

UNAPOLOGETIC

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Intro

This paper is not an apologetic defence of a theistic worldview, because the traditional Christian theological framework does not require defence. Belief in God can be warranted from proper basis alone, similar to how most people assume other minds actually exist, despite not ever considering the basis of that assumption.

There are, however, various rational reasons to assume that other minds actually exist. Similarly, there are various rational reasons to assume that God actually exists. This paper discusses several of the 25 “good” arguments presented in the book *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for God*.^[1] Some arguments are summarised from other sources, including Swinburne's *The Existence of God*,^[2] and C. Stephen Evans' *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God*.^[3]

Arguments

The Naïve Teleological Argument: An Argument From Design for Ordinary People

The naïve teleological argument discussed by C. Stephen Evans attributes apparent intentional design in the natural world as an indication of the existence of God.^[4] The argument is ancient, and is so named because it does not require specialised scientific knowledge to comprehend. Modern naturalism is unbothered by apparent design; evolutionary theory enabled secular thinkers to explain it without recourse to theism. Richard Dawkins summarises: “Although atheism may have been logically tenable before Darwin... the theory of evolution has... made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist”.^[5] Evolutionary theory does not, however, undermine the argument. It is reasonable to argue that there are aspects of the natural world which still require purposive explanation. Some examples include observations apparent in cosmology, teleology, and morality.

Cosmology

The cosmological argument is grounded in an experience Evans deems “cosmic wonder”. Humans experience cosmic wonder upon examining the universe and considering the origins and fragile existence of contingent objects. Everything might easily never-have-been, yet the complex orderliness of reality suggests the possibility of a necessary being, God. However, God’s necessity is not obviously apparent because human finite awareness cannot comprehend the necessity of God’s existence. Cosmic wonder is thus a natural sign which inclines one’s disposition to theism.

Teleology

The teleological argument notes the “beneficial order” of natural processes to reveal more specific information about God’s character; he is a designer working to establish specific goals. The surface level orderliness of natural cycles and ecosystems is apparent to ordinary people, demonstrating that God’s nature entails immutability, intelligence, and omnipotent power. Surface level orderliness rests upon a deeper order of physical laws and constants, inspiring discussion about fine-tuning.

Morality

Moral obligations and human dignity are natural signs apparent within human morality. Few secular thinkers refute the existence of either moral obligations or human dignity, but rather focus upon explaining these phenomena (with varying degrees of success). Theistic explanations for moral obligations and dignity are generally more robust and cogent than naturalistic explanations.

It is important to note that all three examples listed above meet the criteria of the “wide accessibility principal” (WAP), and the “easy resistibility principal” (ERP). To satisfy the WAP, a natural sign must be universally accessible to all people. To satisfy the ERP, it must be possible to explain a natural sign without reference to theism. The ERP is a necessary condition for the existence of free will.

The naïve teleological argument is founded upon an array of natural signs for which the existence of God can be posited as an explanation.

The Argument from Physical Constants

An extension to the anthropic fine-tuning argument, Robbie Collins presents an argument based on the “science-friendly” nature of the universe; the argument from fine-tuning for discoverability.^[6]

The standard anthropic argument is based on the apparent fine-tuning of universal constants. For example, the cosmological constant must be tuned to within 1 in 10^{120} of its theoretical possible range of values to permit conditions for life to exist.^[7] This fine-tuning is often dismissed by recourse to multiverse theory - given a large or infinite number of initial conditions, it is inevitable that conditions will arise to permit human life. Multiverse theory itself has various issues (e.g., Boltzmann brain problem), and so far no multiverse models have been produced that would not also require extensive fine-tuning.^[8]

Albert Einstein and Eugene Wigner both commented on the “miraculous” intelligibility and discoverability of the physical universe.^[9] Collins rigorizes this sentiment by examining various universal parameters and defining a discoverability-optimality range for each parameter, demonstrating that each one is tuned surprisingly to its optimal value.

Entropy

It is surprising that the universe has relatively low entropy throughout. Human life only requires a small pocket of low entropy to exist, yet a fully structured universe is observed. Universal low entropy is crucial for discoveries in the fields of astrophysics and cosmology; without being able to observe other galaxies the origins of the universe could not be studied. Cosmologists have attempted to find a naturalistic explanation for universal low entropy, but have been unable to do so.

Fine-structure constant

The fine-structure constant, α , is a parameter that quantifies the strength of the electromagnetic force. Collins computes that a small decrease in the value of α would prevent the development of fire-based technology, while a small increase would reduce the resolving power of optical microscopes, and reduce the efficiency of transformers and electric motors. Collins determines that α falls within its discoverability-optimality subregion.

Cosmic microwave background radiation

Cosmic microwave background radiation (CMB) is a critical tool in cosmology, and it is dependent upon the baryon to photon ratio, η_{by} . In general, more intense CMB is more effective for cosmology. Collins calculates that the observed ratio η_{by} maximises the intensity of CMB, placing η_{by} in the discoverability-optimality subregion.

Collins concludes by highlighting how the discoverability-optimality hypothesis avoids observer-selection biases, while emphasising that his hypothesis makes “falsifiable” predictions, none of which have yet been disproven. Since fortunate conditions for scientific discovery are probable given the existence of God, but improbable otherwise, the argument from fine-tuning for discoverability can be considered a powerful argument for theism.

The Argument from Colours and Flavours (The Argument from Consciousness)

Richard Swinburne presents the argument from colours and flavours, more formally called the argument from consciousness or pure mental events.^[10] The argument hinges upon the concept of mental events, and the phenomena of consciousness itself.

Mental events such as thoughts, feelings, and sensory experiences are events to which the subject has privileged access. Although it is possible to record the brainwaves produced in a subject's brain when they sample a piece of chocolate, only the subject knows what the experience of tasting the chocolate is like.

How a person experiences colours and flavours is not a matter of brainwaves, but properties of that person's consciousness (or soul). To illustrate how the brain and consciousness are distinct, consider a thought experiment where a subject's brain is split into hemispheres, and each half is placed in a new body. Did the subject survive the operation? Perhaps the subject is still alive in one brain or the other, but there is no way to be certain. A person's consciousness is distinct from their brain/body, and every person has access to only their own consciousness.

This kind of consciousness is a good argument for theism if it is what would be expected given the existence of a God, but improbable otherwise. Consequently it is useful to consider the functional implications of the human mental condition.

Although it is possible to make superficial statistical inferences about how humans perceive the world, access to other people's minds is limited. The God of classical theism has reason to bring about this state of affairs in the interest of permitting free will. To know how to hurt or help others, people must be able to assume that other brains fundamentally perceive the world in a similar fashion (e.g., burning is painful). To preserve free will and enable moral choice, a person's mental life must be free of external influence. For example, there would be no opportunity to commit crimes if the thoughts of potential criminals were public knowledge.

It is also worth noting the inexplicable nature of consciousness itself. Since consciousness is distinct from a person's body, it exists outside the realm of the physical. How can processes of the natural world create a thing which does not exist in physical reality? David Chalmers writes "Materialism is a beautiful and compelling view of the world, but to account for consciousness, we have to go beyond the resources it provides".^[11]

If there is a God, he is probably not interested in creating robots. Rather, he would be interested in creating creatures with a rich, semi-private mental life that can interact in relationship with him, and have the capacity for moral choice. Since this type of consciousness is observed in reality, and it is expected given the existence of a God, the argument from colours and flavours has real force. Furthermore, naturalism fails to adequately explain the phenomenon of consciousness itself; attempted naturalistic explanations are more complex and make more assumptions than a theistic explanation.

The Argument from Love and (Y) The Meaning of Life

From the naturalist perspective, all of mankind's "hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms" (Bertrand Russell, *Free Man's Worship*).^[12] For those who believe that existence demands a purpose, and that love represents more than a neurochemical reaction, the naturalistic perspective is deeply unsatisfying. Jerry Walls discusses how naturalism fails to meaningfully address the questions of love and existence, while demonstrating how these concepts integrate constitutionally into the Christian theological framework.^[13]

From the naturalistic perspective, there cannot be any predetermined meaning to human existence. Sartre's best attempt to describe the human condition is "abandonment".^[14] Naturalism also fails to explain the gap between objective, and subjective perspectives identified by Thomas Nagal, who writes: "From far enough outside (objective) my birth seems accidental, my life pointless and my death insignificant. But from inside (subjective) my never having been born seems nearly unimaginable, my life monstrously important, and my death catastrophic".^[15] Since naturalism is unable to reconcile this gap, Nagal now advocates for a worldview where "mind is fundamental to reality, not a mere side-effect".^[16]

Naturalism states that love is the chemical byproduct of evolutionary forces. Evolutionary psychology suggests that eros is a mechanism to ensure loyalty for successful co-parenting. Altruism is explained through the concept of kin selection, or described as a cost-benefit relationship in social exchange theory. For anyone who has experienced the transformative power of love, this explanation may seem unsatisfying. Love requires active choices and mutual connections; it is not a simple product of hormonal responses. This intentionality of love suggests that it cannot be understood through reductionism.

Now consider the theistic perspective of existence. From the doctrine "God is love", Plantinga writes that the meaning of existence is addressed through the Christian story of incarnation and atonement. It is the greatest story possible to tell; its central character, God, is the greatest possible being. Rather than a condition of abandonment, humanity is the beloved of the greatest possible lover, in the greatest possible story.^[17] Theism also addresses Nagel's gap between subjective and objective reality. Incarnation and atonement shows that:

1. Our birth is not staggeringly improbable, it was ordained by God and he delights in it.
2. Humans feel like they belong in their existence even though it is objectively meaningless. The theistic framework states that humans do truly belong as beloved creatures of God; subjective feelings align with objective reality
3. Objective and subjective perspectives do not conflict. Rather, the subjective perspective is elevated because as beloved creatures of God humans are not limited to their own will and capacity; they can aspire to do greater things

Similarly, the theistic framework provides a deeper, better explanation of love than naturalism affords. Romantic love is transformed by the love of God into a form of altruism, and is a clue that points to love at the heart of transcendent reality. Plantinga argues that love is a necessary feature of reality since it is part of God's nature. Love is a personal attribute, and is best explained by the personal God of classical theism who desires personal relationships. For those who believe love exists beyond physical reality, and that the meaning of existence demands a satisfying answer, these arguments may hold force.

The Bach Argument (The Argument from Beauty)

In *De Veritate* Augustine asks “are things beautiful because they give delight, or do they give delight because they are beautiful?” Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine concur upon the latter.^[18]

The argument from beauty, (based on Phillip Talon’s formulation) states that beauty is a profoundly significant feature of reality, finding its deepest fulfilment and explanation within a theistic framework. Naturalism attempts to explain beauty through evolutionary theory, but cannot address the possibility that beauty transcends material manifestations.

Ancient cultures recognized beauty in the natural world; Athenagoras of Athens writes: “Thus if the world is a harmonious instrument rhythmically moved, I worship not the instrument but the one who tuned and strikes the strings and sings to it’s accompaniment the melodious strain”.^[19] More recently, Swinburne writes: “If God creates a universe, as a good workman he will create a beautiful universe. On the other hand, if the universe came into being without being created by God, there is no reason to suppose it would be a beautiful universe”.^[20]

Implicit in Swinburne’s statement is an objective view of beauty. However, even if objectivity is denied, the argument still holds force. But denying objective beauty is difficult, because both non-objectivist and subjectivist perspectives of beauty suffer from problems of internal coherence. Although the existence of objective beauty might be considered a basic belief, there are also rational premises to support the perspective. Consider the way language implicitly ascribes beauty as a property of things/actions: “Today is a beautiful day”. Or consider acts of vandalism against artworks or architecture; people are outraged when something beautiful is destroyed for no good reason (despite the fact that it will never impact their lives) because beauty is a property of the item, and suffers a conjunct destruction.

Can naturalism fully explain the human perception of beauty? Evolutionary arguments attempt to explain why certain landscapes might seem beautiful; people are attracted to landscapes that are conducive to human flourishing. However, there is not enough data regarding human evolution to craft these explanations with any degree of certainty. It is particularly difficult for naturalism to explain why humans perceive mathematics as beautiful, given the lack of obvious evolutionary advantage. Nevertheless, scientists regularly use mathematical beauty as a guide to developing theories that uncover truths of reality.

Do differing opinions of aesthetic judgement indicate that beauty is subjective? Although people may have subjective interpretation, this does not show nonexistence of objective beauty. Critics may debate the order of the list of best movies of the year, but usually all have the same films on their list. This comprehensibly aligns with Christian theology, which states that humans have access to basic evaluative intuition even in their fallen state. However, because of fallenness, humans lack a natural understanding of more complex values and so often have differing aesthetic judgements.

In summary, objective beauty is an expected feature of the world if God exists. Naturalism uses complex evolutionary theories to explain the human perception of beauty, but there is insufficient data to be certain of these explanations. Positing the existence of nonmaterial, transcendent beauty is a far simpler explanation, and is supported by observations of reality (natural beauty, objective language, mathematical beauty). Anyone who recognises the nonphysical reality of beauty should by extension also recognise the existence of God as the source of all transcendent beauty.

Moral Arguments

Although an exhaustive list of moral arguments could fill many books, the key points of C. Stephen Evans formulation^[21] can be summarised by referencing the concepts of moral obligations, moral awareness, and human worth.

A moral obligation is some kind of moral duty which dictates what one ought to do. Obligations are universal; secular thinkers acknowledge moral obligations and claim to abide by them without recourse to theism. Plantinga argues that obligations are best explained through Divine Command Theory (DCT), and further argues that morality is objective and independent of human epistemology. The *Euthyphro* dilemma presents the theistic ethicist with a challenge of arbitrariness, but Robert Adams' version of DCT addresses this challenge by acknowledging the character of God as "good" by definition.^[22] Divine commands are aimed at the good, and are consistent with God's essential character; this is why moral arguments serve as high-information natural signs for the existence of God.

In *The Existence of God*, Swinburne presents an even more basic argument; any human moral awareness is only probable given the existence of God. Swinburne notes that although some species of animals may be inclined to behave altruistically towards other members of their community, they do so without any understanding of their actions as morally good. There is no reason to believe that natural processes could create brain states with the capacity to generate moral beliefs. Nevertheless, human moral awareness is an observable feature of reality. Swinburne notes that this moral awareness can be reasonably expected given the existence of a God who desires to create free agents capable of moral choice. Since human moral awareness is probable given the existence of a God, but improbable otherwise, this argument lends weight to the cumulative case for theism.

The concept of human dignity is universal, being acknowledged by the UDHR among other humanist documents. Some extremist groups like Nazis and racists intentionally violate this dignity, but it is for precisely this reason that Nazism has become synonymous with evil. Despite rarely ever disputing its existence, secular ethicists have had difficulty generating naturalistic explanations for the concept of human dignity. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard explores the concept of human dignity using an illustration of watermarked paper.^[23] Although different sheets may contain different text, each one is inscribed with a common watermark. Similarly, all humans possess an "inner glory" or basic dignity that is recognisable regardless of the person's age, character, or mental condition. Human dignity functions as a natural sign for God because the image of God is watermarked upon all human life. The natural sign does not require religious belief to function; nonreligious observers recognize humans as created in the image of God, even if they do not consciously process their observation.

Moral arguments are often highly effective because few people dispute the existence of obligations, or human dignity. Non-theistic explanations of these two phenomena are neither as simple, nor self-consistent as classical theism. Importantly, the natural signs of morality are both widely available, and easily resistible. Moral signs indicate God is essentially good, and desires a relationship with human persons. For anyone who is convinced of objective moral truth, these arguments may contribute to the cumulative case for theistic belief.

The Cosmological Argument

In *The Existence of God*, Swinburne presents a robust formation of the cosmological argument, emphasising the simplicity of theism to explain the universe's origin. Other formulations of the argument (e.g., *Kalam*) assert that a personal agent with libertarian free will is required to act as a first mover because free will is the only mechanism that could initiate the universe.^[24] Swinburne's formulation is more conservative, noting that theistic explanations of existence are simpler than atheistic ones, and thus more probably true.

Considering the existence of a complex physical universe provides a premise for the cosmological argument. The argument is unaffected regardless of the (potential) existence of a multiverse. Since the concept of a complex universe and the nonexistence of God are logically compatible, the cosmological argument is an inductive argument.

Modern science indicates the universe began during the big bang, ~15bn years ago. There must have been a beginning to the universe as governed by the current laws of nature because the big bang constitutes a physically impossible state. There cannot be knowledge of anything prior; there may have been a different universe governed by different laws, but it is simpler to postulate nothing rather than something.

Swinburne discusses the relationship of individuals to collections, showing that since the universe is described by its prior past states, a naturalist considers its existence over time a brute fact. A theistic perspective explains existence in terms of actions of a personal agent, who is the ultimate cause of the universe and continuously upholds it. In this case only the existence of a personal agent (God) is a brute fact, not the complex universe.

When postulating the existence of God, it is sensible to postulate the simplest kind of God, who has infinite power, knowledge and freedom. Limiting God's abilities raises questions about why he has that particular amount of power. It is important to note that this type of God is compatible with the Anselmian God of classical theism, who possesses qualities of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. Polytheism is problematic; it is complex, and incompatible with the observable uniformity of the physical universe.

The complex universe evolved from a prior state; its starting point was once a finite thing, with certain ways of developing built into it. Rather than having uniform laws of nature, it is logically possible the universe might have had no laws and complete chaos, or laws that caused immediate annihilation. Naturalism concludes that this complex initial state of the universe is a brute fact. Conversely the theistic perspective concludes that only God's existence is a brute fact, and his actions have caused the universe's current complex state.

It is very unlikely that the complex nature of the universe should exist as a brute fact. However, there is a good chance that if God exists, he would create a universe much like current physical reality, where free agents have the ability to make moral choices. Since it is only possible to speculate about the cause of the universe, it is preferable to postulate the simplest possible theory because simple hypotheses are more likely to be true. It is far simpler to say that God himself exists as a brute fact, than to suggest that the initial complexity of the entire universe is a brute fact. Consequently, the cosmological argument is a good inductive argument for the existence of God.

Theodicy

A theodicy is a response to the question of why a good God permits the manifestation of evil. While not a strictly traditional theodicy, Plantinga's free-will defence^[25] is arguably the most robust response. A theodicy suggests specific reasons why God might permit evil, while a defence attempts to show that there is no logical contradiction between the concept of a good God, and the existence of evil. Most philosophers accept Plantinga's free-will defence, accepting it as a sufficient rebut to the logical problem of evil.^[26]

The argument can be summarised as follows:

- A world with free will is more valuable than a world without free will, because free will allows for moral agency and the possibility of love
- In any possible world that God can create, humans would eventually freely choose to sin
- While sinless worlds are logically possible, they are not feasible to bring about (transworld depravity)
- God cannot create creatures with the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. Evil is the result of creatures exercising their free will. God could only prevent the existence of evil by eliminating the possibility of moral free choice

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