

Hello,

My name is Kevin Vandergriff, and I will be defending Christian theism against my opponent. I am grateful for our host and technological aficionado, Justin Schieber, and Mr. Lowder's willingness to enter into this debate with me.

In this debate, I will defend three main contentions:

- 1) Christian theism is not significantly less simple than Specified Naturalism.
- 2) If God exists necessarily, than prior probability of naturalism, no matter how simple, is 0.

AND

- 3) Christian theism has significantly more explanatory power and scope than Specified naturalism.

Before I begin though, let me define what I mean by God on Christian theism:

There exists a transcendent, personal being that brought the physical world into being, who is maximally powerful, intelligent, and good. Lastly, this God has decisively revealed important aspects of its will for us through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Please note that Christian theism makes two fundamental predictions that my arguments will confirm:

1-A Personal being caused the physical world to exist

2-A Physical world should be intrinsically structured toward the positive, or optimal realization of moral and aesthetic values; let's call this a value-generating universe.

Please also note, that Specified naturalism makes two fundamental predictions that my arguments will disconfirm:

1-The universe is eternal and uncaused

2- Neither nature nor the condition of sentient beings here on earth (or in the universe I would add) is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions on the part of personal beings; let's call this the hypothesis of an indifferent universe

With that in mind let's look at my first contention: 1) Christian theism is not significantly less simple, and probably is just as simple overall as Specified Naturalism.

Simplicity is a function of two things, modesty and coherence. The more claims a hypothesis makes the more immodest it is.

- 1) The problem for my opponent is that 4 of his arguments (Argument from Biology, Pain and Pleasure, Flourishing and Languishing, and Triumph and Tragedy) presuppose the hypothesis of an indifferent universe, which Paul Draper says is roughly equal in simplicity to theism. This means that Mr. Lowder is incorrect to imply that Christian theism is significantly less simple than specified naturalism because his entire case cannot be simpler than the most immodest aspect of it.

Let's take a look at my second contention:

- 2) If God exists necessarily, than it doesn't matter if Specified naturalism is simpler than Christian theism.

I will give two arguments to think God exists necessarily which would entail that naturalism is incoherent, and thus ultimately self-defeating, since it presupposes God is contingent. As Paul

Draper writes, "If theism were a necessary proposition and also true, then atheism would be, not just false, but self-contradictory, and so theism would have an intrinsic probability of one."

Let's look at my third contention; Christian theism has more explanatory power and scope than Specified Naturalism.

1) Argument 1: God is the best explanation for the origin of the universe

In 2003, three scientists developed the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem which shows that any universe which is, on average, in a state of cosmic expansion throughout its history cannot be infinite in the past but must have a beginning. In 2012 Vilenkin showed that models that are not on average in a state of cosmic expansion fail on other grounds to avert the beginning of the universe. Vilenkin concluded, "None of these scenarios can actually be past-eternal." "All the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning."

This fact disconfirms naturalism because it predicts that the universe is eternal and uncaused. Moreover, experience and intuition teaches that things that begin to exist have causes, so if the universe began to exist, then the universe must have a cause. But what kind of cause? By the very nature of the case, the cause must transcend the universe, have enormous miraculous power because it created the universe with no prior materials, and be an unembodied mind. Why a mind? Only abstract objects or an unembodied mind can transcend the universe, but we also know that abstract objects can't cause anything; therefore it follows that the transcendent cause of the universe must be an unembodied mind.

2) Argument 2: God is the best explanation of why space-time and all its contents exists rather than nothing

James Sinclair has developed a novel argument for God's existence which presupposes the universe is eternal but caused; he writes, "Quantum indeterminacy is only resolved through observation (called 'collapsing the wave function'). Hence an outside measurement apparatus must always exist. But cosmologists started to run into a problem when they began to consider the whole universe as a quantum object. What or who, outside the universe, collapses its wave function? An infinite regress problem develops that can only be resolved by recourse to a conscious, and necessary being!" William Lane Craig offers another reason to think the cause of an eternal universe is God, "I know of no other way to explain how a contingent universe can come from a necessarily existing cause; unless the cause is a personal agent who can freely choose to create a contingent reality."

3) Argument 3: God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.

As William Lane Craig brilliantly stated, "How is it that a mathematical theorist like Peter Higgs can sit down at his desk, and by pouring over mathematical equations predict the existence of a fundamental particle (the Higgs Boson) which experimentalists would discover 30 years later after sacrificing thousands of man hours and billions of dollars? Mathematics is the language of nature. How is this to be explained? If mathematical objects are abstract entities that are causally isolated from the universe then their applicability is a lucky coincidence. On the other hand, if mathematical objects are just useful fictions, how is it that nature is written in the language of these fictions?" The theist has a ready explanation; God patterned the universe after a mathematical structure that scientists routinely describe as value-generating or beautiful,

elegant, simple, and complex. Moreover, people often value rationality, and if there is a rational mind par excellence that brought the universe into being, it is not surprising on theism that the universe is intelligible in terms of a cosmic mathematical grid, but it is very surprising on naturalism.

4) Argument 4: God is the best explanation of the discoverability of the universe.

What do you need to make cosmic and local discoveries? You need an intelligible universe, a planet with the deposits left from billions of years of geological and biological evolution to develop advanced technology, intelligent enough creatures to come out of evolution, and most surprising perhaps, you need a planet like Earth that shows up at just the right time and place in the cosmic evolution of the universe. Astrophysicist Hugh Ross writes, "Our human era ... is theoretically the earliest and most optimal epoch that allows astronomers to study light from the origin of the universe. They can see light clear back to 0.000028 of its present age. Because of the universe's age, astronomers can directly view 99.9972 percent of cosmic history and almost behold the instant of cosmic creation!" This and several additional features show that the universe must be fine-tuned in order to be discoverable; but what is value-generating about the discoverability of the universe? It allows us to develop technology, which in turn allows us to greatly expand our ability to improve our conditions. Second, being able to understand the universe is widely perceived as intrinsically valuable judging by the effort it requires on the part of scientists to pursue fields of advanced physics, our respect for those that do, the fact that the government spends billions of dollars to fund research on the fundamental structure of the cosmos, and that the public generally supports this. Perhaps even more valuable is that this research has led to discovery of evidence for the existence of God which naturalists and Christian theists alike agree is of the utmost potential value. This is a huge coincidence that Christian theism doesn't need.

5) Argument 5: God is the best explanation of why there are embodied morally responsible agents,

Paul Draper writes, "One of the most striking facts about the universe human beings inhabit is that it contains, not just any life, but embodied moral agents (and patients)—living beings that have moral duties to others" and because..."such beings have a distinctive sort of dignity or worth does not raise the probability of their existing on the assumption that naturalism is true, but does raise the probability of their existing on theism." In addition, moral agency requires moral responsibility which in turn requires having the right kind of control over our behaviors. Humans have this kind of control because our brains are the most complex things in the universe. Keep in mind that there is no ladder of progress intrinsic to the process of evolution; you can rewind the tape, hit replay, and you aren't guaranteed to get embodied morally responsible agents ever again. Thus, embodied moral agents are not only improbable on naturalism, but of such a high value that they are precisely what you would expect in a value-generating universe predicted by Christian theism.

It gets worse for the naturalist. Recently, scientists in the fields of astrophysics, classical cosmology, quantum mechanics, and physics have been stunned to discover that the strengths and quantities that appear in the laws of nature as well as certain initial conditions that were just put in at the Big Bang, are fine-tuned to a precision hard to imagine to produce the building blocks and environments that embodied moral agents need in order to evolve anywhere in the universe. If any of these constants and quantities or initial conditions were altered by even a hairs breadth, the evolution of life would be physically impossible anywhere in the universe. As Paul Draper writes, "The fine-tuning data greatly strengthens the argument from embodied

moral agents because they show that moral agency is extremely improbable on naturalism (It is only because if this strengthening that the argument from moral agency can compete in the same league as the argument from evil). ...Thus, moral agency is extremely unlikely given naturalism”

6) Argument 6: God is the best explanation of moral agents who apprehend necessary moral truths.

Charles Darwin once imagined a world where the instinctual moral beliefs of human beings were selected for under the same environmental conditions of that as hive-bees, “If . . . men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters, and no one would think of interfering.

This illustrates the chancy, contingent, and extrinsic relationship between a biological species’ instinctual moral beliefs that natural selection happens upon, and what rational beings with enough intelligence discover when they do ethics; namely, some moral facts are necessarily true. It is necessarily wrong to rape, murder, and slander. It is necessarily good to love, become a doctor, and appreciate works of art. But the question immediately arises, if natural selection does not intrinsically select for instinctual moral beliefs amenable to necessarily true reflective moral beliefs, but rather only those beliefs that are beneficial for survival, then how is it that natural selection, unguided, produced moral agents with instinctual moral beliefs that are amenable to necessarily true reflective moral beliefs? The chances are incredibly slim on naturalism, but exactly what you would expect on theism.

7) Argument 7: God is the best explanation of the connection between the flourishing of the kinds of moral agents there are, and the necessary moral truths that apply to them.

As Greg Ganssle has written, “Not only do we have beings to which necessary moral truths apply but we have beings that are made up in such a way that doing what is right (as determined by analytic moral truths) turns out to be good for them. It contributes to their flourishing rather than their languishing. Maybe only one in ten universes that are moral in that they have the right sorts of beings are such that moral goodness and the flourishing of the beings involved converge.” The evidence that we live in a value-generating universe is becoming overwhelming.

8) Argument 8: God is the best explanation of why there are self-aware beings

Theism entails that self-awareness exists whereas naturalism does not. Since self-awareness does exist, it follows that self-awareness is evidence favoring theism over naturalism. J.P. Moreland captures the reason self-awareness supports theism over naturalism better than anyone, “The appearance of finite consciousness qua finite requires explanation and theism may employ the explanatory resources of its basic ontological inventory (e.g. consciousness in God) for that explanation...because consciousness per se is ontologically basic. Not so for a naturalist...”

9) Argument 9: God is the best explanation of the historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth. According to William Lane Craig, “New Testament historians have developed something of a consensus that Jesus came on the scene with an unprecedented sense of divine authority, to stand and speak in gods place, that in himself the kingdom of god had come, and as visible demonstrations of this fact he carried out a ministry of miracle working and exorcisms, the

supreme confirmation of this claim is his resurrection from the dead. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then we have a divine miracle on our hands and evidence for the existence of god.” I realize that church leaders and members have a reputation of saying you just accept the resurrection of Jesus on ‘blind faith,’ but there are actually four facts that have been established and accepted as true by the majority of New Testament historians today (atheist, theist, liberal, and conservative alike) on the basis of objective historical criteria like independent, multiple attestation, embarrassment, dissimilarity, and the like. They are:

- 1) After dying from crucifixion, Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea
- 2) On the Sunday following the crucifixion, Jesus’ tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers
- 3) On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.
- 4) The original disciples believed that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary.

The question that presents itself to us is what is the best explanation of these four facts? In his book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, historian C. B. McCullagh lists six tests which historians use in determining what is the best explanation for given historical facts.⁶ The hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” passes all these tests:

1. It has great explanatory scope: it explains why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and why the Christian faith came into being.
2. It has great explanatory power: it explains why the body of Jesus was gone, why people repeatedly saw Jesus alive despite his earlier public execution, and so forth.
3. It is plausible: since Jesus’ Messianic and divine self-understanding supercharges the religio-historical context with miraculous anticipation and concrete meaning; the resurrection serves as divine confirmation of those radical claims.
4. It is not ad hoc or contrived: it requires only one additional hypothesis: that God exists. And I have given evidence to think God exists
5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs. The hypothesis: “God raised Jesus from the dead” doesn’t in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don’t rise naturally from the dead. The Christian accepts that belief as wholeheartedly as he accepts the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.
6. It far outstrips any of its rival hypotheses in meeting conditions (1)-(5). Down through history various alternative explanations of the facts have been offered, for example, the conspiracy hypothesis, the apparent death hypothesis, the hallucination hypothesis, and so forth. Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. None of these naturalistic hypotheses succeeds in meeting the conditions as well as the resurrection hypothesis.

10) Argument 10: God is the best explanation for the worthwhileness of life.

If we are in a value-generating universe, then we would expect self-aware beings with a right to life to have enough positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment

in it to make it worth living. Indeed, in general, human life is on balance worth living. If this were not the case, then the following would be true:

1-We would have a moral obligation to no longer have children

2-Humans would be responsible for any and all suffering their children undergo

3-We should be witnessing mass suicides

4-We should expect the happiest people to alive today to live in the most developed and well-off countries.

The problem is that none of these things are true!

Moreover, because tragedies do occur, we would expect God to make humans highly resilient and adaptable to horrific tragedies even if God has good reasons for allowing them. This is exactly what we find, psychologists have amassed strong evidence that humans are initially very troubled by tragedies, but are hard-wired to be resilient overcome them, in general.

Because we don't understand all of God's reasons for permitting tragedies, and perhaps we never fully will, we would expect God to set up a mechanism whereby we are comforted in the face of tragedies. Not surprisingly, psychologists have found that people are comforted in the face of seemingly random and pointless tragedies if they can find meaning and purpose in them. Finding meaning in life events leads to more positive emotions, which in turn leads to a greater ability to find meaning and purpose. This is called the "upward spiral" of greater well-being. Fortunately for my case, psychologists have also found that humans are hard-wired to find meaning and purpose in tragic events.

In summary, then, I've presented a cumulative case to think Christian theism has more explanatory power and scope than Specified Naturalism based on the origin of the universe, the contingency of the universe, the applicability of mathematics, discoverability, embodied moral agents and fine-tuning, moral belief in necessary moral truths, moral truths and flourishing, self-aware beings, the resurrection of Jesus, and the worthwhileness of life. If Jeffery wants us to believe that naturalism is true, he must first tear down all ten of the arguments that I presented, and in my next speech I will tear down the nine arguments he has made to think that God does not exist, though if you were paying attention I have overwhelmed four of Jeffery's arguments within the positive case I have already made. More on that later.