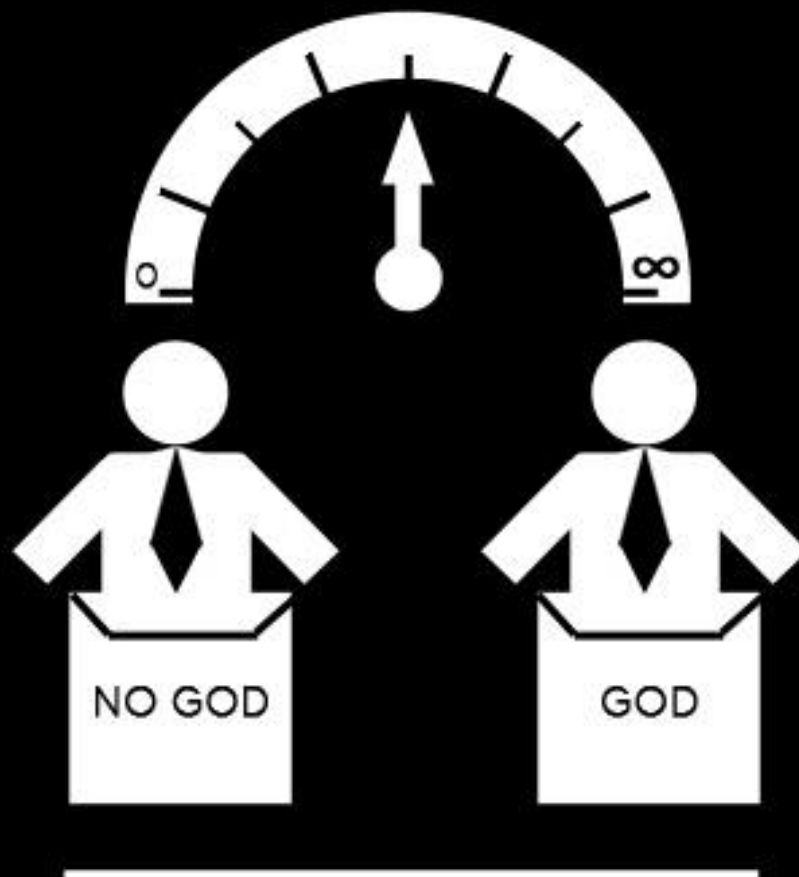


How To Debate Atheists



by Mike Manea

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<http://mikemanea.com/conversations/>

Apologists have been debating atheists for millennia. The modern apologist however faces more scrutiny than ever before. The combined forces of science and advances in technology have sharpened the debate to a razor's edge. When doing a quick survey of most modern Christian apologists, an astute observer will realize that they are falling short in their defense. Most Christian apologists rely on a classical logic framework for debate while atheists use a more empirical framework. While one can practice logic in isolation a debate requires effective communication which in turn relies on common ground. And, the disparity between the two frameworks has led to confusion and miscommunication.

For the record, I don't count myself an expert on the topic. I am however consciously incompetent while, it seems to me, most Christians these days, including most professional apologists, are unconsciously incompetent when it comes to this particular group. With that in mind, the approach I am presenting here is more of a primer; a sort of start-up framework that others could build upon in the hopes that a better methodology is eventually developed. I realize some people question the need to effectively engage this group and I am not going to respond to such people because frankly, as far as I am concerned, they are out of touch with present realities.

Chapter 1 - The Preliminaries

Let's then set the stage by saying that we are involved in a public debate framed around the question 'Does the Christian God exist?' (a fairly common debate format) And, for the sake of doing the topic justice, let's also say that although public, the debate is not live and therefore we are not limited by the typical time constraints.

In this situation I would proceed as follows:

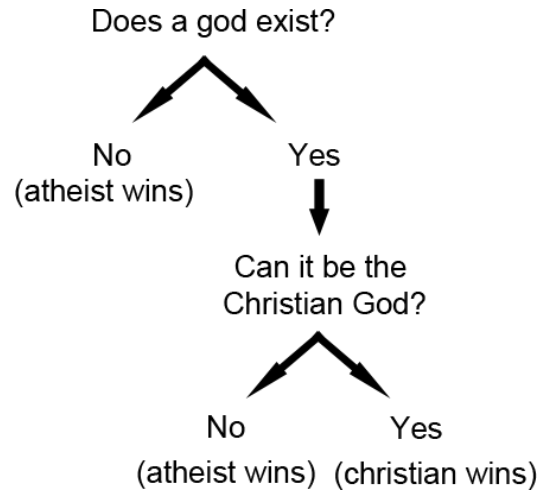
1) Break the debate into two parts: (a) Does 'a' god exist and, (b) Can this god be the God of Christianity.

Is the atheist willing to work under the assumption that a god does exist and what needs to be determined is whether this god could be the Christian God? If not, we need to first debate the existence of a god in general. We can come back to the Christian God once this first question is settled.

Chances are this will already cause friction with the atheist before the debate even starts. But, as far as I am concerned, this point is non-negotiable; there will be no debate if the atheist does not agree to break the debate into parts. The reason the atheist prefers to keep these topics together is because he can present arguments against Christianity and, if the apologist gives an adequate

response to those arguments he could then say, 'well, it does not matter since there is no reason to think a god exists anyway.' But, if the apologist gives good reason to think God does exist, it still does not matter since that does not mean the Christian god exists. Also, the atheist might question the historicity of some miraculous Bible story all the while working under the assumption that miracles cannot happen. So the Bible is not trustworthy because it mentions miracles which cannot happen because there is no god and, because the Bible is not trustworthy, that is additional evidence that there is no god. Of course, a book that makes no mention of miracles would provide no support for God anyway.

Now I am not even saying here that atheists are intentionally being deceptive in doing this. The complexity of the debate is such that it is very easy to fall into circular patterns of thinking which is why the two topics need to be debated separately. Moreover, the existence of the generic god can be debated as theists rather than as Christians meaning that the same approach can be used by different denominations as well as other theistic religious groups.



2) Agree on what constitutes acceptable evidence and start with a blank slate.

It is important when debating someone to first come to an agreement regarding what type of evidence you will each accept as valid. There needs to be some standard that can be used to judge the validity of arguments and, if that standard is not agreed upon, there can be no rational discussion.

Fortunately, we can agree with the atheist on two forms of evidence: logical and scientific (this is more than can be said for many Christian groups we might interact with.) This does not mean that we cannot use other types of evidence but only that we must first provide logical and/or scientific support for that additional line of evidence before using it.

I'm actually saying this more for the sake of the Christian than for the atheist since many Christians assume the atheist is somehow obligated to accept Biblical evidence or experiential evidence right off the bat. Christians tend to take many things for granted in these debates not realizing that it is because they already believe in god that those things seem true. When talking with atheists however, nothing can be pre-supposed; the discussion starts with a completely blank slate.

But, even though I am saying this for the Christian, it does help to mention it to the atheist as well so that he knows this is a point he does not need to convince you of.

3) Establish burden of proof.

You wouldn't want to find yourself in a court trial where you were considered guilty until proven innocent, right? Identifying which side has the burden of proof in these debates is just as essential. There is a problem however in that the burden of proof always goes to the side making the positive claim; in this case, 'God DOES exist.' This point often gets apologists in trouble because they inadvertently walk into a situation where, unless they can provide overwhelming evidence for the existence of God, they are automatically wrong. Carl Sagan popularized the phrase, 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence' meaning that the existence of an intelligent supernatural entity is such an outrageous concept that an excessive level of evidence should be produced before the claim can be rationally accepted. And, working under these parameters means the debate is lost before it even starts. It is amazing how often apologists make their entire case never realizing that the atheist is holding them to this unrealistic standard.

But, since the theist IS making the positive claim, isn't the atheist correct in having such expectations?

Imagine that X, Y, and Z are underground workers that get stuck in a tunnel when the ceiling collapses. It takes emergency personnel several days to break them out and, when they finally get to them they discover that Z is dead with multiple stab wounds to the back. When the investigation is over it is clear that Z was murdered, that the murder happened just hours before the tunnel was reopened and that there was no one else in the tunnels that could have done it other than X and Y.

Now what if X went to trial and made the following argument:

- according to the law I am innocent until proven guilty and therefore,
- unless you can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that I am the one who did it, then
- I am not guilty and Y has to be the murderer.'

The flaw in the way atheists approach this debate is that the existence of god is not an isolated claim, as in 'someone somewhere exists.' The god-concept stems from necessity and is offered as one explanation for existence. As extraordinary as the god-claim seems, it is no more extraordinary than alternative claims. If the atheist disagrees, it is his job in this debate to demonstrate otherwise.

So in essence, this debate cannot be framed simply as 'does god exist.' We have to start with the one 'known' in the equation, mainly that we, our planet and the universe as a whole, exist. From there each participant can offer and support their explanation for existence whether it be god for the theist or naturalism (usually) for the atheist. Thus the burden of proof rests equally on each participant and conclusions are drawn by contrasting alternative explanations rather than by evaluating just one of the explanations against some exaggerated standard.

Otherwise we can play that game as well. Can the atheist prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that naturalism is true? If not, then a god must exist. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence after all, evidence the naturalist cannot produce. Therefore, the debate is not theism vs. atheism but theism vs. naturalism.

4) No default position

This point is somewhat similar to the previous but warrants its own section. There are times when the atheist will go along with the theism vs. naturalism setup and yet he will still debate as if naturalism should be considered the default option. Sometimes this is just instinctive since this is how his mind works. But in many cases it is because this reflects the scientific thought process and the atheist is unable to differentiate between a science debate and a philosophy debate.

In science, work is done under an assumption that naturalism is true. Questions of god or the supernatural are simply ignored, i.e. methodological naturalism. But, since this is a debate about naturalism and god, we cannot still presuppose the very things we are trying to determine. Because we are starting with a completely blank slate, if any position should be considered the default, a case must first be made for this. It cannot be taken for granted by the atheist and it is the responsibility of the theist to hold him in check on this point.

5) Naturalism in science

(I cannot do justice to this topic in a few sentences so if these concepts seem foreign I recommend an in depth study of 'methodological naturalism'.)

I mentioned above that science works under an assumption of naturalism. What this means is that science has a built in bias toward naturalism and against god and the supernatural. Professional atheist debaters will be aware of this but we must be careful since they could still use this fact to play on the ignorance of the audience.

Imagine a world where there is a 50/50 chance that a phenomenon is supernatural. The way science would approach this is by assuming that 100% of the phenomena are natural. It would conduct experiments based on that premise for each one and, if the results repeatedly line up with expectations, conclude that it is in fact natural. It would arrive at a supernatural conclusion after having exhausted all the natural options.

We don't live in a universe where the chances of the supernatural are 50/50 but neither can we yet be sure that our universe is 100% natural. Depending on where in the process scientists are with any particular theory, the certainty that the naturalistic assumptions are correct varies and we must therefore be careful to evaluate each scientific conclusion and to try to correct for this bias.

6) Naturalistic assumptions confirmed

Atheists will often say that the success of the scientific method confirms the naturalistic assumptions of science. Except that it doesn't. Supernaturalism or belief in god in no way implies that everything in nature has to function through supernatural means causing the scientific method to fail often.

Consider the most extreme situation possible: a universe where god supplied only the initial conditions and everything else occurred naturally from there with no further interference from

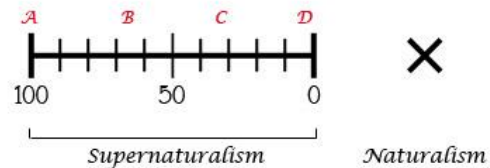
god. In such a situation, the scientific method would work nearly universally and yet the naturalistic assumptions of science would still be false. The current state of scientific advancement is nowhere near what it would need to be to push god back to such an extreme degree so claiming the assumptions of science have already been confirmed is ridiculously premature.

I have [an article](#) where I go into this in far more detail so I will not spend more time on it here. In fact I highly recommend it to anyone involved in the theist-naturalist debate to read first the [article by Barbara Forrest](#) (linked to at the top of my article), read [Maarten Boudry's response](#) and then [my response](#) to them both.

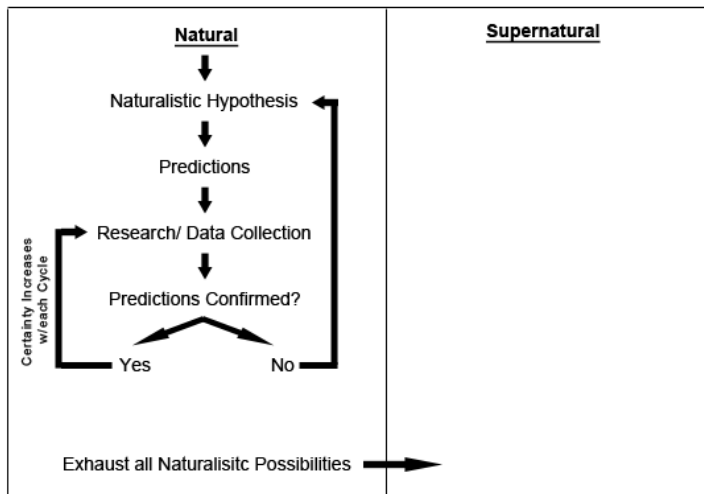
7) Death by lack of methodology

In the [article by Barbara Forrest](#) mentioned above she makes a very important point. She states that while we do have a methodology for studying the natural, we have no methodology for studying the supernatural and this in itself should be sufficient reason to dismiss it.

Degree of Divine Intervention



- A God creates everything and maintains everything - Scientific method does not work
- B God creates everything but things maintain themselves - Scientific method works sometimes
- C God uses processes to do the creation for him - Scientific method works most of the time
- D God creates only the initial conditions - Scientific method works almost always



She however is wrong. We do have a methodology for discovering the supernatural. That methodology is still the scientific method via a process of elimination. If we exhaust every possible naturalistic explanation for something, we are left with the supernatural. (see 'definition' section below)

8) Define 'god' and the 'supernatural.'

Another problem that often comes up in these debates is that atheists use faulty definitions of the supernatural. They do this in several ways:

- a. They equate the supernatural with magic, fairy tales and overall nonsense by definition. The supernatural cannot exist because nonsense cannot exist. Further debate is superfluous because of the way the word is defined.
- b. They define the supernatural as something that would be unable to affect the natural world since only physical causes can have physical effects (causal closure). This is a purely arbitrary definition and makes the supernatural irrelevant from the start.
- c. They define the supernatural as a scientific blind spot. In this way the supernatural cannot really exist because it is only a matter of time before science figures it out and it becomes natural.

A more coherent working definition of the supernatural is 'something that is not confined to the fundamental forces of our universe.' Or, to say it differently, "any phenomenon which has its basis in entities and processes that transcend the spatiotemporal realm of impersonal matter and energy described by modern science." (Boudry, et al - paper linked to above)

When it comes to god, since we are currently debating the existence of the generic god and not some specific version of god, an appropriate definition is:

- an intelligent being,
- that is not confined to our material universe
- but has the capacity to create such an universe

Whether god is good or bad or whether he is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent or omnibenevolent does not matter at this point since, if an evil, less than all powerful god exists, the atheist is still wrong.

9) A scientific model for the supernatural

One of the main difficulties in talking about the supernatural is that there is little else in our world that we can compare it to. So the discussion often ends up being my imaginary version of the supernatural vs. your imaginary version. Each side can make pronouncements about how the supernatural works or what evidences we should be able to find and there is nothing on which to test those ideas.

Until now. In my opinion, computers have made it possible to simulate, in theory, the natural-supernatural relationship. We can create a virtual environment on a computer in relation to which WE would be considered supernatural. I will explain this in more detail in chapter 3 and have an article about it [here](#), but for now the idea is simply:

- if the brain is fully responsible for the human mind we will one day be able to replicate that mechanism within a computer program
- we will be able to build a virtual environment where everything results from a set of fundamental forces like the four fundamental forces of our own universe.

- we will be able to develop intelligent virtual entities whose brains are a direct product of those virtual fundamental forces just as our brains are a product of the fundamental forces of our own universe.

- to such virtual beings everything within the virtual universe will be considered 'natural' and everything in our universe will be 'supernatural'.

Reasoning through this model will allow us to evaluate our thinking and our methods in reference to the supernatural. I will be referring to this as the Computer-Simulated-Reality (CSR) model from here on.

10) Isolate the deist god from the theist god

The idea here is simply that any atheist argument that applies to the god of the deist would apply to the theist's god as well while the reverse is not necessarily true. Focusing on the deist god first allows us to isolate arguments and determine what part of the atheist's case is the strongest.

This is done for several reasons. First, if the atheist can make a strong case against the deist god the rest of the debate is unnecessary. If however the case against the deist god is weak this can no longer be used as a fallback position later in the debate. Not isolating the arguments can lead to similar problems as described in step 1. There is a nebulous set of 'overwhelming' evidences against the deist god that the atheist can mention in passing whenever he runs into difficulties disproving the interventionist god and a similarly nebulous set of anti-interventionist god arguments that can be alluded to when the case against the deist god seems weak. By following the concepts in order, deist god > interventionist god > Christian God, we can address each aspect fully and then there is no further need to revisit it.

11) Tackle one point at a time

It isn't always easy to do but its best in these discussions to focus on one argument at a time and to try to get to a conclusion before moving on to something else.

One common problem to watch out for is what I call the argument avalanche. This is where the atheist starts throwing out point after point in quick succession not giving opportunity for rebuttal trying to imply that a position must be wrong if so many arguments against it can be produced. Never mind that with a bit of imagination, and a lot of time to waste, someone can produce an unlimited number of arguments against any position.

A good example of how this is done later in the debate is where an atheist brings up contradictions in the Bible and then links to some website that claims to have found 10,000 of them. It is impossible to address them all in any reasonable amount of time.

The way I deal with these situations is to:

- A) Ask the atheist to choose some manageable number of contradictions, say 10, 20 or 50,
- B) Go through the website himself and pick the best 10, 20 or 50 he can find (so I don't get

accused of picking easy ones),

C) Agree to go through the list one at a time and, if addressed, to scratch it off the list and not bring it up again.

12) The argument from ignorance

When discussing something that science does not have a good explanation for the atheist will often tell you that just because science cannot come up with a naturalistic explanation for something does not mean that this something did not occur naturally anyway. And, that is true. But neither does it mean that it did.

Sometimes the atheist will argue that 'I don't know' is a perfectly good answer. And it is. In science, it is much better to admit ignorance than to make stuff up. However, the atheist must understand that 'I don't know' does not provide any additional weight to his position in this debate. If we start off with the balances set at 50/50 for theism vs. naturalism and he places his 'I don't know' on his side of the scale, it does not tip things in his favor in any way. This is why it is important to deal with the 'default position' issue early on.

13) Atheism as a cult

Whether someone belongs to an organized cult or not, there is such a thing as a cult-mindset. Cult-minded people are especially difficult to reason with and this for specific reasons:

- They hold a belief system that flows logically from a set of flawed foundational premises. Given those premises, their worldview IS the most logical worldview and any argument against it will naturally appear erroneous.
- If however the flawed premises are attacked directly, such persons are unlikely to actually evaluate those premises; they might consider such attacks a distraction from the real issues or they might feel themselves superior in spirituality or intellect and therefore not likely to be wrong on such foundational matters.
- They are also heavily invested in their worldview and change would mean a considerable disruption to their way of life.

Such people tend to go through three phases:

- a) (first) The Evaluation Phase - where they are not yet fully convinced even if they speak or act as if they are.
- b) (last) The Uncertainty Phase (sometimes) - After holding these views for some time they might reach a stage where they are no longer as sure as they once were.
- c) (middle) The Full Immersion Phase - Here the person has fully bought into the belief system and is very unlikely to change. In essence, it would take a disproportionate amount of effort to convince such a person that they are wrong to the point where it's not even worth trying since the likelihood of success is minimal.

Now I must acknowledge here that the above does not apply to all atheists and could be applied just as much to many Christians or theists. However, there has been in recent years a movement

among the atheist community and it seems to me that more and more of the atheists I meet these days have bought into this mindset.

Some of the flawed premises this mindset rests on have already been addressed and I will continue to bring up more of them as I go along. In fact, many of the points mentioned this far are nothing more than amateurish debate tricks. But, with the possible exception of some of the atheist thought leaders, it does seem that the majority of atheists today do genuinely buy into them. For example, most atheists are convinced that placing the entire burden of proof on the theist is the correct way to frame these debates and that naturalism should be the default option. In fact, my bringing up these points will very likely appear to them as a deceptive attempt to give theism an unfair advantage rather than an attempt to correct an unfair advantage that atheists currently hold.

So why am I mentioning this? When apologists engage atheists in debates they need to realize that, while the debates are necessary, they are not conducted for the sake of the atheists themselves. It is unlikely that anything they say will appear convincing to the atheists. However, in every debate there are people in the audience who are on the fence on the issues and are still susceptible to reason. Because many of these people are not able to see through the fallacious reasoning of the atheists on their own they are likely to end up siding with them at the end. If however these flawed premises are identified and addressed, such people are very likely to recognize the flaws even if the atheists themselves don't see them. And, as a result, the atheist's case will no longer seem as strong.

Today most apologists have a skewed perception of the effects of these debates and for this reason might not appreciate the points I am covering in this document. Because as of now the majority of people are still theist, apologists get a false sense of how successful their efforts are. So for example if 100 people are watching a debate, 20 of them will side with the atheist and 60 of them with the theist no matter what the arguments presented. Only the remainder 20% actually evaluates the arguments and follows the weight of evidence. When the debates are over the apologists discover that 60% of the audience agrees with them and feel that they have won. In reality, the 20% that started off undecided usually end up siding with the atheists which means that the debate was actually lost. Over time the makeup of the population will change and apologists won't know what hit them. After all, they had been winning all along.

My hope is that apologists will wake up and reevaluate their criteria for success. I am convinced that when it comes to the group that matters, this undecided group, that our side has been losing. And the way to rectify this is to take the time to point out the flaws in the foundational premises of the atheist's worldview. While the atheists themselves will not appreciate this, those still capable of unbiased reason will.

Chapter 2 - Debating the Deist's God

According to the deist a god created the universe and then went on his merry way not interfering further. Does the theist have good reason to believe that at least such a god exists? Does the atheist have any reason to think he does not and naturalism is more likely? Since we're starting

with a blank slate and the initial portability is 50/50 (50% god vs. 50% naturalism), by the end of this section of the debate can the scales be tipped significantly towards one side or the other?

There are obviously many types of arguments that can be offered here by both sides and I will not be able to cover them all but I will address some of the more common ones as well as some of the possible pitfalls.

Common Theist Arguments

1) The cosmological/first cause argument

The popular form of the argument can be summarized as follows:

- i. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- ii. The Universe began to exist.
- iii. Therefore, the Universe had a cause.

There are several problems with this argument. First, how would you go about proving premise 1? You can make that claim but how would you demonstrate it? How would you prove premise 2, as in, how can you prove the universe began to exist as opposed to always existing? And lastly, if the universe does have a cause, why does it follow that this cause must be god?

As far as I can tell, this argument only appears strong to theists because of theistic presuppositions which they don't even realize they hold. I have heard it used numerous times in debates and by the end, even I end up siding with the atheists. My advice, don't use it.

2) The fine tuning argument

This is another argument I would never use. The idea is that the various forces of our universe are so finely tuned that even a minor change to one of them would destroy the universe.

Imagine for a second a sphere resting on three legs. If the height of one of the legs is even slightly adjusted, the sphere rolls off. But that does not mean that by adjusting the height of the other legs as well you couldn't find another configuration that works.

Even if the universe seems fine-tuned, this does not mean that there are no other configurations of fundamental forces that would also produce a fine tuned universe.

Reasoning Through the Deist Paradigm

If a supernatural intelligence created the universe and then left us to ourselves, the only means we would have to determine the existence of such a being would be in the creation itself (since this god would not be around to provide other kinds of evidence). But, we would not be able to directly prove that the universe was created. We would need instead to look for ways to show that it was not. The less able we would be to provide adequate explanations for how our universe could exist without a creator, the more likely that it was created.

This would apply to every facet of our universe. For example, if we did not have the theory of evolution or another naturalistic explanation for the development of living organisms, there would be far fewer naturalists today. Historically, pre-Darwin, people who rejected theism became deists not naturalists.

So the question we need to ask ourselves is, where are things today when it comes to naturalism being verified? And the answer is that, even though science has gone a long way, there is much further yet to go.

Birth of the Universe and Entropy

I seldom find atheists who acknowledge this as a difficulty for naturalism but the experts in the field (physics, cosmology) do struggle with it. In essence, our universe is much like a wind-up toy. Things move from a state of high potential energy to one of low potential energy. Given enough time, our universe will reach a state of heat death. And, by implication, going far enough into the past there must have been a state of high potential energy that is hard to account for.

Normally we would say that entropy can decrease if you're not dealing with a closed system and the decrease is accounted for by an increase elsewhere. But when it comes to the universe, that only pushes the question back further. So someone might say that the Big Bang can be explained in the context of a multiverse. But then, in what context can the multiverse be explained?

As of now, I know of at least three conflicting answers that prominent scientists have proposed to explain this question and the lack of a consensus itself is significant.

Small sample size

But even if scientists could settle on one hypothesis, we currently have access to too little of the universe to be able to confirm that hypothesis. Drawing conclusions based on the little we can observe would be like calling a presidential election after polling 10 people in Kansas.

In essence, there are still aspects of our universe that we don't have a good naturalistic explanation for and neither are we in a position to confirm those explanations if we did. And, our inability to do this makes it next to impossible as of yet to draw any meaningful conclusions about naturalism or the need for a creator.

Someone might say here that my point about entropy is very similar in nature to the cosmological argument. But notice that while the cosmological argument claims that a god must exist my point is simply that there are still sufficient difficulties with naturalism for us not to be able to determine conclusively if it is actually possible.

Bomb in a Box

Imagine a bomb that is placed inside a metal box and the box placed in a metal room. If the bomb explodes and we somehow have perfect knowledge of all the atoms and all the forces involved, we should be able to tell by looking inside the room if someone had tampered with the

metal shreds inside. In essence, there are certain arrangements of pieces that would never occur given that explosion so finding those arrangements becomes evidence of tampering.

Even if it could be demonstrated that naturalism is possible and could produce a universe, it does not necessarily mean it produced ours. Given all the possible configurations of a universe, certain configurations would not occur as a result of the processes that started our universe. So if science advanced far enough for us to understand our universe in detail, it might become possible to tell if the configuration of our universe is one of the ones that could occur naturally. This point is of no use to us now but it is yet another way that we might be able to tackle this question in the future as science advances. For now however, we are flying blind and siding with naturalism over theism is mostly a matter of faith.

Arguments from design and complexity

Design and complexity does not prove a creator but they do require that the naturalist produce an explanation, a mechanism for how that complexity can be achieved naturally. For example, evolution was needed to explain complex organisms and an abiogenesis theory is still needed to explain the first cells.

Abiogenesis

This topic is a favorite for theists since this is something naturalists must explain but for which they don't have a good explanation yet (though scientists feel they have some good ideas of how it might have happened). And, while I agree that this is a difficulty for naturalists, I don't recommend placing too much stock in this as an argument. There is no way to know (apart from religious conviction) that scientists won't someday find a naturalistic answer for abiogenesis as well.

Evolution

As far as atheists (and scientists) are concerned, this matter is settled; evolution is true. And, while it does not necessarily disprove the deist god, it does weigh heavily against Christianity.

I personally don't recommend getting into an evolution debate without significant background in biology. By no means think that if you follow the playbook of creationists like Ken Ham, Kent Hovind, Ray Comfort and the like, you will get anywhere in such debates (neither are the Discovery Institute and other Intelligent Design entities much better). Also, just because the atheist accepts evolution does not mean he is competent to debate it. I personally feel that there is sufficient content matter here to warrant making this a separate debate altogether. So I will not spend a lot of time on it but just cover some basic points.

First, in this context, by evolution we don't mean 'change over time.' We are referring here to universal common descent. Basically, after abiogenesis happened and the first self-reproducing cells are produced, evolution takes over and deals with everything that happens from that point on to bring us to the present state of living organisms; all through naturalistic means.

Now having defined the parameters of the discussion the point that needs to be emphasized is that while evolution might be uncontested within a scientific context it is not necessarily uncontested in a theism/naturalism debate. This because, in science, naturalism is assumed while here, naturalism is under scrutiny. The question needs to be asked, to what degree does the naturalistic methodology of science affect our conclusions about evolution.

This topic is important to the discussion since, as mentioned earlier, the case for naturalism is much stronger as a result of evolutionary theory. And, while evolution does not settle things in favor of naturalism, its case will be significantly weakened without it.

Occam's Razor

This is an argument often used by naturalists that I agree with to some degree. In essence the idea here is that when dealing with an unknown it is best to go with the hypothesis that makes the fewest assumptions. Postulating a god requires more assumptions than postulating naturalism. This principle however is more of a rule-of-thumb concept that helps prevent unnecessary work. When applied in a lab setting it does not necessarily lead to the correct conclusion more often than not. So in essence, this is a principle I would apply if we had nothing else to work with.

Demonstration

I mentioned in the previous chapter that we will probably be able to create our own universe on a computer someday (the CSR model). This would mean that we will be able to actually demonstrate that creation can be a viable means for bringing a universe into existence. I am not sure how we would do the same for naturalism.

In other words, if we manage to create a universe ourselves this will show, well, that a universe can be created. On the other hand, I don't think there is any way to show in a lab that a universe can develop naturally. This might not seem like a significant point but if we have two options and we can show that one option works but can't show the other option works that should mean something.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are many different arguments that could be brought up in this section and my intention was only to cover some of the more common ones. However, the question we need to ask ourselves by the end of this section is whether the balances have departed significantly from the 50/50 state we started with. Even if arguments like Occam's razor, evolution etc. might tip the scales in the naturalist's favor, other arguments like entropy, abiogenesis and the CSR model demonstration above will tip it in the other direction.

Many theists try to provide arguments they consider good reasons to believe the deist God exists (cosmological, fine tuning, etc.) and in the end are convinced the issue is settled. Similarly, by discrediting those arguments atheists feel they have provided good reason to believe the deist God does not exist and they are just as convinced their case is solid. In most cases however by

the end of this section, a rational, unbiased person has to conclude that there isn't sufficient evidence to know either way. That's not to say science might not someday be able to produce more convincing evidence but this is just where things are at as of now whether we like it or not. Those who insist otherwise generally do so because of personal conviction and not due to any actual evidence, logical or scientific.

Chapter 3 - Debating The Interventionist God

So if, by the end of the previous section, nothing definitive can be determined about the existence of the deist's god, can we at least rule out the interventionist god? (If the atheist comes out ahead at the end of the previous section, this part might not even be necessary) Once again, the god of the deist is a god that created the universe and then left, not interfering further. The interventionist god on the other hand might still interfere by performing miracles, helping people, sending revelations etc. (although still not necessarily good, omnipotent or omniscient)?

Many atheists think that this god, at least, can easily be ruled out. After all, so many claims of miracles have been debunked by science and double-blind intercessory prayer experiments have shown that prayer doesn't work. But there is one question that no one seems to ask: if the interventionist God exists, should we expect to be able to scientifically prove his existence? In essence, the majority of arguments that atheists typically bring against the interventionist god are arguments against a version of this god that we already know doesn't exist.

But why shouldn't we expect to be able to scientifically prove the existence of the interventionist god?

Well, if a god created this universe he is very likely at least as intelligent and technologically advanced as we are given that we have not yet been able to create a universe. Also, having gone through all this trouble, he very likely already has a plan regarding how he intends to interact with his creation. There are generally three options:

1. He wants his existence to be obvious and undeniable to everyone
2. He does not want his existence to be known at all even if he still continues to interfere in various ways
3. He wants something in between those two extremes

Now since, as we've said, god is smarter and more capable than us, if his intention was option (1) he would have revealed his existence himself by now. Otherwise what could possibly have kept him from doing so if it is what he wanted to do? And thus, why would we expect to find scientific evidence of his existence when, by definition, such evidence would make his existence undeniable and this is clearly not his plan?

Out of the three options above, before our discussions even start and before any arguments or any evidence is presented, we already know for a fact that option one isn't true. So there is no point in wasting additional time and energy on that option. Let's think for a second under what circumstances the intercessory prayer experiments would have worked:

1) If god were some sort of brainless sky puppet. He could not reveal himself directly but needed us to push certain buttons; repeat certain magic words, perform certain rituals etc.

2) If god were somehow impotent. He wants to reveal himself but is limited to performing minor miracles and just waiting for someone to set up a double blind experiment so he can reveal his existence for real.

3) If god were stupid. He doesn't realize he is being set up with our experiments and inadvertently reveals himself.

4) If god's arm was being twisted. By setting up these experiments we are somehow forcing god to respond even though he doesn't really want to.

Therefore, when debating the interventionist god the discussion, from the very beginning, should be framed as follows:

We know that the type of god who wants his existence to be universally known does not exist. And, if there is a god who wants to remain fully hidden there is nothing we can do about it so we can just ignore that option. Therefore, what can we determine about the god of option three?

Here are some of the questions that we need to ask as we go on from here:

- Is it even possible for this third version of god to exist?
- Is it possible for us to know he exists if we cannot know it scientifically?
- If so, what other ways of knowing are there beside scientific knowledge?
- If a god does not want to reveal himself in ways that can be scientifically verified, how else could he reveal himself such that people would be able to trust that revelation?
- Why wouldn't a god want to reveal himself?

We will come back to these questions in a bit but for now I want to take a look at the topic from the perspective of a creator.

I mentioned that in this chapter I would discuss the CSR model in more detail. In our universe, there is a direct link between the four fundamental forces and our consciousness. These forces keep the atoms together which form molecules which in turn form our cells which form organs like the brain where our consciousness comes from (some Christians believe we have a soul, but what matters is that this is what atheists believe and the argument applies to them). If the brain as a physical organ is fully responsible for our consciousness it follows that one day we will fully understand how the brain works and will be able to replicate it the way we replicate other organs today, thus creating new individuals. It also follows that we will be able to create computer programs that have similar functionality.

Therefore, imagine that we create a virtual universe that is also based on a set of fundamental forces and that we built everything within this universe as a product of those forces. We then introduce intelligent personoids whose consciousness is a product of those same virtual forces. These virtual personoids can perceive their virtual environment through senses that can gather

virtual data but these senses are not able to perceive our reality in any way. And, to make the illustration more applicable, let's also say that this virtual universe is complex enough so that the personoids would not immediately be able to understand the nature of their universe.

Now having created such a universe it is entirely up to us to decide how we choose to interact with it. We might decide to run this entirely as an experiment and let things play out without interfering in any way. Or, we might choose to reveal ourselves to the virtual beings, let them know that we are their creators and interact with them freely. But, we might also go with some in-between option. We might interact with just some individuals or only under certain circumstances. Basically, what we decide to do is entirely up to us. So, at least when it comes to the CSR model, this third option of partial interaction is perfectly valid.

But what if we did not want all the personoids to know we exist and yet still wanted to interact with a few of them? Would it be possible to reveal ourselves to the few in a way where they could have confidence that the revelation is trustworthy? Remember, this revelation would not count as scientific evidence since it would not be repeatable. Also, to what extent would we be able to interfere with their reality before it would qualify as scientific evidence of our existence? In other words, how much tampering would we get away with before these personoids would be able to prove we exist? (I recommend here reading another article I've written on [intercessory prayer](#).)

It is important, as we continue evaluating these issues, that we put ourselves in the shoes of the creator and look at things from that perspective as well instead of focusing only on the limitations of our own methodologies.

This question will be discussed further in the next chapter but for now I am stopping here. Since I am not sure when I will start working on the next chapter, let me mention also that there are a couple of other arguments for god that I never use and don't recommend using: the argument from morality and the argument from the resurrection of Jesus. I have an article here that explains why I never use the [resurrection argument](#).

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