12</sup>, time will tell whether there will be evidence to the contrary or if science will continue to support to these claims.

A second option would be to reject Draper's definition of nature and offer a definition that remains agreeable with the inductive argument for naturalism while not also permitting the inductive argument for supernaturalism. It is hard to see how this might work. Such a

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<sup>12</sup> Draper, 300.

redefining of “nature” should not be *ad hoc*. Thus one would need to indicate why Draper’s definition is not good enough and how some different definition would be better. Even if there were some better definition, I do not see how it could avoid the cosmological argument, specifically, issues of origination and regress.

A third option would be to reject both the naturalistic and supernaturalistic inductive arguments entirely. This would require much stronger support than N’ or C’ before affirming N or C respectively. What exactly that “stronger support” would look like is unclear. If one rejects both arguments, then one may be advocating agnosticism towards naturalism and supernaturalism, at least until a better argument is presented. One concern in going this route relates to consistency. It seems that much of what we believe is based on inductive reasoning similar to the move from N’ to N or C’ to C. If one rejects this, then one should reject any similar reasoning as well. This would result not only in agnosticism towards naturalism and supernaturalism, but agnosticism about anything based upon such inductive reasoning. This may be too steep a price to pay.

### Conclusion

In summary, the reasoning employed in the inductive argument for naturalism can be used to argue for the first premise of the Kalam cosmological argument. The success or failure of such reasoning applies to both positions. If the other important premises of the Kalam are true, then supernaturalism is probably true. This directly undermines the inductive support for naturalism.

A modest conclusion is simply that we should not affirm naturalism just yet. Draper thinks that naturalism is probable on the success of the sciences. What has been discussed in this paper provides reason for thinking that naturalism is probably false. This does not necessarily lump one into the supernaturalist camp. Perhaps agnosticism towards naturalism is more appropriate for the time being. New information may become available that provides better reasons for thinking naturalism is true, but until then, we should not so quickly accept it.

A stronger conclusion is that there is reason enough to reject naturalism and affirm supernaturalism, at least at the present time. As with the modest conclusion, this may change given new evidence. Many will undoubtedly remain unconvinced of this conclusion, but hopefully arguments such as this can serve to foster further inquiry and discussion.

Works Cited

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