

# Craig-Rosenberg Debate

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**The Debate:  
Is Faith In God Reasonable?  
William Lane Craig vs. Alex Rosenberg**

**William Lane Craig: Opening Speech**

Good evening! I am delighted to be able to participate in tonight's debate, and I count it a real privilege to be discussing this important issue with Dr. Rosenberg. Tonight we are interested in discussing some of the arguments that make belief in God reasonable or unreasonable. So in my opening speech I'm going to present several arguments which I think make it reasonable to believe God exists. Then in my second speech I will respond to Dr. Rosenberg's arguments against the reasonableness of belief in God.

I believe that God's existence best explains a wide range of the data of human experience. Let me just mention eight.

*1. God is the best explanation of why anything at all exists.*

Suppose you were hiking through the forest and came upon a ball lying on the ground. You would naturally wonder how it came to be there. If your hiking buddy said to you, "Just forget about it! It just exists inexplicably!", you would think either that he was joking or that he wanted you to just keep moving. No one would take seriously the idea that the ball just exists without any explanation. Now notice that merely increasing the *size* of the ball, even until it becomes coextensive with the universe, does nothing to provide, or remove the need for, an explanation of its existence.

So what *is* the explanation of the existence of the universe (where by "the universe" I mean all of spacetime reality)? The explanation of the universe can lie only in a transcendent reality beyond the universe, beyond space and time, which is metaphysically necessary in its existence. Now there is only one way I can think of to get a contingent universe from a

necessarily existing cause, and that is if the cause is a personal agent who can freely choose to create a contingent reality. It therefore follows that the best explanation of the existence of the contingent universe is a transcendent, personal being--which is what everybody means by "God."

We can summarize this reasoning as follows:

- (1) Every contingent thing has an explanation of its existence.
- (2) If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is a transcendent, personal being.
- (3) The universe is a contingent thing.
- (4) Therefore, the universe has an explanation of its existence.
- (5) Therefore, the explanation of the universe is a transcendent, personal being.

—which is what everybody means by "God."

*2. God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.*

We have pretty strong evidence that the universe is not eternal in the past but had an absolute beginning a finite time ago. In 2003 Arvind Borde, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin were able to prove that *any* universe which has, on average, been in a state of cosmic expansion cannot be infinite in the past but must have a past spacetime boundary.<sup>1</sup> What makes their proof so powerful is that it holds *regardless* of the physical description of the very early universe. Because we don't yet have a quantum theory of gravity, we can't yet provide a physical description of the first split-second of the universe. But the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem is independent of any physical description of that moment. Their theorem implies that the quantum vacuum state which may have characterized the early universe cannot be eternal in the past but must have had an absolute beginning. Even if our universe is just a tiny part of a so-called "multiverse" composed of many universes, their theorem requires that the multiverse itself must have an absolute beginning.

Of course, highly speculative scenarios, such as loop quantum gravity models, string models, even closed timelike curves, have been proposed to try to avoid this absolute beginning.

These models are fraught with problems, but the bottom line is that none of these models, even if true, succeeds in restoring an eternal past. Last spring at a conference in Cambridge celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Stephen Hawking, Vilenkin delivered a paper entitled “Did the Universe Have a Beginning?”, which surveyed current cosmology with respect to that question. He argued--and I quote--, “none of these scenarios can actually be past-eternal.”<sup>2</sup> He concluded, “All the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning.”<sup>3</sup>

But then the inevitable question arises: Why did the universe come into being? What brought the universe into existence? There must have been a transcendent cause which brought the universe into being.

We can summarize our argument thus far as follows:

- (1) The universe began to exist.
- (2) If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a transcendent cause.
- (3) Therefore, the universe has a transcendent cause.

By the very nature of the case that cause must be a transcendent, immaterial being. Now there are only two possible things that could fit that description: either an abstract object like a number or an unembodied mind or consciousness. But abstract objects don't stand in causal relations. The number seven, for example, has no effect on anything. Therefore the cause of the universe is plausibly an unembodied mind or person. Thus we are brought, not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its Personal Creator.

*3. God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.*

Philosophers and scientists have puzzled over what physicist Eugene Wigner called “the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics.”<sup>4</sup> 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 which experimentalists 30 years later, after investing millions of dollars and thousands of man hours, are finally able to detect?

Mathematics is the language of nature. But how is this to be explained? If mathematical objects are abstract entities causally isolated from the universe, then the applicability of mathematics is, in the words of philosopher of mathematics Mary Leng, “a happy coincidence.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, if mathematical objects are just useful fictions, how is it that nature is written in the language of these fictions? In his book, Dr. Rosenberg emphasizes that naturalism “doesn’t tolerate cosmic coincidences.”<sup>6</sup> But the naturalist has no explanation of the uncanny applicability of mathematics to the physical world. By contrast, the theist has a ready explanation: when God created the physical universe, he designed it on the mathematical structure he had in mind.

We can summarize this argument as follows:

- (1) If God did not exist, the applicability of mathematics would be a happy coincidence.
- (2) The applicability of mathematics is not a happy coincidence.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.

*4. God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.*

In recent decades scientists have been stunned by the discovery that the initial conditions of the Big Bang were fine-tuned for the existence of intelligence life with a precision and delicacy that literally defy human comprehension.

Now there are three live explanatory options for this extraordinary fine-tuning: physical necessity, chance, or design.

Physical necessity is not, however, a plausible explanation because the finely tuned constants and quantities are independent of the laws of nature. Therefore they are not physically necessary.

So could the fine-tuning be due to chance? The problem with this explanation is that the odds of a life-permitting universe governed by our laws of nature are just so infinitesimal that they cannot be reasonably faced. Therefore, the proponents of chance have been forced to postulate the existence of a World Ensemble of other universes, preferably infinite in number and randomly ordered, so that life-permitting universes will appear by chance somewhere in the Ensemble. Not only is this hypothesis, to borrow Richard Dawkins' phrase, "an unparsimonious extravagance,"<sup>7</sup> but it faces an insuperable objection. By far, most of the observable universes in a World Ensemble would be worlds in which a single brain fluctuates into existence out of the vacuum and observes its otherwise empty world. Thus, if our world were just a member of a random Ensemble, we ought to be having observations like that. Since we don't, that strongly disconfirms the World Ensemble hypothesis. So chance is also not a good explanation.

It follows that design is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe. Thus the fine-tuning of the universe constitutes evidence for a cosmic Designer.

We can summarize this argument as follows:

- (1) The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
- (2) It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
- (3) Therefore, it is due to design.

*5. God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness in the world.*

Philosophers are puzzled by states of intentionality. Intentionality is the property of being *about* something or *of* something. It signifies the object-directedness of our thoughts. For example, I can think *about* my summer vacation or I can think *of* my wife. No physical object has this sort of intentionality. A chair or a stone or a glob of tissue like the brain is not *about* or *of* something else. Only mental states or states of consciousness are *about* other things. As a materialist, Dr. Rosenberg recognizes this fact and so concludes that on atheism there really are

no intentional states. Dr. Rosenberg boldly claims that we never really think about anything. But this seems incredible. Obviously, I am thinking *about* Dr. Rosenberg's argument! This seems to me to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of atheism.

By contrast, on theism, because God is a mind, it's hardly surprising that there should be finite minds. Thus intentional states fit comfortably into a theistic worldview.

So we may argue:

- (1) If God did not exist, intentional states of consciousness would not exist.
- (2) But intentional states of consciousness do exist.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.

*6. God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties in the world.*

In moral experience we apprehend moral values and duties which impose themselves as objectively binding and true. For example, we all recognize that it's wrong to walk into an elementary school with an automatic weapon and to shoot little boys and girls and their teachers. On a naturalistic view, however, there is nothing really wrong with this. Moral values are just subjective byproducts of biological evolution and social conditioning. Dr. Rosenberg is brutally honest about the implications of his atheism. He writes, "there is no such thing as . . . morally right or wrong."<sup>8</sup> "Individual human life is meaningless . . . and without ultimate moral value. . . . we need to face the fact that nihilism is true."<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, the theist grounds objective moral values in God and our moral duties in his commands. The theist thus has the explanatory resources which the atheist lacks to ground objective moral values and duties.

Hence, we may argue:

- (1) Objective moral values and duties exist.
- (2) But if God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.

*7. God is the best explanation of the historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth.*

Historians have reached something of a consensus that Jesus came on the scene with an unprecedented sense of divine authority, the authority to stand and speak in *God's* place. He claimed 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. But the supreme confirmation of his claim was his resurrection from the dead. If Jesus did rise from the dead, then it would seem that we have a divine miracle on our hands and, thus, evidence for the existence of God.

Now I realize that most people probably think that the resurrection of Jesus is something you just accept by faith or not. But there are actually three facts recognized by the majority of historians today, which I believe are best explained by the resurrection of Jesus.

Fact # 1: On the Sunday after his crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers.

Fact #2: On separate occasions different individuals and groups of people saw appearances of Jesus alive after his death.

Fact # 3: The original disciples suddenly came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus despite having every predisposition to the contrary.

The eminent British scholar N.T. Wright, near the end of his 800 page study of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection, concludes that the empty tomb and the post-mortem appearances of Jesus have been established to such a high degree of historical probability as to be--and I quote--, "virtually certain," akin to the death of Caesar Augustus in AD 14 or the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.<sup>10</sup>

Naturalistic attempts to explain away these three great facts—like the disciples stole the body or Jesus wasn't really dead—have been universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. The simple fact is that there just is no plausible, naturalistic explanation of these facts. Therefore,

it seems to me, the Christian is amply justified in believing that Jesus rose from the dead and was who He claimed to be. But that entails that God exists.

Thus, we have a good inductive argument to the existence of God based on the facts concerning the resurrection of Jesus. We can summarize this argument as follows:

- (1) There are three established facts about Jesus:
  - (a) His empty tomb,
  - (b) His post-mortem appearances, and
  - (c) The origin of the disciples' belief in his resurrection.
- (2) The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" is the best explanation of these facts.
- (3) The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" entails that God exists.
- (4) Therefore, God exists.

*8. God can be personally known and experienced.*

This isn't really an argument for God's existence; rather it's the claim that you can know that God exists wholly apart from arguments simply by personally experiencing him. Philosophers call beliefs like this "properly basic beliefs." They aren't based on some other beliefs; rather they're part of the foundations of a person's system of beliefs. Other properly basic beliefs would be the belief in the reality of the past or the existence of the external world. In the same way, belief in God is for those who seek him a properly basic belief grounded in our experience of God.

Now if this is so, then there's a danger that arguments for God could actually distract our attention from God himself. The Bible promises, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8 ESV). We mustn't so concentrate on the external proofs that we fail to hear the inner voice of God speaking to our own hearts. For those who listen, God becomes a personal reality in their lives.

In summary, then, we've seen eight respects in which God provides a better explanation of the world than naturalism:

1. God is the best explanation of why anything at all exists.
2. God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.
3. God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.
4. God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.
5. God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness in the world.
6. God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties in the world.
7. God is the best explanation of the historical facts concerning Jesus' resurrection.
8. God can be personally known and experienced.

For all of these reasons I think that belief in God is eminently reasonable. If Dr. Rosenberg is to persuade us otherwise, he must first tear down all eight of the reasons that I presented and then in their place erect a case of his own to show why belief in God is unreasonable. Unless and until he does that, I think that we should agree that it is reasonable to believe in God.

### **Alex Rosenberg: Opening Speech**

I don't know whether to laugh or to cry. I hope you didn't pay money to come to tonight's debate because everything that Dr. Craig said—almost everything actually—he said many times before in many different debates almost in the same order and all of them available on the Internet. So you didn't need to come out in this really cold night here in West Lafayette to hear these arguments again. And in particular, what's remarkable about them is how impervious they are to the previous discussions and criticisms that they've been exposed to: Craig's arguments tonight are exactly the same as seven or eight or nine Internet presentations of his arguments in the past. And what it leads me to ask is, is Dr. Craig infallible or does he just not listen? Probably the latter. And I don't think that he listens because he's really not interested in getting at the truth, he is interested in scoring debate points. The two moves that Dr. Craig almost

always makes are first, the burden of proof claim—as though we are in a court of law, as though it was a question of the defending attorney and the prosecuting attorney engaged in an adversarial procedure; and the second thing that you often hear is, “All I need to show to win is...” So, for example, at the very end of his remarks he said, “I’ve got eight arguments and he’s got to refute all eight of them or else I win.”

Philosophy and theology don’t proceed by courtroom style debate. We’re engaged in a cooperative search for the truth, both theist and atheist, not an adversarial contest for victory. This is the wrong format for a profitable discussion of faith or God or science and reason. But let’s turn to the substance of the matter. Our topic is whether faith in God is reasonable. But of course, faith is belief in the absence of evidence, so I’m going to give Dr. Craig the benefit of doubt and accept the change that he has made in the terms of the debate. It turns out that what we’re arguing about is whether *belief* in God is reasonable. And the God we’re talking about is the God of Abrahamic religions: the God of Islam, of Christianity, and Judaism. It’s not the milk and water deism of, for example, the Founding Fathers—Jefferson, Adams, Monroe, perhaps even George Washington. The God we’re talking about has the following features: if he exists, he’s got the three Omni’s and benevolence. He’s got omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and an unqualifiedly good will. If these four features are incompatible with some obvious fact, then of course the theists’ God is nonexistent.

So let’s be clear that we’re arguing about theism here. And in thinking about theism and in thinking about science there is something else that we had better keep in mind. Dr. Craig is very confident about his take on fundamental physics, on important and controversial questions about which physicists have not attained consensus. But in thinking about his take—the sides he chose, the confidence with which he presents his take, the important thing to bear in mind—is

this: there are 2,000 members of the National Academy of Sciences, the most important body of the most distinguished scientists in the United States (of which four are faculty here at Purdue as are Purdue's two Noble Prize winners in chemistry), of these 2,000 people, 95% of them are atheist and the percentage for the physicists is even higher. What do these people know about physics that Dr. Craig doesn't know? Is it a coincidence that this number of the members of the National Academy of Sciences are unbelievers? I think it isn't and I think it requires us to take with a certain lack of confidence the claims that Dr. Craig makes about science. And I'm going to controvert some of those claims right now. In particular, many of the arguments that Dr. Craig gave tonight, and which he has given repeatedly in the past, rest on the first cause argument, an argument that goes back certainly to Saint Thomas Aquinas and probably to Aristotle. And it rests on, of course, the principle of sufficient reason, the principle that everything that exists must have a cause.

Now the remarkable thing about this argument and the principle of sufficient reason on which it rests is that the principle is plainly false. It's refuted trillions of times every second throughout the universe. It's refuted in this room and I will give you a pretty full explanation of why. Take two uranium-238 atoms that are absolutely indistinguishable. In a given moment these two indistinguishable atoms, atoms of exactly the same mass and energy state have the following difference: one produces an alpha particle spontaneously and the other doesn't. And there is no cause whatsoever for that difference. Suddenly one emits an alpha particle and the other doesn't and there is no cause whatever for that difference between them. That's what quantum mechanics tells us. Now you might think that that's not a very important fact of nature, but one mole or Avogadro's number of uranium-238 molecules emits three million alpha particles a second. And every helium atom on this planet is one of those alpha particles. The

smoke detectors that operate all through this auditorium to protect us from fires operates because of the indeterminate, unexplained, completely spontaneous appearance of an alpha particle out of a uranium atom in these systems. For Dr. Craig to insist on arguments that rest on the claim that *every event had a cause that had to have brought it into being* is just bluff. It's not a principle accepted in physics. And you can't argue for it from its intuitive attractiveness.

Let's consider the fine-tuning argument, another of the claims about science that Dr. Craig makes. This is the argument that the charge on the electron, the gravitational constant, the mass of the electron, Planck's constant, the Hubble constant, the cosmic density parameters, are all so beautifully arranged to make human life actual that there must have been some purpose or design that brought them into being in order to do that—that's the best explanation of the values of these constants. Well to begin with, this is terrible carbon chauvinism. If these constants had been slightly different, maybe there would be intelligent life in the universe that's germanium based or silicon based. Look at the periodic table of the elements. Look at the atoms around carbon in the periodic table. Ask yourself whether, if some of these constants had been slightly different, whether there might not be intelligent creatures in the universe that are differently composed from us?

More importantly, physics ruled out the kind of teleology, the kind of purpose of thinking that Dr. Craig invokes here 400 years ago. And if there is one thing that physics is not going to go back to and turn around and accept in its search for the fundamental nature of reality, it's the invocation of purposes. There are, of course, in physical theory at least two different ways in which the constants of our part of the universe could have come into existence, while there have been an indefinitely large number of other combinations of constants making up other inaccessible regions either of this universe or of other universes. The inflationary period soon

after the Big Bang produced regions of space by completely quantum mechanical, indeterministic symmetry breaking, which are inaccessible to us, which are beyond our horizon, our event horizon. And there are possibly indefinitely many of these. And for all we know there may be life or there may not be life in them.

And then of course string theory and M theory tell us that there are minimally 10 to the 500<sup>th</sup> different kinds of possible universes or actual universes bubbling up out of the quantum foam of the eternally existing multi-universe. I'm not going to take sides on these varying theories, but I defy professor Craig to argue from authority that it is impossible for something to have been created from nothing, from the uncaused symmetry breaking which is characteristic of the cascade of events that produces our universe, in addition to the indefinitely many other universes bubbling up out of the quantum foam of the multiverse. That symmetry breaking is another example of the violation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason on which Dr. Craig stakes so many of his arguments.

Let's turn to something much more accessible, objective values. Now, Dr. Craig's argument that only God can underwrite objective values was refuted by Plato in 390 BC in an argument that he gives in the first and the simplest of his dialogues, the *Euthyphro*. I'm very tempted to say to Dr. Craig, "What part of the *Euthyphro* don't you understand?" The question that Plato raises in the *Euthyphro* goes like this: Take your favorite moral norm, "gay marriage is forbidden" or "FGM is required" or "thou shall not kill." Now ask yourself this question: is it morally right because God chose it or did God choose it because it's morally right? We all know the answer to this question. The answer to this question is God chose it because it's morally right. What that means, of course, is the moral rightness of "thou shall not kill" is an entirely independent fact from God's choosing it—it's because he recognizes the moral rightness of

“thou shall not kill” that he imposed it on us. And that means that the mere fact that it’s God who imposed it on us doesn’t explain the nature of the objective value. It’s that further fact that he was wise enough and smart enough to detect about “thou shall not kill” that made it the morally right value. And this is a point that Socrates makes to Euthyphro in the first and simplest of the dialogues and it is a problem that in fact theological ethics has wrestled with ever since.

The only option in responding to this argument is the divine command theory, a theory that has had its exponents all the way back to William of Ockham. And the trouble with divine command theory is that in order to articulate that theory, in order to defend it, in order to make it sound plausible, you have to already commit yourself to there being some normative facts or moral facts about the moral rules that make them right independent of God saying, “You do it or you go to hell.” There is a rightness about moral norms that cannot be exhausted by the mere fact that they were handed down on a mountain to Moses from God.

Now natural selection is a theory, of course, about how we came to be moral, why we are moral, and about what the ecological conditions are that made us moral. It explains our morality but it doesn’t necessarily explain away our morality; that requires something else. And the suggestion that without God the naturalists, the Darwinian, has no basis on which to underwrite his normative commitment, that again is bluff. In fact, it’s the person who claims that God gave us normative morality, and that explains its normative rightness, is the person who has, regrettably to use the expression that Dr. Craig so invokes, the burden of proof of explaining what is it about God that makes for the moral rightness of the ethical norms that he imposes on us. And there are, of course, any number of alternative ethical theories that underwrite the objectivity of ethics, among them utilitarianism and social contract theory and ideal observer theory and Hume’s theory of the sympathies and the Kantian theory of the categorical

imperative. And the real problem for Dr. Craig is he needs to refute each of these normative theories in order to show that there is no other basis for ethics than God and the resources that he will use to cast out on these theories also cast out on the divine command theory.

Let's turn to the argument from the New Testament. I am sort of gobsmacked as a philosopher that he should persist in propounding this preposterous argument. Ask yourself the following question. In 1827 Joseph Smith got 11 people to certify that they observed the golden tablets which he, an illiterate person, was able to translate from reform Egyptian, and thus to convey the Book of Mormon to the Mormons (the Latter Day Saints). Do we believe on the basis of those 11 certificates that are only about 160 years old that the Book of Mormon is the revealed word of God? The Koran tells us that Mohammed ascended to heaven from the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the dome of the rock, in Jerusalem on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 621. And there are millions and millions of Muslims all over the world who are committed to that great truth. Do you think we in this room should believe it? Scientology, [a religion] that claims eight million adherents throughout the world, tells us that seventy-five million years ago somebody named Zena brought billions of people to earth on spaceships that looked like DC8s. And are we to believe that there are 55,000 people in the United States or eight million people around the world who really believe this too? Is there any reason why we should accept the certification of L. Ron Hubbard and the Church of Scientology that this actually happened? No, of course not! How many of you are familiar with the statues of Madonna taken out from their churches once a year which shed tears? Of course, scientists can tell us exactly what the physical properties are of these statues and how the rapid and sudden change of temperature between the inside and the outside of the cathedral produces condensation which the devout believe to be tears. But the testimony of the devout is no reason for us to believe it.

Think about this: Of the first 62 DNA exonerations of people who turned out to be innocent of charges of capital crimes in the United States, 53 of these people were convicted on eyewitness testimony. We know from cognitive social science how unreliable eyewitness testimony is today. Why should we suppose that eyewitness testimony from 33 AD is any more reliable? This as an argument for God's existence seems to me to be bizarre.

Of course the killer argument against God's existence is the argument from evil. It's enough to show that theism is unreasonable and it is, of course, the principle reason for apostasy from the Christian faith and the Jewish faith and Islam all through the centuries. The argument is simple and terrible. And it goes like this. If the theistic God exists, he is omnipotent and benevolent. A benevolent creature eliminates suffering to the extent that the benevolent creature can. Therefore, if there is a God and he is omnipotent and benevolent, he eliminates all suffering. As we know, it's obvious that there is plenty of suffering in the world—both man-made and natural suffering. So, if there is a God, then he is either not omnipotent or neither benevolent nor omnipotent or benevolent and theism is false. The problem of evil is theism's problem from hell.

Now I want to say one last thing about the problem of evil and about the potential responses that Dr. Craig will make and that he has made in the past. And I need to make something about my own personal history clear here. There are lots of responses to the problem of evil that I find morally offensive, and I find them morally offensive for a certain reason: I'm the child of Holocaust survivors. My whole family, except for my parents, was killed by the Nazis including two half brothers of mine. I will not take kindly to a suggestion that Dr. Craig has made repeatedly in debate formats like this that the innocent children who died in the Holocaust or died in the hands of the soldiers of Israel in Canaan—that these innocent children like my half brothers—were more fortunate, were luckier because they ascended to heaven

directly, than the SS soldiers who killed them and lived very nice, very comfortable, very long lives in West Germany after World War II. I am not going to take kindly to that kind of an exculpation of theism. In particular, Dr. Craig has said before and said in one sentence at least tonight that nobody has ever shown the incompatibility of theism and suffering—that it's part of the divine plan that's beyond our cognizance. Well, the argument that I sketched, the argument from evil is a logical deduction which shows the incompatibility of an omnipotent and benevolent creature with suffering on this planet. It is not enough to fob suffering off on the mystery of God's plan or on the alleged logical compatibility of these two views.

Now I'm going to stop and in the reply I'm going to want to take up the two new arguments that Dr. Craig introduced, the argument from mathematics and the argument from intentionality, but I think I've put enough on the table for him to rejoin, thank you.

### **William Lane Craig: First Rebuttal**

I noticed that in Dr. Rosenberg's opening speech he didn't really present many arguments *against* the reasonableness of belief in God. He gestured in the direction of the problem of evil, but he didn't really develop it. The problem is that that argument is based upon controversial premises such as *if God is all powerful, he can create just any world that he wants* and that *if God is all good, he would want to create a world without evil*, and neither one of those is necessarily true. And that is why among philosophers, even atheists, the logical version of the problem of evil is widely rejected. So what Dr. Rosenberg needs to show is that it is impossible that God could have morally sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering in the world, and until he does that he hasn't even begun to offer a problem of evil that disproves theism.

Rather when you read Dr. Rosenberg's work, what you discover is that his skepticism about God's existence is really rooted in his scientism or naturalism, which makes it

unreasonable to believe in God. But here I think it is absolutely crucial that we distinguish between two types of naturalism that Dr. Rosenberg tends to blur together: *epistemological naturalism*, which says that science is the only source of knowledge, and *metaphysical naturalism*, which says that only physical things exist. Let me say a word about each one of these.

With respect to epistemological naturalism, I want to make two points. First, it's a false theory of knowledge, for two reasons. First, it's *overly restrictive*. There are truths that cannot be proven by natural science. And the success of natural science in discovering truths about the physical world does nothing to show that is the only source of knowledge and truth. Second, it's *self-refuting*. The statement "Natural science is the only source of knowledge" is not itself a scientific statement, and, therefore, it cannot be true. For these two reasons, epistemological naturalism is a false theory of knowledge that is widely rejected by philosophers.

But leave that point aside. The really important point for tonight's debate is the second, that epistemological naturalism does not imply metaphysical naturalism. A case in point would be that of Willard Quine, the most famous epistemological naturalist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Quine showed himself to be commendably open to the reality of non-physical entities. He wrote, "If I saw indirect explanatory benefit in positing . . . *possibilia*, spirits, a Creator, I would joyfully accord them scientific status too, on a par with such avowedly scientific posits as quarks and black holes."<sup>11</sup> And, in fact, Quine was as good as his word. For he *did* posit the existence of immaterial, non-physical objects, namely, mathematical objects like sets. Quine's case shows that the epistemological naturalist need not be a metaphysical naturalist.

But, secondly, many of my arguments for God's existence do just what Quine said: they show, on the basis of scientific evidence, the explanatory benefit of positing God. And so they

are *acceptable* to the epistemological naturalist. The epistemological naturalist can and, I think, should be a theist. So the real issue in the debate tonight is not epistemological but metaphysical naturalism. And Dr. Rosenberg hasn't given us any reason to think that metaphysical naturalism is true.

So what can we say about metaphysical naturalism? Well, again, I want to make two points. First, my arguments for the existence of God show that metaphysical naturalism is not true. There is a personal, transcendent reality beyond the physical universe. But, secondly, I think that metaphysical naturalism is so contrary to reason and experience as to be absurd. In the following arguments, the first premise in every case is taken from Dr. Rosenberg's own book.

First, the *argument from intentionality*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, I cannot think about anything.

That's because there are no intentional states. But,

(2) I am thinking about naturalism.

From which it follows that

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

So if you think that you ever think about anything, you should conclude that naturalism is false.

Second, the *argument from meaning*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, no sentence has any meaning.

And he says that all the sentences in his own book are in fact meaningless. But,

(2) Premise (1) has meaning.

We all understood it! And therefore it follows that

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

Third, the *argument from truth*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, there are no true sentences.

That's because they're all meaningless! But,

(2) Premise (1) is true.

That's what the naturalist believes and asserts. From which it follows

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

Fourth, the *argument from moral praise and blame*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, then I am not morally praiseworthy or blameworthy for any of my actions.

Because, as I said, on his view objective moral values and duties do not exist. But,

(2) I am morally praiseworthy and blameworthy for at least some of my actions.

If you think that you've ever done something truly wrong or truly good, then you should conclude that

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

Fifth, the *argument from freedom*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, I do not do anything freely.

Everything is determined. But,

(2) I can freely agree or disagree with premise (1).

From which it follows

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

Sixth, the *argument from purpose*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, I do not plan to do anything.

But,

(2) I planned to come to tonight's debate.

That's why I'm here! From which it follows

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

Seventh, the *argument from enduring*. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, I do not endure for two moments of time.

But,

(2) I have been sitting here for more than a minute.

If you think that you're the same person who walked into the room tonight, then you should agree that

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

And finally, the *argument from personal existence*. This is perhaps the *coup de grace* against naturalism. According to Dr. Rosenberg,

(1) If naturalism is true, I do not exist.

He says there are no selves, there are no persons, no first-person perspectives. But,

(2) I do exist.

I know this as certainly as I know anything! From which it follows

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

In a word, metaphysical naturalism is absurd. And notice that my argument is not that it is unappealing. Rather it is that metaphysical naturalism flies in the face of reason and experience and is therefore untenable.

So, in sum, epistemological naturalism is consistent with theism, and metaphysical naturalism is absurd.

So let's now return to those arguments that I offered for God's existence and see how Dr. Rosenberg responded to some of them.

He didn't respond to the first argument, *why anything exists* rather than nothing.

As for *the origin of the universe*, he says, “But not everything has a cause. In quantum mechanics virtual particles come to be without a cause.” Notice that he misstates the first premise, which is that *the universe began to exist*, and then the second, *if the universe began to exist, the universe has a transcendent cause*. That’s because the universe can’t come into being out of nothing. And virtual particles don’t come out of nothing; they come out of the quantum vacuum, which is a sea of roiling energy. Moreover, in quantum mechanics, it’s not clear that these entities are in fact uncaused. There are deterministic interpretations of quantum mechanics according to which the behavior of these particles is fully determined. And, finally, I would say in response to this that, regarding the origin of the universe, you have to believe the entire universe could come into being from nonbeing in order for it to come to exist without a cause. And I think that takes more faith than belief in the existence of God!

He didn’t reply to the argument about of *the applicability of mathematics* in the world.

As for *the fine-tuning argument*, he simply appealed here once again to the multiverse hypothesis. But I refuted that in my opening speech. If we were just a random member of a multiverse or World Ensemble, then we ought to be having totally different observations than the ones that we in fact have. And therefore that’s why physicists like Roger Penrose have concluded that multiverse hypotheses are impotent to explain the fine-tuning of the universe. He says, “Perhaps you can have another basis for life, like silicon.” What he doesn’t appreciate is that in the absence of fine-tuning there wouldn’t even be matter! There wouldn’t even be chemistry, much less stars and planets where life might evolve. So I don’t think he really understands the extent of the fine-tuning of the universe and the catastrophic consequences that would ensue if it were not finely tuned.

He didn’t respond to the argument from *intentional states*.

As for *objective moral values*, in his book he admits that naturalism faces an even worse problem than the Euthyphro dilemma.<sup>12</sup> For the theist, the Euthyphro dilemma is easy to solve; namely, you craft a third alternative: that God himself is the Good and that his commands are necessary expressions of his moral nature. So they are neither arbitrary, nor is the Good something external to God. But on Dr. Rosenberg's view, there is no basis for moral value or moral objectivity. And that's why he is a moral nihilist, who doesn't think that anything is truly right or wrong.

As for *the resurrection of Jesus*, he just doesn't understand, I think, the credibility of the New Testament documents in this regard. You can't compare them to Joseph Smith's claims], which were probably lies, or to Mohammed's ascension, which is probably a legend, because in this case we are dealing with early eyewitness testimony that is not the result of conspiracy or a lie; these people sincerely believed what they said. And that's why most historians accept those three facts. Therefore, the naturalist has got to come up with some alternative explanation. You can't indict eyewitness testimony in general and then use that against a specific case. You'll have to show in the specific case of the Gospels that this testimony is unreliable. And that is not the opinion of the majority of historians who have investigated these documents.

So, for all of these reasons, I think his metaphysical naturalism is wholly unreasonable, whereas theism, by contrast, I think, is eminently reasonable and plausible.

### **Alex Rosenberg: First Rebuttal**

Gee, what a lot to cover. So, I guess the way to begin is to say, I wrote *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*. I actually didn't want to call it "The Atheist Guide to Reality." I wanted to call it something else but my editor said you'll sell a lot more books and even get yourself invited to a debate like this if you use the word 'atheist' in the title. But, of course, the important thing to

remember about this book, *The Atheist Guide to Reality*, is the structure of its argument, which was that science has a number of important implications. In fact, in the first couple of pages in my book I identify 14 of these implications. And most of them sound really bizarre, just the way Professor Craig suggested in his remarks. But the real issue is that among these 14 implications of science that I argued, one of them is atheism, and the others are that set of doctrine that Dr. Craig described as absurd. None of them is supposed to follow from atheism. None of the things that he says are manifestly false and that I have argued for in my book follow from atheism. Therefore, of course, the *modus tollens* argument, as we call it in logic, which Professor Craig is trying to advance, is based on a complete misrepresentation of what it says in that book. What it says in that book is that all these alleged absurdities *along with atheism* follow from the truth of science. Now, you can reject all of these alleged absurdities, but, if I am right about the logical structure of my argument, you've got to reject science. And I don't think Dr. Craig wants to reject science because he's building God on his interpretation of what science is supposed to show.

The other thing you can do, of course, as many of my philosophical colleagues are wont to do, is to reject the argument that I mount about what science shows regarding these issues like free will and the nature of the self and the grounds of morality and the purposelessness of the universe. That's an interesting and important set of issues in philosophy, and there are issues in the philosophy of science about the relationship between science and the agenda of the persistent questions of philosophy. They are not questions about the relationship between atheism and these persistent questions and it is simply a callow mistake to suppose that you could refute atheism by controverting these controversial doctrines that I argue for in philosophy. We didn't come here tonight to debate metaphysical naturalism or epistemological naturalism, we came here to debate

whether the belief in God is reasonable or not. And that question has practically nothing to do with whether the strange theses that I argue for in this book are right or not.

Let's just take one example, the *problem of intentionality*. The problem of intentionality is a really hard problem to understand in philosophy. Dr. Craig mentioned a couple of times that intentionality is the fact that our thoughts appear to be *about* stuff: that I'm thinking *about* Craig now, and I'm thinking *about* the timer that says I've got eight and a half minutes to finish my rebuttal. How is this possible? How is it possible for one chunk of matter—my brain—to be *about*—intrinsicly *about*—another chunk of matter? That is a profound mystery in philosophy with which philosophers have been trying to wrestle certainly since Descartes, and I think since Plato made the point in the *Meno*, one of his other dialogues. Now you may think that's not a problem, that it's not very difficult. But, if you start reading Descartes and you read Leibniz and the philosophers in the tradition of Western philosophy, you'll see that it's a huge problem. And it's a problem for science, for neuroscience. How is it that the wet stuff in the brain can do this? There are two answers to this question, be about happenings outside the brain in the world? One is Descartes' answer of dualism: there is mind and it's independent of the brain, it's a totally different spiritual substance. Theists love this argument for obvious reasons. If there is a spiritual substance in us—a soul, a person, a self—-independent of our brain, well then of course, if it is not physical, it's indestructible and it's well on its way to immortality which is just what the Christian religion wants us to believe. That's dualism. Most scientists aren't dualists. There is the odd exception, Eccles and even some philosophers like Descartes or Popper, but most scientists, most neuroscientists, think that cognition is a brain process. And the problem is to explain one chunk of matter can have this property of *aboutness*. And that question has nothing to do, nothing interesting to do, with atheism or theism.

Let's take the matter of numbers. Dr. Craig says is a miracle, it's a wild coincidence that mathematics is applicable to the world on my view. Well, he hasn't reckoned with the remarkable number of alternative mathematical objects that mathematics have conjured up, have thought about, have theorized about, or about the remarkable range of possible mathematical functions relating these objects. The fact is that we know that there are indefinitely many mathematical objects and indefinitely many functions relating these mathematical objects and it is a sheer argument from ignorance to suggest that the number is so small (the number of this vast range that apply to the world is so small), that it demands divine authority to make it come out that way. Just among the non-Euclidean geometries alone, there are indefinitely many. And it happens that in the small, one of them appears to apply on this planet and in larger spaces another applies, but any one of an indefinitely large number could perfectly well apply in the universe. The suggestion that it is some mystery that one of them does could only be explained by God's good grace to the physicists just seems to me bizarre. Again, just something that beggars the imagination.

The last thing I want to talk about is Dr. Craig's brief rejoinder that there is no logical incompatibility between God's being omnipotent and benevolent and the existence of suffering. Now Christian philosophers have been worried about this problem from hell at least since the greatest of them, Leibniz. And they have done handsprings and twisted themselves up in knots to try to find some explanation because logically speaking, if God is omniscient and God is omnipotent and God is truly benevolent—has a totally good will and would never will anything but for the best—then the existence of suffering on our planet—human suffering and natural suffering of other animals, for example—is something that needs desperately to be explained. And we've had over the course of 400 or 500 years of wrestling with this problem the free will

defense and the God's will defense and nobody has managed to provide a satisfactory explanation of suffering. And I insist that the problem is logical, and Dr. Craig needs to tell us exactly how an omnipotent God and an entirely benevolent God had to have the holocaust in order to produce the good outcome, whatever it might be, that he intends for our ultimate providence. Couldn't he have just gotten away with World War I or the Great Leap Forward or The 30 Years War, which killed untold millions, or the Bubonic Plaque that killed 40% of the population of Europe? Did he have to have every one of those in order to produce the kind of beneficent outcome which it is divine providence to expect? I just don't see it. I cannot understand it. I find it offensive and I find it perplexing. And in all honesty, if Dr. Craig could provide me with any kind of a logically coherent account that could reconcile the evident fact of the horrors of human and inhuman life on this life planet over the last 3.5 billion years with the existence of a benevolent, omnipotent agent, then I will turn Christian. Thank you.

### **William Lane Craig: Second Rebuttal**

I am really excited about that last statement that Dr. Rosenberg made. Honestly, Dr. Rosenberg, if you would read the work of people like Alvin Plantinga, Peter van Inwagen, and others on this problem of evil, you will know that hardly anyone to date defends the logical version of the problem of evil because the atheist simply hasn't been able to shoulder the burden of proof required to put it through. Listen to what Paul Draper, who is an agnostic philosopher here in the Department [of Philosophy] at Purdue says. He says, "Logical arguments from evil are a dying (dead?) breed. . . . for all we know, even an omnipotent and omniscient being might be forced to allow [evil] for the sake of obtaining some important good. Our knowledge of goods and evils and the logical relations they bear to each other is much too limited to prove that this could not be the case."<sup>13</sup>

In particular, the atheist assumes that *if God is all-powerful, he can create just any world that he wants*, and that's not necessarily true. If God wills to create free creatures, then he can't guarantee they will always do what is right. It's logically impossible to *make* someone *freely* do something. So God's being all-powerful doesn't mean he can do the logically impossible. So the atheist would have to prove there is a world of free creatures which God could create which has as much good as this world but without as much evil. How could he possibly prove that? That's pure speculation.

What about the other premise, that *if God is all-good, then he would create a world without evil*? Well, the problem here is we are assuming that God's purpose is just to make us happy in this life. But on the Christian view that's false. The purpose of life is not worldly happiness as such, but rather the knowledge of God. There may be many evils that occur in this lifetime that are utterly pointless with respect to producing worldly happiness, but they may not be pointless with respect to producing a knowledge of God and salvation and eternal life. It's possible that only in a world suffused with natural and moral evil would the optimal number of people come to know God freely, find salvation and eternal life. So the atheist will have to prove that there is another possible world that has this much knowledge of God and his salvation in it but which is produced with less evils. How can he possibly prove that? It is pure conjecture.

It's impossible to prove those things, and that's why the logical version of the problem of evil has been widely abandoned. Peter van Inwagen, Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame, says that "it used to be widely held that evil . . . was incompatible with the existence of God: that no possible world contained both God and evil. So far as I am able to tell, this thesis is no longer defended."<sup>14</sup> So, Dr. Rosenberg, I want to invite you to think about becoming a theist tonight because the main obstacle that you presented need not be an obstacle for you anymore.

Now what about the positive arguments that I offered for God's existence?

The first one is *why anything at all exists*, and there's been no response in tonight's debate to this first argument. You can't just say the universe exists without an explanation if it's contingent. If it's contingent, then, as Dr. Rosenberg says in his book, "there could have been nothing."<sup>15</sup> So why is there something rather than nothing? The theist has an explanation, but the atheist by his own admission has no explanation.

What about the problem of *the origin of the universe*? I showed that it's of no avail to appeal to quantum mechanics because in quantum mechanics things don't come into being from nonbeing, from nothing; they come out of the energy in the vacuum. But for the universe to come into being, it will have to come from literally nothing because the beginning of the universe is the beginning of all matter and energy and space and time. Again, theism has an explanation for how the universe came into being, but atheism is impotent in this regard.

Regarding *the applicability of mathematics*, all that Dr. Rosenberg could say is, "There are various alternatives mathematics like non-Euclidean geometries." But that doesn't go one inch toward explaining why our physical universe is structured on this incredibly complex mathematical structure and foundation. Again, the theist has an easy explanation: God constructed the universe on this mathematical structure. The naturalist is at a loss to explain it.

What about *the fine-tuning of the universe*? I explained the disastrous results that would ensue if the universe were not fine-tuned, and I also explained why you can't dismiss this problem by the multiverse hypothesis. And there's been no response to that.

Regarding *intentional states of consciousness*, Dr. Rosenberg says, "How can one chunk of matter be about another one?" I agree with him on this; it can't! That leads him to deny that we ever think about anything. It leads me rather to say, "But I *do* think about things! Therefore

there must be minds.” And minds fit nicely into a theistic worldview because God is the ultimate mind. So the presence of finite minds in this world is nothing mysterious. It fits into a theistic world in a way that it doesn’t fit into an atheistic world.

As for *objective moral values*, it’s the same situation. Dr. Rosenberg rightly understands that if atheism is true, if metaphysical naturalism is true, there are no objective moral values and duties. He and I actually *agree* on a great deal. But what I will say is, “Obviously it *is* wrong to do certain things.” And therefore it follows that there must be a foundation for moral values beyond the physical world in God, a transcendent, personal being.

Regarding *the resurrection of Jesus*, again, you can’t discuss this responsibly without getting your fingers dirty and looking at those documents. You can’t attack other documents like Joseph Smith and Mohammed and use those to impugn the credibility of the Gospel sources. The fact is that majority of New Testament historians who have investigated these documents have concluded to those three facts that I mentioned. Remember N.T Wright says that they are as firmly established as the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70! But the naturalist has no explanation for these facts.

Finally, regarding the idea that *God can be personally known and experienced*, why can’t God be a properly basic belief for me grounded in my experience of God? I don’t see why not.

Finally, what about metaphysical naturalism? How is this relevant in tonight’s debate? He says these bizarre consequences that he affirms don’t follow from atheism; they follow from scientism. My argument was that scientism, or epistemological naturalism, doesn’t imply metaphysical naturalism—remember the case of W.V. O. Quine. But if God does not exist, then I think metaphysical naturalism is true. Metaphysical naturalism doesn’t follow from epistemological naturalism, but it does follow from atheism. The most plausible form of atheism

is, I think, metaphysical naturalism. But there are all those absurd consequences that result from that that I described. He bites the bullet and affirms these bizarre consequences. Why not step back and say, “No, this is crazy. This is *not* the world we live in. Ours must be a theistic world.”? If his only obstacle is the logical problem of evil, then that obstacle has now been removed, and Dr. Rosenberg should find himself free to embrace joyfully the existence of God as the answer to these deep questions.

### **Alex Rosenberg: Second Rebuttal**

Just as, of course, Dr. Craig is repeating himself, I don't have much recourse but to repeat myself because, just as he suggested, I haven't answered one or another of his points, he similarly hasn't answered any number of mine. That's the problem with this kind of a debate and this kind of a performance. It doesn't work. What I would like to be able to do is ask William Lane Craig a question and listen to his answer, and formulate a reply and listen to his answer, and then give a view and listen to his question, which is the way in which philosophical dialogue proceeds, and which enables us to at least find out where the crucial issues are between us and how we could mutually agree to adjudicate these matters. Now I really need to know why he is so committed to the principle of sufficient reason which underwrites a good half of the arguments from science which he advances for us? I made the point that the principle of sufficient reason is false. It's not just that its not known to be true, rather it's plain out flat false and disconfirmed all over the galaxy, all over the universe, all over the multiverse, indefinitely many times in infinitesimally small units of time. And I don't understand why he insists that it's just intuitively obvious that if something exists, there had to be a prior entity of some sort which brought it about. We know that alpha particles come into existence for no reason at all every moment in this room. Why should we assume that the universe is any different? Why should we

assume that purely quantum mechanical symmetry breaking, which produces the characteristic features of our universe, couldn't be the nature of reality as far back as we can possibly dig in cosmology?

Now let's talk about the argument from evil. I keep hearing these quotes—he's even invoking my best friend Peter van Inwagen—asserting that nobody anymore believes that the argument from evil is a problem for theism. Not where I come from. Where I come from, that's the first thing that we worry about: how can you reconcile theism and evil? Now you can reconcile God and evil if you reduce his power from omnipotence or assume his benevolence is less than complete—that he's pretty good or he's good most of the time. But even a philosopher like Peter van Inwagen, who I think is probably the best metaphysician working in our field today, even he can't go any further in his book, *The Problem of Evil*, in saying that he thinks that the argument from evil is not decisive, that it doesn't absolutely and completely destroy theism.<sup>16</sup> Is not, as he says, a successful argument. And the reasons that he gives, I would be embarrassed to set before you because they have to do with an argument called "The Sorites," an argument that's been known since the time of the Greeks and that is the sort of argument that gives philosophy a bad name among more well rounded, less theoretical people.

Professor Craig invoked the free will defense: that God gave us free will and because he gave us free will, he gave us the power to do evil and the evil is done by us as a result of our exercise of free will. Well, I have three things to say about this. The first is that God could have given us free will without giving us the Holocaust or the Bubonic Plague. He could have given us free will without giving us all the horror of the history of our species. The second thing is that God apparently made some people with free will who caused no suffering at all, whether it's small children or the saints of the Catholic Church or whoever your favorite person without sin

may be. And the third thing is this. Let's think about the following very simple thought experiment. Suppose I give you all an arithmetic test. You all have free will. You can all choose. I give you an arithmetic test: it's 10 questions such as " $3 + 5 = ?$ ," or " $16/2 = ?$ ," or " $4^2 = ?$ ," and I offer you a \$1,000 for each right answer and excruciating pain for each wrong answer. You all have free will. How many of you are going to give me any wrong answers? None of you! You're going to have \$10,000 at the end of the 10 question arithmetic test. You all had free will, you all chose freely, and you always give me the right answer. Why couldn't God have arranged the universe and us so that we all have free will and temptation was never presented to us, or when it was presented to us, we always chose rightly? Why could God not have arranged matters that way, and so arrange matters that in our exercise of free will we never chose evil, we never chose the outcome that produce suffering for anybody? That seems to me a logically coherent possibility and is enough to show that the problem of evil remains with us.

Regarding New Testament scholarship, I have great respect for New Testament scholars and for the higher criticism and for the deep scholars of the Christian religion who study the New Testament. Some of them have told us that 75% of it was forged and all of them tell us that it was written by people who were illiterate and most of them recognize that the writings—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—could not have dated from any earlier than 30 or 40 or 50 years after Jesus lived. And of course, the Aramaic in which they were written was completely lost and all the extant New Testaments are in Greek. Therefore the opportunity for misrepresentation or mistranscription or other kinds of mistakes was huge and indeed has been documented by scholarship over the last 200 years. But most of all, why should we accept the credibility of Christian scholars writing about Christian documents? No more than we should accept the

scholarship of Islamic scholars writings about Islamic documents or Scientologists writing about Scientology.

### **William Lane Craig: Closing Statement**

Well, I want to thank Dr. Rosenberg for a very stimulating debate this evening! I hope that you've enjoyed it as much as I have! In my closing statement, I would like to draw together some of the threads of this debate and see if we can come to some conclusions.

In tonight's debate, I presented eight reasons why it's reasonable to believe in God and eight reasons why metaphysical naturalism is unreasonable, in fact, absurd. Now Dr. Rosenberg has presented only one argument for atheism tonight, and that is the problem of evil. And it was very clear in his last speech that he hasn't understood it. He says, "Why couldn't God have created people with free will so that they always choose to do the right thing?" This has been dealt with by theist dealing with the problem of evil, and the reason is because the wrong subjunctive conditionals of freedom might be true for God to actualize such a world. There are possible worlds which are not feasible for God to actualize because if he were to create the creatures in certain circumstances and leave them free, they would go wrong. And as far as we know, for all that we know, in any world with free creatures in which there is this much good in the world, there will also be this much evil. It may not be feasible for God to actualize a world having this much good without this much evil. That doesn't mean the Holocaust is necessary. No, not at all! But it would mean that in a world in which, say, the Holocaust didn't occur, other events would have occurred that would have been comparably evil. So what Dr. Rosenberg again would have to show, or the atheist would have to show, is that God has the ability to create another world, another possible world of free creatures, that would involve this much knowledge of God and eternal salvation as the actual world but without as much suffering. And there is no

way that the atheist could prove that. It is utter speculation. And that's why the argument is regarded today as bankrupt.

Now with respect to the arguments for metaphysical naturalism, I think what Dr. Rosenberg has done for us tonight is describe brilliantly what an atheistic world would be like. It is a world in which there is no meaning, no truth, no thoughts about anything, no moral values, no enduring selves, no first-person perspectives. His only mistake lies in thinking that *that* world is our world. But it manifestly is not. Our world is not Dr. Rosenberg's world. Our world is a world in which we *do* exist, we *do* have thoughts about things, and in which there *are* therefore meaning, truth, and value. Dr. Rosenberg admits that theism provides a better explanation of such a world than does atheism. Since our world is evidently such a world, it follows, I think, that it is reasonable to believe in God.

In addition to that, I presented eight arguments for a belief in God. In his last speech he said, "Why are you so committed to the Principle of Sufficient Reason?" Because a very modest version of that [principle] is plausibly true, namely, that if a contingent thing exists, there is a reason or an explanation why it exists rather than not. Given that principle, which is very plausible and modest, you need an explanation for why the universe exists.

This is especially evident if the universe came into being at some point in the finite past—it can't just come from nonbeing. I won't repeat what I said about the applicability of mathematics, intentional states of consciousness, or objective moral values.

Regarding the resurrection of Jesus, the sources we have for the resurrection of Jesus go back to within five years of the event, and they were *not* written in Aramaic. He's just incorrect; they were written in Greek. So we have the New Testament in the original language in which it

was written, and the text is 99.8% authentic and pure. So doubts on this head are simply groundless.

The one thing that we haven't talked about tonight is my eighth point, that God can be personally known and experienced. And I want to close by saying this: I myself wasn't raised in a believing home (although it was a good and loving home). But when I was in high school, as a junior I met a Christian who sat in front of me in German class, who shared with me her faith about God's love. I had never heard of this before. I began to read the New Testament, and as I did, I was captivated by the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Well, I went through a period of about six months of soul searching, at the end of which I just came to the end of my rope and gave my life to Christ. And I experienced the inner spiritual rebirth that I've walked with day by day, year by year, now for over 40 years--a spiritual reality that I believe you can find as well, if you will seek him with an open mind and an open heart.

So as I close tonight, I would encourage you, if you're seeking for God, do what I did. Pick up the New Testament, begin to read, and ask yourself, could this really be the truth? Could there be a God who loves me and cares for me and gave himself for me? I believe it could change your life, just as it changed mine.

### **Alex Rosenberg: Closing Statement**

So here is another positive argument for atheism. It's so obvious that I hadn't thought I should introduce it and I certainly didn't think I was going to have time, but why is it that science has so little use for the God hypothesis? You may recall when the King of France, Louis XIV approached Laplace, the great 18<sup>th</sup> century physicist, and asked, "But what is the role of God in your system?" The answer Laplace gave was, "I have no need of that hypothesis." Of course the reason that science has no need of the hypothesis is that God makes no contribution to the

predictive power of any part of any of the sciences, and for that reason there is no basis on which to invoke God either for explanatory or any other purposes in science. Science has no more need for (and indeed, a considerable reason to deny the existence of) God than it has to accept the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus. The absence of a role for God in the predictive and explanatory content of science is quite apart from the problem of evil. It is the principal reason why 95% of the members of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States are atheist, and why science can provide not only no good basis for theism but an excellent argument against it.

I think back to the invocation of Willard Van Orman Quine, the great American philosopher, by Professor Craig. You will recall that he pointed out that Quine adopts abstract objects, the objects of mathematics, as existing even though they are abstract, even though they are not concrete, even though they are not physical items of the world. Why? Because they were indispensable to the predictive power of science. And because they were indispensable, Quine said that science not only had no good argument against them but in fact it had a good argument for their existence because of the contribution they made to enabling us to predict detailed experiments—meter readings of scientific experiments (which is the litmus test of reasonability among scientists). And to invoke the objects of mathematics as part of an argument for the existence of God fails to reflect this indispensable fact about the reasons that scientists are committed to them. If God could do as much for science as the number 2, then physicists will be much more receptive to his existence.

Let me end this debate with a little advice from an atheist. Dr. Craig has ended by making a personal statement about the importance of Jesus Christ to his own character and well-being, his own spiritual state. Believe if you want to. Have faith in Jesus Christ if you need to. But do

not make yourself vulnerable to reason and evidence. Do not demand that your belief be reasonable. You will risk the loss of your faith. You may well lose your faith. Those who have lost their faith in God are generally those who have felt the need for good reasons, for evidence, for argument. Better that you should take as your slogan “*Credo qui absurdum*; I believe because it is absurd.” That’s a far surer basis. It’s not an epistemologically respectable one, but it’s a psychologically far firmer basis to believe in the existence of God. You cannot accept that faith is reasonable, but that doesn’t stop you from believing. And of course, those friends of mine who are devote Christians, of whom I count a number of people that Professor Craig mentioned tonight and even Professor Craig, with whom I am sure I will have a friendly exchange after this debate is over, will tell you that unreasoned faith is in many ways the firmest basis for commitment to Jesus. Faith and not reason, thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Borde, A. Guth, A. Vilenkin, “Inflationary spacetimes are not past-complete,” in *Physical Review Letters* 90 (2003): 151301; Preprint archive: <http://arxiv.org/abs/gr-qc/0110012>

<sup>2</sup> Audrey Mithani and Alexander Vilenkin, “Did the universe have a beginning?” ArXiv 1204.4658v1 [hep-th] 20 April 2012. Cf. his statement “There are no models at this time that provide a satisfactory model for a universe without a beginning” (A. Vilenkin, “Did the universe have a beginning?” lecture at Cambridge University, 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXCQelhKJ7A>>). Specifically, Vilenkin closed the door on three models attempting to avert the implication of his theorem: eternal inflation, a cyclic universe, and an “emergent” universe which exists for eternity as a static seed before expanding.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Lisa Grossman, “Why physicists can't avoid a creation event,” *New Scientist* 11 January 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Wigner, “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences,” in *Communications in Pure and Applied Mathematics*, vol. 13, no. I (1960).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Leng, *Mathematics and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 239.

<sup>6</sup> Alex Rosenberg, “The Disenchanted Naturalist’s Guide to Reality,” <http://onthehuman.org/2009/11/the-disenchanted-naturalists-guide-to-reality/>.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 175-6.

<sup>8</sup> Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist’s Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 145.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 95.

<sup>10</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 710.

<sup>11</sup> W.V.O. Quine, “Naturalism, or living within one’s means,” *Dialectica* 49 (1995): 252.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenberg, *Atheist’s Guide to Reality*, 113.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Draper, "The Skeptical Theist," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 176-7.

<sup>14</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 151.

<sup>15</sup> Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

## God and the Rational Basis for Science

Robert Kaita

Drs. Craig and Rosenberg covered many topics that relate to their particular positions as to whether or not a faith in God is reasonable. My comments will address those that specifically relate to the perspectives I have as a scientist. I begin with what it means to be reasonable. Scientists like myself typically collect data, and see if they fit into some kind of discernable pattern. If they do, we create a model that allows us to predict what additional data might look like. We then obtain that data, and they either support these predictions, or suggest ways that the model should be modified for a more accurate picture of the phenomenon we are trying to explain. In some instances, the new data might require us to discard the model altogether and start anew.

The process just described is commonly called the *scientific method*. A simple example relates to the response “It tastes like chicken,” which is often given when people are asked about meat not typically in their diets. We then have the model that all meat tastes like chicken, with perhaps modifications to account for the differences in color and fat content in animals like ducks and rabbits. A radical change in the model would be needed, however, to account for a piece of sirloin. It would be hard to claim that such meat tastes like chicken, even if prepared according to the recipe for “chicken fried steak!”

The need for radical change is still occurring in my own scientific field. When I started my research career in plasma physics over thirty years ago, we used to proudly proclaim that our area included 97% of the matter in the universe. This is because as far as we knew, most of it was made up of stars. We knew they were so hot that the electrons surrounding atomic nuclei within them were stripped off, resulting in a state of ionized gas called “plasma.” In 1998,

astronomers made an unexpected discovery in their study of very old supernovas.<sup>1</sup> They measured the so-called Doppler shift of the light from these remnants of stars to find out how fast they are going, much in the same way that you can learn about a train's motion by the change you hear in the pitch of its whistle.

For much of the twentieth century, it was commonly held that the universe was expanding. Edwin Hubble made that discovery in the 1920's. He showed this through his own Doppler shift measurements of light from distant galaxies. Up to that time, many scientists thought that the universe was in a "steady state," with no beginning or end. In fact, Albert Einstein wanted to "correct" his general theory of relativity to be consistent with this belief. He added a factor, called the "cosmological constant," to create an artificial force that would keep the universe "in balance." In actuality, Einstein's theory without the cosmological constant could have predicted that the universe is expected to expand. When Hubble discovered that this was indeed the case, Einstein admitted to introducing the cosmological constant for philosophical reasons. This caused what he called his "biggest blunder."<sup>2</sup>

The more recent supernova studies indicate that the universe is actually accelerating in its expansion. In other words, Einstein's cosmological constant is not only nonzero, but has to have the right sign and size to give everything the extra "push" to make this acceleration possible. Furthermore, the supernovas do not "look" like what they are supposed to, but the light seems to be magnified and intensified as if there is some sort of "lens" between them and us. The most likely explanation of these phenomena involves something called "dark matter" and "dark energy." It is called "dark" because we cannot detect it directly, but only infer its existence on what we observe from the behavior of "ordinary" matter. Such matter is what the heavenly bodies familiar to us are made of, and it is presently believed to constitute 4.9% of the universe.

It means that plasma physicists like myself have had to be taken down a big notch, as we now study 97% of only that very modest 4.9% of what constitutes the universe.

We can use these examples as a framework to discuss certain concepts that relate to “reasonableness” in the sciences. First, it allows us to distinguish between reasonableness and what we might call a majority consensus. The former has to do with the quality or content of the methodology. A common methodology in the taste example would be the process of eating. In a society where a majority never tasted beef and a minority did, each could be considered “reasonable” if they were both able to describe the process of tasting as the basis of their conclusions. We thus have a majority consensus that all meat tastes like chicken, but we cannot conclude that the minority is “unreasonable” if they followed the same methodology. In astronomy, we have a common methodology that allows us to interpret Doppler shift data, whether collected nearly a hundred years past by Hubble or only about a decade ago by the group studying supernovas. The majority consensus before the latter did their measurements held that the expansion of the universe was not accelerating. The common methodology meant, however, that there was no *a priori* criticism of the supernova group as being “unreasonable” just because their results initially suggested a clearly minority position.

There are other important distinctions that have to be made. Suppose you believe that for whatever reason, beef cattle do not exist. You cannot then point to the majority consensus about all meat tasting like chicken as being “reasonable” simply because it is consistent with your belief, and assert that the minority that has tasted beef is thus “unreasonable” when they beg to differ. You also have to make sure that the majority you cite really did do the “taste test,” instead of assuming that all meat must taste like chicken because in your estimation, there can be no other alternative. In our example from astronomy, Einstein admitted that his introduction of the

cosmological constant was based on his belief that the universe was in steady state. This determined what he thought the majority consensus should be, with any other alternative being “unreasonable.”

The reason why I mention all of this is that Dr. Rosenberg takes great stock in the following claim about the National Academy of Sciences. As he put it, “the important thing to bear in mind is this: there are 2,000 members of the National Academy of Sciences [NAS], the most important body of the most distinguished scientists in the United States ... [and] of these 2,000 people, 95% of them are atheists.” This statistic does seem to indicate something about the majority consensus in this group. As I have argued earlier, however, this alone cannot be used to make a strong claim about the “unreasonableness” of believing in God, and dismiss the minority who do by simply declaring that their position has no merit.

First, we need to understand the methodology, i.e., how the question about faith was asked. Devoid of context, it is not at all clear if the conclusions about their beliefs were specifically associated with what they know and do as scientists. From interactions with colleagues at major research institutions, I can understand their hostility toward religion. They often associate it with a reactionary fanaticism that promotes ignorance. Sadly, I have to concede that many who are devout in their faith oblige. There are also quite a few scientists, on the other hand, who claim they are atheists but never really thought about why. If asked about their beliefs, they might say something about not needing God to do their work. Aside from the occasional prayer for patience, I would have to agree when it comes to the challenges I generally face in the laboratory. I frankly do not think about God when I try to fix a piece of faulty hardware or debug a computer program. These colleagues are more indifferent than hostile, and do not exhibit the kind of intellectual antipathy that the unqualified statistic about NAS members might suggest.

Furthermore, suppose that the 5% of the National Academy of Sciences who admitted to believing in God were sitting together in the room where the debate between Drs. Craig and Rosenberg was held. If these hundred people, representing the “most distinguished scientists in the United States,” stood up, their presence would be noticed and their faith would have to be explained. The challenge is amplified when you survey the colleagues of the NAS members. Elaine Ecklund did just that in her book, *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think*.<sup>3</sup> She reports that nearly half of the scientists she interviewed claimed some kind of religious affiliation.

For those who do not believe in God, Ecklund’s research does indicate that there are many who think that “science trumps religion.” She also found, however, quite a few who have had bad experiences with organized religion in the past, or simply feel that it is foreign or unimportant. They are strong determinants of the attitudes of people toward faith, and are not unique to scientists. We should thus be cautious about relating the science they do to the faith they lack. Furthermore, only ten percent of those interviewed felt that an increase in education always leads to a decrease in religious commitment.

The scientists in Ecklund’s study were from the University of Florida’s annual report on the “Top American Research Universities.” They included Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, MIT, Stanford, Penn, Berkeley, UCLA, Chicago, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Washington, USC, Washington University in St. Louis, Yale, and Princeton where I work. From personal familiarity with what you need to be a successful scientist at these institutions, I find it hard to believe that atheism provides a significant *intellectual* edge in election to the NAS. This is consistent with Ecklund’s observation that most scientists did not think that there was an inverse correlation between education and religious commitment.

The scientists at the top American research universities are already an elite. It thus seems unlikely that the large apparent drop in religious belief between this group, and the elite among the elite that NAS membership purportedly represents, can be explained solely on the basis of greater intellect and better training. For example, a member of the NAS who clearly exhibits the kind of achievements common to his colleagues there, but also has a strong faith in God, is Professor John Suppe. Dr. Suppe is an old friend and colleague at Princeton who is Emeritus Blair Professor of Geology there.

The Blair Professorship is the second oldest endowed position of its kind at Princeton. Its first holder was the great scientist Arnold Guyot. Among his many achievements were to discern the key processes or “laws” of glacial motion, determining the glacial origin and distribution of patterns of those curiously deposited “erratic” boulders throughout Europe, and advancing ecological concepts for the interconnectedness of the earth, its inhabitants, the oceans, and climate. Guyot also established a group of weather stations and a standard method of gathering and recording meteorological data. This developed into the US Weather Bureau.

What is perhaps less well known is the importance Guyot placed in promoting a view of the “harmony” between quests for the truth in science and religion. His last book, in fact, was *Creation, or the Biblical Cosmogony in the Light of Modern Science*.<sup>4</sup> It is particularly curious how Guyot’s thinking on the subject came about. James Dana prepared a memoir of Guyot shortly after his death, for the NAS in fact, as a tribute to its distinguished member. According to Dana, Guyot had an interest in the so-called nebular theory of the great French mathematician, Pierre Simon LaPlace. Guyot postulated that the earth’s continents coalesced from smaller islands into larger continents. Dana wrote the following.

Looking only to the suggestions of science under which the so-called nebular theory had in his mind a place, he made out a scheme of the successive stages in the earth's development. After its completion it 'flashed' upon him that the succession arrived at was just that of the cosmogonic record in Genesis, and this led later to a critical comparison of the two. Harmonizing the Bible and science was, hence, far from his original purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, this is what happened. Dana goes into great detail in how Guyot was impressed with the rich and profound implications of the progressions from the inorganic to the organic, and the simple to the complex, which are found in the beginning of the Bible.

Guyot's views on science and faith should not be dismissed lightly as anachronistic and irrelevant to the 21st century, any more than his "purely scientific" accomplishments. Both his scientific achievements, and the scientific methodology that enabled him to "harmonize" science and religion, are as valid now as they were back then. Dr. Suppe, holding the same endowed professorship and membership in the NAS as Guyot, is a prime embodiment of this. He became a Christian after he was already a tenured professor at Princeton. As he put it, his "unarticulated hunger for something more to life caused [him] to take breaks from work on Sunday mornings to walk across campus to the Princeton University Chapel."<sup>6</sup> It is there, after hearing the words from the Gospel of Matthew that promised rest for the "weary and burdened," that he decided to take on the "yoke of Christ" and give Him control of his life.

Dr. Suppe freely compares the way his observations and experiences as a Christian are tested and evaluated within the "self-correcting Christian community" with the manner in which observations, interpretations, and theories are tested vigorously in a scientific community. He clearly had to have a deep understanding of the latter to enable his success as a scientist.

Although he admits that the church is not a “scholarly analytical enterprise,” its expectation that the experience of an individual believer be “consistent with biblical experience, church history and Christian experience today” can be as much of a “self-correcting” framework as the consistency scientists expect of “observational claims and interpretations of other scientists because they have had similar research experiences.”<sup>7</sup>

Views like Dr. Suppe’s thus merit serious consideration as to why a belief in God is reasonable. If Dr. Rosenberg wishes to dismiss members of the NAS like Dr. Suppe as anomalies, he must credibly establish that the body made a “mistake” in evaluating his ability to reason, and those of the hundred or so others who also believe in God. Indeed, he would have to go back into the nineteenth century, and “explain away” towering figures like Guyot whose greatness is recognized to this day. Dr. Rosenberg thus cannot cite the criteria of superior intellect and education he associates with NAS membership, and simply use them to conclude that belief in God is not reasonable. Instead, he must recognize the possibility that there are mitigating factors having little to do with science that may put believers in God at a disadvantage for election to the NAS. This could very well turn out to be the main reason for the small percentage of such believers in the NAS today.

Suppose that as a scientist who believes in God, you appreciate the fact that your abilities and accomplishments are gifts from Him. Included in these gifts is your physical family, and the spiritual one with whom you worship. Part and parcel of this comes the injunction and desire to serve them, and the recognition that they take time from your professional activities. The perspective that your value comes from what God has given you, instead of what you achieve on your own, also has implications. You might find it far more rewarding to insure that your students and younger colleagues get recognition, rather than yourself. You may have inspired

their research, but you want them to author the publications and give the lectures that publicize the results they worked so hard to get. Since you have already established yourself as a scholar at a major research institution, the understanding that you can afford to do this is supported by your beliefs.

The altruism so expressed is clearly not exclusive to those who believe in God, nor does it necessarily impede them from getting NAS membership. It is simply postulated as a reason, barring further details, why the faith claims of NAS members could differ from the group from which they are drawn. If our “treasures are in heaven,” to use Christian parlance, there is less incentive to take the extra effort to seek them “on earth.” There is often a level of individual publicity required for election to the NAS, over and above what comes from the normal course of performing first-rate science at a top-ranked research university. You may still be committed to getting such work done, but less concerned about who gets the credit. Without further information, there may be a stronger correlation between absence of faith and importance of societal recognition, rather than intellectual ability, among NAS members.

We thus see the difficulties in using the statistics Dr. Rosenberg cites about the beliefs of scientists. The lack of information about them suggests that he is using a kind of “argumentum ad verecundiam,” or an invalid appeal to authority. The members of the NAS are clearly renowned experts in their scientific fields. However, Dr. Rosenberg cites them as authorities in areas of faith, where it is more difficult to evaluate their expertise. He asks what the NAS scientists know that Dr. Craig does not. This cannot be answered, since we really do not know how these scientists came to the faith positions they hold.

Dr. Rosenberg does seem to suggest the kind of answer atheist scientists might provide, should they be asked, about the “unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics.” His dismissal of

this claim as an argument for God is in response to Dr. Craig's mention of the essay with this title by Eugene Wigner. Its complete title is "The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences," and he concludes with the following.

The miracle of the appropriateness of the language of mathematics for the formulation of the laws of physics is a wonderful gift which we neither understand nor deserve. We should be grateful for it and hope that it will remain valid in future research and that it will extend, for better or for worse, to our pleasure, even though perhaps also to our bafflement, to wide branches of learning.<sup>8</sup>

The critical point that Wigner is making is a general claim about the effectiveness of mathematics as a language for the laws of physics. A language consists of elements that can be combined in an intelligible way. For example, Linear B was used to write the earliest known form of Greek. What is remarkable is not that it is on over four thousand tablets found at Knossos. Rather, it is the fact that it is an extinct, syllabic script that was decipherable. Once this was accomplished, each of the tablets became legible through knowledge of the language that links them.

Dr. Rosenberg cites the plethora of non-Euclidean geometries to counter Wigner's views of mathematics. He argues that Euclidean geometry was once the only one that was known, and it was thus considered with awe and wonder when it was formulated. Now we know that many geometries are possible. According to Dr. Rosenberg, this removes the mystery that comes from the uniqueness formerly claimed for Euclidean geometry, and so it is with mathematics in general. The problem with this reasoning is that every alternative to Euclidean geometry is itself a geometry. Each of these geometries is built on a set of axioms from which a series of logical steps can be followed to derive theorems. This is as important a contribution of Euclid to

geometry as the geometry that bears his name.

Euclidean geometry, for example, includes as one of its axioms the parallel postulate, i. e., "that, if a straight line falling on two straight lines make the interior angles on the same side less than two right angles, the two straight lines, if produced indefinitely, meet on that side on which are the angles less than the two right angles."<sup>9</sup> Two familiar examples of non-Euclidean geometries are called "hyperbolic" and "elliptic." They can be obtained if you set aside the parallel postulate. This is a statement, however, that only makes sense if we stay within the axiomatic framework of mathematics. Dr. Rosenberg rightly points out that Euclidean geometry is no longer unique. However, an infinite number of non-Euclidean geometries can only bear witness to the fact that they fit into the same logical system that mathematics embodies, so it does not address Wigner's assertion about how miraculous it is. They cannot explain why mathematics exists with the properties it has, any more than the thousands of clay tablets can explain why Linear B is intelligible.

More broadly, concepts like "multiverses" from the "Many-Worlds" interpretation of quantum theory also cannot be discussed without mathematics.<sup>10</sup> The idea originally came about as a result of trying to "understand" some of the unusual characteristics of quantum mechanics. In the so-called "two-slit" diffraction experiment, you get an interference pattern when you shine light on it. Photons, however, behave like particles if you detect them individually; they go through one slit or the other. To resolve this paradox, your measurement separates your "universe" from the one where the photon went through the other slit, i. e., one of many other "multiverses." They must be equally "real" to explain the interference pattern from the wave nature of light.

We can postulate that the number of "multiverses" so defined may be infinite. We also know

that in our own universe, mathematics just “happens” to be effective as a language for the laws of physics. We cannot then conclude, however, that our universe is thus unexceptional because it is one of an infinite number of “multiverse” possibilities. This is because each separate “multiverse” is inaccessible from every other. Our only “knowledge” of their existence comes from the laws of physics, specifically in quantum mechanics, that could purportedly give rise to them. Thus, the only universes that can “exist” are those where mathematics *must* “work,” and the question of why it does at all is still unanswered. The origin of this “wonderful gift,” as Wigner calls it, remains a miracle.

Physicists like myself need the appropriateness of the language of mathematics as the central “hypothesis” for what we do to be “reasonable.” This is very different from what we need to do our work. Here lies what I think is a fundamental misunderstanding of perhaps the most famous quote by LaPlace. It is what he said to Napoleon Bonaparte at a reception in the rose garden of wife Josephine at Malmaison in 1802. The great English astronomer, Sir William Herschel, recorded a first-hand account of what ensued in his diary. Napoleon purportedly asked LaPlace who is the author of what we observe in the heavens. LaPlace replied that a sequence of natural causes could account for the origin and preservation of celestial bodies. Napoleon then asked why Newton mentioned God extensively in his writings, but LaPlace did not do so even once. This is when LaPlace supposedly explained that he “had no need of that hypothesis.”<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Rosenberg cited the quote to support his assertion about the unreasonableness of belief in God with great relish. This is certainly understandable, although his desire for rhetorical flourish does create a bit of a historical challenge. Louis XIV died thirty-four years before LaPlace was born, so you do need to hypothesize God to arrange a meeting between them! More seriously, we must be careful about exactly what LaPlace was saying. The context of his conversation had to

do with what eventually became his five-volume treatise on celestial mechanics. Laplace's stated goal was to offer what we might call today a "first principles" solutions to the complex many-body problems posed by planetary motion in our solar system. In modern parlance, this would do away with formulations containing parameters that would have to be adjusted to fit the data.

While I might be more circumspect in a conversation with the head of my country, I fully sympathize with LaPlace's assertion in such a context. There is no denying that empirical models are useful. Physicists, however, tend to feel that a complete understanding of a particular phenomenon can only come from a "first principles" theory without adjustable parameters. For example, the recent discovery of the Higgs boson completes the set of subatomic particles predicted in the so-called "Standard Model." It explains how subatomic particles interact, but does not include gravitation. Many physicists have worked on this for a long time, and they might be tempted to say, "God only knows how," out of frustration rather than an assertion about science or theology. Like LaPlace, we do not need to hypothesize God to keep on going.

What we do need, however, is an ongoing belief in the "effectiveness of mathematics" in our quest. Indeed, such "faith" is something LaPlace might have found quite "reasonable." It is true that he often said he did not believe in God. He did, however, find it useful to compare humanity with a hypothetical omniscient intelligence. In that sense, it is reminiscent of Einstein's references to the "Old One." Both did not appear to believe in God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and this suggests the extent of what LaPlace meant. Nevertheless, they had a strong sense that there were absolute truths to be known and discovered. While not affirming their embodiment in an entity like God, such a position would not exclude it either.

It is thus a stretch to suggest that either LaPlace, or Einstein for that matter, would have claimed with certainty that it would be unreasonable to believe in God. Because we can never

know anything with certainty, LaPlace was fascinated with something called the probability of causes as a means of quantifying our ignorance. The probability of causes is associated with both LaPlace and the British minister and mathematician, Thomas Bayes. Widely known as Bayes Theorem, it begins with a “guess” that a particular prediction or explanation has a certain probability of being correct. This probability then changes, and becomes more accurate, as we acquire more data.

LaPlace’s ideas of God and probability of causes were intimately linked. He constantly updated them throughout his life as he acquired new information and considered what it meant. This ongoing process, combined with his belief in the limitations of humankind’s intelligence, would not likely lead to the kind of absolute definitiveness about God that his famous quote might suggest. Indeed, it makes LaPlace difficult to classify definitively as an atheist or deist. Such a person could then hardly be held up as an unequivocal champion of atheism that some might want him to be. It puts his assertion about not needing to hypothesize God in the very restrictive context of how we do science, believer and nonbeliever alike. Consistent with this, I have no problem in claiming that we practice science in the realm of God-given mathematics, not God’s miraculous interventions.

From the perspective of science, then, belief in God seems reasonable to me. This is not to deny that many scientists profess atheism, but rather, to suggest that considerations outside of what they do professionally may inform on their lack of faith. In Dr. Rosenberg’s case, what seems to be first and foremost in his mind is not the evidence from science but the problem of evil. This is clear, and also very understandable, from the moving conclusion of his opening speech. There, he mentions the unspeakable horror his family went through during World War II. He describes how he was a child of Holocaust survivors. He explains that only his parents

escaped being killed by the Nazis. I grew up in Queens in New York City, in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. This was within a decade or so of World War II, and I heard many tales from my schoolmates that were equally heart-rending. I recall vividly the story of the parents of one of my friends, who worked as slave laborers in a German factory. During air raids by Allied bombers, they did not want to seek shelter. They would have rather faced death instead, which they saw was the only escape from their misery.

I also remember an incident in primary school, when my teacher asked her students to raise their hands if their families were in concentration camps. A large percentage did, including myself. My teacher at first looked surprised, since I clearly did not look Jewish. She then realized that I must be of Japanese ancestry, and was quick to point out that my family had to have been placed in what she called a “relocation center.” It was then my turn to be surprised, in that up to then, I always heard that their internment was in a concentration camp.

Considering how many Americans, to this day, are unaware of how their government imprisoned thousands of its citizens without due process, I at least appreciate my teacher’s familiarity with “relocation centers.” The one where my family went was in a place called Poston, Arizona. With only very short notice, they were among the 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry who were imprisoned because their only crime was their ethnicity. They were forcibly moved into cramped, tarpaper-covered barracks without plumbing or cooking facilities. Surrounding them were barbed wire fences and towers with armed guards. There are similarities up to this point with conditions and circumstances under which the Nazi concentration camps were set up. I do end them here, because clearly, what then happened to the prisoners in each case could not differ more starkly. The subsequent experiences of one prisoner, namely my father, points out the complexity of trying to understand suffering and evil in the abstract.

My father was born in Florin, which is now part of greater Sacramento in California. He completed his secondary education in Japan, and then attended the University of California at Berkeley. He was first interned at the Poston War Relocation Center, which was the camp's official name, at the start of World War II. He then joined the US Army. It was segregated at that time, and many have heard of the heroism of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team in Europe. This highly-decorated unit was comprised almost entirely of American soldiers of Japanese descent. Much less known is the service of US soldiers of Japanese ancestry who served as military linguists. My father was recruited to join them, because of his education and fluency in Japanese. Much of his work was secret, including the role he was to have in the invasion planned for the Japanese mainland. The mission was called off after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japan unconditionally surrendered. My father then went to Tokyo during the US occupation of Japan. There, he met my mother when they were working together at General MacArthur's General Headquarters.

I mention all of this because they do give me pause when I go from the abstract and general to the concrete and personal concerning suffering and evil. I have been to Hiroshima, and seen the chilling photographs of the dead and dying, along with the remnants of objects distorted beyond recognition by the intense heat of the bomb blast. As a physicist, I also cringe when asked if I "make nuclear weapons." Yet, I wonder if my father would have survived his secret mission as an American of Japanese ancestry, during an invasion that was expected to result in millions of casualties. If the US never went to war with Japan, it is also very possible that my father would have never returned there, and met my mother in a General Headquarters for an occupation that would have never occurred.

I am not, of course, taking the position of advocating world wars or the use of nuclear

weapons. I cannot, however, admit to the depth of understanding to speak definitively of evil and suffering, when it is very possible that I could not exist if the darkest days of human history never happened. I could very well argue that it is reasonable to believe in God if He did not allow World War II to occur, or if He had a purpose for ending the “Great Crusade,” as Eisenhower put it, without nuclear weapons. If one or the other of these terrible events never happened, it is highly probable that I would not be around to make that argument. The difficulty I have in resolving this conundrum makes it disingenuous of me to suggest that just because these events did occur, it is unreasonable for anyone to believe in God.

What I do understand is the reasonableness of the faith in God that my father shared with me. He could have also raised me to be bitter about the treatment of Americans of Japanese ancestry during World War II, as many of my generation continue to feel. While never claiming that it was justified, he suggested, as the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (8:28 NIV). In that context, he would speak less about the internment camp and more about his US Army service record. I think subsequent history has supported the practical as well as spiritual consequences of my father’s attitudes. The fruits of the heroism of those in his generation can pretty clearly be seen through an African American general serving as Secretary of State, a Japanese American general becoming Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and perhaps even an African American President who could not have been elected without the sacrifices made many years before.

In my essay, I have given evidence to show that as a physicist, it is reasonable to believe in God. I admit that they may not be persuasive to everyone. This may be, however, because factors beyond science and philosophy come into play. We cannot avoid the legitimate influence of

personal and family experience. Bitterness is a reasonable response to the experience of Americans of Japanese ancestry, from the injustice of internment to indignity of segregation in the armed forces. Reasonable too, is a belief that this is somehow part of a greater plan God has, and we have seen its manifestations in a society that is more equitable now than it was seventy years ago. Reasonableness, as it involves us individually, thus ultimately involves choice. As the choice of believing in God was reasonable to my father, so it is to me.

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<sup>1</sup> A.G. Riess et al., *Journal of Astronomy* 116, 1009 (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Albert Einstein, *The Meaning of Relativity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), 127 (see footnote).

<sup>3</sup> Elaine Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Guyot, *Creation, or the Biblical Cosmogony in the Light of Modern Science* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884).

<sup>5</sup> James D. Dana, *Memoir of Arnold Guyot 1807-1884* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Sciences, 1886), 332.

<sup>6</sup> John Suppe, "Ordinary Memoir," *Professors Who Believe: The Spiritual Journey of Christian Faculty*, ed. Paul M. Anderson (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Wigner, *Communications in Pure Applied Mathematics*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1960).

<sup>9</sup> Fifth postulate in Euclid's *Elements* (ca. 300 BC).

<sup>10</sup> H. Everett, *Rev. Modern Physics* 20, 454 (1957).

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Bertsch McGrayne, *The Theory that Would Not Die: How Baye's Rule Cracked the Enigma Code, Hunted Down Russian Submarines and Emerged Triumphant from Two Centuries of Controversy* (New York, NY: Yale University Press, 2011), 30.

## Faith In Anything is Unreasonable

Victor J. Stenger

Not only is faith in God unreasonable, **faith in anything is unreasonable. Faith is belief in the absence of supportive evidence and even in the light of contrary evidence. No one disputes that religion is based on faith.** Some theologians, Christian apologists, and even a few secular scholars claim that science is also based on faith. They argue that science takes it on faith that the world is rational and that nature can be ordered in an intelligible way.<sup>1</sup>

However, science makes no such assumption on faith. It analyzes observations by applying certain methodological rules and formulates models to describe those observations. It justifies that process by its practical success, not by any dubious metaphysical assumption. **We must distinguish faith from trust. Science has earned our trust by its proven success.** Religion has destroyed our trust by its repeated failure.

In this essay I will focus on the scientific arguments that William Lane Craig uses in this and other debates to justify his claim that it is not only a reasonable hypothesis that God exists but that it is the most reasonable hypothesis. Note that he means not just any god, but the personal God of Christianity.

### *A Natural Explanation*

Let me begin with Craig's claim that the universe can only be explained by a transcendent, personal creator. All one has to do to refute this claim is to provide a plausible natural explanation for the origin of the universe. No proof is required. **Unless Craig can prove that such an explanation is not only currently impossible based on existing knowledge, but will forever**

remain impossible and that only a transcendent, personal creator is conceivable, his argument fails.

Modern cosmology, based on exquisitely precise data, provides any number of scenarios for a purely natural universe independent of any supernatural forces. I need just mention the current favorite, the *eternal multiverse*. In 1983, cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin, with some trepidation, suggested what is now called *eternal inflation*.<sup>2</sup>

Inflation is the notion developed in the 1980s that our universe began with a brief exponential expansion of many orders of magnitude followed by the almost linear expansion discovered by Edwin Hubble in 1929 that became known as the *Big Bang*. Three spectacular space telescopes measuring the structure of the cosmic microwave background (CMB) with ever-increasing sensitivity—COBE launched in 1989, WMAP launched in 2001,<sup>3</sup> and Planck launched in 2009—have left little doubt about the basic validity of the inflationary universe. Their observations joined with many others have been precisely fit to a “hot-big-bang” model that includes inflation.

According to eternal inflation, once expansion is started it never ends, with new universes being created all the time. In 1986, Andre Linde elaborated the idea showing how it was possible that the universe reproduces itself indefinitely and “may have no beginning or end.”<sup>4</sup>

Eternal inflation, as conceived by Vilenkin and Linde, results in the continual production of universes inside of other universes in a fractal-like structure.<sup>5</sup> Basically, while a bubble universe is exponentially inflating to a much larger size, other bubbles can nucleate in the ever-growing empty *de Sitter space* surrounding the center of the original bubble.

The fluctuations in the temperature of the CMB across the sky observed with many instruments in space and on Earth provide evidence for the nature of the universe when it was

only about  $10^{-35}$  seconds old. Virtually every attempt to model the physics leads to the conclusion that our universe is but one expanding bubble in a *multiverse* filled with an unlimited number of other bubbles, and **this process existed eternally in the past and will continue eternally into the future.**

Now Craig will undoubtedly insist that this scenario is unproven. But, he has the burden of disproving it in order to claim divine creation of a single universe. His is still the less parsimonious hypothesis, since it is based on no evidence whatsoever while eternal inflation is based on our best empirical knowledge. Apologists scoff at the whole idea of the multiverse, saying it is pure speculation and unobservable, as if God isn't.

However, it is not pure speculation when you make inferences from well-established science. Furthermore, the existence of a multiverse is in principle detectable. Early in our universe another universe may have been sufficiently close for its gravity to affect the isotropy of the CMB. Or, the bubbles may have collided leaving a bruise on each. A detection of a large-scale anisotropy in the CMB could provide evidence for a universe outside our own. The Planck space telescope has confirmed several unexplained anomalies of this nature that were hinted at in earlier observations by WMAP.<sup>6</sup>

Now, since the observation of another universe beside our own would be the greatest scientific discovery in history, don't expect any cosmologists to make such a claim until they have ruled out every other possibility to the highest level of confidence and seen the data independently verified several times.

In this debate, Craig asserts, "The proponents of chance have been forced to postulate the existence of a World Ensemble of other universes, preferably infinite in number and randomly ordered, so that life-permitting universes will appear by chance somewhere in the Ensemble."

That's not only wrong, it's an insult to serious scholars. What Craig calls the World Ensemble is the multiverse and it is most certainly not a postulate introduced to avoid God. It is the conclusion of our best current models of cosmology based on extremely precise observations of modern astronomy and best knowledge of fundamental physics.

Craig also asserts that any multiverse had to have a beginning. In the debate he first argues that the universe we live in had to have a beginning and then later mentions that the argument also applies to the multiverse. Let us examine this claim.

### *Beginnings*

For many years, Craig has used what he calls the *Kalam cosmological argument*, which says that because the universe had a beginning and because anything that begins requires a cause, it follows that God exists.<sup>7</sup> Now, I don't see why that follows. **Why couldn't the universe have a beginning that was not "caused"? If there were a cause, why must it be God? And why should the "God" that was the cause of the universe be the deity of an insignificant ancient desert tribe who two thousand years ago sent His son, who is also Himself, down to Earth to die an agonizing death to atone for the fact that four thousand years earlier two humans committed the terrible sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge?**

Craig refers to a 2003 paper by Vilenkin and collaborators Arvind Borde and Alan Guth (BGV) that Craig claims proves that the universe had to have a beginning.<sup>8</sup> I have asked Vilenkin, whom I have known personally for many years: **"Does your theorem prove that the universe must have had a beginning?"** He replied, **"No. But it proves that the expansion of the universe must have had a beginning. You can evade the theorem by postulating that the universe was contracting prior to some time."**<sup>9</sup> The same point has been made by Anthony Aguirre, Steven Gratton,<sup>10</sup> Sean Carroll, and Jennifer Chen.<sup>11</sup>

The universe could have been contracting before it was expanding. In figure 1 we have a space-time diagram showing *worldlines*, which are paths in space-time, of particles emerging from the origin of an expanding universe.

**[INSERT FIGURE 4.1 HERE]**

Figure 4.1. A spacetime diagram showing worldlines of particles emerging from the origin of our universe. They can be extended in the negative time direction allowing for an eternal multiverse.

BGV proved that all the worldlines had to originate from a point, which can be interpreted as the beginning of *our* universe, that is, the one we live in. However, the other authors showed that the worldlines continue through the origin to the negative side of the time axis, allowing for the possibility of an eternal universe, an anathema to Craig and those who believe in any kind of creation.

As far back as 1987, Stephen Hawking pointed out that it is a mistake to assume that only expanding cosmological solutions are possible since the direction of time has no intrinsic meaning.<sup>12</sup>

In short, *our* universe had a beginning but that need not have been the beginning of everything.

### *The Origin of Our Universe*

Craig makes the claim, in this debate and in other places, that theism is the best explanation for the origin of the universe, while atheism offers none. But theism is no explanation at all.

Saying “God did it” explains nothing. How is that any different from saying, “The Tooth Fairy did it” or “Nature did it?” At least the last statement is based on real knowledge. And note the sleight-of-hand: when Craig says that God did it, he is not just saying that an unknown something must have caused the universe to start. Instead, **Craig is insisting—with no rational basis—that the deity originally worshipped by Hebrew shepherds thousands of years ago, and now worshipped by a minority of humans calling themselves Christians, brought the universe into existence.**

In fact, using both quantum mechanics and general relativity we can develop plausible scenarios for how our universe came about naturally, without the need for a divine creation. I will present one example, based on well-established physics and cosmology. And, as long as we don’t allow Craig to cast the burden of proof from where it belongs on his shoulders to ours, any viable scenario not ruled out by existing knowledge serves to refute the claim that an uncreated origin is impossible.

The scenario I will present is based on the notion of *quantum tunneling*, which is worked out mathematically in lower-division college physics textbooks. The process is illustrated in figure 2. In classical physics, an object cannot surmount a barrier if its kinetic energy is less than the potential energy at the top of the barrier. However, in quantum mechanics the mathematics of the Schrödinger equation allows a solution inside the barrier in which the wave function is not zero.

**[INSERT FIGURE 4.2 HERE]**

Fig. 4.2. Quantum tunneling through a barrier.

In figure 2, a physical particle is coming in from the left. The dashed line indicates the kinetic energy of the particle, which is less than the potential energy given by the height of the

barrier. Outside the barrier, the wave function is oscillatory, representing an observable particle. Inside the barrier, the particle is "unphysical," meaning unmeasurable, and its wave function is exponential. However, the particle becomes physical again when the wave function emerges from the other side of the barrier and is again oscillatory.

Incidentally, this example should serve to refute any attempt by Craig or others to argue that we are not being scientific here, since science should only deal with observable quantities. We do not have to directly observe an object to be able to calculate its effects on what we can measure. We can't observe quarks or black holes, but we should see their effects. We do. We can't observe the Christian God, but should see His effects. We don't.

Quantum tunneling allows a physical body to pass from a physical region through an unphysical one and back again to a physical one. The probability of that occurring for a macroscopic object on the everyday scale is extremely low, which is why we don't see people walking through walls. But tunneling happens on the subatomic scale and has been firmly established empirically. Indeed, quantum tunneling explains how stars shine.

Now let us apply quantum tunneling to the origin of our universe. David Atkatz and Heinz Pagels<sup>13</sup> and Vilenkin<sup>14</sup> independently were the first to work out this concept mathematically in 1982. An excellent account can be found in Vilenkin's 2006 popular book, *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes*, where you can also learn about eternal inflation and multiple universes.<sup>15</sup>

Vilenkin's scenario calls for our universe to tunnel out of "nothing," which he takes to be the region of quantum chaos that existed before the Big Bang. However, the definition of "nothing" is a contentious matter. If it has some definable property, then isn't it something?

Cosmic creationists simply say that Vilenkin’s “nothing” is still something that exists and so does not answer the question of how the universe came into existence from “nonexistence.”

For my purposes at this point, I am going to avoid the issue by having our universe tunnel from “something,” namely a prior universe (part of the multiverse) that always existed, and so did not have to come from nonexistence. The basic scenario was presented in the very nice review, “Quantum Cosmology for Pedestrians” by Atkatz.<sup>16</sup> I worked it out mathematically, at the undergraduate level, in my 2006 book *The Comprehensible Cosmos*<sup>17</sup> and in a published paper.<sup>18</sup>

The basic picture is illustrated in figure 3. We can describe an earlier universe that is more-or-less a mirror of ours, on the opposite side of the time axis where the origin is at time  $t = 0$ . Such a universe is not forbidden by any known principle or empirical fact.

**[INSERT FIGURE 4.3 HERE]**

Figure 4.3. Our universe appears by quantum tunneling from the prior one, from our point-of-view.

The earlier universe contracts until it forms an unphysical region of total chaos and maximum entropy. However, like the region inside a barrier, this region of chaos can still be described mathematically. The wave function of the universe is able to tunnel through the chaos and reappear on the other side of the time axis and become our expanding universe.

We can compare this figure with figure 1, which showed the classical worldlines for both sides of the time axis. As we have seen, the BGV theorem only requires that the *expansion* of our universe had a beginning. However, even then, this theorem cannot be applied to the origin of

our universe, or the multiverse for that matter, since it does not take quantum mechanics into account. That beginning is not an infinitesimal point in space-time. The point at the origin of figure 1 should be replaced with an unphysical region of finite radius.

In short, our universe didn't have to come from "nothing." From our point of view in this universe, it tunneled from an earlier universe. Now, I do not claim—and do not have to prove—that this is exactly how it all happened. What I do assert is that such a scenario can be fully formulated, with mathematical rigor based on existing knowledge. This refutes any claim that a miraculous creation is necessary to explain the existence of our universe.

### *Fine-Tuning*

Craig also appeals to the fine-tuning argument: "In recent decades scientists have been stunned by the discovery that the initial conditions of the Big Bang were fine-tuned for the existence of intelligent life with a precision and delicacy that literally defy human comprehension."

This discovery is not at all beyond human comprehension, as I showed in my 2011 book *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning*.<sup>19</sup> Craig does not mention any examples, so allow me to refer to his earlier writing on the subject. In many of his debates, he quotes famed cosmologist Stephen Hawking as saying: "If the rate of the universe's expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have re-collapsed into a hot fireball."<sup>20</sup> These are not Hawking's exact words, but it's basically what he says on pages 121-122 of his 1988 blockbuster bestseller *A Brief History of Time*.<sup>21</sup>

However, Craig has lifted this quotation out of context. A few pages later, Hawking explains how this problem is solved in inflationary cosmology. On page 128, he talks about the inflationary model of the early universe, which was still relatively new when his book was

published but is now well established, as we have seen. In the inflationary picture, Hawking notes:<sup>22</sup>

The rate of expansion of the universe would automatically become very close to the critical rate determined by the energy density of the universe. This could then explain why the rate of expansion is still so close to the critical rate, without having to assume that the initial rate of expansion of the universe was very carefully chosen.

In other words, current inflationary cosmology accounts for the fact that the expansion of the universe is at or very near the critical rate. In fact, it does so to one part in sixty orders of magnitude.

In the debate, Craig says, “The finely tuned constants are not physically necessary.” Well, the expansion rate is one constant that is physically necessary, as are others discussed in *Fallacy*. Many physicists think that all the constants will turn out to be “physically necessary” when we finally have a *theory-of-everything* (TOE). However, I am more inclined to suspect that some will turn out to be accidents.

Craig won’t accept that, asserting, “The odds of a life-permitting universe governed by our laws of nature are just so infinitesimal that they cannot be reasonably faced.” He has no way of knowing that. Where is that calculated? Perhaps the range of possible values of all the parameters is so great that even events with infinitesimal probabilities can happen. Plausible arguments can be made on the basis of our best knowledge that a wide range of possibilities exists for all the parameters of physics sufficient to allow for some kind of life.

Once again, Craig has the burden of proving that is not the case, which he hasn’t done. On our planet, events with infinitesimal probabilities happen billions of times a day.

This example alone illustrates why **the fine-tuning argument is bound to fail. It is yet another *god-of-the-gaps* argument**, also known as the *argument from ignorance*. Just because science does not have a current, settled explanation for some fact, that does not justify leaping to the dual conclusions that (1) no scientific explanation can ever be found, and (2) in the absence of a scientific explanation, a fact can only be accounted for by the God of the Hebrews. How can we ever guarantee that no scientific explanation will ever be found? And why should it be the Hebrew God and not Kali, or Zeus, or some other god?

In the case of fine-tuning, the gaps of scientific ignorance are very small and only blown out proportion by wishful magical thinking. In *Fallacy* I examined every serious example of fine-tuning that had been claimed at that time and found them all to be wanting.

Obviously our particular form of life would not exist if the physical parameters of the universe were different, and in that sense we are certainly adapted to the physical properties of our planet. But **Rosenberg is correct when he points out that all conceivable life need not be based on carbon, and certainly Earth-life need not be the only possible form of life that is based on carbon.**

Another common mistake made by fine-tuners is that they usually change **only one parameter at a time, ignoring the fact that other parameters can also change and compensate**. For example, the claim is made that if the electric force were a bit stronger, nuclei of atoms would not hold together because of the electrical repulsion of positively charged protons. But then, if the attractive nuclear force were also a bit stronger, nuclei could still hold together.

You often hear, even from physicists who should know better, that the gravitational force is so exceptionally weak,  $10^{39}$  times weaker than the electrical force, that it must have been fine-tuned, or else the universe would have collapsed shortly after its birth. The fact is, the

gravitational force is proportional to the masses of the bodies interacting and so is as weak or as strong as those bodies are less massive or more massive. The number  $10^{39}$  applies only for the ratio of the electrical and gravitational forces between a proton and electron. Suppose instead we have two unit-charged particles with masses equal to the Planck mass,  $2.18 \times 10^{-8}$  kilograms, which is the natural mass formed from the basic constants of physics. In that case the gravitational force will be 137 times stronger than the electric force.

Gravity is very weak at the subatomic scale because elementary particle masses are very small compared to the Planck mass. The proton is not even an elementary particle but is composed of quarks. Why are two particle masses so small? According to the standard model of elementary particle physics, the elementary particle masses are fundamentally zero and they pick up small masses by scattering off the Higgs bosons that pervade the universe.<sup>23</sup>

### *Mathematics*

Craig argues that the applicability of mathematics somehow proves that God exists. **Mathematics, like language, logic, and science, are human contrivances that are part of our attempt to deal with the world rationally.** Language is our main level of communication, but mathematics and logic serve to check on the consistency of our statements. Science checks those statements against observations. **If language, mathematics, logic, and science didn't work, we wouldn't use them.**

Most of mathematics has little to do with science since it does not deal with observations, the foundation of science. So it can hardly be called the “language of nature.” I don't know of a single scientific principle dealing directly with observations that cannot be stated with words alone, albeit very laboriously. Just look at any of the thousands of popular books out there on science where the publishers have forbade the authors from using a single equation.

Unfortunately, most theoretical physicists and mathematicians hold to a platonic philosophy that fits in well with theology because both assume a reality beyond observed matter. Platonists view their equations as being more real than what they see with their own eyes and instruments. For example, some physicists argue that the abstract quantum fields in their theories, which exist in a multidimensional abstract space, are the “true realities” while their corresponding particles, called *quanta*, are artifacts. (Every quantum field has a quantum particle associated with it). Yet, the fact is that no one has ever measured a field. They only measure particles. The so-called field or wave effects that are observed in experiments, such as the interference and diffraction of light, are the statistical result of the detection of a large number of particulate photons. Photons are not waves. They are particles. And you can always detect individual photons no matter what the experimental setup. Beams of photons, not individual particles, are described as waves.

So what is it that physicists are doing when they develop a mathematical theory? They are analogous to carpenters, using the tools of mathematics to manufacture models that describes observations. No one has any way of knowing what the “true reality” is that lies behind observations. Theologians say they have revelation, but no purported revelation has ever been verified empirically.

On March 23, 1882, a girl named Emmy Noether was born in Erlangen, Bavaria. The daughter of a mathematician, she would turn out to be a mathematical genius and make one of the most important contributions to physics in the twentieth century. Its impact is only now beginning to be fully appreciated. Noether would be considered one of the foremost feminist heroines of the twentieth century had more people understood mathematics and physics.<sup>24</sup>

In 1915, Noether published a theorem that completely changed our philosophical understanding of the nature of physical law. Until I learned about it, I always thought, as most

physicists still think, that the laws of physics are restrictions on the behavior of matter that are somehow built into the structure of the universe. Although she did not put it in these terms, Noether showed otherwise.

Noether's theorem proves that *for every continuous space-time symmetry there exists a conservation principle*. Three conservation principles form the foundational laws of physics: conservation of energy, conservation of linear momentum, and conservation of angular momentum.

Noether showed that conservation of energy follows from time translation symmetry; conservation of linear momentum follows from space translation symmetry; and conservation of angular momentum follows from space rotation symmetry.

What this means in practice is that when a physicist makes a model that does not depend on any particular time, that is, one designed to work whether it is today, yesterday, 13 billion years ago, or 13 billion years in the future, that model automatically contains conservation of energy. The physicist has no choice in the matter. If he tried to put violation of energy conservation into the model, it would be logically inconsistent.

If another physicist makes a model that does not depend on any particular place in space, that is, one designed to work whether it is in Oxford, Timbuktu, on Pluto, or in the recently discovered galaxy MACS0647-JD that is 13.3 billion light years away, that model automatically contains conservation of linear momentum. The physicist, once again, has no choice in the matter. If she tried to put violation of linear momentum conservation into the model, it would be logically inconsistent.

Similarly, any model that is designed to work with an arbitrary orientation of a coordinate system, to work whether “up” is defined in Alaska or New Zealand, must necessarily contain conservation of angular momentum.

Since these three principles form the basis of classical mechanics, it can be said that the laws of physics do not govern the behavior of matter. They are human artifacts that follow from symmetry principles that govern the behavior of physicists. God had nothing to do with them.

Although this is not widely recognized, Noether's connection between symmetries and laws can be extended beyond space-time to the abstract internal space occupied by the state vector of quantum mechanics. These abstract spaces are not so obvious as the three dimensional space we experience. They are introduced to describe observed forces from different points of view. By noting what particular quantities are conserved we can infer what symmetries apply.

In this case, we have a principle called *gauge symmetry*, which is equivalent to rotational symmetry in the multidimensional state vector space of quantum mechanics. The various conservation principles that apply in this regime, such as conservation of electric charge, arise from gauge symmetry. Furthermore, when the equation of motion of a charged particle is made *locally* gauge symmetric, that is, independently symmetric at every point in space and time, Maxwell's equations of electromagnetism fall right out of the mathematics. In other words, the electricity and magnetism are *fictitious forces*, like the centrifugal and Coriolis forces (and gravity), inserted into theories by physicists to preserve certain symmetries.

Gauge symmetry did not stop with classical physics. In the late 1940s it was applied to quantum electrodynamics and in the 1970s to the highly successful standard model of elementary particles that received its final corroboration in 2012 with the observation of the Higgs boson at

the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Geneva, almost fifty years after it was first predicted as the source of the masses of elementary particles.

In the standard model, three of the four forces of nature—the electromagnetic and the weak and strong nuclear forces—arise from local gauge symmetry. The electromagnetic and weak forces are united in a single electroweak force, but its symmetry only holds at the very high energies just now being reached at the LHC but also existed in the very early universe. The electroweak force is spontaneously (accidentally) broken at lower energies. Gravity is still treated separately with Einstein's theory of general relativity, but it is also heavily based on symmetry principles.

While the standard model is a long way from Noether's original work, it confirms the general idea that what we call the *laws of physics* are simply logical requirements placed on our theories to make them objective, that is, independent of the point of view of any particular observer. In my 2006 book *The Comprehensible Cosmos* I called this principle *point-of-view invariance* and showed that virtually all of classical and quantum mechanics can be derived from it.<sup>25</sup> The book subtitle is: *Where Do the Laws of Physics Come From?* The answer: They didn't come from anything. They are either the necessary requirement of symmetries that preserve point-of-view invariance or accidents that happen when these symmetries are spontaneously broken.

### *Eating from the Tree of Knowledge*

According to the book of Genesis, about 6,000 years ago God created the world in six days, resting on the seventh. On the first day, He starts by creating heaven and Earth. But they are in darkness and He says, “Let there be light.” On the second day, He makes a firmament to divide the waters above, which He called Heaven, from the waters below. On the third day, God

demands dry land to appear in the waters below, called it Earth and called the waters Seas. On day four, God adds the sun, moon and stars to the firmament of the heavens. On the fifth day, He orders the waters to bring forth fish and birds. On the sixth day, God has Earth bring forth cattle, beasts, and creeping things. And finally, God made man in His image and gave Him dominion over all Earth and its living things. And then He saw it was good and took a day off to recover from His labors.

This contrasts with the cosmos viewed by science today: Quantum fluctuations in the energy field in the very early universe trigger exponential expansion, followed by the conventional Hubble expansion of the Big Bang. Elementary particles appear that eventually form nuclei and atoms as the universe cools. After 380,000 years, photons decouple from the rest of matter, eventually becoming the cosmic microwave background. The structure of that background carries information about the earliest moments, perhaps  $10^{-35}$  second after the beginning. The original fluctuations, greatly amplified by inflation, triggered the formations of the first stars and galaxies around 200-400 million years later. Exploding stars began making the atoms of oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, necessary for our kind of life. After several generations of stars lived and died our Sun and the Earth formed from the dust of supernovae about 4.5 billion years ago. A billion years later, life began on Earth. Then, 100,000 years in the past, an eye blink ago, the first humans sat around campfires and told stories. In the last few hundred years we, their descendants, have gone beyond those campfire myths and built instruments that allow us to see 13.8 billion years into the past.

The picture of the multiverse today starts with our own visible universe of 100 billion galaxies, each containing a hundred billion stars, 13.8 billion years old. The most distant object we can see is now 45 billion years away, taking into account the expansion of the universe

during the time its image travelled to our telescopes. This marks a horizon beyond which we cannot see because light has not had the time to reach us in the age of the universe. Inflationary cosmology implies that on the other side of our horizon lies a region containing perhaps  $10^{100}$  as many galaxies that arose from the same explosive seed that produced our universe. And that's just our personal bubble universe. Besides that we also have the eternal multiverse containing an unlimited number of other bubble universes of comparable size. Although intelligent life is most likely very rare, in this vast multiverse it is hard to imagine that there aren't countless planets with intelligent life.

Surely, then, it is ludicrous to think that humanity, which came along only about 100,000 years ago and will be lucky to last another 100,000 years, is the special creation of a divinity that presides over this vast reality. Alternatively, Jesus is continually dying on the cross, every nanosecond or so on some planet in the multiverse, in order to redeem every form of life that evolved sufficient intelligence to eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Vilenkin. "Birth of Inflationary Universes," *Physical Review D* 27, no. 12 (1983): 2848-55.

<sup>3</sup> George Smoot, and Keay Davidson, *Wrinkles in Time* (New York: W. Morrow, 1993); E. Komatsu, *et al*, "Wmap Five-Year Observations: Cosmological Interpretation," *The Astrophysical Journal Supplement Series* 180 (2009): 330-76; Planck Collaboration, "Planck 2013 Results. XXII. Constraints on Inflation," *Astronomy & Astrophysics* (2013): \_\_\_\_.

<sup>4</sup> Andrei D. Linde. "Eternally Existing Self-Reproducing Chaotic Inflationary Universe," *Physics Letters B* 175, no. 4 (1986): 395-400.

<sup>5</sup> Andrei Linde, "The Self-Reproducing Inflationary Universe," *Scientific American* 271, no. 5 (1994): 48-55.

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<sup>6</sup> Planck Collaboration, “Planck 2013 Results. XXIII. Isotropy and Statistics of the CMB,” *Astronomy & Astrophysics* (2013): \_\_\_\_.

<sup>7</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument. Library of Philosophy and Religion*. (London: Macmillan, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Arvind Borde, Alan H. Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin, “Inflationary Spacetimes Are Not Past-Complete,” *Physical Review Letters* 90 (2003): 151301.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Vilenkin, email communication May 21, 2010.

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<sup>11</sup> Sean M. Carroll and Jennifer Chen, “Spontaneous Inflation and the Origin of the Arrow of Time,” <http://arxiv.org/abs/hep-th/0410270> (accessed May 22, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> S. W. Hawking, “Quantum Cosmology,” in S. W. Hawking, and W. Israel, eds. *Three Hundred Years of Gravitation* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 642.

<sup>13</sup> David Atkatz and Heinz Pagels, “Origin of the Universe as a Quantum Tunneling Event,” *Physical Review Letters* D25 (1982): 2065-73.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Vilenkin, “Creation of Universes From Nothing,” *Physics Letters B* 117B (1982): 25-28.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), chap. 17.

<sup>16</sup> David Atkatz. “Quantum Cosmology for Pedestrians,” *American Journal of Physics* 62, no. 7 (1994): 619-27.

<sup>17</sup> Victor J. Stenger, *The Comprehensible Cosmos: Where Do the Laws of Physics Come From?* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), 312-19.

<sup>18</sup> Victor J. Stenger, “A Scenario for a Natural Origin of Our Universe,” *Philo* 9, no. 2(2006): 93-102. Available at <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/vstenger/Timeless/TimelessSkeptic.pdf> (accessed May 9, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Victor J. Stenger, *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning: Why the Universe is Not Designed for Us* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> William Lane Craig, “The Craig-Pigliucci Debate: Does God Exist?,” <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/craig-pigliucci2.html> (accessed March 15, 2013).

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, (New York: Bantam, 1988), 121-22.

<sup>22</sup> Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, 128.

<sup>23</sup> Technical point: The strength of gravity is measured by a dimensionless parameter  $\alpha_G = Gm_p^2/\hbar c = m_p^2$ , where  $m_p$  is the proton mass by convention. This is arbitrary and, although any mass will do, it would have been better to use an elementary particle such as the electron. In any case, the strength of gravity is determined by the masses of particles involved and cannot be defined absolutely.

<sup>24</sup> Nina Byers. 1999. E. Noether's Discovery of the Deep Connection Between Symmetries and Conservation Laws. <http://www.physics.ucla.edu/~cwp/articles/noether.asg/noether.html> (accessed January 15, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Stenger, *The Comprehensible Cosmos*.

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## God without Argument

Paul K. Moser

The question of God's existence seems not to go away, even for highly educated atheists. In addition, the question of God's existence seems not be conclusively settled, either pro or con, by sound deductive or inductive (including abductive) arguments for any sizeable group free of prior commitments on the question. Why is this? Might this indicate something important about the God in question? We shall pursue such questions to illuminate **the kind of inquiry suited to a God worthy of worship**. Perhaps typical philosophical debaters on God's existence have a misplaced emphasis in their argumentative mode. Perhaps **they confuse evidence and argument**, as many people do. I shall contend that important corrections are needed here.

### *Whose Existence?*

Initially, we should settle what we mean, at least roughly, by the slippery term "God." Otherwise, the nagging question, "*Which* God?," will not go away, and our progress will suffer accordingly. Alleged gods come in many different forms and characters, and therefore uncritical talk of "God" yields semantic and epistemological obscurity in inquiry. In that case, we end up with something akin to Lewis Carroll's problem of the hunting of the snark. In addition, we then risk having not only false expectations for God but also misleading standards for what qualifies as suitable evidence for God. So, self-conscious clarity in our use of the key term "God" can save us from unnecessary problems in inquiry.

We should make a decision up front on what (initial) semantic significance we give to the term "God." Nobody else will make the decision for us; nor will the world impose a semantic decision on us. I recommend that, at the start, we set the bar as high as possible and use the term as a perfectionist title. **Specifically, the term "God" is a title requiring worthiness of worship and**

hence self-sufficient moral perfection in a titleholder. We can lower the bar later if we wish, but we would be ill-advised not to consider this perfectionist title as fitting for one who is divine. One important advantage of this use of a title is that we can ask about God's existence even if God does not exist. A title can have clear semantic sense even if it lacks an actual titleholder, that is, a referent. So, inquirers about God need not beg questions against atheists or agnostics.

We can get some help by understanding the term "God" via the familiar properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. The abstractness and generality of these properties, however, can hinder illumination and decision-making regarding questions about God's existence. We can avoid undue abstractness if we understand the title "God" to connote the kind of worthiness of worship that includes *perfect redemptive love (agapē)* in virtue of perfect goodness. Such a title, however, need not denote an actual titleholder who is worthy of worship.

A divine agent with perfect redemptive love would actively seek what is morally and spiritually best for all agents, even those opposing God. What is best in this regard would include an intended reconciliation of humans to God in order to empower humans to share, if imperfectly, in God's perfect moral character. So, **God would undertake purportedly redemptive interventions in human lives, including in the lives of people opposed to God who have not finally rejected God.** Any alleged god who fails to undertake such interventions would fail by the standard of worthiness of worship and hence would fail to be God. So, in the absence of enemy-love, a candidate for being God will always fall short.

God's purportedly redemptive interventions would not need to be the same for all people. God could intervene in ways sensitive to the varying receptivity or the lack thereof in humans, and God could use the most advantageous timing for the various interventions aimed at human

redemption. It could be pointless and even counterproductive, for instance, to intervene in a case where a human is not ready at all to receive that intervention in a redemptive manner. So, God could hide from some people at times, at least until they are ready to respond in a suitable manner. [NB he's giving arguments for these conclusions!]

We should expect God to be elusive in ways required by perfect redemptive love. Accordingly, God would not be transparently ever-present in the way a conclusion of an argument can be. This lesson fits with the nature of the God represented in important strands of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the three heirs to Abrahamic faith in God. In particular, it fits with the nature of the elusive God of Isaiah, Jesus, and the apostle Paul, who sometimes hides from people for their own redemptive good. As truth-seekers, we should not exclude this kind of God from the start.

#### *Argumentism about God*

Let's call "argumentism about God" the view that one's knowledge of God's existence (if it is actual) depends on one's having some argument or other for God's existence. Many theist, atheist, and agnostic philosophers assume argumentism about God, if uncritically, and they are not alone in assuming it. Perhaps such a view is an occupational hazard for philosophers, given their preoccupation with arguments on various perennial topics of philosophy. We need to be suspicious of argumentism about God, however, because it does not fit well with a God of perfect redemptive love. Perhaps it fits better with lesser gods, but we need not digress.

An argument is simply a finite series of claims, some of which—the premise(s)—are intended to support, via an inference, some other claim(s) in the series—the conclusion(s). The intended inferential support can be either deductive or inductive (including abductive), and inductive inference can confer probability on a conclusion in various ways, one of which is an

abductive, or explanatory, inference. Philosophers disagree on the exact conditions for when an explanatory inference confers reasonableness on a conclusion, but we need not pursue this complex topic. Our present concern is much bigger than that of when abduction yields reasonable belief. **Our main concern is whether we should expect human knowledge of God's existence to depend on an argument.**

The God of Abrahamic theism contrasts with many other (alleged) gods, including many gods of philosophical theism. One obvious difference is that Abraham's God offers a promise of redemption for all cooperative people, even God's former enemies. In fact, it is difficult to identify any other initially plausible candidate for such a God of redemptive promise. The gods we know of from ancient Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome do not offer the universal redemptive promise of Abraham's God or anything like it.

Comparative history aside, we should not expect to find the God of Abraham in the conclusion of a philosophical argument or any argument. This God, if real, is no conclusion, statement, or proposition of any sort. If this is an obvious ontological point, then it is obviously true. God would be a living personal agent with a morally perfect will and corresponding purposes. **As perfectly redemptive, God would come to cooperative humans directly to invite them to know and obey God, without need of any argument, because the divine redemptive aim would be for humans to know and trust God.** An argument, however compelling, could interfere with such an aim by directing human attention away from God himself. Accordingly, God would be intentionally active and challenging toward humans in ways that arguments and their conclusions are not. Arguments and their conclusions do not have intentions, even if their human proponents do; nor can they redeem humans at odds with God.

As perfectly redemptive, God would be compassionately corrective in ways that arguments and their conclusions are not. Arguments and their conclusions are not compassionate at all, even if their human proponents are. The God of Abraham would offer to receptive humans a *personal* call to redemption and the corresponding *personal* conviction of its need. Not being personal agents, arguments and their conclusion cannot deliver on this front. Specifically, arguments cannot *personally* offer redemption in a way that prompts personal indebtedness in recipients. God could send his beloved son to show us who God is and to manifest God's redemptive love for us. An argument, however, is no candidate for any such redemptive initiative, even if it can play an incidental role for some people.

As a perfectly redemptive agent, God would personally offer to humans forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life in fellowship with God. Arguments and their conclusions, however, lack the power of redemptive agency to do so, even if they describe such power. It would be a category mistake to suggest otherwise. Arguments and their conclusions lack the intrinsic personal agency to offer an I–Thou interaction or relationship between themselves and humans. Not being a personal agent, an argument's conclusion does not stand in an I–Thou relationship with anything. God would be significantly different, owing to divine agency and its corresponding redemptive purposes. Accordingly, belief *that* a conclusion is true cannot supply faith *in God*. Such faith, as a cooperative self-response to divine self-manifestation, would have a *de re* agent-to-agent, I–Thou feature that goes beyond merely discursive arguments and their conclusions.

Some gods of philosophical theism are explanatory postulates based on considerations of a best (available) explanation. The God of Abraham, however, does not fit well with the model of an explanatory postulate. Such a postulate is familiar in some of the natural sciences where a

directly unobserved entity is postulated to make sense of some observed empirical data. In physics, for instance, one might postulate the existence of a subatomic particle to account for perceived data generated by an oscillating particle accelerator. Since the mid 1960s, accordingly, our best physics has acknowledged the existence of quarks of various types even though quarks are not observed directly, because they are not individually isolated. Similarly, one might recommend God as an indispensable, or at least a valuable, explanatory postulate, on the basis of an abductive inference akin to familiar inferences in subatomic physics.

Let's acknowledge a distinction between an explanatory postulate and a *mere* explanatory postulate. The former may be directly observed by humans, whereas the latter is not subject to direct human observation. We do not ordinarily think of something directly observed by us as a "postulate." It strains ordinary use, for instance, to say that one's parents are explanatory postulates. Some philosophers may talk that way on occasion, but such talk runs afoul of the mundane idea that parents do not need to be postulated because they present themselves to us in our direct experience. So, we may ask why one would categorize one's parents as "postulates" when they can be directly encountered in one's experience. [Suppose someone needs to prove patrimony]

Some philosophers will recommend God as an explanatory postulate on the ground that not all people have, or seem able to have, a direct experience of God. In this regard, God's reality is not a matter of direct experience for all concerned in the way the perception of ordinary observable objects is. So, they might propose, we need to approach God as an explanatory postulate, at least relative to the experience of some people. Even so, we need another distinction: even if God has not been directly experienced by some people, a perfectly redemptive God would have to be *available* (if at the redemptively opportune time) to be directly

experienced by all cooperative people. Humans could exclude themselves from experiencing a perfectly redemptive God (by making such an experience redemptively pointless), but they also could strive to become cooperative toward such an experience. A simple analogy comes from the perception of the stain-glassed windows in a cathedral. If I insist on remaining outside, I may have no visual perception of the beauty of the windows. Upon choosing to go inside, however, my experience of the windows changes significantly.

If a perfectly redemptive God is available for direct human experience, as many responsible humans testify, then we should expect significant implications for knowing God's reality. In that case, **we need not be limited to arguments for our evidence for God's reality, because we could rely on our experience of God as basic, foundational evidence for God.** Such foundational evidence can be defeasible (that is, subject to override by other foundational evidence), and it need not logically entail what it justifies.<sup>1</sup>

**Evidence is not exhausted by arguments, given that the evidence provided by experience is not always an argument.** My experience of my computer screen, for instance, is not an argument or even a claim of any kind. I can make a claim *about* my experience, but that is another matter altogether. Likewise, a direct experience of God would not be an argument or a claim, even if one can make a claim about that experience.

**If one can have a direct experience of God, and thereby have foundational evidence for God's reality, we need to ask what value, if any, there is in an argument for God's existence.** The value would not be in our need of an argument for human knowledge of God's reality, because the evidence component of such knowledge could be satisfied without an argument. Perhaps, then, an argument gets its value in the attempted expression, presentation, or communication of one's having knowledge of God's reality. The latter is different from one's having knowledge of

God's reality, because one could have such knowledge without expressing, presenting, or communicating it. The same point holds for one's knowing *that* God exists (if one wants to talk of purely *de dicto* rather than *de re* knowledge regarding God's existence). One's presentation of knowledge to others is not to be confused with one's having that knowledge. A directly analogous point holds for evidence.

What is fitting for one's presentation of knowledge to others needs to be guided by what one's knowledge actually consists in. Otherwise, one's presentation will not represent one's actual knowledge. In some cases, one's supporting evidence in one's knowledge will not be publicly shareable in the way that, for instance, news about the weather is. This can result from the nature of the object known and the corresponding evidential experience. If, for instance, I have direct knowledge of my sporadic toothache, my knowledge that I have a toothache now will not depend on my presentation of this knowledge to others. Perhaps, then, nobody else knows about it. In addition, when I present my knowledge of my sporadic toothache to others, I need to clarify that my knowledge of my sporadic toothache's reality does not depend on my argument that I have a sporadic toothache. I could have the former knowledge without the latter argument. In addition, the failure of the latter argument, in terms of the validity of its inference or the truth of a premise, would not necessarily undermine my foundational evidence or knowledge of my sporadic toothache. Accordingly, the failure of my argument to convince others would not necessarily undermine my foundational evidence or knowledge.

We can apply the previous lesson to knowledge of God's reality and any argument for God's reality. George Mavrodes has remarked:

Is there something that can be proved to everyone by some argument or other?

Perhaps there is, though this also seems unlikely. If 'God exists' were to be a

proposition of this sort then everyone would have to know something or other (not necessarily the same thing) that entails that God exists.... Perhaps everyone does know something of this sort but there is no reason to think so.<sup>2</sup>

**It would be a tall order to show that everyone knows something or other that entails that God exists.** In any case, one's lacking a cogent argument that God exists would not exclude one's having foundational evidence or knowledge that God exists. Likewise, one's failing to be able to present such an argument could leave foundational evidence for God's reality unscathed.

Argumentism neglects that God could provide salient evidence for God's reality to humans, say by a divine self-manifestation, without any human reliance on an argument. **If this evidence for God's reality does not have any undefeated defeaters, it could satisfy the evidence condition for knowledge of God. In that case, a person's salient evidence and knowledge of God's reality would not depend on an argument possessed by that person. [I'm more radical than Moser: I hold to the HS as an intrinsic defeater-defaeter!]** In particular, that person would not need to rely on an inference from a premise to a conclusion. Accordingly, such evidence and knowledge would not depend on one's having or presenting an argument for either God's reality or one's knowledge of God's reality.

Argumentism suggests that we must rely on arguments to reason our way to secure knowledge of God's reality. This suggestion, however, is at odds with the moral character of a perfectly redemptive God, the kind of God worthy of worship. Such a God would take the redemptive initiative toward humans, both in favoring humans and in seeking a redemptive and cognitive relationship with them. Accordingly, God would come to receptive, or cooperative, humans with direct, self-manifesting evidence of divine reality. Otherwise, humans would be at a loss to acquire salient evidence of God's reality.

God would have no good reason to produce or underwrite arguments that bind agents, on pain of irrationality, to acknowledge God's existence. In particular, a divine redemptive plan would not suffer if, apart from direct experiential evidence from God, humans rationally could withhold judgment regarding God's existence. In that case, humans would not be rationally bound by any argument to acknowledge God's existence. As redemptive, God would seek a kind of volitional cooperation from humans, and arguments for God's existence would not have an essential role in that goal. Debates about God's existence typically ignore this consideration.

We could formulate various arguments for God's reality, and many such arguments attract the attention of philosophers. Without a basis in God's interventions in human experience, however, the arguments will be wobbly at best in failing to present a resilient basis to suitably critical inquirers. These arguments then will lead to the kind of disappointing impasse we typically see in debates between philosophical theists and atheists or agnostics. We need to clarify the aforementioned concerns about argumentism in connection with a better understanding of a perfectly redemptive God.

### *A Self-Authenticating God*

Given God's perfect moral character, we should expect God to be not only redemptive but also self-manifesting toward (at least) humans willing to cooperate with God. In addition, given God's perfect moral character, we should expect God to be self-sacrificial for the good of humans. Accordingly, we should expect God to be self-giving in redemption, and not just discursive in instructing about redemption. Various parts of the Old and New Testaments portray God as self-sacrificial in attempting to redeem humans. This portrayal fits with what we should expect of a morally perfect God, given a common understanding of moral perfection.

If God is inherently self-sacrificial, opportunities presented to humans for self-sacrifice for the good of others can be significant for knowing God. They can include God's self-manifesting presence in offering to humans the opportunity to conform to God's perfect moral character. Indeed, they can be opportunities for humans to participate in God's moral character of self-sacrifice and even in God's powerful activity of self-sacrifice. Specifically, they can be opportunities for humans to *cooperate* volitionally with God's presence and activity of self-sacrifice.

God's power and presence could become salient for humans as they cooperate in ongoing divine self-sacrifice when the opportunity arises. Perhaps God's presence is typically intended to be, and typically is, cooperative in this manner relative to humans. If God's distinctive causal power includes the power of self-sacrifice for the good of others, we should expect God's presence to include such power of self-sacrifice. **We should also expect the evidence for God to become tenuous and elusive as we ignore or resist such power of self-sacrifice in our lives.** The power in question is called *agapē* in the New Testament, and it can be present to humans even if they fail to classify it as God's power or presence. God can be present *de re* to humans, then, even when they do not know it or believe it *de dicto*.

God's moral perfection would require that God perfectly love all other persons, even enemies of God. The New Testament endorses this requirement in various ways, for God and even for humans who cooperate with God.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, God's self-manifestation would include the presence of redemptive love for a human, but this human still could perceive his or her own inadequacy and unworthiness relative to this powerful *agapē*, and could even turn away from it.

Alan Richardson has commented on the kind of divine evidence in question:

I would ... deny that my faith was self-induced and unsupported by any evidence; I would insist that it was the *intrinsic quality* of [for example] my doctor or my friend which had created my faith in him, not some subjective impressions of my own. So it is with faith in Christ: it is he who has awakened faith in us by being what he was and doing what he did. And when I find that my initial decision to trust him is confirmed by my actual experience of doing so, then I may say that I have ‘proved’ him...<sup>4</sup>

The self-manifestation of God’s distinctive character (or “intrinsic quality”) of *agapē* could awaken faith in God for a suitably cooperative human. **In the absence of defeaters, this self-manifestation could supply conclusive evidence in support of such faith in God.** Faith in God then would have a salient evidential ground in human experience (of God), and it would not be self-induced, groundless, or suspiciously abstract regarding its basis. Accordingly, faith in God could be above reproach without relying on any philosophical argument of natural theology.

As a causal agent, **God could authenticate God’s own reality and character for humans. This self-authentication** would include God’s self-manifesting his distinctive moral character to humans (perhaps in conscience) and producing traits of this character in the experiences and lives of cooperative recipients. **So, as a self-manifesting agent with a unique, morally perfect character, God could be self-evidencing and self-authenticating toward humans.**<sup>5</sup> **This neglected view does not reduce to the dubious view that a subjective human experience is self-authenticating regarding God. God would be an independent moral agent and the ultimate base of *agapē*, not a subjective human experience [NB On this definition a God who provides good arguments is self-authenticating!].**

The Christian God, as the supreme, perfect authority, would ultimately testify to Himself, via the Spirit of the risen Christ, God’s own image. Neither mere claims nor mere subjective

experiences are self-attesting about objective reality in a convincing manner. As an intentional causal agent, however, God would be self-authenticating in being self-manifesting and self-witnessing regarding God's and Christ's reality and moral character.<sup>6</sup> This kind of self-authenticating fits with the biblical theme of God's confirming his own reality, given that God inherently has a morally perfect character and cannot find anyone or anything else to serve this purpose.<sup>7</sup>

My proposed position has major implications for Christian epistemology. It may be called, following James S. Stewart, *the divine self-verification of Christ in conscience*:

This is a very wonderful thing which happens: you begin exploring the fact of Christ, perhaps merely intellectually and theologically – and before you know where you are, the fact is exploring *you*, spiritually and morally.... You set out to see what you can find in Christ, and sooner or later God in Christ finds you. That is the self-verification of Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

Inquirers about God should investigate this kind of experience, and not just philosophical arguments about the existence of God. **Arguments can divert attention from, and obscure the importance of, this kind of experience.**

The Christian God would manifest the divine character of *agapē* in (the experience of) receptive humans, pouring out God's enemy-love in their hearts.<sup>9</sup> This is something only God could do; mere humans and counterfeit gods, including imaginary gods, lack the needed power and character. Being *sui generis* here, God should be expected by us to be self-attesting and self-witnessing. No other agent has the self-sufficient *agapē* character of enemy-love needed for the task; so, no other agent is worthy of worship or divinely self-manifesting. God's self-attesting would challenge potential recipients to move toward enemy-love and forgiveness, away from **destructive selfishness and pride. Ultimately, then, Christians do not convince people regarding**

God; *God would do this*, and Christians would contribute by being in union with God in Christ, thereby manifesting the power (beyond the mere talk) of God's own *agapē*.

God would want people to know God directly, in an I-Thou acquaintance relationship, without the dilution or the distraction of philosophical arguments. Accordingly, God would want the self-commitment of a human agent to *God*, not (in this context) to an inference or a conclusion of an argument. This fits with the biblical theme that God alone is our foundation, rock, and anchor, including our cognitive foundation regarding God's reality.<sup>10</sup> God would want to be one's sole evidential foundation for believing in God and for believing that God exists, and hence would not want an argument to assume this role. The evidential foundation would be *God in God's self-manifesting interventions* in one's life, including in one's conscience. This would uphold God's vital existential significance for human inquirers. We could put ourselves in a position to apprehend divine self-manifestations by being sincerely and willingly open to receive and to participate in redemptive self-sacrifice, the hallmark of God's perfect moral character.

An argument can obscure the importance of directly knowing God, and many uses of arguments by Christian philosophers actually do this. In addition, when familiar theistic arguments come under heavy fire, many critics take this fire to underwrite their agnosticism or atheism. This is misleading, because the key evidence is not an argument. We could represent foundational evidence for God in a sound *first-person* argument, but such an argument cannot exhaust or replace the underlying experiential evidence from divine self-manifestation. In addition, such an argument does not presume that everyone has the relevant foundational evidence.<sup>11</sup>

Philosophers often overlook the importance of a *nondiscursive* manifestational witness in human experience to God's powerful redemptive reality. In doing so, they overemphasize the

role of discursive, intellectual reasons for beliefs regarding God. This deficiency may be the residue of a dubious kind of epistemic coherentism that lacks the needed resources of an experiential foundationalism. Alternatively, it may stem from a confusion of the conditions for one's either having or manifesting evidence and the conditions for one's giving an argument. We do well, however, not to confuse evidence and an argument. If all evidence is an argument, we face a devastating epistemic regress problem.<sup>12</sup>

An evidential component is *discursive* if and only if it uses assertive language to express a state of affairs. The New Testament category of "witness" (*marturia*), however, is broader than that of discursive evidence. A witness to God's reality and redemption may include discursive evidence, but it need not. A *nondiscursive* mode of human existing or relating can be a witness to God's redemptive character in virtue of manifesting certain properties of God's character, such as divine *agapē*, without making an assertion. This neglected point bears on an aim to manifest one's reasons for acknowledging God, including an aim to manifest a reason for the hope in God within one.<sup>13</sup> Even when a witness to God's reality includes a discursive component, that component need not be an argument. It could be a descriptive testimony to what God has done in one's life.

Foundational reasons or evidence need not be discursive, but can be nonpropositional character traits supplied by God's self-manifesting intervention: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, John's Gospel portrays Jesus as announcing that his disciples will be *known* by their *agapē* for others.<sup>15</sup> **Jesus did not mention or use any philosophical arguments in this connection, or in any other connection, with regard to God's intervention. The same is true of His followers represented in the New Testament.** This noteworthy fact, moreover, does not qualify as a deficiency in their actual reasons or evidence.

Talk is cheap, and therefore many inquirers will wonder whether an argument has support from a corresponding nondiscursive witness, which can have power and cogency irreducible to statements and arguments.<sup>16</sup> We should expect a self-authenticating God to intervene with such a witness, at least for cooperative recipients.

### *Whither Arguments?*

We should expect a debate to include an exchange of arguments, but to what end? *Philosophical* theism typically relies on some argument of natural theology, and, in this respect, is not to be confused with the theism of the Old and New Testaments. The biblical writers do not offer their theism with arguments from natural theology; in this respect, biblical theism, including its implicit epistemology, differs from philosophical theism. In addition, it is doubtful (at least to many people) that the familiar empirical arguments of natural theology cogently yield a god who is a *personal agent*, even if they yield various impersonal explanatory postulates.<sup>17</sup> **I can imagine, for instance, an *impersonal* necessary source for a contingent universe, despite William Lane Craig's report that he cannot imagine this.** Moreover, the arguments of natural theology neglect that the God of biblical theism is elusive and hides from humans on occasion. Arguments and their conclusions do not bob and weave in that manner, for the redemptive good of human agents. Accordingly, the arguments of natural theology can easily distract one from an intervening God who offers a redemptive self-manifestation.

People aiming to win debates with philosophical arguments would do well to consider the following from George Mavrodes:

Every valid argument is reversible. Someone who is determined to remain an atheist at all costs can always buy consistency by denying the apologist's premise, even if this means giving up some previously acknowledged conviction.<sup>18</sup>

We are ... interested in whether there is any argument that will prove God's existence to everyone. Such an argument has apparently not yet been invented. If it is to be invented, there must be some set of propositions that everyone knows and that entail, by logical relations that are also known to everyone, that God exists.... [T]here is not much reason to believe that [this] is possible.<sup>19</sup>

If these observations point in the right direction, we need to acknowledge that clashes between theists and atheists need to go deeper than arguments. We can illustrate this lesson now.

Craig offers seven quick arguments for the existence of God, without clarifying the defining parameters for being “God” in his perspective. Must his postulated God be worthy of worship and hence morally perfect? We are not told, but if we omit enemy-love, we omit the God of Jesus Christ. Alex Rosenberg finds Craig's arguments to be too quick, and remains unconvinced. So, we have an impasse between the debaters.

Craig's arguments have fallen short of one of their *apparent* goals: rationally to convince readers like Rosenberg, or at least to move them closer to theism. Why are we left with this impasse? Are the arguments inadequate for their own purpose? Presumably, they are not designed just to satisfy readers already committed to theism. Craig, however, does not acknowledge that his arguments have failed to meet an apparent goal; nor does he specify what his goals are for his arguments. So, the debate languishes.

When philosophical theists present arguments for God's existence, they accept a burden: rationally to convince (some) people who read or hear the arguments. They do not want to give just arguments they deem sound, such as the toothless argument noted by Mavrodes: “Either nothing exists or God exists; something exists; therefore, God

exists.”<sup>20</sup> Philosophical theists want to give arguments where acceptance of the premises does not depend on acceptance of the conclusion. They want to give *rationaly cogent* arguments for their audience. Otherwise, they could scale back to a smaller group of recipients already agreeable to their conclusion.

Craig’s seven arguments face a debilitating problem unnoticed by the debaters. The problem arises from the unclarified talk of God as “the best explanation.” Philosophical use of “an inference to a best explanation,” or abduction, is typically inference to “a best *available* explanation,” and not “the best explanation.” The qualification is crucial, because we cognitively limited inquirers are not in a position to examine *all possible* explanations that bear on our relevant data. **Craig’s language of “the best explanation” assumes that he has surveyed all possible explanations and found one explanation to be “the best.” Clearly, he has not done so, because he, like other humans, does not enjoy access to all possible explanations in the domains in question.**

We have at best only the explanations now available to us, and not all possible explanations. So, we should settle for a best *available* explanation, and not use exaggerated talk of “the best explanation.” The history of science recommends such cognitive modesty in our use of abduction. The future can bring new explanations that we have not yet anticipated, as the history of science shows. Craig’s seven arguments run afoul of this commonplace lesson. In addition, we may have to settle for “a” best available explanation, because we do not always enjoy a *singular* best explanation.

Given that our cognitive limits call for a restriction to our “best available explanation,” we must ask: best available *for whom?* For everyone? Evidently not, if nontheists like Rosenberg and theists like me do not find Craig’s arguments cogent (to

us), given our evidence. So, a neglected abductive question arises: what is the best available explanation of the impasse between philosophical theists (of Craig's sort) and unconvinced inquirers like Rosenberg and me? Does this explanation involve an alleged deficit of rationality or intellect in those of us unconvinced by the arguments? If so, what exactly is this deficit, and how can it be removed, if it can? Here is where the debate should begin, at a level where we are probing foundational issues, and not just throwing quick arguments at each other to score points in a debate.

The impasse arises partly from divergence over *what it is to be* (or, the conditions for) a "best (available) explanation." In particular, a key matter of divergence concerns the extent to which, or the way in which, a good or best (available) explanation can exceed relevant data and background commitments. The hypothesis of God as explainer *excessively* outstrips, and thus is theoretically *too remote* from, the relevant data to qualify as a good or best (available) explanation, according to the conditions for such an explanation adopted by many theorists, including theists and nontheists. These data are contingent events, the origin of the physical universe, the applicability of mathematics to the physical universe, the apparent fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life, consciousness, moral values, and various historical facts about Jesus.

At least for the first five or six categories of data, many theorists will find the explanatory appeal to God to be theoretically too remote (perhaps even causally too remote) from the data, given their conception of a best (available) explanation. In addition, I remain unconvinced that those data yield (abductively) an explainer who is a *personal agent*. So, if I had *only* the corresponding arguments, I would not be a theist.

Craig reveals his own tentativeness when he weakens some of his inferences to “plausibly”—something much weaker than “the best explanation.”

The unconvinced theorists are not necessarily rationally or intellectually inferior to the advocates of the seven arguments in question. Instead, the former work with a more rigorously local understanding of what it is to be a good or best (available) explanation, and regarding the first five or six categories of data, they rationally can withhold judgment rather than postulate God as the explainer. The hypothesis of God is theoretically too remote, in their view, from the relevant data to serve the needed explanatory purpose. So, we need not insult the intelligence or the rationality of the unconvinced theorists. Instead, **we should focus on why the arguments fail to convince them, along the line suggested.** A debate with this focus would prove fruitful in a way the current debate is not. A kind of question-begging about what it is to be a best (available) explanation stunts this debate.

**Craig does mention personal experience of God in passing (and contrasts it with an argument), in two brief paragraphs. Such experience, however, does not play a central role in his approach, at least by the standard of attention received. This is a mistake.** Due attention would lead to pressing questions about why some people have such experiences and others do not, and about the implications for the role of arguments in exchanges about theism. Such questions get no attention in this debate. This is a missed opportunity to explore the roles of volitional factors, spiritual discernment, and divine elusiveness and hiding in theistic evidence.<sup>21</sup> So, the debate does not explore the deeper matters of religious epistemology. Instead, it stays at the surface, and begs key questions.

Some theists might balk at my agnosticism about Craig's abductive inference from the empty tomb of Jesus and the post-mortem appearances of Jesus. He cites the view of Tom Wright that the occurrence of these events is "virtually certain, akin to ... the fall of Jerusalem in AD70." Given the very limited and largely non-independent historical sources we have, we should regard this as hyperbole.<sup>22</sup>

Nontheists might oppose my foundationalist theistic evidence by offering a defeater: horrifying evil in the world. Rosenberg thus invokes a "logical" problem of evil, but he fails to convince here. Philosophers now widely recognize that, as the free will defense illustrates, there is no logical incompatibility between God's existence and the evil of the world. (See any recent responsible treatment of the topic.) Even if Rosenberg raises some plausible questions facing Craig's seven arguments, he offers no defeater of the kind of experiential evidence for God outlined here. In addition, a demand for a theodicy will be misplaced, because we limited humans should not expect to know God's purposes in allowing evil. Furthermore, because my position does not depend on any argument from philosophical theism, it is unscathed by Rosenberg's objections to Craig's arguments.

Finally, I recommend an end to the kind of debate at hand. Such a debate gains us nothing. Instead, we need to investigate why many widely used theistic arguments fail to convince many intelligent, rational inquirers of theistic and nontheistic persuasions.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see Paul K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> George Mavrodes, *Belief in God* (New York: Random House, 1970), 47.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Matt. 5:43–48; Lk. 6:32–36; Rom. 12:9–10, 20–21; Col. 3:13 (New International Version).

<sup>4</sup> Alan Richardson, "The Death of God: A Report Exaggerated," 102–119. In Richardson, *Religion in Contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 109 italics added.

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<sup>5</sup> See H. R. Mackintosh, *The Divine Initiative* (London: SCM Press, 1921), chap. 2; “Who is this Jesus? (2),” 80–89. In James S. Stewart, *The Strong Name* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1940), 87–88; Cf. Moser, *The Severity of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chap. 3.

<sup>6</sup> See Rom. 10:20, Jn. 14:23.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Gen. 22:16–17, Isa. 45:22–23, Heb. 6:13–14.

<sup>8</sup> See Stewart, “Who is this Jesus? (2),” 80–89; Cf. Moser, *The Severity of God*, chap. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Rom. 5:5.

<sup>10</sup> See Ps. 18:2, 31, 28:1, 31:3, Isa. 44:8; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9–13.

<sup>11</sup> On this matter, see Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 2.

<sup>12</sup> For details, see Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> See 1 Pet. 3:15.

<sup>14</sup> See Gal. 5:22–23.

<sup>15</sup> Jn. 13:35.

<sup>16</sup> On a nondiscursive witness in personifying evidence of God, see Moser, *The Evidence for God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Mavrodes, “Jerusalem and Athens Revisited,” In *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 201.

<sup>19</sup> Mavrodes, *Belief in God* (New York: Random House, 1970), 46.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> See Moser, *The Severity of God*.

<sup>22</sup> On Wright’s mistaken abductive inference about the resurrection, and my positive alternative, see Moser, *The Elusive God*, 189–99.

## Some Philosophical Aspects of the Craig-Rosenberg Debate

Theodore M. Drange

The topic was formulated as the question "Is faith in God reasonable?" but I find both the terms "faith" and "God" to be unclear. It may be that "faith in God" is a kind of code-phrase, as it is not used much apart from Christianity. Is faith simply believing what one is told? I do not know. Anyway, a plain interpretation of the question would be "Is it reasonable to believe that God exists?" I shall take it that way. But there remains the issue of defining the word "God." One ought to get clear on what "God" means before one embarks on any consideration of whether or not God exists. Unfortunately, neither Dr. Craig nor Dr. Rosenberg gave that issue the treatment it deserves. In what follows, I shall first critique Craig's eight arguments for God's existence. Later, I shall take up Rosenberg's remarks.

### *Craig's Arguments*

#### *Argument #1*

The argument's premises (1) and (3) depend on a distinction between contingent things and necessary things, which can be questioned. According to Hume, whatever can be conceived as existing can also be conceived as not existing, so what, then, might be an example of "a necessary thing" (i.e., a thing which cannot be conceived not to exist)? I understand the contingent/necessary distinction as applied to propositions or sentences, but not as applied to other objects. Craig provides no clarification here.

Even assuming that it makes sense to speak of necessary things, there remain three questions about premises (1) and (3). First, why claim that every contingent thing must have an explanation for its existence? Why couldn't a contingent thing simply have always existed? Craig later tries to refute the idea of an eternal universe in his argument #2, but makes no mention of

the point in connection with this argument #1. Such an attempted refutation is needed here as well, since merely being contingent would not entail that a thing have an origin. **Second, why couldn't a contingent thing simply come into existence uncaused? Rosenberg points out that such an idea is invoked in quantum physics. And, third, why claim, as is done in premise (3), that the universe (which includes all time) is a contingent thing?** How could there be any reality at all without time? What might be going on in such a reality? Craig provides no answer to any of these questions.

Premise (2) reads "If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is a transcendent, personal being." I find the expression "transcendent personal being" (or "transcendent person" for short) to be exceedingly obscure. "Transcendent" means "outside of all space and time." Is there anything to which it might be applied? That is a controversial issue in philosophy, which I shall not get into. Let us simply grant for the sake of argument that there are abstract entities, such as numbers, that are transcendent in the given sense. Then **the question arises as to how there could be anything *else*, aside from such abstractions, that are outside all space and time. I find it incomprehensible.**

But it gets worse. What could the expression "transcendent *person*" refer to? **A person is presumably something which has thoughts and performs actions. But that requires at least being within time, if not also within space.** And it is at least a conceptual requirement, if not a definitional one. So, even if the expression "transcendent person" is not an explicit contradiction, it still expresses a conceptual impossibility. If "God" is defined as "a person who has thoughts and performs actions outside of all time and space," then it is conceptually impossible for God to exist. Note that in his first rebuttal Craig says, "There is a personal, transcendent reality," using the present tense. So, his view is that God is still transcendent now, not that God ceased to be so

upon creating space and time. Since transcendence entails timelessness, the conceptual difficulty could be formulated in terms of the latter. As Christian philosopher Richard Swinburne has pointed out, despite the appeal to divine timelessness within some Christian traditions, **it is actually incoherent to speak of a timeless being as performing such actions** as are ascribed to God in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Our very concept of "performing an action" requires acting within time. Also, Craig says at the end of his closing statement, "God loves me and gave his life for me." It could make no sense to speak of a timeless being as having such properties. In short, the sentence "God exists," given Craig's definition of "God," is conceptually meaningless.

Perhaps Craig would appeal to the tradition of apophatic theology according to which God is something ineffable and beyond all human comprehension. But if he does that, it would defeat his purpose of using the God-hypothesis to explain anything. To explain is to try to clarify and make more comprehensible. One cannot do that by appealing to something which is totally beyond human comprehension. Every time Craig says, "The best explanation for such-and-such is a person who is outside time and space," it is clear that he is saying something false, for whatever is beyond all human comprehension cannot be any explanation for anything whatever. Craig's project with his arguments is one in natural theology, which is incompatible with apophatic theology.

The question to which argument #1 is addressed is **"Why is there something rather than nothing?"** But, arguably, that is an unanswerable question, since any answer that is given to it would necessarily appeal to something or other, which would merely introduce a further question: **"Why does *that* thing exist?"** To answer **"Why does something exist?"** by saying, **"Because of God,"** would merely invite: **"Why does God exist?"** One is immediately back to the starting point, so, in effect, no answer to the initial question has been given. Simply replacing

one question by another is not in any way to answer the first question. Craig might say, "God necessarily exists in the sense that his nonexistence is inconceivable." But how could that be when there are millions of people who believe that God does not exist? They should not be able to think that thought if it is inconceivable.

Finally, how about the idea of absolute nothingness? Most people find it impossible to think such a thought. **They might claim, "There is something rather than nothing because it is necessarily so, since the very idea of nothingness is unthinkable."** Saying that is clearly more reasonable than saying, "There is something rather than nothing because of a person who performs actions outside of time and space." The latter statement seems more like a piece of nonsense than an appeal to a "best explanation" for anything.

### *Argument #2*

According to premise (1), the universe (defined as all of spacetime reality) had a beginning. But it is unclear that that is so. Even if our own observable universe began with a "big bang," it may have originated out of a spacetime reality that existed prior to it and which itself had no beginning. Physics has not ruled that out, despite Craig's erroneous claim that it has. However, I leave further discussion of premise (1) to the scientific commentators.

Premise (2) says, "If the universe began to exist, then it has a transcendent cause." What is a "transcendent cause" supposed to be? It is presumably a cause that is outside time. But **what can causality be except a relation between events in time?** The only kinds of things that might be outside time that I can think of are abstract things like numbers. But, as Craig himself points out, those are things that have nothing to do with causality. He goes on to claim that there could also be an unembodied mind that is outside both time and space. But **science tells us that all minds are brain-dependent, so Craig's notion conflicts with science here.** Furthermore, **all mental**

activities of which we are aware necessarily occur within time. What sense could it possibly make to speak of mental events except ones that occur within time? Craig provides no help on this point.

Craig's argument #2 is in effect telling us that time itself was deliberately caused or created by an intelligent being, but that would require that there be something in existence *prior* to time itself, since a deliberate cause must precede its effect. That would involve a time before there was any time, which is a contradiction in terms. To avoid the contradiction, Craig may try to bring in the idea of "simultaneous causation," but that is an exceedingly difficult notion to grasp, especially when the thing that is supposed to be "simultaneously caused" is all of spacetime reality. Furthermore, the idea that deliberate creation, as by an intelligent being, might involve "simultaneous causation" is beyond all comprehension. How could an explanation which appeals to anything so incomprehensible be "the best explanation" for what we observe? It is an absurd argument.

### *Argument #3*

Here Craig talks about "the application of mathematics to the physical world." What is that supposed to be? Scientists formulate quantitative propositions about what they observe and employ the language of mathematics for the sake of precision. That is all that mathematics is: a language for expressing quantitative ideas in a precise way. Could there be observations of a quantitative nature not expressible by any form of mathematics? I can't think of any. Nor does Craig explain how it might be possible. So, of course the application of mathematics to the physical world is no coincidence, since scientists simply create whatever mathematical language they need to do the job. The first premise of the argument, according to which the applicability of mathematics to the world would be a coincidence if there did not exist a person who is outside

spacetime, is absurd. Not only is the reference to a person outside spacetime in itself absurd (as argued previously), but the idea that there could be any coincidence involved in scientists' use of a language to express their quantitative propositions is also absurd.

Even if we were to grant for the sake of argument that pure mathematics contains necessary truths, it would not help here. For those truths would not be about physical reality but rather about an ideal reality. (For example, Euclidean truths are about Euclidean points and lines, not about physical objects. As Rosenberg points out, the precise description of physical reality called for various non-Euclidean geometries.) And even a deity who could do anything conceivable would not be able to change the truths of pure mathematics, which are here assumed to be necessary. So it could still make no sense to speak of applying pure mathematics to physical reality, as though one could change the math to make it fit.

Craig suggests that when Peter Higgs in 1964 predicted the existence of a certain fundamental particle, he did so simply as a result of studying pure mathematics. But that is not how it happened. What Higgs studied was not pure mathematics, but physical theory expressed by means of mathematics. There was no application of mathematics to physics beyond the mere use of a language to express quantitative propositions in a precise way. Since it is impossible for there to be quantitative situations not describable mathematically, in effect, the "mathematics argument" is at worst absurd and at best comes to nothing.

#### *Argument #4*

All that the expression "fine-tuning of the universe" means in argument #4 is the suitability of the constants appealed to in physical laws for the development of life as we know it. What is the explanation for that suitability? Craig claims that the constants could have had different values from what they have, producing a universe that is totally inhospitable to life. But **why**

believe that it is physically possible for the constants to have been different? The mere ability of people to imagine different sets of values for the constants does not imply it. For example, electrons have a certain mass and there are physical laws that make appeal to that value. The mere fact that we can imagine a world in which electrons have a different mass does not imply that such a world is physically possible. Whether it is or not is an open question.

Physicists have speculated that there may be multiple universes with different sets of physical constants. If that were so, then the fact that our universe has the particular set of constants that it has could be a matter of chance, with the odds of it increasing as the number of other universes increases, perhaps approaching infinity. Craig says that there is no good evidence to support the given "multiverse" hypothesis, but neither is there any evidence against it. Craig makes the remarkable statement that most of the observable universes in a multiverse would be ones "in which a single brain fluctuates into existence out of the vacuum and observes its otherwise empty world." Why believe *that*? It strikes me as preposterous. Craig gives no reason for it whatever. On the contrary, the multiverse hypothesis does indeed explain the existence of our set of constants at least as well as any other hypothesis. It is certainly a far better explanation than Craig's God-hypothesis, which has gross defects. One of those defects is that it is totally incomplete as an explanation, since it omits any account at all of *how* God might have done any "fine-tuning." No *modus operandi* is supplied. But still worse, it is an appeal to some incomprehensible being who performs actions outside of spacetime. To call it any sort of "explanation" at all, even a bad one, is being too generous.

Craig maintains that most of the alternate universes that have different physical constants from those in our universe would be ones that are inhospitable to life. But why believe that? Maybe life is much more hardy and adaptable than has been realized and can develop and even

thrive in environments quite different from any encountered in our universe. Scientists do not have any evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, **I find it inconsistent for Craig to say both that life could not exist in universes radically different from ours and also that God is alive without even being within spacetime.** If life can exist outside spacetime, then surely it can also exist in seemingly inhospitable universes.

It is claimed in the so-called Fine-tuning Argument that the fact that life has developed and survived in our universe with its specific physical constants is somehow improbable and surprising, but that has not been shown. Furthermore, even if the best that scientists can do would be to declare it an unexplained brute fact that the physical constants are as they are, that would still be more comprehensible than any appeal to a "person who exists outside spacetime," and thereby much preferable to it.

#### *Argument #5*

The first premise maintains that if God (that person outside spacetime) did not exist then we would not be able to think about anything. One's immediate reaction is "Huh? How would *that* follow?" The best that Craig can come up with here is that physicalism (a worldview that appeals only to physical things) would have trouble explaining intentional mental states. I have two comments on that. First, it may be that physicalism could indeed provide an adequate explanation. **The key issue has to do with how observations of objects become imprinted on brains, so that animals could have thoughts which represent those objects. I see nothing here that totally defies physicalistic explanation, though it might be a quite complex project to carry through in detail.**

My second comment is that Craig seems to make the ridiculous presupposition that there are only two worldviews, one which appeals solely to physical things and the other which appeals to

a "transcendent person" (whatever that might be). So, to attack one worldview would be automatically to support the other. But there are obviously many other sorts of worldview. **One of those might make appeal to propositions, which are types of thoughts that people have.** To think about something would simply be to entertain (or have in mind) a proposition, which, according to one view, is a nonphysical thing. We need not get into whether or not such an appeal to thoughts, propositions, and minds could be reduced to a physicalistic worldview, which would be a huge question in philosophy. But, whatever the outcome of that controversy might be, there would certainly be no need to introduce absurdities such as "a person outside spacetime." Hence, Craig's argument #5 is an utter *non sequitur*.

#### *Argument #6*

A similar leap is made in the second premise of argument #6, where Craig claims that if the "transcendent person" did not exist, then nothing would be objectively right or wrong. Again, the conclusion fails to follow, since, **as Rosenberg points out, there are at least a half-dozen different theories of objective morality that make no appeal to any deity. Just to pick one of them, consider consequentialism, according to which an action is morally wrong if and only if it leads to bad consequences (suffering or death) in the long run.** Craig's example of the murder of people, including many children, would be objectively wrong by that theory because of its bad consequences. Such a theory could take many different forms, which we need not get into. **Craig offers no refutation of consequentialism or any other alternate moral theory.** Since there is no need to appeal to any "transcendent person" here, argument #6 is also shown to be an utter *non sequitur*.

Rosenberg attacks Craig's divine-command theory of morality by bringing in the Euthyphro dilemma. Is an act good because God commands it or does God command it because it is good?

Rosenberg maintains that the latter must be the case, since not even an omnipotent being could perform the inconceivable act of making something bad into something good. But then God would not be the arbiter of what is good or bad, which would refute the divine-command theory. Craig tries to escape the dilemma by saying, "God himself is the Good." What could *that* possibly mean? Craig provides no explanation whatever, only the meaningless slogan itself. Furthermore, there is nothing whatever in Craig's definition of "God" as a "transcendent person" that would imply "God is the Good" (whatever that might mean) or even that God has any good will at all towards humanity. There seems to be some sort of equivocation involved in Craig's arguments with regard to the definition of "God."

Craig's ethical theory is like that of a child: "To be good is to obey your parent." According to Craig, to be good is to obey God, which is the same idea. But that is a false theory. Obedience is not the same as morality. The Nuremberg Trials established that. An adult ethical theory would equate morality with maintaining peace and cooperation with one's neighbors, which has a consequentialist focus. Adults would say, "Yes, that is closer to what I mean by morality."

However, Rosenberg's main attack on argument #6 is not on its second premise, but on its first premise, according to which objective moral values exist. That attack, too, is quite formidable. We do not observe moral properties such as rightness and wrongness in nature, nor are such properties studied or even acknowledged to exist in any of the natural sciences. A good case could be made that moral values are merely subjective assessments on the part of individuals or groups. If there happens to be an action that everyone says is wrong, that would not in itself show objectivity, only universal agreement in attitude among people. Suppose everyone were to find flowers "beautiful." That in itself would not make beauty an objective property of anything. Similarly, everyone finding a certain type of act "morally wrong" would

not make morality an objective property of anything. But I do not want to take a stand here on the truth of the first premise in Craig's argument #6, as the issue is too complex. It should be noted, though, that **Craig himself provides no support for that premise. He just assumes it to be true, saying, "Obviously, it is wrong to do certain things," apparently thinking incorrectly that that proves morality to be objective.** Anyway, as shown above, the argument is a total failure, whatever the merits of its first premise may be.

#### *Argument #7*

In this argument, Craig appeals to alleged historical support for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The support is quite unconvincing. There is no consensus among historians about the events described in the gospels. **Contrary to what Craig claims, they do not agree that there was an empty tomb or that people claimed to witness post-mortem appearances or that Jesus' disciples had any sudden change in their beliefs.** There is too much to count against the historical accuracy of the gospels to warrant any such consensus, including gross inconsistencies in the accounts of the resurrection themselves. With regard to the alleged eyewitnesses, **Craig maintains, "these people sincerely believed what they said."** But we have no good support for **that**, and even if it were so, as Rosenberg points out, eyewitness testimony is notoriously unreliable, and especially so when it is 2000 years old. **Craig says (in his closing statement), "the sources we have for the resurrection of Jesus go back to within five years of the event."** But that is just flat-out false. Just about all New Testament historians maintain that there was a gap of at least thirty years before any writings that we have copies of today came to be produced, and even longer for any of the gospel accounts of the resurrection. Of course, staunch Christian historians may claim the reliability of the gospels, but that counts for very little. History is a subject that is notorious for bias and conflicting opinions among alleged experts. Mormon historians agree that

the Book of Mormon is reliable, which Craig simply dismisses without argument. For that reason, no good case has been made for the first premise of the "resurrection argument."

What about the second premise? It maintains that if indeed the three alleged facts presented in the first premise (an empty tomb, claims of post-mortem appearances, and a change in the disciples' beliefs) were true, then the best explanation for them would be the hypothesis that Jesus was raised from the dead by some "person outside spacetime." And, again, that is at least highly dubious, even if not utterly incoherent. *There are many alternate explanations for the given events, including naturalistic ones, that would be far more reasonable. Craig's claim (in his second rebuttal) that there could not be any such naturalistic explanation is simply false. One such hypothesis is that Jesus didn't really die, but regained consciousness, escaped the tomb and left town, perhaps with the aid of someone else who subsequently kept quiet on the matter. Another hypothesis would be that Jesus' body came to be lost or perhaps was removed from the tomb. Both hypotheses, among many others, could serve to explain Craig's three alleged facts in a naturalistic way. All of those explanations would be better than the "transcendent person" hypothesis for various reasons. They would at least be comprehensible, whereas the "transcendent person" hypothesis isn't. It should be noted, though, that to prove the falsity of premise (2), all that is needed is any hypothesis among the many that would explain the given facts at least as well as the God-hypothesis does. And that is exceedingly easy to do, which refutes the argument without even getting into controversies surrounding its first premise.*

#### *Argument #8*

Craig says that #8 isn't really an argument, just an appeal to his own personal experience. Unfortunately, *he does not explain how anyone can possibly experience a being that is outside space and time.* In his closing statement, he urges others to seek the transcendent being "with an

open mind and an open heart," but he provides no help in comprehending what "a person who thinks and acts outside space and time" might possibly be or how such a being could be recognized or identified. In any case, **this non-argument #8 has no force for anyone who has never had the alleged experience, whatever it might be.**

Maybe some atheists have on occasion what might be called "atheistic experiences." They gaze at the stars on a clear night and a profound sense of God's nonexistence overwhelms them. Perhaps even Craig has had such an atheistic experience but has deliberately repressed it. I think that the main value of **non-argument #8 is that it reveals Craig's true motivation. It is not that he himself is really convinced by arguments 1-7, but rather that he merely uses them to try to convince others. The actual basis of his theistic belief lies in his own religious experience that he describes in #8, and which would still suffice for him even if all the previous arguments were to be demolished. He has even admitted that basic role for #8 elsewhere.**<sup>2</sup>

I think that Craig wanted the debate question to be what it is, instead of "Is there any good objective reason to believe that God exists?" so that he could still somehow support a "Yes" answer to it (via his #8) even if the answer to the latter question should turn out to be clearly "No." It's like a kind of sleight-of-hand. **Aside from urging Craig to try to gain an atheistic experience, we atheists simply need to tell him that all of his arguments have been refuted and the religious experience that motivates him is not anything that we have experienced, so his alleged case for the "reasonableness of faith in God," when understood as any sort of objective support for belief in God, comes to naught.**

#### *Rosenberg's Definition of "God"*

In his opening speech, Dr. Rosenberg defines "God" as "[a being who has] omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and an unqualifiedly good will." However, there is hardly any

overlap between that definition and Craig's definition ("a transcendent person"), which makes no reference whatever to any of the four properties cited. My view is that whoever takes the atheist side in any debate with Craig should let Craig define "God" and should subsequently base all of his remarks on *that* definition.

Rosenberg's definition is just as nonsensical as Craig's. **The divine attribute of omnipresence is particularly obscure. If something is omnipresent, does it exist everywhere?** If so, what kind of thing might that be, space or gravity perhaps? If it is a being, then does the being exist totally in every place or just in part? Certainly Craig's deity, who is supposed to be outside space, cannot be anywhere, let alone everywhere. So, it cannot be omnipresent. The two definitions are clearly incompatible. Also, as mentioned previously, Craig's definition of "God" makes no mention of the deity having a good will.

Furthermore, **omnipotence seems to conflict with other divine attributes. An omnipotent being could make Himself learn something new, but would then not be omniscient. And he could do a wicked deed, but would thereby not be omnibenevolent.** Furthermore, just having the word "good" in a definition of "God" is objectionable because of its subjective character. Having presented such a defective definition, Rosenberg should have pointed out its defects, but failed to do so. More importantly, I do not see that he seriously addressed Craig's definition of "God," let alone pointed out the absurdity inherent in it. The two speakers were not on the same page.

#### *The Argument from Evil*

Rosenberg maintains that a benevolent deity would aim to minimize human suffering. Craig responds that the Christian God is not so much concerned with human suffering as with "having the optimal number of people coming to know God freely." There are many problems with that response.

First, it is appealing to "the Christian God" rather than to the "transcendent person" that Craig used as the definition of "God" previously. If Craig were to stick with the "transcendent-person" definition, then he could simply say that the problem of evil does not arise, since benevolence is not part of that definition. The very fact that he did not go that route shows (again) that there was some sort of equivocation involved in his uses of the word "God" in the debate.

Second, it is unclear whether Craig is saying that God does not want at all to minimize human suffering or whether he is saying that God has that only as a kind of secondary goal. If he is denying that God wants at all to minimize human suffering, then he is denying that God is benevolent, which is a considerable departure from traditional theology. On the other hand, if he is saying that God has minimizing human suffering as only a kind of secondary goal, then he needs to explain why that goal has been so woefully unfulfilled. Omnipotent beings should be able to fulfill all of their goals to the maximal degree, whether the goals are primary or secondary. Craig has not provided any such explanation.

Third, "to know" is not an action verb, so to speak of "coming to know God freely" is meaningless nonsense, perhaps even ungrammatical.

Finally, the way to get people to become aware of God is for God to reveal Himself to them. Craig needs to explain why God has not done more to reveal Himself to people, especially if, as he claims, God's primary goal is to have the optimal number of people become aware of Him. It should be noted that for God to reveal Himself to people would not in any way interfere with their free will. In fact, as people gain more knowledge, their freedom comes to be enhanced. This is a point that I have developed at length elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that Craig's claim that God cares more about "having the optimal number of people coming to know God freely" than about human suffering is objectionable for many reasons.

Although I believe and have argued that the existence of much suffering is good evidence for the nonexistence of the Christian God, I have also defended the claim that the existence of many nonbelievers constitutes even better evidence for it.<sup>4</sup> And, indeed, that claim is most clearly true relative to the sort of deity that Craig describes when he says that God cares more about "having the optimal number of people coming to know God freely" than about human suffering. Obviously, a deity hoping to save people from damnation through their acceptance of His son would be upset if, far from accepting His son, they did not even believe that He or His son exist. It is unfortunate that Rosenberg did not make an appeal to that highly-relevant problem of nonbelief in any of his rebuttals.

In his second rebuttal, Craig challenges Rosenberg to "prove that there is a [possible] world of free creatures ... which has as much good as this world but without as much evil." That is easily done. Imagine a world like ours but in which humans have an immunity to cancer. There would be considerably less human suffering and premature death than in this world, and yet human free will would be totally unimpeded. In fact, the elimination of the scourge of cancer would greatly enhance human freedom, especially since many more people would live additional years, thereby having a greater opportunity to exercise their free will. Craig might object that it is logically possible that cancer has some good effects that we do not as yet know about and that, as a result, the cancer-free world that I am imagining would contain evils which outweigh whatever benefits there may be in an absence of cancer. But, in that case, why couldn't God simply eliminate those evils that would exist in a cancer-free world? Even if they were to turn out to be somehow required by natural law, that should not prevent God, the creator of all natural law, to fix the laws so as to prevent those evils, whatever they might be.

Another possible world that would be much better than ours while retaining everyone's free will would be one in which people are much more inclined to be moral than they are in our world. People in heaven are presumably like that. Such a disposition could be instilled in people directly, just by making them better natured or more altruistic. It could also be instilled in them indirectly through a system of immediate earthly rewards for good behavior and punishments for bad behavior. In neither case need there be any interference whatever with anyone's free will. Rosenberg made this point quite correctly with his Holocaust example.

### *Rosenberg's Second Argument*

Rosenberg came up with another atheistic argument, in addition to the Argument from Evil, but it was explicitly formulated only in his closing statement. The argument, which might be called "the Argument from Absence of Scientific Role," goes as follows:

- (1) If God were to exist, then scientists would have made some appeal to Him in their work.
- (2) But no appeal to God is ever made in any scientific work.
- (3) Therefore, God does not exist.

Whether or not there is any merit in premise (1) would depend on how "God" is defined. If "God" were defined in a meaningless way, as, for example, Craig's "person outside spacetime," then premise (1) and the whole argument would be meaningless. So, Rosenberg needs to come up with a definition of "God" that would at least allow premise (1) to be intelligible, and preferably one that would, in addition, make the premise plausible. Unfortunately, he did not do that. Of course, as an alternative, he could have just used Craig's definition of "God" and proceeded accordingly (as I suggested above). As for Craig, he never did explain why it is that a being who, according to him, serves to provide the very best explanation there is for so many features of our world as are appealed to in his arguments 1-7, is also a being totally neglected in

the sciences. Rosenberg pointed out in his opening statement that 95% of the 2000 members of the National Academy of Sciences are atheists. Why is that so? Are scientists stupid or what? Maybe Craig will answer this in his response.

### *Metaphysical Naturalism*

Although metaphysical naturalism (the view that only physical things exist) does indeed entail atheism, Craig goes on to make the claim that the implication also goes the other way: i.e., that atheism entails metaphysical naturalism. As Rosenberg pointed out, that is clearly wrong. In fact, Craig himself presented a counter-example to his own claim in the form of W.V.O. Quine, who was an atheist, but not a metaphysical naturalist. It is clear that an atheist could consistently believe in all sorts of non-physical things. Aside from Quine's sets and other abstract entities (like numbers), there are *qualia*, *possibilia*, propositions (even sentence types), Cartesian minds and mental events, as well as ghosts, fairies, vampires, voodoo, karma, and reincarnation, all of which are presumably non-physical. Although it may not be reasonable for an atheist to believe in such things, it would be quite logically compatible with his atheism. Buddhists would be a large group of people who are atheists but not metaphysical naturalists. To say that atheism entails that only physical things exist is obviously false. That mistake on Craig's part makes much of his debate material, attacking metaphysical naturalism, *irrelevant* to the debate topic. To his credit, Rosenberg pointed that out in his first rebuttal.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, revised edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 223-229.

<sup>2</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 31-50.

<sup>3</sup> Theodore M. Drange, *Nonbelief & Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), chap. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 286-291.

## **There are Serious Reasons for Belief in the Existence of God**

Timothy McGrew

### *Introduction*

It is difficult to evaluate a debate on a philosophical issue. On the one hand, any debate is a performance, and it invites evaluation at that relatively superficial level. On the other hand, it involves an exchange of arguments and counter-arguments that have a claim to evaluation in their own right. And then there are the other arguments—the ones that the participants did not make that they could have. From the standpoint of a spectator, it is hard to avoid evaluating the show; but a philosophical examination must drill down to a deeper level.

The performance, in this case, is relatively easy to evaluate. Craig is a highly skilled debater with decades of experience, and he showed superior organization, preparation, and time management. He hammered on the eight points presented in his opening statement, responded to Rosenberg's objections, consistently picked up on Rosenberg's drops, and summarized his own case both in his rebuttal and in his closing statement. Rosenberg's performance, though often interesting, was less organized, and he allowed Craig to control the structure of the debate from the outset.

Since the performance is all that many people will evaluate, one might wonder why anyone engages in formal debates on topics of this sort. The question is a reasonable one. As Rosenberg correctly points out, a formal, timed, oral debate is a far from optimal method for the discovery of truth. But if one view or the other is simply hopelessly wrong, unable to be rationally supported by any plausible lines of argument, then an able advocate for the opposing side might hope to show this. Rosenberg clearly wanted to persuade his listeners that faith in God is irrational, out of touch with modern science, epistemologically disreputable. If so, I do not

believe that he succeeded. This is due in part to his relative lack of preparation and in part to the tone of condescension that repeatedly surfaced in his remarks. About the latter I have little to say except that it materially detracted from the persuasiveness of his presentation. To open by suggesting that Craig's arguments have all been refuted numerous times placed him in the awkward position of having to swat them all down effortlessly; and whatever position one takes on the ultimate issue, I do not believe that this can be done. If he really thought that the arguments Craig presented do not merit careful attention and can be refuted by a gesture toward quantum theory or the Euthyphro dilemma, then he miscalculated. These are serious arguments worthy of serious consideration.

The stated topic of the debate is the question, "Is faith in God reasonable?" It is a misfortune that the word "faith" is today often (and not only by its adversaries) debased in meaning to mean "blind or irrational belief." On that reading, a negative answer to this question would seem to be a foregone conclusion. Since Craig's signature work is titled *Reasonable Faith*, he clearly does not intend to use the word in the debased sense. There are also richer theological dimensions to the term involving matters like personal commitment and trust. But the issues at stake in this debate are the epistemic preliminaries to those theological issues. **The question, then, should be understood as asking, "Is it reasonable to believe in the existence of God?"**

### *Craig's Primary Arguments*

In his opening statement, Craig lists eight things that he claims are best explained by God's existence. Seven of these he presents as arguments; the eighth is an invitation to a certain sort of experience. Each opens a wide field for philosophical exploration.

#### *1. The Argument from Contingency*

Craig opens with a thought experiment made famous by Richard Taylor, designed to show that the universe requires an explanation.<sup>1</sup> This argument rests on a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (hereafter, PSR) according to which, for any existing thing whatever, up to and including the whole universe, there is some explanation or other for that thing's existence, some reason why it should exist rather than not.

Proponents like Taylor say that some such principle is required for the intelligibility of the universe. Are they right? That is hard to say, partly because it depends on the notion of "explanation" we wish to invoke. In some cases, we explain the present existence of one thing at least in part by the previous agency of another: the table on which I am writing exists (in part) because a carpenter, who was there before the table was, designed and assembled it out of pre-existing materials. But *that* sort of explanation is not one that any thoughtful theist will want to hold up as the type invoked in this principle, since applying it evenhandedly would raise awkward questions about the existence of God himself. And for those theists who are working in the Judeo-Christian tradition, this sort of explanation would also run afoul of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Craig signals his awareness and avoidance of this elementary pitfall by referring to the relevant cause of the universe as one that is "metaphysically necessary in its existence." This expression apparently means to convey the idea that the existence of God is somehow *self explanatory*. A key question is why, if the existence of some things (or at least one thing) is self explanatory, the universe itself may not also be such a thing.

Craig's brief opening presentation does not carry us into this area of the discussion, but there are various lines of argument by which one might try to justify the distinction. One is an argument from the analogy between the universe and another physical object. The analogy is

suggestive but not decisive; there are some obvious important disanalogies between any limited object and the entire physical universe taken as a whole (e.g., the universe could exist without the ball's existing but not *vice versa*). It is difficult to give a definitive answer to the question of how those disanalogies should be factored into the force of the argument.

A second line of argument is a direct appeal to intuition: it just seems incredible that the existence of any physical object, great or small, should be self explanatory. I suspect many people feel the force of this appeal. But a fair number of people probably have the same intuitive response to the claim that the existence of an immaterial being with causal powers is self explanatory. If intuition is not decisive in the latter case, why should it be decisive in the former? There may be a principled answer to this question, but it will require some work to flesh it out.

A third approach is an indispensability argument: some such principle (so Taylor argues) is necessary in order for the physical universe, as a system, to be intelligible. Certainly, the principle has been very fruitful historically. Whether it can be extended to the universe as a whole is, once again, a tricky question. Presumably God, being neither a system nor a component in a system, would not be subject to the same requirement.

Rosenberg's attack is more direct. Rather than charging the theist with a selective application of explanatory categories, he dismisses the PSR—which he describes as “the principle that everything that exists must have a cause”—as incompatible with quantum theory. Since quantum theory is true, the PSR is false, a quaint piece of metaphysics left behind by the progress of modern physics. Craig's argument is thereby deprived of a vital premise.

There are multiple problems here. First, the principle as Rosenberg states it is neither equivalent to nor entailed by the version of the PSR that Craig has invoked. Craig's principle is stated in terms of *explanations*, whereas Rosenberg's is stated in terms of *causes*. Craig picks up

on this misstatement in his second rebuttal. Second, the appeal to quantum theory is misplaced. Rosenberg points to the spontaneous decay of one atom of uranium-238 while another, quantum mechanically indistinguishable from it, does not decay. This is, however, an *event*, not the existence of a thing, so it is not clear how the example is supposed to apply to the existence of the universe as such. Moreover, to say that the event is uncaused is to endorse a problematic interpretation of quantum theory. The existence of non-local hidden variable interpretations cannot be so easily brushed aside.

The extension of this argument to the conclusion that there is a transcendent, personal being goes by very quickly. It would be useful if Craig would explain this step at greater length.

Before we leave this argument, two technical points require consideration. First, premise 1 is stronger than it needs to be to permit the derivation of the conclusion. All that is required is that

1\*. If the universe is a contingent thing, then it has an explanation of its existence.

A counterexample to 1 need not ruin the argument that can be mounted with 1\*.

Second, the argument may have some value even if some of the premises are uncertain. Suppose, for example, that both 1\* and 2 are, on the basis of such considerations as we have seen, merely a bit more likely than not—say, each has a probability of 0.6. If the other premises are certain, then this will set a lower bound on the probability of the conclusion of 0.2. That is not enough to render the conclusion believable. But as it constitutes only a lower bound, it certainly puts the conclusion on the table for discussion. Something similar holds for any deductively valid argument with uncertain premises.

I conclude that Craig has the better of the exchange with respect to his first argument. While there are several interesting issues left to pursue, and the argument as briefly presented is not air-

tight, Rosenberg missed the mark and wound up criticizing something that bears little relation to what Craig advanced.

## 2. *The Kalam Argument*

Craig's second argument is a version of the *Kalam* argument about which he has written extensively. For the defense of the first premise, he invokes the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem, according to which every universe that has been on average expanding has a finite past. I find this line of argument for premise 1 of the *Kalam* persuasive. There remains a theoretical possibility that in some strange way the rather minimal condition for the application of the BGV theorem is not satisfied by our universe. (Could the multiverse be on average contracting while our little corner of it is on average expanding?) But as far as I can tell, given the present state of our understanding of cosmology, that is not the way to bet.

Rosenberg skips over this premise to focus his attack on the second one, that if the universe began to exist, then the universe has a transcendent cause. His critique again involves an appeal to quantum theory—in this case, to the appearance of alpha particles in the decay of uranium-238. This fact shows, he argues, that the principle that *every event had a cause that had to have brought it into being* is false.

But Rosenberg has misstated the premise in two ways. First, Craig has here restricted his claim to the minimal one necessary to make the argument deductively valid: *If the universe began to exist, then the universe has a transcendent cause*. Rosenberg's attempted counterexample is aimed at a more general claim. Second, as Craig points out in his first rebuttal, it is the wrong claim anyway; the second premise of Craig's argument is about a special sort of event, the universe's *beginning to exist*, not about events *überhaupt*. So even if he were right that not every event has a cause, that claim still would not engage with the premise as Craig stated it.

In fact, the example does not even show that something can come into existence out of nothing. The alpha particles that are emitted in the decay of uranium-238 into thorium-234 are simply two protons and two neutrons from the nucleus of the original uranium atom; they do not come into being *ex nihilo* at the time of decay. In multiple ways, therefore, Rosenberg's criticism of the second premise of the *Kalam* argument fails to make contact with Craig's actual argument.

In his opening statement, Craig offers no defense of the second premise. In his First Rebuttal he comes back to it very briefly, saying simply that "the universe can't come into being out of nothing," and in his Second Rebuttal he says that "theism has an explanation for how the universe came into being, but atheism is impotent in this regard." But this is at best enthymematic support for the conclusion that the universe has a transcendent cause. Does premise 2 rest solely on intuition? If not, does it rest on the evidence of examples of some more general claim from which 2 follows? There are well-known issues in the logic of confirmation that cry out for exploration here.

If the universe was caused to exist, what follows? Craig says that the cause is a transcendent being, by which he means something itself not a part of the material universe. Granting the very moderate PSR in play here, this seems fair enough. This cause, he continues, must be either an abstract object or an unembodied mind. If the disjunction here is exhaustive, it is at least not obviously so. **I freely admit that I have no third possibility in mind; but at the moment I also have no knock-down argument that these are the only possibilities. It would be interesting to see this point expanded, particularly since it is critical in getting us to something with a fair subset of the traditional characteristics of God.**

So Craig has put forward a plausible case for the existence of a cause of the universe's beginning to exist, and Rosenberg has not succeeded in undermining that case. By itself, this

does provide some evidence for the existence of the God of traditional theism. But the further step to more detailed information about the nature of that cause deserves more discussion than it received in the oral portion of the debate.

### 3. *The Applicability of Mathematics*

Craig's third argument moves into more abstract territory. There are, I think, two issues intertwined here. First, there is the issue of the success of present-day mathematical physics. How is it, he asks, that a mathematical theorist like Peter Higgs can predict an empirical discovery? One natural response to this question is that a great deal of empirical information went into the formulation of the physics with which Higgs was working in the 1960s. The existence of some residual scalar particles is a logical consequence of the mechanism Higgs proposed to explain how elementary particles have mass. But that explanation rests on principles that were themselves devised to account for massive amounts of information already available about the behavior of more familiar fundamental particles. So if we take the prior success of mathematical physics as unproblematic, I do not think there is much of an argument here for the existence of God.

But now the second question arises: why *should* we take the success of mathematical physics for granted? Is it not rather remarkable that our universe is describable by mathematics? The rhetorical force of the question depends in some measure on what the alternatives are. **Could the universe have *failed* to be mathematically describable? Given the existence of whole continua of mathematical functions, it is hard (for me, at least) to say what that would have looked like. To this extent, I think Rosenberg makes a good point when he refers in his First Rebuttal to “the remarkable range of possible mathematical functions.”**

The argument can, however, be pressed at a different level. Granting *arguendo* that any universe could be given some mathematical description or other, certainly there are possible ways that a universe could be that are not describable in relatively simple mathematics of the sort that creatures such as we can comprehend. The fact that our universe is not just mathematically describable but (relatively speaking) mathematically *simple* is indeed curious. This is not, admittedly, the direction Craig goes with the argument; he stresses, in his Second Rebuttal, the “incredibly complex mathematical structure” of the universe. But I think it is a line of thought worth investigating.

Craig suggests that the applicability of mathematics is best explained by the universe’s being created by a deity who had its mathematical structure in mind. I should like to hear more at this point. An infinitely intelligent being is not under any obvious obligation to make a universe on a relatively simple mathematical model. Further premises held by some significant figures in the history of science (Kepler comes to mind) might yield that conclusion; if the heavens can declare the glory of God, the intricate dance of fermions and bosons might also show His handiwork. But the whole argument passes by too quickly for us to see how this line of reasoning might be fleshed out.

I conclude that there is interesting material here, but I am inclined to say that the most interesting and promising way to develop the argument is different from the one Craig pursues.

#### *4. Cosmological Fine-tuning*

The fine-tuning argument raises another set of complex issues. First, a technical point about the structure of the argument. Craig casts each of his arguments in deductive form, and this does have certain advantages from the standpoint of communication to a wide audience. However, he introduces them as explanatory arguments, and the formal structure of explanatory inferences is

not deductive. As a result, the explanatory structure generally gets swept into one of the premises. Usually it is not too hard to disentangle the argument and identify that underlying structure; but sometimes the deductive form creates problems.

As a case in point, the eliminative Law/Chance/Design framework Craig gives to this argument creates a difficulty. Although the inference

1. L or C or D
2.  $\sim$ L
3.  $\sim$ C

Therefore,

4. D

is valid, the inference

1. L or C or D
2.  $\sim$ L
3. Probably  $\sim$ C

Therefore,

4. Probably D

is not. Bracketing other questions about the argument, we need a comparison of the probability that the constants would have these precisely balanced values, supposing the truth of the chance hypothesis, with the probability that they would have these values, supposing the truth of the design hypothesis. For all that we can say before examining the matter, *both* might be low; merely noting that *one* of them is low will not do the necessary work to make the conclusion probable.

The argument can be recast in a Bayesian form that is explicitly contrastive; this is, for example, how Robin Collins formulates it.<sup>2</sup> But here we run up against other difficulties, just one of which I will note.<sup>3</sup> Suppose that there is a ball in n-dimensional space of life-permitting values

for the various constants and that the ratio of the area of this ball to the total infinite range is vanishing. Then we must face the awkward consequence that the argument would have precisely the same probabilistic force if the volume of the ball were billions of orders of magnitude larger, since the ratio of *any* finite space to infinite space is equally vanishing.<sup>4</sup> One might appeal to infinitesimals in order to circumvent this problem, but as I have argued elsewhere, this move will not work.<sup>5</sup> One might instead reject countable additivity.<sup>6</sup> But (again, waiving other concerns) this expedient leaves us with the same dilemma: if fine-tuning works, so does coarse-tuning, *and it works just as well*. Yet intuitively, if the argument has any force at all, the discovery that there is a ridiculously large finite range of life-permitting values should appreciably weaken that force.

There are, therefore, significant problems that need to be faced in making the fine-tuning argument work. That does not mean that there is nothing to it. I am as sensible as anyone of the intuitive appeal of the argument. But it does mean that it will need very careful formulation, more careful than it has yet received, before it can be well evaluated.

##### 5. *Intentional States of Consciousness*

The argument from intentional states of consciousness seems to me to be a very serious and significant argument against naturalism; and if naturalism is undermined, the number of ways to be a consistent atheist is appreciably diminished. The deductive formulation, however, obscures the explanatory structure that is implicit in Craig's brief discussion. I would prefer to flesh it out something like this:

1. If theism were true, it would not be nearly so surprising that there are numerous beings with intentional states as it would be if theism were false.
2. There are numerous beings with intentional states.

Therefore,

3. There is significant evidence for theism.

Intentional states, as Craig says, fit comfortably into a theistic worldview; but they do not fit nearly so well into an atheistic one.

From reading some of his other work, I expected Rosenberg to mount an attack on premise 2. Instead, after brushing aside dualism with the observation that “[m]ost scientists aren’t dualists,” he argues that the question of how one chunk of matter can be about another has “nothing interesting to do” with atheism or theism. But I think it does. If there is really such a thing as intentionality, then that is a datum, and we may quite reasonably ask what explanatory resources theism and atheism have on hand to account for the datum. On the one view, consciousness and intentionality are built into reality on the ground floor. On the other view, they are not, and *despite the best efforts of naturalist philosophers of mind over the past few decades, there is no plausible account of how they could come to exist if they were not there to start with.* The existence of conscious intentional states must therefore count as evidence in favor of the former view.

#### *6. Objective Moral Values and Duties*

Craig’s sixth piece of evidence is a straightforward presentation of the moral argument for the existence of God. Here, again, the argument proper is presented deductively, but the setup proposes that “God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties.” I think that the latter approach is more promising. Premise 2 of the deductive formulation (a subjunctive conditional and not an indicative one, we should note) might be strictly false, and yet the existence of objective moral values and duties could still be evidence for the existence of God in virtue of the fact that it rules out various non-theistic positions without adversely affecting theism.

Listing various non-theistic theories that embrace objective moral values, as Rosenberg does when he addresses this issue in his opening remarks, is an effective rejoinder to the deductive version of the moral argument, but it is the wrong approach to use in criticizing the explanatory one. There is a good reason that many thinkers have balked at the “queerness” of moral facts in a naturalistic universe; Rosenberg himself, as Craig points out in his First Rebuttal, is a ruthless eliminativist on this point. That was not where the debate went, perhaps because it is hard to face a live audience and say bluntly that there are no objective moral truths, particularly when one’s principal positive argument is the problem of evil. Yet the position is not flatly inconsistent; one could present the problem of evil simply as an *internal* problem for various forms of theism. We will return to this issue below.

Rosenberg hangs his critique of the moral argument on the Euthyphro dilemma. This, I think, is a significant mistake. Modern formulations of Divine Command Theory have dealt decisively with the Euthyphro dilemma by making a distinction between the divine *character*, which provides the metaphysical ground for moral values, and divine *commands*, which create moral obligations.<sup>7</sup> The debate has moved on; the interesting questions lie much deeper, e.g., in the problem of whether, as natural law theorists insist, there are moral obligations that do not arise from the commands of any authoritative source.

The existence of objective moral values does, then, count as some evidence in favor of the existence of God. The only clear way to cut the argument off would be to argue against the existence of such values. But in the oral debate, Rosenberg did not choose to make that argument.

### *7. Historical Facts about Jesus of Nazareth*

Craig's seventh piece of evidence consists of a brief presentation of the well-known "minimal facts" approach to the resurrection of Jesus. Rosenberg responds by listing a variety of non-Christian claims to the supernatural, adducing them as evidence that eyewitness testimony is not reliable. His examples are of very uneven weight for this purpose; the explanation for moisture on the outside of statues of the Madonna, for example, would seem to call into question the judgment or scientific erudition of witnesses rather than their veracity. But the others will do no real work in undermining the case for the resurrection unless we draw the extremely strong conclusion Rosenberg wants.

And that conclusion is completely unwarranted. The critical literature on eyewitness testimony is largely focused on cases where various confounding estimator variables are in play, e.g., the people are strangers to one another, witnesses are intoxicated, cross-racial identification is involved, the initial situation involves short exposure (typically 12-45 seconds), and high levels of stress or a weapon are involved.<sup>8</sup> Not one of these factors is plausibly in play in the case of the witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. Far from undermining the value of the evidence we do have, the study of the vagaries of eyewitness testimony heightens the puzzle of how Jesus' intimate acquaintances could have been so profoundly mistaken as to have believed that he had appeared to them alive after his crucifixion again and again over a period of many weeks.

But for Craig's argument, even that is not required—or not obviously so. The argument Craig presents depends, not on the reliability of the witnesses *per se*, but on points conceded by the majority of critical New Testament scholars and historians. It is therefore beside the point to object to eyewitness testimony; the points on which Craig's argument hangs depend only on the ability of historical scholars to extract reliable historical facts from ancient documents.

We might be pushed back in the direction of eyewitness testimony, however, when we examine the alternative explanatory hypotheses for the data. Take Craig's Fact #2. Are a majority of historical scholars agreed that groups of people who were intimately familiar with Jesus' appearance simultaneously experienced what they believed to be extensive, coordinated, polymodal interactions with him? This claim goes beyond the strict letter of the early creed embedded in 1 Corinthians 15, though it is certainly consonant with it. I am uncertain how far the consensus extends in this direction, and it obviously matters for the evaluation of the hallucination hypothesis. There are ample resources for addressing that hypothesis in the Gospel accounts. But that brings us back to the question of the broader historical trustworthiness of the resurrection narratives in the Gospels. *So without knowing more about the details of the scholarly agreement, it is difficult to pass judgment on the explanatory step in Craig's argument.*<sup>9</sup>

#### *8. Personal Encounter with God*

Craig's eighth consideration is more an invitation than an argument. It does, however, raise some questions that deserve exploration. First, although some Christians like Alvin Plantinga report having had intense personal religious experiences that persuaded them of at least some of the central truths of Christianity, many others (and here I must include myself) have not. *To what extent is Craig committed to the idea that such experiences are normative for Christians?*

*Second, what is their significance in the presentation of a public case for theism?* However persuasive such an experience may be for the individual who has it, it is, in Philip Doddridge's memorable phrase, "like the white stone, mentioned in the Revelation, in which there was a new name written, which no man knew, but he who received it."<sup>10</sup>

*Third, how much weight should even the individual place on such experience?* Early last year, Michael Sudduth, a prominent Christian philosopher of religion, announced that he had

undergone an intense and transformative religious experience. I do not doubt his sincerity. But he describes the event as a personal encounter with the Lord Krishna, and in consequence of it, he has converted to a form of Hinduism (Gaudiya Vaishnavism). This event is a sobering reminder of the pitfalls inherent in the appeal to personal experience and, for a Christian, a reminder of the necessity of the advice, δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα (1 John 4:1).

### *Rosenberg's Arguments*

Rosenberg's critique of faith in God in this debate has three major divisions: that most distinguished scientists are atheists, that science has no use for the God hypothesis, and that evil is logically incompatible with the God of traditional theism.

#### *1. Appeal to the authority of eminent scientists*

Rosenberg claims that 95% of the members of the National Academy of Sciences are atheists. I have been unable to find a source that will substantiate this claim; in 1998, 72.2% of the members of the NAS professed "personal disbelief," with another 20.8% opting for "doubt or agnosticism" and the remaining 7% for "personal belief."<sup>11</sup> A ten to one ratio is, of course, still a hefty majority. But *who cares?* The appeal to a poll of eminent scientists on a subject outside of their expertise as scientists looks like an unfortunate dialectical misadventure. It is rather like polling a large group of distinguished theologians on the interpretation of quantum mechanics.

Rosenberg goes on to ask what these scientists know about physics that Craig does not, taking the disagreement of the majority with his metaphysical conclusion as a ground for doubting his scientific claims. But with regard to the actual physics invoked in the opening arguments, as far as I am able to tell, Craig turns out to be right. What separates Craig from the unbelieving members of the National Academy of Sciences is not his understanding of modern cosmology.

## 2. *Dispensability*

In his closing statement, Rosenberg suddenly introduces a new line of argument: that belief in God is unnecessary, since it plays no role in science. But again, so what? The existence of Julius Caesar makes not the slightest contribution to the predictive power of any of the sciences, yet there he is, striding through the pages of history, none the worse for his scientific inutility.

The most promising place to look for a role for God in science is in the explanation of things like the origin of the universe. Craig has made a serious argument that there is not and in the nature of the case cannot be a purely naturalistic explanation for this event. But even if theistic explanations for the origin of the universe were to prove chimerical, there are other phenomena such as intentionality that physics, for all its impressive predictive successes, cannot bring within its scope. Therefore, the argument from dispensability does not have any traction here.

## 3. *The Logical Problem of Evil*

We turn back to Rosenberg's central argument from his opening statement, the problem of evil. I am willing for my part to grant the justice, *prima facie* and *pro tanto*, of the claim that the existence and scope of the evils we see count as evidence against the existence of God. (The extent to which they count as evidence against more specific versions of theism is a different matter.) But Rosenberg eschews the explanatory approach and declares that the existence of God is *logically incompatible* with the existence of evil. This version of the argument is a very old one, elegantly formulated by Epicurus as a rhetorical question that Hume repeats in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. But a lot has happened in this area since 1776. It is now widely recognized that anyone attempting to resurrect the logical problem of evil shoulders the enormous burden of showing that the evils we are aware of could have been prevented without thereby allowing equal or greater evils or preventing equal or greater goods.

Since the 1960s, the debate over the problem of evil has shifted to evidential formulations, and in the hands of writers like Rowe and Draper the evidential problem of evil is a serious argument that demands (and has received) serious attention from thoughtful believers. I should have liked to see an exchange between Craig and Rosenberg on that point, as I believe it is a subtle and interesting objection to theism—probably the single most powerful objection there is. So although I do not (at least here) fault Rosenberg for his choice of weapons, I wondered whether in his First Rebuttal he might shift to an inference to the best explanation. Alas, no: “I insist that the problem is logical, and Dr. Craig needs to tell us exactly how an omnipotent God and an entirely benevolent God had to have the holocaust in order to produce the good outcome, whatever it might be, that he intends for our providence.” This is an unreasonable demand. Rosenberg is the one making the claim of logical incompatibility; it is up to him to produce the argument. And if he hopes to use it as a persuasive tool, he needs to engage at a serious level with the nuanced defense against *that* charge developed by Plantinga and others.<sup>12</sup> In the oral debate, unfortunately, this did not happen.

#### *Craig’s Critique of Rosenberg’s Naturalism*

Craig takes a significant portion of his time in his First Rebuttal retailing some of the more startling claims from Rosenberg’s book. In response, Rosenberg urges that these positions are consequences, not of atheism as such, but of modern science. Paying attention (and proper deference) to modern science should, he thinks, make us atheists; it should also make us disbelieve in the existence of propositions, meanings, moral values, and our own selves.

Craig finds these claims astonishing, and Rosenberg agrees that they sound quite bizarre. But he also protests that since they don’t follow from atheism *per se*, the *modus tollens* arguments Craig has advanced are based on misrepresentations of what he said in the book. Here I am

perplexed, since Craig explicitly formulates each argument as a critique, not of atheism, but of metaphysical naturalism. And this is obviously relevant to the subject of God's existence. Naturalism is, today, the metaphysical view of choice for atheists. If it can be shown to be hopeless, or even seriously defective, then the number of ways to be a consistent atheist has been sharply narrowed.

Rosenberg's position, however, is that these claims follow simply from *science*, so that anyone who is inclined to dispute them may as well take up the matter with the National Academy of Sciences. I am tempted, perversely, to poll the members of that distinguished body to discover what they think about claims like *You cannot think about things* or *All words and sentences are meaningless* or *You do not exist*. But let us be fair: if we cannot expect their expertise to transfer to the matter of the existence of God, then equally we cannot expect it to transfer to the matter of meanings and thoughts. These are issues that we need to hash out as philosophers.

And speaking as a philosopher, I feel bound to register my profound conviction that these strange consequences really do follow from a prior philosophical commitment rather than from the assured results of modern science. Naturalism deserves no credit for the development of vaccines or the discovery of penicillin or the explanation of retrograde motion. Here I think that Lord Balfour's assessment remains as apt as it was a century ago: "Who would pay the slightest attention to naturalism if it did not force itself into the retinue of science, assume her livery, and claim, as a kind of poor relation, in some sort to represent her authority and to speak with her voice?"<sup>13</sup>

Rosenberg thinks that those of us who think this way are in the grip of an illusion, and in the Question and Answer period he quoted a passage from his book to reinforce the point:

Look, if I am going to get scientism into your skull I have to use the only tools we've got for moving information from one head to another: noises, ink-marks, pixels. Treat the illusion that goes with them like the optical illusions in Chapter 7. This book isn't conveying statements. It's rearranging neural circuits, removing inaccurate disinformation and replacing it with accurate information. Treat it as correcting maps instead of erasing sentences.<sup>14</sup>

I appreciate Rosenberg's attempt to be consistent, but I wonder if he realizes just how problematic this sounds to someone who is not in the grip of naturalism:

Look [Implicitly, *You* look—but who is “you” here?], if [Beginning of a logical relation? But those aren't physical] I [Who?] am going to [Purposive action?] get scientism into your skull [Don't like the sound of that, thank you very much] I [No, but really, who??] have to use [Purposive action again?] the only tools we've got for moving information [A moment please—what is information?] ...

Illusions are always someone's illusions; *si fallor sum*, as Augustine pointed out. And if it comes to using “tools” to rearrange the cognitive maps of the unenlightened, why stop at arguments? Why not go for propaganda instead? That is a tool of proven effectiveness; and on Rosenberg's principles, there is no moral reason not to use it.

#### *Rosenberg's Closing Statement on Faith*

In his closing statement, Rosenberg offers advice to Christians, from an atheist: “[D]o not make yourself vulnerable to reason and evidence.” If he had accomplished what he set out to do, this advice, though condescending, might have seemed more credible. But the arguments actually provided in the oral part of the debate—not all of them of equal weight, of course—come down heavily on the side of theism. That does not by itself settle the question. But I hope that it provokes a more searching conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1992), 99-108.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Collins, "The Teleological Argument," in William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (New York: Blackwell, 2009), 202-81.

<sup>3</sup> See McGrew, McGrew, and Vestrup, "Probabilities and the Fine Tuning Argument: A Sceptical View," *Mind* 110 (2001): 1027-37; reprinted in Neil A. Manson, ed., *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (Routledge, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> The coarse-tuning objection to the FTA was first formulated by Lydia McGrew.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy and Lydia McGrew, "A Response to Robin Collins and Alexander R. Pruss," *Philosophia Christi* 7 (2005): 425-43.

<sup>6</sup> This approach has been explored by Robin Collins and is advocated by Alvin Plantinga in his book *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 205-11.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Philip Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in Michael Beaty, ed., *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 303-26; Robert Merihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Wells, Memon, and Penrod, "Eyewitness Testimony: Improving its Probative Value," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 7 (2006), 51-54.

<sup>9</sup> For a somewhat different approach to the question, not based solely on "minimal facts," see Timothy and Lydia McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles," in Craig and Moreland, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (2009), 593-662.

<sup>10</sup> *Three Sermons on the Evidences of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Waugh, 1752), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, Letter to *Nature* 394, No. 6691 (1998), 313.

<sup>12</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), chap. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur James Balfour, *The Foundations of Belief*, 8th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), 135.

<sup>14</sup> *The Atheist's Guide to Reality* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011), 193.

## Not Reasonable But Not Unreasonable

Michael Ruse

It is an unfortunate but true fact of life that even the most scintillating of verbal exchanges rarely translate directly into interesting and valuable written reports and I am afraid that this is true of the debate between William Craig and Alexander Rosenberg. They are undoubtedly very bright chaps who know a lot of things, but for the reader little of this comes through. We get brief—brief to the point of vacuous—accounts of various positions, and rarely do these get explored by either speaker to the point where we get something of value, and especially not of value and new. For this reason, in my reaction, I shall not feel at all bound to follow through in order the various points made by the two speakers. Rather I shall focus first on what seems to me to be the biggest problem of all, one avoided by both speakers—perhaps by Craig out of caution and Rosenberg out of ignorance. I should say that what I have to say in the rest of my response is dependent upon this discussion, so you should not think I am simply ignoring the Craig-Rosenberg encounter. Far from it, as you will see when I then turn to two points, one made by each speaker and in my opinion inadequately addressed by the other. I shall conclude by a brief trawl through a grab bag of various other points raised in the debate.

I am absolutely convinced that the central notion of the Christian religion, that of God, is completely incoherent. For that reason, while I am quite prepared to take Christianity seriously as a historical and cultural phenomenon, I simply don't know how one could subscribe to it. I don't think that what I am saying is particularly new, but since it is not raised, let me spell out my point. I take it that Christianity did not exist when Jesus died or (and I will get to this later) when he supposedly rose three days later. For what it is worth, I don't think Jesus set out to

found a religion. I think (in line with the tradition whose most notable representative was Albert Schweitzer) that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher who thought the end would come in his own lifetime and who, when on the cross, found he had made a bad mistake.<sup>1</sup> I don't think this is to downgrade Jesus, and indeed my Quaker heritage taught me to think that Jesus' ignorance was part of being a man and not just a god and that that moment of realization followed by acceptance was the crucial moment in the whole Easter drama. Be this as it may, Christianity had to be invented by Christians because Jesus did not do the job.

And here's the rub, because there were two traditions drawn on by the early followers, from Peter and Paul down through four centuries to Augustine. On the one hand, there was the Jewish tradition. I realize that there were lots of arguments in those early years about how much Christianity should draw on Judaism, but the fact of the matter is that it did draw on Judaism and by the time of Augustine realized that it simply had to do this. Without the early chapters of Genesis, for instance, the Augustinian notion of original sin makes no sense, and without original sin the death on the cross is pointless. (I know the Eastern tradition doesn't see things quite this way but similar arguments can be tailored for that.) And the point I want to make about the Jewish tradition is that God is a person. I don't think He is supposed to look like an old codger in a bed sheet, rather like me at a toga party, but the fact is that **He is not an abstract entity. He is one of the chaps.** (I say He although again I recognize that a distinctive thing about the Jewish god is the He in some way is not a sexual being, unlike all of the other gods around Him.)

This means that God thinks, hopes, loves, hates, and much more, including being willing to argue and open to having His mind changed.<sup>2</sup> Remember the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. And this it seems to me implies that **in some sense God—and not just Jesus—is in time.** You will remember the poem about Bishop Berkeley's philosophy and how "God is always about in the

quad.” He may be always about, but the point is that He is about—today, yesterday, tomorrow. This is a caring father (or mother) and caring fathers (and mothers) are at it all of the time. The sparrow falls, and God is there concerned. You have a triumph or a disaster and God is there too, just like your mum and dad came to High School graduation and cried with you when you applied to Duke and didn’t get in and told you that you would much rather go to Harvard anyway.

On the other hand, there was the Greek tradition. Starting with Saint Paul, there were a lot of very clever and well educated early Christians, and they tried to make sense of their religion by drawing on the best philosophical thinking of the day, namely the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, first the former and then secondly (admittedly much later) Aristotle. Now I recognize that the god of the Greeks was not the god of the Christians—or rather the gods of the Greeks (I am talking now of the gods of Plato and Aristotle and not the traditional gods) were not the gods of the Christians. So some jiggling had to take place. Aristotle’s god, for instance—the Prime Mover—seems not to have been aware of our existence and spent its time contemplating its own perfection. (A bit like some ex-girlfriends of mine.) **But the essential aspect of the Greek god got transferred and the essential aspect is that god or God (for the Christians) is outside time and eternal—unchanging. He is not one of the chaps. He is not a person.**<sup>3</sup> God—and of course Plato makes this very clear—is a bit like a mathematical entity. You don’t ask when the 3, 4, 5 triangle first became right-angled nor do you ask when it will quit being right-angled. It just is, and the same is true of God. He exists necessarily. (I will leave the aseity debate—just what kind of necessary existence God has—on one side for the moment.)

Of course there is a lot more that you can say about what is known as this classical Christian conception of God—about His being omniscient and omnipotent and all loving and so forth. The

point is that this is not a guy who gets cross and who gets happy and who is open to argument and who might change His mind. **God simply doesn't change. And that I think points to the essential incoherence of Christianity because a God who doesn't change is basically a God who cannot do anything. And that is not a God worthy of worship because such a God could not have been a creator nor could He be doing anything for us now or in the future.** (To be fair to the Greeks, I don't think they have this problem. Aristotle's god does nothing for us but we strive to its perfection—it is the ultimate final cause. You might think that Plato's Demiurge was doing something, namely designing, but only if you think the designing was an actual act in time and not an eternal principle of ordering.) **God has to be a person but if He is a person then He cannot be a necessary being [NB assumes necessity implies timelessness]** and you start to run into a host of problems there too. One of which is whether we should worship another person. Isn't this idolatrous? At which point I say, give up, the Christian God simply doesn't make sense.

I am sure that Craig will have a response to all of this. I only wish it had been raised and discussed. It is not as if it is a trivial point or has not been troubling Christians down the ages. Today for instance we have the Catholic Thomist Brian Davies pushing the classical god and the Protestant personalists Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga pushing the personal god. You cannot have it both ways. For myself, I don't think you can have it either way.

Now, in the light of what I have just written, let me push on to a couple of arguments that I don't think are given proper responses in the debate. First there is Craig's argument about the very fact of existence. This is what Heidegger calls the fundamental question of metaphysics: "Why is there something rather than nothing?"<sup>4</sup> I am not really sure that Rosenberg gives it its full due. He rather brushes it off by pointing out that in quantum mechanics we have events without causes and suggests that the universe and its contents might be causeless also. But is this

good enough? Surely one should say that, within the context of quantum mechanics we cannot ask for causes. But this is a different matter. Perhaps there are causes; it is just that we cannot meaningfully ask for them. **I am not saying that quantum mechanics will ever be overthrown or that we might someday find the causes. I am just not sure we can say that the causes don't exist.**

Having said this, does this make Craig's point? I don't think it does, if the point is that we must accept that God exists. I am not one with Wittgenstein to say that the fundamental question is no real question.<sup>5</sup> It seems to me a perfectly good question. I am not sure it has an answer or at least that it has an answer that we will ever find out. But that does not leave room for God. At least, if it does leave room for God, it doesn't follow that the only room is for God. Perhaps Rosenberg is right. There are no causes. **Perhaps things just are.** (I am not denying Rosenberg's conclusion. I am just saying that I don't think the appeal to quantum mechanics gives him his conclusion.)

Don't forget also that in philosophical arguments, you need to look also at the other person's solution. I think already we have reason to be worried about Craig's solution. Suppose God is a person. I don't see this as a necessary being, in which case we are caught in one of those regresses so beloved of untutored undergraduates and of Richard Dawkins. What caused God? The great virtue of the classical conception of God is that you don't get caught in this infinite regress. God is a necessary being and so God doesn't need a cause. Like the 3, 4, 5 right-angled triangle, He exists eternally. But there are still problems. **First, how can something that is unchanging create a contingent universe? If you say it is a mystery, then it seems no more of a mystery to say that there was no cause. Second, what does it mean to say that something exists necessarily? Although the ontological argument rather suggests that this necessity is logical necessity, the usual claim is that God has a factual necessary existence.<sup>6</sup> He is cause of Himself.**

His existence follows from His essence. Aseity. But does this really make sense? David Hume would have thought not. Are we not just positing what we need? I think Craig owes us an answer which he does not give.

Going the other way, there is Rosenberg's argument about the problem of evil. Craig is altogether too quick on this. I would have liked to have seen Rosenberg spell it out a bit more, although to be fair he does do this more in his responses, but it really isn't good enough for Craig simply to say that we have solved that one and move on. Let us agree that there are some standard moves one can make and that they are not all as stupid as Voltaire makes them seem in *Candide*. Free will is a good thing and it is better to have it than not, despite the pain and so forth. Perhaps this is a vale of soul making, which is good for us as we develop into fully responsible beings. It is better to feel pain than not given fire, because only in this way do we learn to fear the flames. But leave all of that. Go right to the top. Craig really needs to take on the *Brothers Karamazov* discussion. Dostoevsky tells of a general with many serfs.

One day a serf-boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favourite hound. 'Why is my favourite dog lame?' He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw. 'So you did it.' The general looked the child up and down. 'Take him.' He was taken—taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback, with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock-up. It's a gloomy, cold, foggy, autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry... 'Make him run,' commands the general. 'Run! run!' shout the dog-boys.

The boy runs... 'At him!' yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child.

The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eyes!<sup>7</sup>

Nothing. Nothing is worth that suffering. The one brother, Ivan, who is telling the story, turns and challenges his sibling, Alyosha.

'Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.'

'No, I wouldn't consent,' said Alyosha softly.<sup>8</sup>

How do you answer that? I don't want eternal salvation on the back of Anne Frank's death in Bergen-Belsen. And if you tell me that God had no choice in the matter, then I question His free will and I question also His omnipotence. To be honest, I question whether He is loving also. I don't mean that I think Craig is callous. I agree that any religion that has its God dying in agony on the cross is a religion that takes pain and suffering seriously. I just don't think it has an answer. I don't think Craig had an answer for Rosenberg. With respect, teenage conversions to Jesus just don't cut the mustard.

Now finally let me turn to some of the other arguments. First the matter of morality. I am not sure that either side does full justice to the other side. On the one hand, **Craig is simply wrong if he thinks that the naturalist cannot explain morality. There is huge evidence today that humans are very social animals and that part of this sociality is some kind of moral sense.** There is nothing very radical in saying this. John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice* allowed as much.<sup>9</sup> In the struggle for existence, cooperation can be as good a strategy as all out combat, and often is very much better. The worry of course is that all of this suggests that morality is a matter of

emotions—I want to help you and feel better if I do—and this is surely counter to what morality really is about. I ought to help you and this is true even if I don't want to help you and feel no better and perhaps worse (cost, waste of time) if I do.

However, naturalists are ahead of the game on this.<sup>10</sup> Part of the case is that if morality were all a matter of mere emotion it would soon break down. Alex helps Bill but Bill recognizes that there is nothing behind this so he doesn't bother to help Alex. Alex resents this and soon no one is helping anyone. It is recognized that something more is needed. In the words of the late John Mackie we “objectify” morality.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not it is objective in the sense of having some external referent, we think that it is. “Rape is wrong,” doesn't mean just “I don't like rape” or some such thing as the emotivists would have had it. It means that it really is wrong, whether or not anyone cares. It was wrong when the Russians marched into East Prussia. But the feeling that it is really wrong is as much a part of our biology, our nature, as anything else. There is no need to suppose that there is anything “out there.”

Does this mean that there is no god? I am not sure that it does. What it does mean is that we don't have to suppose God and Immanuel Kant and John Henry Newman and William Craig are wrong on this. Could there be a God behind morality? Rosenberg suggests not and he invokes the Euthyphro argument—is that which is good, good because God wants it, or does God want it because it is good? Either way we run into paradox. But my sense is that the natural law argument fixes this.<sup>12</sup> At some level, morality is what God wants, but it is not arbitrary nor is it external to His will. God has made us as we are and He wants us to go with this—he wants us to do what is natural. Sodomizing little boys for our pleasure is not natural and hence it is wrong. This is not an arbitrary judgment by God along the lines of making it wrong to drink tea on Tuesdays. Pace the Mormons, there is nothing unnatural about drinking tea on any day of the

week. Doing what Catholic priests have been all too prone to do is against our nature and that is why it is wrong and non-arbitrary. But we are as God made us and so He does decide in the end. None of this proves God or anything but I don't think morality disproves God anymore than it proves Him.

I am afraid that when someone tells me that someone has written an eight-hundred page book proving that the Resurrection did occur I am put in mind of Shakespeare: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." The problem is that it is all very well comparing the rise from the dead of Jesus to the death of Caesar Augustus, but **the fact is that we do not start with two equals. People die. There is lots of evidence of that. We don't find the death of Caesar Augustus very surprising. In fact, all other things being equal, we don't find the death of Caesar Augustus surprising at all.** He was 75 when he died and whether it was from natural causes or because his wife Livia bumped him off, either hypothesis is plausible. Rising from the dead a day or two after you are killed just isn't plausible.

**It is logically possible of course, but the evidence required is massive.** I suppose that if you had the dead body before you and half a dozen qualified doctors and they made sure that the body was dead and then they watched and had gadgets hooked up and so forth that one might at least start to wonder if the body now suddenly came to life. (Actually, I would want more than doctors. I remember the Uri Geller spoon-bending episode and how he fooled the physicists. I would want professional magicians around too. They know the tricks.) But of course we don't have anything like that. As Rosenberg points out, we are working from documents written long after the event and these documents are notoriously, let us say, imaginative. Think of all of the stuff about virgin birth and fulfilling prophecies and so forth. **As Rosenberg also points out, if we are to take the Jesus story as truth why not the stories of the Mormons?**

To be perfectly honest I wish that people like Craig—and his teacher Wolfhart Pannenberg—would give up this business of proving the gospel stories. It's never going to work and it certainly is never going to convince those who are not already convinced. Better to take the whole thing on faith and leave it at that. Even better to stop worrying about whether the Resurrection was literally true at all. Simply say that clearly something happened to fill the hearts of the followers with certainty and joy and determination, at a time when frankly they had no reason for any of this. Best of all to focus on the really important things in the Jesus story like the parable of the Good Samaritan or Paul's paean to love in 1 Corinthians 13.

I confess that I start to get a bit irritated when people start to trot out the anthropic principle. I honestly thought that Darwin had put to rest that old chestnut. Apart from anything else, all of this appeal to design—which in its modern form is a result of the need to cement the Elizabethan Settlement and has little to do with the discussions in either Augustine or Aquinas—is so theologically mistaken. John Henry Newman had it exactly right. “I believe in design because I believe in God; not in a God because I see design.”<sup>13</sup> Continuing: “Design teaches me power, skill and goodness—not sanctity, not mercy, not a future judgment, which three are of the essence of religion.”<sup>14</sup> In any case the kind of argument that so intrigues Craig really is on a par with: “Think of a number. Double it. The answer you want is a half.” I have my quarrels with Steven Weinberg, the Nobel Laureate in physics, who seems to think that expertise in one area confers expertise in all areas, but on this topic he seems absolutely right. He writes of the carbon atom, something that is formed from lighter elements, namely, hydrogen and helium. We cannot go straight to ordinary carbon but need first to get a carbon in a radioactive state—this needs an energy of roughly 7 million electron volts (MeV) above the energy of ordinary carbon. This matches the energy of the helium nuclei. However, for reasons that will become apparent, it

cannot be above 7.7 MeV over the normal state. Once we have the radioactive state, ordinary carbon follows naturally. But what about this radioactive state?

In fact, the carbon nucleus is known experimentally to have just such a radioactive state, with an energy 7.65 MeV above the normal state. At first sight this may seem like a pretty close call; the energy of this radioactive state of carbon misses being too high to allow the formation of carbon (and hence of us) by only 0.05 MeV, which is less than one percent of 7.65 MeV. It may appear that the constants of nature on which the properties of all nuclei depend have been carefully fine-tuned to make life possible. **Looked at more closely, the fine-tuning of the constants of nature here does not seem so fine. We have to consider the reason why the formation of carbon in stars requires the existence of a radioactive state of carbon with an energy not more than 7.7 MeV above the energy of the normal state.** The reason is that the carbon nuclei in this state are actually formed in a two-step process: first, two helium nuclei combine to form the unstable nucleus of a beryllium isotope, beryllium 8, which occasionally, before it falls apart, captures another helium nucleus, forming a carbon nucleus in its radioactive state, which then decays into normal carbon. The total energy of the beryllium 8 nucleus and a helium nucleus at rest is 7.4 MeV above the energy of the normal state of the carbon nucleus; so if the energy of the radioactive state of carbon were more than 7.7 MeV it could only be formed in a collision of a helium nucleus and a beryllium 8 nucleus if the energy of motion of these two nuclei were at least 0.3 MeV—an energy which is extremely unlikely at the temperatures found in stars. Thus the crucial thing that affects the production of carbon in stars is not the 7.65 MeV energy of the radioactive state of carbon above its normal state, but the 0.25 MeV energy of the radioactive state, an unstable composite of a beryllium 8 nucleus and a helium nucleus, above the energy of those nuclei at

rest. This energy misses being too high for the production of carbon by a fractional amount of 0.05 MeV/0.25 MeV, or 20 percent, which is not such a close call after all.<sup>15</sup>

Let me bring this part of the discussion to an end by mentioning the problem of consciousness, and then finish with a final reflection. As far as I can see, no one has solved the problem of consciousness. We have made huge strides forward about understanding the brain and how consciousness is dependent upon it. I see no reason to argue that consciousness is something apart from the material world, although whether it is of the material world seems to me to be the problem at issue. If I were pressed I would probably say that I am a dualist, but then if I were pressed further I would probably say that one cannot be a dualist. In other words, I am probably what they call a “new mysterian,” thinking that we haven’t solved the problem and probably never will.<sup>16</sup> Here I see a difference between something like consciousness and the origin of life. Neither problem has been solved but it seems to me that we are on our way with the second. At least I can imagine what it would be like to have a solution to the second, but I cannot even imagine a solution to consciousness. Having said this, I just don’t see where God comes into it. Of course Christians are at liberty to say that consciousness is part of being made in the image of God, but that is not a scientific solution and in a way just shoves the problem back one step to ask what does it mean to say that God is conscious? In fact, if you take the classical conception of God it makes it more difficult, for I don’t see how an unchanging being can be conscious. With Hume I think it is all a flow of ideas and that means change. But the mere fact that something cannot be explained by us does not at once imply God. We cannot solve Goldbach’s conjecture, every number is the sum of two primes, but I don’t see what God has to do with it.

My concluding point is to agree with Alex Rosenberg—with Karl Barth for that matter—that basically the Christian’s best bet is to leave reason and evidence out of it. Better to go with faith

and simply refuse to get drawn into argument. You won't convince the non-believer but you won't convince the non-believer anyway. I should say that having agreed with Rosenberg, paradoxically I am probably closer to Craig on this. Rosenberg thinks Christian belief is not only not to be defended by reason but positively unreasonable. Science shows this. My position is that there are questions that science doesn't answer—why is there something rather than nothing, for example—and if the Christian wants to try his or her hand at this, then I say go ahead. I don't think you have to take the Christian position. You can be a skeptic like me. But **I don't think science makes the Christian effort incorrect. It is not reasonable but it is not unreasonable.**

I should add however that I don't think that this is quite all there is to be said. I don't think that being a Christian is just a matter of personal choice like preferring tea over coffee. You may claim that you don't have any choice about being a Christian but you should realize what Richard Dawkins and a whole history of atheists before him keep drumming in, namely that being a Christian—or a Jew or Muslim or atheist—is not just a matter of epistemology.<sup>17</sup> It is a moral issue too. Dawkins claims that being a Christian is to endorse something that leads to war and hatred and abuse of small children and demeaning of women and much more. I realize that there is the other side too—Christians involved in education and health care and much more—but this only reinforces the point. I think that if you are a Christian or an atheist then you should ask about what this means for you and for society. It is fashionable in some quarters today—particularly by scientists—to say that philosophy is a waste of time with no implications for anything. But it isn't really and this debate shows why.

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<sup>1</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) and Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> For more see Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, "A Lecture on Ethics," *The Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 3-12.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g., John Hick, "Necessary Being," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 353-69.

<sup>7</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Translated by Constance Garnett (New York: The Lowell Press, 1912, first published 1880), 266.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>9</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g., Michael Ruse ed., *Philosophy after Darwin: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> John Mackie, *Ethics* (Harmondsworth, Mddx.: Penguin, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Ruse, *Science and Spirituality: Making Room for Faith in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, XXV*, eds. C. S. Dessain and T. Gornall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 97.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Steve Weinberg, "A Designer Universe," *New York Review of Books* 46, no. 16 (1999): 46-48.

<sup>16</sup> Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2007).

## **Rhetoric as Hermeneutic Key: The Reasonableness of Faith in God**

Martin J. Medhurst

For any debate to be meaningful, one thing must occur at the outset. The interlocutors must agree on the terms of the debate and mutually agree about how the key terms in the resolution are to be defined. In the debate between William Lane Craig and Alex Rosenberg, the resolution was framed as a question: “Is Faith in God Reasonable?” Before any arguments were introduced, the debaters should have discussed what they meant by the three key terms—faith, God, and reasonable. Since they each failed to do this, we can only surmise what their definitions are from the way they framed their arguments during the course of the debate.

Professor Craig appears to equate reasonable with logical and thus spends most of his time trying to form logical arguments that “prove” the existence of God. Professor Rosenberg, on the other hand, appears to equate reasonable with that which is scientifically demonstrable, even going so far as to claim that anything that cannot be scientifically proven is not reasonable. Both positions, I will argue, are mistaken because they want to treat reasonableness as a stand-in for their pet methodologies, totally ignoring the fact that the topics about which reasonableness is in question are faith and God.

By definition, neither faith nor God can be reduced to logical proof or scientific demonstration. Thus, whatever else reasonable may refer to it cannot refer to logical validity or scientific proof. According to the biblical book of Hebrews, faith is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).<sup>1</sup> Note that faith has to do with substance and with evidence. It is not mere whimsy, as Professor Rosenberg comes close to asserting throughout the debate. Faith in God is not equivalent to belief in the Easter Bunny. As

for God, the Bible teaches that “God is a spirit” (John 4:24). It images God as Creator (Gen. 1:1), Sustainer (Isa. 12:2), Companion (Gen. 21:22), and Father (John 8:41). The biblical attributes of God include that He is just (Deut. 32:4), merciful (2 Chron. 30:9), loving (1John 4: 8, 16), kind (1 Cor. 13:4), forgiving (Psalm 103:3), faithful (1Cor. 1:9), and desirous of a relationship with mankind (Exod. 6:7).

If all of this is true—and as a Catholic Christian I believe that it is—then our definition of reasonableness is going to have to be of such a nature as to comport with the nature of faith and the nature of God. In this chapter, **I will argue that only a rhetorical approach to our three key terms is sufficient to sustain an affirmative answer to the resolution.**

### *The Nature of Rhetoric*

Rhetoric is the ancient art of discourse that was practiced by the pre-Socratics, theorized by Aristotle, taught by Isocrates, practiced by Cicero, and brought into the service of the Christian faith by Augustine, himself a professor of rhetoric prior to his conversion. As an art with a 2500 year history, rhetoric stands alongside philosophy as one of the oldest intellectual disciplines in the Western world. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.”<sup>2</sup> Rhetoric, for Aristotle, was the art that stood between formal logic (analytics) on the one side and pure poetry on the other. He describes rhetoric in his treatise *On Rhetoric* as being the “counterpart of Dialectic.”<sup>3</sup> While dialectic reasons about issues of moral complexity using question and answer formats (much like the Socratic dialogues penned by Plato), rhetoric reasons about such matters using continuous discourses—speeches.

But before one can give a speech on any subject, one must first discover what needs to be said. Hence, the first part of Aristotle’s definition—rhetoric is *the faculty of observing*—has to do with the methods by which one can see—find or discover—what might be said, and

ultimately what should be said in a given situation. Aristotle's primary means for discovering speech content is his list of topics—places that one can go to look for argumentative substance. Aristotle says that there are 28 such places, including opposites, definition, word meanings, parts, cause and effect, and the meaning of a name. Note that the topics do not tell the speaker what to say, they merely point to places where argumentative substance—the stuff of arguments—can be found. Once a speaker has consulted each of the topics, he will have found more than enough substance for any speech he may wish to make. The art comes in deciding which of these argumentative topics should be used in a given situation. And that takes us to the second part of Aristotle's definition.

Rhetoric is the art of observing or discovering *in any given case*. Aristotle realized that social and political situations, unlike scientific cases or logical demonstrations, are always unique. There are no natural laws that dictate an answer, no regular or systematic ways of proceeding in every case. Every situation is different because the audience for the speech is always different. Whether in a court of law, a legislative assembly, a ceremonial gathering, or any other type of situation in which rhetoric is called for, the speaker must marshal his arguments in light of the people he needs to persuade, the purpose or goal toward which he wants to move them, and the constraints that he faces on the specific day in question. Rhetoric is an art precisely because it must be created anew in every new situation or occasion.<sup>4</sup>

Because each situation is unique, the speaker must analyze himself, his audience, and his situation before trying to discover the available means of persuasion. Aristotle is very clear that not all means of persuasion are available at all times or in front of all audiences. The speaker must discover the specific means that are available at any given moment, and select, arrange, and stylize those means in such a manner as to be most persuasive to the audience at hand. In *On*

*Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies three primary means of persuasion—persuasion that arises from the character of the speaker (ethos), persuasion that arises from the content of the arguments within the speech (logos), and persuasion that comes about as a result of the emotional appeals to the listeners (pathos). In another work, *Poetics*, Aristotle writes about a fourth mode of appeal based on story line or plot (mythos), what today we would call a narrative. Speakers select from among these modes of appeal to fashion a speech that they believe will move an audience to belief or action. They use two forms of argument—enthymemes and examples—to convey their ideas to the audience.

Enthymemes and examples are central to Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. The enthymeme is a deductive form of argument that functions much like the syllogism functions in formal logic. Unlike the syllogism, however, the enthymeme is only a quasi-logical form because it has only two parts, not three. Whereas a syllogism has a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion which, if the rules of the syllogism are followed, will result in a conclusion that can be held with certainty, with the enthymeme one of the parts is intentionally left unspoken because it is thought to reside in the hearts and minds of the listeners. The listeners psychologically supply the missing part of the argument from their own storehouse of beliefs, emotions, and convictions. The audience thus cooperates in its own persuasion by supplying part of the argumentative chain. Such arguments are often highly persuasive but by their very nature the conclusions or convictions that follow from accepting the arguments cannot be held with certainty because the argumentative chain has not followed syllogistic rules and has, in fact, gone outside of the speaker's own reasoning to involve the listeners in helping to complete the argument. While enthymemes are deductive in nature, examples are forms of inductive reasoning. But like all induction, reasoning from examples cannot lead to certainty. Yet the

stacking of examples can be highly persuasive. Used in combination, enthymemes and examples are powerful tools in the making of persuasive arguments.

The reason rhetoric is helpful in so many areas is because only a very small fraction of a person's everyday world involves issues for which certain answers exist. In Professor Rosenberg's world of natural science many issues do have a certain answer and he is perfectly right in pursuing those issues toward that end, using the methods of science that will allow those answers to be discovered. There is nothing in the Christian faith that would prohibit such a search and much that would, in fact, commend it. In Professor Craig's world everything, it seems, can be reduced to syllogistic (or in many of his examples quasi-syllogistic) reasoning. But try as he might, Professor Craig cannot prove the existence of God through human reasoning, if by "prove" we mean to reason to a conclusion that can be held with certainty (which is what all logicians mean by prove). Neither Rosenberg's nor Craig's methods are going to be very helpful when discussing issues of faith, God, and reasonableness. What will be helpful are rhetorical methods. Why? Because rhetorical methods never claim that they can lead people to hold positions with certainty. They claim only that they can lead people to conclusions that are plausible, conclusions that can be respectably held even in the face of uncertainty. One of the enduring uncertainties is the nature of God and whether one ought to place faith in such a being. To meaningfully answer that question, one must first understand what the Bible means by faith.

The Greek term that is most often translated as faith in the New Testament is *pistis*. Interestingly, *pistis* is also the term that Aristotle uses for modes of persuasion in *On Rhetoric*. Rhetorical scholar James Kinneavy conducted a thorough word study of *pistis* as it was used in the New Testament and in ancient rhetorical works, including those of Aristotle. He did this to explore the question of whether the Christian concept of faith might have its origins in Greek

rhetorical theory. As he notes, “most authorities agree that it is difficult to posit any definitive source for some of the major features of the Christian notion of faith. It is not Jewish, and it is not Greek, nor does it derive from the mystery religions of the time.”<sup>5</sup> Instead, Kinneavy argues, the likely source for how New Testament writers thought about faith was the Greek rhetorical tradition, a tradition in which *pistis* (persuasive proof) carried connotations of both trust and belief.

Biblical faith is not, therefore, blind or unthinking or irrational. To the contrary, by marrying the Jewish notion of trust in God with six Greek ideas concerning the available means of persuasion, the New Testament writers created a concept of faith that was unlike anything known at the time. First, in both traditions, faith/persuasion is seen as an honorific idea, as something to be valued and cherished. Second, the idea of trust—in the speaker for the Greeks, in God for the Christians—is central to both. Third, both involve an intellectual assent to a belief or a proposition. Fourth, that assent is to matters of substance—to ideas or beliefs or doctrines. Fifth, both traditions see faith/persuasion as a gift—a sort of grace or charism—whose effects are greater than the sum of its parts. Sixth, faith/persuasion is something freely accepted—there is no coercion involved. And seventh, *pistis* implies in both traditions only a limited measure of certainty that amounts to holding conclusions as plausible or probable rather than as absolutely certain.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the New Testament concept of faith through the lens of rhetorical theory is important because, as Kinneavy notes, “the Bible largely is rhetorical.”<sup>7</sup> And it is rhetorical in at least two ways. First, the design and structure of the biblical books have as their ultimate goal that readers might come to know and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. In some of the books that design is hidden or obscured (Revelation) while in others it is announced

plainly: “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30). Any literary work whose ultimate goal or purpose is to persuade the reader to adopt a particular set of beliefs or to engage in particular actions is a work of rhetoric. Thus, by definition, whatever else the Bible may be, it is a rhetorical work. But in addition to having a rhetorical design, the Bible also achieves its purposes through the deployment of rhetorical devices and techniques—irony, paradox, repetition, reversal, parallelism, personification, allegory, analogy, metaphor, metonymy, typology, and the like. It is through these features of design and style that the New Testament writers make their case for belief in Jesus as Lord. And it is a case that has all of the dimensions that Aristotle would advise a pagan Greek to use, as Kinneavy notes:

The fact is that of the six component meanings that *pistis* had in the Greek rhetorical tradition, all six are incorporated into the Christian concept of faith. These six are the categories used in the classifications of the rhetorical situation: Faith is a free decision change (a conversion), faith embodies a measure of uncertainty, faith is a belief in the credibility of the source of the message (ethical argument), faith is a belief engendered by a promise of some good or a threat of some evil (pathetic argument), faith is a belief engendered by a rational cause (logical argument), and faith can be a belief engendered by an outside cause (extrinsic argument). Across the entire New Testament, there is no doubt that the concept of faith generally carries these component meanings.<sup>8</sup>

I have spent considerable space on the issue of faith. I have done so because unless one has a clear idea of what faith means in the New Testament it is easy to dismiss it, as Professor Rosenberg tends to do, as nothing more than blind belief. But Christian faith is grounded in multiple sources—in the character of God (ethos) as revealed in both the Old and New

Testaments; in the statements and promises of God (logos) as recorded in Scriptures; in the hope of eternal life and the fear of eternal damnation (pathos) as one's final destination; and in the work of Jesus's sacrificial death on the cross (a parallel to Jewish Temple sacrifices) and subsequent resurrection from the dead (a parallel to the resurrection of Israel in the valley of the dry bones—"can these bones live?"—described in Ezekiel 37); and in the direct experience of people (witnesses) whom we deem to be trustworthy. In short, Christians have reasons for believing as they do and expressing the faith that they have come to believe. **We believe because we have been persuaded by good reasons.**

In the end, Christian faith is a matter of persuasion, not logical demonstration or scientific certainty. **I cannot know (*episteme*) that God exists** any more than I can know that love or hatred exist, yet there is substantial evidence that they do, and that they can be directly experienced by human beings. As Christians, we call that coming to know "faith," but that faith is reckoned as a response to a persuasive message. I come to know the character of the speaker. I listen to the speaker's words and judge their veracity. I feel the speaker's attitude toward me and experience His love and acceptance and forgiveness. All of this is a rhetorical process.

With this understanding of faith, let us turn to the notion of God. As presented in the Bible, God has many attributes of personhood. He speaks, he acts, he has emotions (love, anger, regret), and he forms relationships. In the Old Testament the primary relationship God has is with the people of Israel, with whom he forms an eternal covenant (Lev. 26:9-13). In the New Testament the primary relationships are God to Jesus (as father to son), Jesus to his disciples (as teacher to students), and the early Christian church to the world (as witnesses to their faith in Jesus as Lord of both heaven and earth). In both testaments God is known through his mighty acts in history—delivering the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage in the Old Testament and doing signs

and wonders in the New Testament, with the ultimate sign being Jesus's resurrection from the dead. Signs are a form of rhetorical proof discussed extensively by Quintilian and Augustine. The Bible is full of signs that invite interpretation. Rhetoric is the hermeneutical tool that allows that interpretation to take place.

Again, what we find is that the God of the Bible exhibits many of the same rhetorical characteristics as we found with the notion of faith. God is a person whose word can be trusted and whose character (ethos) is known. He is a God who displays emotion (pathos) for the purpose of guiding the thoughts and actions of his children. He is a God who gives commandments and provides moral instruction (logos). This God acts through the rhetorical devices of signs, enthymemes, and examples, all of which point to something beyond themselves. They are invitations to know and experience the very essence of God's being—His love. But, like all rhetorical transactions, that love can be accepted or rejected. The issue in the Craig/Rosenberg debate is whether it is reasonable to have faith in such a God. **But what does “reasonable” mean in this context?**

**Since both faith and God are rhetorical constructs, it seems clear that “reasonable” must be similarly construed. Reasonable in this context cannot mean demonstrative or able to be held with absolute certainty (as with Laws of Nature). Reasonable must mean that which a normal person, given adequate information, would believe. The problem with the Craig/Rosenberg debate is that both interlocutors seem intent in trying to make “reasonable” into “certain.”** In the rhetorical tradition the two terms are almost direct opposites. Aristotle distinguishes between proofs that are certain (*apodeixis*) and those that are only probable (*eikos*). He also distinguishes between subjects that are scientific, grounded in nature, and those that are social, grounded in human action. He does so because he realizes that the kind of proof necessary in the scientific

class of subjects is not the same kind of proof necessary—or even possible—in the social class of subjects. So when Professor Rosenberg seeks to apply scientific certainty to issues of social import (and what could be more important than the nature and destiny of mankind?), he is making a category error. Likewise, when Professor Craig seeks to encompass his case for God within the strictures of syllogistic logic, he is applying a standard based on demonstration (*apodeixis*) which no human topic can bear if treated realistically (**which may be why some of his purported syllogisms are not valid syllogisms at all**).

What is reasonable in a rhetorical universe are those things which most people, or the majority of people, or the wisest people, hold to be so. In ancient Greece the art of rhetoric was most often applied to civic affairs because it is in that realm that questions arise to which no certain answer can be given. The same is true today in all social, moral, political, and religious questions. If we could know for sure what effect our policies would have, there would be no need for debate. But we don't know, so debate and argument are our best means for examining the options and trying to convince others of our point of view.

The point is simply that what is reasonable depends on the nature of the situation or issue, the strength of the arguments and evidence that can be marshaled, the perceived character and credibility of the person making the argument, the strength of opposing arguments, the time frame within which a decision must be made, and the composition and values of those who make up the audience or decision-making body. As one or more of these elements change, the nature of what is reasonable will also change. Therefore, what is reasonable is always situation and audience dependent.

*The Craig-Rosenberg Debate*

I will now turn to the debate itself and apply the rhetorical understanding of faith, God, and reasonableness that I have just set forth to the arguments proffered by Professors Craig and Rosenberg. Many of their arguments turn on matters of nature and science. To these arguments, rhetoric has little or nothing to add, since rhetoric operates in the realm of the contingent rather than the realm of the certain or unchanging. But there are at least three arguments on each side that do have rhetorical dimensions or implications. In Professor Craig's presentation, I will discuss his arguments that 1) God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life, 2) God is the best explanation of the historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth, and 3) God can be personally known and experienced. In Professor Rosenberg's presentation, I will discuss his contention that 1) faith is belief in the absence of evidence, 2) that the testimony of the devout is no reason to believe the New Testament, and 3) that Christians should not demand that their faith be reasonable because "you will risk the loss of your faith."

Professor Craig's arguments about fine-tuning and the emergence of intelligent life on Earth have been debated for centuries, most recently by the advocates and opponents of Intelligent Design Theory. Whatever one's view of that particular theory may be, it is indisputable that there are arguments—public arguments—to be made on all sides of the issue. Such arguments are not, on their face, absurd, because they involve matters beyond the strictly scientific—matters such as school curricula, research funding, and criteria for hiring and firing.<sup>9</sup> Craig's argument, which he reduces to a formally valid syllogism, is that there are only three options for explaining why the universe has this dimension of fine tuning: physical necessity, chance, or design. Craig's argument is mildly persuasive, but only because there are so many unknowns to consider. He equates physical necessity with the laws of nature, essentially making necessity, by definition, coextensive with the laws. But an argument from definition is only as strong as the definition.

Likewise, Craig's critique of the chance argument rides on "the odds" of it being possible. But being unlikely—which it certainly seems to be—is not the same thing as being impossible.

Craig offers no positive proofs for the design argument, only negative proofs of the other two options. His case would be substantially stronger, from a rhetorical point of view, if he had introduced positive arguments, cited examples, explicated more fully what the "odds" against design are and perhaps compared those odds to a topic with which a general audience—the audience for this debate—could relate. Instead, **Craig employed an old debater's technique known as the method of residues in which the debater first sets forth the options, then systematically eliminates all but one of those options, and finally concludes that the only option left must be the truth. It is an effective debate technique, but it doesn't establish a particularly strong case for the preferred option. And this is unfortunate because there is a strong case to be made for the fine tuning of the universe by a designer.** It is a rhetorical case based both on arguments from probability and arguments from sign. That the majority of Americans still believe some version of design theory is, I believe, because the rhetorical case for design is strong.

Rosenberg's response to Craig's argument from fine tuning is even weaker than Craig's logical proof. In essence, Rosenberg begs the question at issue when he begins his rebuttal with the phrase "if these constants had been slightly different." But that is precisely the point—they were not different. They were precisely calibrated in such a manner as to support intelligent life as we know it. One can imagine all sorts of counterfactuals but that does not change the facts. Rosenberg chooses not to deal with the inconvenient facts upon which Craig's argument is based. Rosenberg's other objection—that Craig's answer implies a teleology, a purpose to the universe—is true. Throughout the debate Rosenberg maintains that science has no need of

teleology. And in a technical sense this is probably true. Scientists can pursue strictly naturalistic laws and phenomenon without, as they might call it, the God hypothesis. Yet merely because science can operate within a closed system of its own making does not necessarily mean that God does not exist. It only means that God does not exist within their system of knowing which, as Rosenberg clearly states, has defined God out of existence as a beginning proposition. Even if God did exist and was the best explanation for the phenomena under investigation, scholars like Rosenberg wouldn't recognize His existence or role in the universe because they have rejected teleology as having any explanatory value right from the outset. God could be lurking right under their microscopes and they would not recognize Him because they have already rigged the game to exclude Him as a possibility.

Craig's second argument that I wish to examine is his claim that God is the best explanation of the historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth. I agree with virtually everything Craig says under this point, but I disagree with the way he frames his claims. Craig wants to frame this argument as a contest between faith and facts. He says "most people probably think that the resurrection of Jesus is something you just accept by faith or not. But there are actually three facts recognized by the majority of historians today." But as we have already learned, the biblical concept of faith is akin to the rhetorical concept of rhetorical proof—there is a rational basis to the faith that Christians embrace. Part of that rational basis involves the three facts that Craig cites—the empty tomb, the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, and the changed attitude and actions of Jesus's disciples. But part of it also involves other rhetorical concepts such as ethos, kairos, pathos, and narratio.

Why did Jesus's disciples believe the reports of the empty tomb? Probably because they were brought back by Peter and John, the two disciples with the highest ethos among the group.

If it had only been the women who claimed the tomb was empty, they might not have believed. Likewise, the timing of Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection was, as the disciples later learned, in accordance with the Hebrew Scriptures (Matt. 1–2; Matt. 21:4; Luke 22:37; Luke 24:45–47). This was the opportune moment that God had selected since before the world was made. The resurrection happened at precisely the right time both in terms of prophecy and in terms of motivation. What had been a dejected and depressed group of disciples suddenly became an empowered and fearless group of advocates. How can one explain that? The disciples were huddled in a room and were afraid (pathos). Then the fear turned to joy. The resurrection becomes the centerpiece of the narration that will form the core of the Christian witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the Roman Empire. The story of Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection, woven together by rhetorical design and technique, becomes the vehicle for the greatest persuasive movement in the history of mankind. From a small group of disciples in AD 30 to the conversion of the Emperor and the legalization of Christianity as one of the accepted religions of the Empire in AD 313, the spread of the Christian narrative and the belief in Jesus as Lord was unlike any social, rhetorical movement at any place or any time in terms of its rapid spread and culture-changing impact.

Rosenberg's reply to Craig's argument is twofold—to compare the eyewitness testimony of the disciples with that of more recent religious movements such as Mormonism and Scientology, with the implication being that if these eye witness religions are bizarre and false—which Rosenberg clearly thinks they are—then on what basis can we believe the supposedly similar claims of Christianity. And then Rosenberg attacks eye witness testimony in general as unreliable. While we can grant Rosenberg's point about the unreliability of eyewitness testimony in general, that says nothing about the particular events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus. In

addition to the initial eyewitnesses, there is the empty tomb—something with which every anti-Christian apologist from Celsus to Porphyry has had to deal—at least one reluctant witness (Thomas), a sudden change from fear to joy, a motivation to engage in public witness, a missionary impulse, an identification with a person and a cause that far surpasses any that previously existed, and a willingness to sacrifice one's own life for that identification. How does Rosenberg explain these facts, all of which are attested by both Christian and non-Christian sources?

Craig's third argument which I wish to consider is that God can be personally known and experienced. His stance is that belief in God ought to be considered a properly basic belief. This is a philosophical concept which, if accepted, really makes argument about God superfluous, since His existence is no longer a matter of argument but a part of the basic belief structure that can be assumed. While I would not take this tack myself, I do think there is a God-consciousness in all people. As far back as human history can be traced, there is evidence of worship of one or more gods.<sup>10</sup> From where did this God-consciousness come? I can no more prove that it originates in spirit than Professor Rosenberg can prove that it originates in matter. But the fact is that it does exist.

Personal testimony is only worth as much as the credibility of the person doing the testifying in the eyes and ears of those who receive the testimony. This, too, is a rhetorical construct. The fact that 2.1 billion people across the globe profess some version of Christianity no more proves that Christianity is true than the fact that 95% of the American Academy of Science are atheists proves that unbelief is to be preferred over belief. Numbers never equate to truth and, in fact, appeal to the crowd is a well-known logical fallacy. Even so, the fact that for two millennia people have professed Jesus as Lord seems to suggest that the story touches something universal

in mankind. I do not believe that anyone can be argued into believing in God, Christ, or Christianity, although such arguments are clearly available and are, to me, persuasive. The Bible teaches that people respond to Christ only when God the Father beckons them to do so (John 6:44). It also teaches that Christianity becomes attractive only when people see love in action—love of God and love of neighbor (1 John 3:16–19; Matt. 22:37–40).

Next I turn to three arguments by Professor Rosenberg. The first of these three is his statement that faith is belief in the absence of evidence. As I hope to have shown already, this is simply a mistaken definition of Christian faith. It may be an accurate statement of faith in general, but it is not an accurate statement about Christian faith. Faith, in Christianity, is more akin to persuasive proof, and proof comes in at least four varieties—the proof that arises from the character of the speaker, the proof that arises from the emotions evoked by the speaker in the audience, the proof that arises from the rational appeal made by the speaker, and the proof that attends identification with the story or narrative told by the speaker. Christian faith draws on all four of these *pisteis* and thus always advances reasons for belief. These reasons are not, strictly speaking, logical proofs. They are psychological or rhetorical proofs and they depend for their validity on adherence by an audience.<sup>11</sup> Professor Rosenberg may not like or approve of such proofs, but the fact remains that these are the sorts of proof offered by the writers of the Bible and thus the kind of proof that must be engaged if one wishes to challenge biblical faith. To assert that Christian faith is belief without evidence is simply not true.

The second of Rosenberg's arguments that I will examine is his statement that the testimony of the devout is no reason to believe the New Testament. This argument would not be so egregious if Rosenberg had argued that the testimony of the devout is not the *only* reason to believe the New Testament. But as he has framed the argument, I must disagree. The testimony

of the devout is one reason—and a good reason—to believe the New Testament account. Why? Because the testimony was freely given, uncoerced; it was given not by one or two people, but by scores of people from all walks of life; the testimony was corroborated not only by other testimony but also by subsequent acts and events; the testimony was taken seriously by opponents of the Christians; the testimony was affirmed both by those closest in time to Jesus but also by subsequent church history and experience. According to Aristotle, testimony is a form of inartistic proof—proof that comes from outside of the speech itself. Though it is not a formal part of the art of rhetoric, it is nevertheless a kind of external proof that can be highly persuasive and that was widely used in the ancient world. Aristotle was writing about testimony about 300 years before Christ. Why should a form of proof recognized by Aristotle be viewed with such disdain?

The weightier response to Rosenberg, however, is that testimony was only one kind of proof offered to support the New Testament narrative. If all we had to go on was testimony, then Rosenberg's case would at least be plausible. Unfortunately, for him, there is much more. There are physical facts such as crucifixion as a form of capital punishment, the historical record of Pontius Pilate as procurator of Judea, the recognized practices of the Roman guards such as breaking the bones of the condemned so as to hasten death, burial in a stone tomb (of which there are still thousands today in Israel), an empty tomb with the stone rolled away, the physical appearances of Jesus attested by multiple witnesses, and, of course, the witness of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves to the death and resurrection of Jesus, Scriptures written 400 to 800 years before Jesus was even born. Professor Rosenberg can, of course, contest all of these facts. What he cannot do is claim that testimony is an illegitimate form of discourse or that it should be

totally disregarded with respect to the truth value of the New Testament. It is one—and only one—of the forms of proof offered by the writers of the New Testament.

Finally, I turn to Rosenberg’s third argument—that Christians should not demand evidence for their beliefs because to do so risks the loss of their faith. I totally disagree. Christians not only should demand evidence they should seek for it wherever it may be found. That certainly includes the realms of scientific knowledge, logical analysis, and mathematical reasoning. Christians have nothing to fear in pursuit of the truth wherever that truth may reside or through whatever methodology it may be discerned. Augustine was right when wrote that “every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord’s.”<sup>12</sup> Or, put more directly—all truth is God’s truth. It must be because He is the creator of Truth and all the minor truths that spring forth from his creative activity.

So, by all means, study science, and math, and logic. But don’t stop there. Also pursue the study of history, and literature, and classics, and rhetoric. There are truths to be discerned through the study of these subjects as well. Do not try to force the Bible or Christianity into a mold for which it was never created nor intended. The Bible is not a science text; it never claimed to be. The Bible is a testament to the work of God in history, as that work was perceived and experienced by his people. The Bible is a book of rhetorical design and strategy whose end and purpose is to testify to the mighty works of God in and among his people. Like all great works of rhetorical artistry, it utilizes myth, history, testimony, acts, events, laws, folkways, customs, mores, rites, rituals, cultural understandings, sacred texts, secular texts, community rules, literary forms and genres, and various rhetorical devices to convey its message. In the end, that’s what the Bible is—a persuasive message about the love of God extended to all humanity.

### *Conclusion*

The Craig/Rosenberg debate has touched on numerous subjects, some of them far beyond the realm of rhetoric. The realm of rhetoric is that which is contingent—that which might be other than it now is. In general, natural science falls outside of the realm of rhetoric because it deals with the laws of nature—things that cannot be other than they are (unless you're a *Star Trek* fan). Even so, there are some rhetorical dimensions to science such as the ethos of scientific authority and the mythos of scientific progress.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary rhetoricians such as Leah Ceccarelli, Alan Gross, Jeanne Fahnestock, Lawrence Prelli, and Thomas Lessl have had much to say about the rhetorical dimensions of science and their work is well worth reading. So, too, is the work of such philosophers as Steve Fuller, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Alvin Plantinga. Even science has its rhetorical aspects, but I shall leave that discussion to others more expert than myself.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how neither scientific demonstration nor formal logical analysis can account for the terms of the debate. To properly understand faith, God, and reasonableness, one needs to adopt an explicitly rhetorical framework, one that understands these terms as rhetorically inflected. So understood, we can affirm the resolution. Is faith in God reasonable? Absolutely. Can such a faith be held with certainty? No, not if by certainty one means a scientific demonstration or a formally valid logical analysis. Christian faith can, however, be held with a high degree of probability. That probability is based on such faith being persuasive, with the persuasion being grounded in the various forms of rhetorical proof discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, I would argue, Christian faith could never be anything other than rhetorically known for the simple reason that only a rhetorical invitation can be refused. There is no free will in science; no free will in the rules of the syllogism. Only a rhetorical world—a world in which persuasive reasons are offered to an audience and the audience is free either to

accept or reject that invitation—is consistent with the nature and character of God as portrayed in the Bible.

Much of a rhetorical worldview is predicated on the character of the speaker—in this case, God. The nature and character of God—and of the God/Man Jesus—is made clear in the Scriptures through rhetorical means. We come to know—and to trust—God and His Son because we have seen their character, had a personal experience of their presence and friendship, and learned to rely upon their judgment. In the process, we have listened to their words—whether in the form of the Ten Commandments or of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount—and we have come to understand the truth of their teachings. We have been touched in our inner core by the emotions that their friendship has engendered, feelings of grace, and love, and forgiveness, and humility. This is the reasonable faith I embrace and it points to the One who is called the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and the Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Random House, 1954), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *The Rhetoric*, 19.

<sup>4</sup> On the nature and requirements of a rhetorical situation see Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 1-14; Lloyd F. Bitzer, “Functional Communication: A Situational Perspective,” in *Rhetoric in Transition: Studies in the Nature and Uses of Rhetoric*, ed. Eugene E. White (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), 21-38.

<sup>5</sup> James L. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins*, 92-100.

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<sup>7</sup> Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins*, 134.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of issues related to the teaching of Intelligent Design see Francis J. Beckwith, *Law, Darwinism, and Public Education: The Establishment Clause and the Challenge of Intelligent Design* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); John Angus Campbell and Stephen C. Meyer, eds., *Darwinism, Design, and Public Education* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> On the implications of adopting a rhetorical approach to knowledge see Michael Calvin McGee and John R. Lyne, "What Are Nice Folks Like You Doing in a Place like This? Some Entailments of Treating Knowledge Claims Rhetorically," in *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs*, ed. John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 381-406.

<sup>11</sup> On the distinction between formally valid proofs and rhetorical proofs that require adherence by an audience see Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958), Bk. II, XVIII.28.

**He writes with such confidence and aplomb—until you read his objections and see how bad they are!**

### **Faith, not Reason, Underwrites the Belief in God**

*Clarke Rountree*

Rhetorical scholars have noted for more than two millennia that persuasion involves five sister arts, which are concerned with arguments and appeals (invention), effective arrangement, well-chosen words (style), an effective system for recalling content during an oral presentation (memory), and good physical presentation (delivery). In this essay I apply that framework to an analysis of the discourse of Professor Craig and Professor Rosenberg in their debate over the reasonableness of believing in God to assess their effectiveness in making their opposing cases. Generally, while Professor Craig earns high marks for organization, style, memory, and delivery, he falls short when it comes to invention, specifically in his reasoning (logos). **Because reasoned persuasion is critical to an argument, this failure of invention, in my opinion, requires a judgment that Professor Craig lost this debate.** I will begin my analysis with a brief consideration of the last four canons of classical rhetoric as employed in this exchange, as well as speaker credibility (*ethos*, one of three elements of invention), before turning to arguments and emotional appeals that are central to invention.

#### *Professor Craig's Winning Manner Trumps Professor Rosenberg*

Professor Craig was trained in public speaking at the excellent program in communication at Wheaton College, and it shows. His address was more orderly, polished, and effectively delivered than Professor Rosenberg's. He took great advantage of his position as first speaker to offer his array of eight syllogistic arguments, presented systematically on PowerPoint slides, with strong transitions that tied them together neatly. He ends his opening statement by shifting

the burden of proof to Professor Rosenberg, insisting that “he must first tear down all eight of the reasons that I presented and then in their place erect a case of his own to show why belief in God is unreasonable.” Indeed, that provocation found Professor Rosenberg reacting to these opening arguments in his own opening statement, rather than making an independent case of his own. In this off-the-cuff response, Professor Rosenberg had no opportunity to overlay a strong organizational structure on his remarks, though he did insert strong transitions to keep listeners on track (e.g., “Let’s turn to the argument from the New Testament.”). Communication scholars have noted that orderly presentations are more persuasive than those that are disorderly, so Craig enjoyed an edge in this respect.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Craig’s style and delivery supports his credibility as a speaker. He appears sincere, confident, and intelligent. He presents himself as a reasonable adherent to the Christian faith, a faith itself which invokes ideas of charity, gentility, and fairness. He makes strong eye contact with the audience, which supports perceptions of sincerity and confidence in what he says. His vocal variety supports his meaning, such as when he raised his tone and volume to express a sense of disbelief that a fellow traveler might direct at a hiker who claims that a ball found in the forest was not made but always existed. His voice remains even-tempered, even when the debate becomes heated.

Professor Rosenberg, by contrast, appears combative, incredulous, and dismissive. He partly comes across that way because he uses his initial affirmative statement as a rebuttal, **rather than providing his own argument for why we do not need God to explain the universe**. He opens by stating that

I hope you didn’t pay money to come to tonight’s debate because everything that Dr. Craig said—almost everything actually—he said many times before in many different debates

almost in the same order and all of them available on the Internet. So you didn't need to come out in this really cold night here in West Lafayette to hear these arguments again.

He charges that Professor Craig is “impervious...[to] previous discussions and criticisms” and asks whether “Dr. Craig [is] infallible or does he just not listen?,” concluding, “Probably the latter.” Although Professor Rosenberg certainly demonstrates facility with the issues at hand, the difference between his own belligerent style and the friendly demeanor of Professor Craig is striking. This may have diminished the sense that Professor Rosenberg is committed to a constructive search for answers on these difficult questions.

Professor Rosenberg speaks in a clear, forceful voice that conveys his incredulity at the positions of Professor Craig. He appears spontaneous in his comments, using a single small page with notes on both sides (as contrasted with the elaborate PowerPoint slides of Professor Craig), looks up to the audience with eye contact that reflects his cogitation, evincing thoughtfulness. He includes many more disfluencies in his speech than Professor Craig—as one might expect in impromptu remarks—with “uhs” that are occasionally distracting.

Both speakers use language that is mostly understandable and add examples to clarify points, such as Craig's ball in the woods and Rosenberg's uranium-238 example. However, Professor Rosenberg relies upon technical terms more frequently, such as his reference to “indeterministic symmetry” and “event horizon,” which are likely to leave his lay audience confused.

Professor Craig more typically appeals to commonsense, intuitive understandings, whereas Professor Rosenberg offers difficult explanations that may seem nonintuitive. For example, Professor Craig raises the problem of intentionality, dismissing published statements by Rosenberg on metaphysical naturalism with the following syllogism:

(1) If naturalism is true, I cannot think about anything.

That's because there are no intentional states. But,

(2) I am thinking about naturalism.

From which it follows that

(3) Therefore, naturalism is not true.

In response to this commonsense claim, Professor Rosenberg is left to warn this lay audience that “The problem of intentionality is a really hard problem to understand in philosophy.” Briefly, he asks: “How is it possible for one chunk of matter—my brain—to be about—intrinsically about—another chunk of matter?” Unfortunately, this is too little for a lay audience.

Generally, this sense of a commonsensical understanding of the world meshes well with Professor Craig's embodiment of the sincere, reasonable Christian, while Professor Rosenberg is relegated to the role of the erudite atheist frustrated by the challenge of explaining his complex positions and winning concessions from Professor Craig. The one exception to these contrasting roles is when Professor Craig attempts to explain the problem of evil. Professor Rosenberg gains sympathy with his reference to a family decimated by the Holocaust, to which Professor Craig responds, unsatisfyingly:

[F]or all that we know, in any world with free creatures in which there is this much good in the world, there will also be this much evil. It may not be feasible for God to actualize a world having this much good without this much evil. That doesn't mean the Holocaust is necessary. No, not at all! But it would mean that in a world in which, say, the Holocaust didn't occur, other events would have occurred that would have been comparably evil.

This “balance of good and evil” argument is hard to square with God's omnipotence, pushing Professor Craig away from his commonsense appeal.

Overall, Professor Craig had an advantage with his immediate lay audience in arrangement, style, memory, and delivery, which supported his image as a sincere and commonsensical advocate. Professor Rosenberg was well spoken, but necessarily technical in places. He came across as combative and frustrated, perhaps hurting his credibility with the audience. But, if we scrutinize the arguments of Professor Craig, we find that Professor Rosenberg's frustration is warranted. His reasoning is weak in comparison to that of his opponent. **He also sets up a straw man in attacking Professor Rosenberg's published arguments for metaphysical naturalism**—arguments that have little relevance to the debate here. In the interest of space I will skip over these arguments and turn to the primary case Professor Craig makes for God's existence.

*The Argument for a Reasonable Belief in God as an Argument from Signs*

Professor Craig offers eight arguments for God's existence, drawing upon the existence of the universe, the origin of the universe, the applicability of mathematics to the world, the fine-tuning of the universe, intentional states of consciousness, objective moral values, historical facts about Jesus, and, indirectly, subjective experiences of God. Typically, such proofs for the existence of God rely upon what rhetorical scholars call *argument from sign*. **This argument urges that one thing is an indicator of a second thing.** A typical example is, "where there is smoke, there is fire," whereby smoke becomes a sign for fire. The problem is that most signs are not infallible—where there is smoke, there might be a smoke machine (commonly used in theatrical staging). Aristotle only offered two examples of signs he considered infallible, noting: "But if someone were to state that there is a sign that someone is sick, for he has a fever, or that a woman has given birth, for she has milk, that is a necessary sign."<sup>2</sup> Arguments from sign are strengthened (1) when the connection between the sign and the thing it indicates is strong, (2) when there are multiple supporting signs, and (3) when there are few or no contrary signs.<sup>3</sup>

The argument from sign is central because the Judeo-Christian God created the universe from nothing, putting Him outside of that universe—preexisting it and not being part of it.<sup>4</sup> Even if He intervenes in this universe (e.g., talking to Moses; sending Jesus to die for the sins of humankind), He is not *of* this universe. The known laws of the universe do not apply to Him. Yet, our scientific knowledge draws from and develops theories to explain our universe, and has no means for explaining anything outside of it (other than, say, theorizing about alternative universes). Thus, none of the evidence for God can be direct evidence *of* God, but only of His “handiwork.” In Professor Craig’s arguments, this handiwork is taken as a sign of God—proof of His existence.

Professor Craig does not designate his arguments as reasoning by sign, but uses the generic term *explanation* in seven of his claims, and overlays a deductive, syllogistic form on all of them. Some of his claims about God might be characterized as causal arguments rather than arguments from sign; for example, **the claim that God is the best explanation for the origin of the universe looks like a causal argument. Causal arguments seem more substantial than arguments from sign in many cases**, because they invoke a literal connection between two things (such as the cue ball striking the eight ball, in the popular billiards illustration of causation). Signs often have complex and intangible relationships to that which they indicate (e.g., a well-made clock indicating an experienced clockmaker).

There are at least two reasons we should not see Professor Craig’s claims for God as causal arguments: **First, as I noted, God is not *of* this universe, so we cannot attribute to him properties of causation that are rooted in the way our universe functions.** (Certainly we know of no instances wherein a being in our universe could merely *say* “Let there be light!” and, POOF!, light pops into existence.) **Second, causal arguments must join together causes and effects in a**

way that the causal connection is understood. Thus, we can say, “The repeated flooding of the Nile led to great fertility of the soil in the Nile Valley.” That statement works because we understand how flooding is connected to soil fertility. Without such an understanding, we might as well say “magic (X) led to this event (Y),” which is to give no causal explanation at all.

On the other hand, the scientific challenges to Professor Craig’s claims primarily rest on causal arguments. They suggest that many of the signs he uses to indicate God actually can be explained as effects of natural processes. Those processes, which are *of this world*, fit within existing scientific understandings of the operations of those processes and thus can be treated as causal arguments. Thus, in my analysis below, I will explain how Professor Craig’s arguments from sign are structured, showing that what he takes as signs are more likely *effects of material causes explicable through scientific theories*.

Professor Craig’s arguments from sign are offered in syllogistic form, though they are not philosophical syllogisms but rhetorical syllogisms, or enthymemes, as Aristotle called them. The difference between the two is that enthymemes build arguments on probable premises, not certain premises; therefore, the conclusions they offer are only probable.[NB incorrect!] <sup>5</sup> I will show that Professor Craig bases his claims about the existence of God on signs that not only are fallible, but weak.

It is notable that the enthymematic form itself has a rhetorical appeal. As Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olybrechts-Tyteca note in *The New Rhetoric*, arguments that take the form of syllogisms or of mathematical proofs gain apparent potency because of their “quasi-logical” form.<sup>6</sup> Thus, because Professor Craig presents eight distinct enthymemes in an orderly manner and draws on the appeal of quasi-logical form, his case appears stronger than it otherwise would appear. The actual strength of those arguments, however, depends upon the strength of the

premises from which these enthymemes are constructed and the reasoning in reaching conclusions.

The first seven of Craig's enthymemes are offered to support conclusions which begin with the phrase, "God is the best explanation of..." followed by some sign of "God's handiwork" that supposedly indicates Him. The "best explanation" caveat acknowledges that there are other ways to explain the things that are taken as signs of God, but urges that the assumption of God's existence beats all other explanations. In short, given the rhetorical character of his argument and the sign-based reasoning he uses, **Professor Craig is not arguing that** existence, the origin of the universe, the applicability of mathematics to the world, the fine-tuning of the universe, intentional states of consciousness, objective moral values, and Jesus's "historical" resurrection **are infallible signs of God, but rather good signs of God.** Such relative arguments require Craig to show that competing ways of accounting for these facts *qua* signs are incomplete, flawed, or at least less compelling than the assumption that God had a hand in shaping the universe, hence his frequent reference to the weaknesses of scientific arguments that would provide alternative explanations of these signs.

Professor Craig insists that all eight enthymemes he offers in support of God's existence must be refuted by his opponent for his position to be defeated. But this claim is overstated, since the arguments presented on both sides are merely arguments from probability. **Instead of thinking of these enthymematic arguments as unique and independent confirmations of God's existence until defeated, we should think of them as** having *weight* in considering the evidence and arguments for his claim about God's existence and, therefore, of the reasonableness of believing in Him. The fact that Professor Craig offers multiple signs of God does strengthen his case, but not enough to carry his argument.

*A Critique of Professor Craig's Arguments for a Reasonable Belief in God*

The weakest enthymemes offered by Professor Craig are those where the facts *qua* signs that are invoked as indicators of God are themselves unsubstantiated. This is analogous to claiming “I see smoke, so there must be fire,” when there is no smoke, but only fog. One example of this factual error is proposition 7, that “God is the best explanation of the historical facts about Jesus of Nazareth,” especially His resurrection from the dead. The argument is straightforward enough: If Jesus was crucified and died, yet He was raised from the dead, as attested by many witnesses, then that would be a miracle. Indeed, it would be a miracle, defying our understanding of biological death—at least for the days of primitive medicine when there was no defibrillator or other means to bring back one whose heart had stopped beating. Such a miracle would suggest that extraordinary forces were involved, perhaps God.

Craig's enthymeme here builds upon the major premise that it is an *historical fact* that Jesus died and was resurrected. He supports this historical fact characterization by claiming that “the majority of historians today” recognize that Jesus died, was resurrected, and appeared to witnesses. Later he limits that claim to “the majority of historians who have investigated these documents [i.e., the Gospels].” In the second rebuttal, he limits this claim further to the “majority of New Testament historians.” Craig offers no survey of historians or other support for this broad claim and, like Professor Rosenberg, I question the neutrality of New Testament historians, who most typically come from schools of theology where belief in the resurrection is assumed or required.

David Hume thought it unreasonable to believe in miracles because they are at odds with our own personal experience of the world; he would hold that first-hand knowledge is superior to the second-hand knowledge of testimony.<sup>7</sup> One of the most popular rhetorical scholars of the

eighteenth century, George Campbell—a minister, as were many modern rhetoricians—challenged Hume by insisting that what he called *concurrent testimony* could be even more compelling than direct experience.<sup>8</sup> *Concurrent testimony*, given by more than one non-colluding eyewitness, is extremely reliable, he insists, because “[t]he probability arises purely from the concurrence itself. That such a concurrence should spring from chance is as one to infinite; that is, in other words, morally impossible. If therefore concert be excluded, there remains no other cause but the reality of the fact.”<sup>9</sup>

With respect to miracles, Campbell holds that “[t]estimony is capable of giving us absolute certainty...even of the most miraculous fact, or of what is contrary to uniform experience.”<sup>10</sup>

While Campbell has a point, he apparently did not understand that Paul and the Gospel writers (1) were not direct witnesses to the resurrection, (2) that they wrote about the resurrection years after it allegedly occurred, and (3) that the later Gospel writers had access to the work of earlier Gospel writers, and probably a collection of sayings scholars call the *Q*, so they had plenty of chances to act in “concert” in offering testimony regarding the miraculous resurrection of Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

Outside the gospels, there is almost no ancient source of information on an historical Jesus. As Professor Rush Rhees noted almost a century ago: “Our knowledge of Christianity rests almost wholly upon writings by His own disciples. Strictly contemporary records there are none; and the references in secular and Jewish history are late and meager.”<sup>12</sup> No archeological finds since then have provided historical support for Jesus’s resurrection.<sup>13</sup> In short, **the testimony supporting the historical death and resurrection of Christ**—offered by Paul, offered by the gospel writers, preserved by the early Church Fathers who selected those gospels, and touted by New Testament historians—is **not disinterested and objective**, but rather the word of those who seek

to push the view that Jesus was God’s only son. History that relies on the very biblical sources used to propagate the faith cannot be the basis for reliable claims of fact about Jesus. Therefore, Craig’s seventh proposition, which uses such shaky facts to claim that God must have had a hand in Jesus’s resurrection, is extremely weak on historical grounds. His “sign” is empty.

Professor Craig’s sixth enthymeme suffers the same problem of assuming something not established. He claims: “God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties in the world.” While Professor Rosenberg counters that there are ethical systems that establish objective moral values (e.g., Kant), and that is a sufficient answer to Professor Craig’s contention, I do not believe we have to concede even that much. **I deny the existence of objective moral values if by “existence” he means that they can be located outside of the particular human communities** who profess them, brooding like some external Platonic “forms.”<sup>14</sup> Professor Craig says that such moral values “impose themselves and are objectively binding and true.” It is not clear what it means for a value to be “objectively binding”—that it can be easily applied, that it is widely recognized as true, that it must be followed?

It is certainly not the case that such “objective” values have been universally followed throughout history. The Romans did not hold back from slaughtering innocents as in the example Professor Craig references, nor did Hitler. For that matter, the Old Testament recounts killings of innocent children *in the name of God* or *on His orders* (e.g., Ezekiel 9:5-7) —a potent problem for He to whom Professor Craig attributes the establishment of an objective moral order. Nevertheless, I do agree that there are basic values that seem generally to have prevailed over much of human history; but, like Professor Rosenberg, I would point to the evolutionary advantages of embracing such values, making their near universality less a product of God’s hand, than of simple survival.<sup>15</sup>

Professor Craig's first five enthymemes feature signs of God that equally could be signs of natural processes or of human adaptation. God is signified, he argues, by existence, by the fact that the universe had a beginning, by the fine-tuning of the universe, by the applicability of mathematics to the world, and by intentional states of consciousness in humans. The last claim is the easiest to dismiss. **If intentional states of consciousness are evolutionarily advantageous, then Darwin provides a good explanation of their existence.** It appears that human evolution from animal forms with greater natural defenses (e.g., the strength and mobility of our Orangutan cousins) to physically weaker but smarter forms was facilitated by early humans' ability to make tools, which intentional states support (e.g., planning the construction of weapons). Planning for hunting, for relocating to greener pastures in hunter-gatherer days, for sharing child-rearing, and, later, for raising crops, all require "intentional states of consciousness." Although the origin of consciousness through biological evolution is mysterious, it is not so mysterious as to require a supernatural "consciousness-bestower." The inadequacy of science, at a given time, to fully explain every conundrum in the universe is no reason to run to a theistic alternative. There have been plenty of problems throughout history that science has grappled with for long periods, with theology filling in the breach, only to eventually yield a scientific account.<sup>16</sup> There is no reason to believe that, at the very least, the physical elements required for consciousness will not be understood.

The fine-tuning of the universe as a sign of God might be framed with this question: "Was the universe made for us (by God), or were we made *by* the universe?" If we were made *by* the universe, as science holds, then it is not surprising that we fit well with the conditions that gave birth to humankind—indeed all life on earth. Does Professor Craig imagine an alternative for human existence? Is it imaginable that intelligent life might have come into consciousness in a

hostile environment, where the air was unbreathable, the water undrinkable, the sun too hot to bear, plant life nonexistent, the law of gravity suspended? What kind of story would we have of such an existence? None of course, because *that intelligent life would not survive to tell the tale!*<sup>17</sup>

Professor Rosenberg smartly observes that to think the universe was finely tuned *for us* is “carbon chauvinism”; that, indeed, intelligent life could have (and perhaps already has) been built by evolutionary processes upon other elements. Indeed, it is quite reasonable to believe that, given the enormity of the universe and the mounting evidence of other planets in it, that other, very different forms of life might be out there. A simple argument from statistical probability supports the idea that there is life on other planets.<sup>18</sup>

The applicability of mathematics to the world that Professor Craig takes as another sign of God, is analogous to the previous argument, except that in this case, it is not evolution that made the adaptations, but humans. Mathematics would not have been developed in the first place if it did not *work* in this world. (It is true that the abstract mathematics that fascinates scholars today may have little relation to the universe, as mathematicians spin out the implications of their symbolizing<sup>19</sup>; but that is true of many fields, including metaphysics and theology.) There is a connection between mathematics and the universe in astronomy that is impressive; but the “fit” we find there is made possible by the regularity that physical laws create in the universe, and mathematics is all about regularity.<sup>20</sup>

The ultimate issue in the argument for God is the question of existence and, more narrowly, of the origin of the universe. The most primitive of religions often deal with why we, and everything else, is here. There seems to be a near universal presumption against existence, absent a cause. Humans always seem to have asked, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

Without shifting this burden against existence, it would be easy to explain being and its origin: “There was no origin; existence always was. Existence is the default, not the exception.” Under this assumption, we need not strain to explain existence because existence is the “natural” state of things. Indeed, it seems that the Big Bang Theory, starting as it does with some “cosmic egg”—which is something, and not nothing—endorses eternal existence. The caveat is simply that *the universe as we know it* did not exist. **But, that does not mean that energy and/or matter (which are interchangeable) did not preexist our universe; rather, our universe became a unique conversion of that energy/matter into the form we recognize today.**<sup>21</sup>

Rhetorical scholar Kenneth Burke has argued that human symbol-using is shaped by a remarkable construct: the negative.<sup>22</sup> There are no negatives in nature—everything positively is what it is. The negative gives us the ability not only to speak of what is, but also of what is not. That allows us to imagine, and speak about, our universe not existing. The negative certainly opens the door to imagining our universe as not existing, of there being a time when nothingness reigned. So, at least linguistically, we have a clue for why humans might question existence, though it is not clear that we need to do so.

Professor Craig builds on our assumption that there was nothing before there was something. He offers a new version of the old clock theory to draw an analogy that supports origins as a sign of God. But his analogy loads the dice with respect to this argument over origins, speaking of some hikers finding a ball in the woods and wondering where it came from. He has a skeptical hiker say: “Just forget about it! It just exists inexplicably!” Now, because a ball is a *manufactured object*, this analogy is a bad one. No one sees a manufactured object and believes it has no origin; rather they assume a manufacturer. **So, Professor Craig has set up a straw man in the skeptical hiking partner, suggesting that doubters (like me) are so extreme that we would not**

assume a creator even for an obviously manufactured object. Of course the universe is natural, not manufactured. The Creator, if there is one, was making rocks and trees and stars, not Louisville Sluggers and baseballs.

Beyond this specious argument, the larger problem with the “God as first cause” position is quite simple—it creates a bigger problem than it solves. After we learn that God created the universe, we naturally should ask: Where did God come from? Now the answer that God is eternal makes him as problematic as a universe whose origins we are trying to explain. Moreover, it seems like a tougher argument to explain the existence of an eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving being than the existence of a material universe that gave birth to much less impressive sentient beings. Why should we take on more than is necessary, as Ockham might ask, if it is not needed to explain the universe?

Professor Craig’s final argument, that God can be personally known and experienced, is not offered as an argument for God’s existence. However, Professor Craig suggests that such subjective experiences of God provide a non-reasoned avenue for learning of the existence of God. Now let me say as someone raised in the South, who attended a Baptist church during my adolescence, and who has been exposed to all sorts of evangelical believers, I do not doubt that a large number of Christians believe they have experienced what they call the “Living Christ.” Such experience ranges from those who look at the beauties of Nature and see God’s hand, to those who read the Bible and see it speaking to their lives and moral choices, to those who modestly attribute “that little voice [of moral counsel] in my head” to Jesus, to those who fall on the ground and speak in tongues, believing God has given them a secret language to speak His truths. In short, I concede that plenty of Christians (and other believers in God) truly believe there is a God and that they have some kind of connection to Him. The *idea* of God is a potent

rhetorical force behind the *belief* in God. The *wish* for such a wise, powerful, loving “father” or “companion” is strong. The *hope* that He has reserved a place after life where there is no pain and we can be reunited with our loved ones is compelling.

*A Reasonable Belief in God?*

In the face of such powerful *pathos* appeals in Christianity—promising that your life has a plan laid out by a beneficent creator, that you never have to die, that you will be reunited with your loved ones—it is time to ask whether it is *reasonable* to believe in God.<sup>23</sup> Typically, we like to distinguish appeals to reason (Aristotle’s *logos*) from appeals to emotion (Aristotle’s *pathos*), suggesting that the former leads to reasonable beliefs, whereas the latter simply distracts us from reason with pleasant or painful provocations. Although rhetorical scholars have long noted that values, and their attendant emotional attachments, are implicated in the most rational of discourses,<sup>24</sup> Christian rhetoric offers some of the most powerful emotional appeals one can imagine (e.g., eternal bliss versus eternal torture). That is not to say that *pathos* is the sole motivator for believers.

If you were to ask someone on the street in the United States, “Is it reasonable to believe in God?” you are likely to get a resounding “Yes.” Most Americans—indeed most people in the world—believe in God. To say that it is unreasonable to believe in God would be to say that a huge majority of people are unreasonable. I do not believe that to be the case, though that is not the same as my saying that Professor Craig won the debate on this issue. Reasonableness here turns on what kind of scrutiny one is able and willing to give to arguments of this sort, as I explain below. My assessment is that Professor Craig lost the debate, despite being the more polished and strategic debater in this instance, for the reasons I have stated above. So how can I reject Professor Craig’s arguments while holding that it is possible for Christian beliefs to be

reasonable? That requires me to draw some distinctions between different kinds of reasonable belief and the sorts of assumptions with which they begin.

Kenneth Burke argues that one of the most powerful rhetorical appeals developed by Christians is Augustine's doctrine, *fides quaerens intellectum*, which holds that Christians should *begin* with faith in God, *then* seek understanding of God and the world He created. Burke uses Augustine's doctrine to illustrate how *terministic screens* operate—words or phrases that direct your attention towards some things, away from others things, and effectively think for you.<sup>25</sup> If you begin with a term and search out its implications, “logologically,” as he puts it, then it leads you to particular conclusions. Thus, if you start with *God* as a key term (of thinking and speaking), then look for *signs* of God, then you are likely to find them. A person brought up in a church to believe in and never question God, to see Nature as a work of God, to interpret the “voice in my head” as the voice of God (rather than a secular “conscience”), and to imagine a life eternal without pain is likely to cling to that belief unless something shakes it. Burke allows that *recalcitrance* in the world can provide resistance to following out the implications of our symbol using, as we “bump into” things that challenge our symbolizing.<sup>26</sup> Someone who believes himself an invincible Nietzschean “superman” will get a rude awakening if an assailant hits him over the head with a billy club. And, indeed, some people who believe in God may run into an evil that shakes their faith. (A man I knew for decades, a life-long Christian and a pillar of his church, expressed his doubts about God's existence after his wife died.) I agree with Professor Rosenberg that the problem of evil poses one of the biggest challenges to monotheistic belief. It provides a kind of recalcitrance that can shake the foundations of one's belief in a benevolent deity.

I am not suggesting that Christians are dupes who are not wise to the world. Rather, I am suggesting that their faith leads them not to question their belief in God. Indeed, I would go so far to say that, when the world does not undermine their faith, they are fairly incurious and close-minded with respect to arguments against God. Churches do not generally encourage a search for evidence in favor of God—they presume God exists, taking it as a matter of common knowledge (after all, most people in the world believe as well), and are taken aback to learn that someone is a non-believer. (Many believers in the audience no doubt viewed Professor Rosenberg as some kind of exotic specimen for this reason, hurting his ability to connect with them.) In my experience, churches do very little by way of explaining the historical evidence for biblical “truths,” the process by which the Gospels were constructed (including who actually wrote them), or the metaphysical arguments that have been offered in support of God’s existence. Indeed, the antagonism of some Protestant denominations towards the Catholic Church leads them to stunning ignorance about its role in the founding of Christianity as a viable religion, the preservation of sacred texts, the elimination of what most today would consider “heretical” doctrines regarding Jesus’s nature, and so forth. I have had students who were Protestants ask me if Catholics are Christians! I have seen Protestant churches with signs claiming: “Founded in 33 A.D.”<sup>27</sup>

In the absence of such education in Christian churches and “Sunday schools,” it is unsurprising that few Christians seek evidence for their beliefs. That may seem strange since their eternal souls rest on such beliefs. On the other hand, I take my life into my own hands every day when I drive a car, but I cannot explain the reasons why the rubber tires on my car don’t explode from the heat and force of starting, stopping, turning, and running at seventy miles per hour. I am not a physicist, but my life depends on the physics of tires “working.” You can say

that I am incurious and close-minded about something so crucial to my life; but, like most people, I take for granted that they are safe.

In addition to a lack of curiosity, most Christians (and other people as well) lack the knowledge to critically assess the arguments over God's existence. I seriously doubt that many people in the live audience of this debate between Professor Craig and Professor Rosenberg, who overwhelmingly "voted" that Professor Craig had won the exchange, have the background to thoughtfully weigh the arguments involving all the philosophical, scientific, and historical claims put forward by each side. Indeed, I heard not a single gasp at the outrageous claim that Professor Craig made about the historicity of Jesus's resurrection. Professor Rosenberg's arguments probably fell flat with this audience first, because those in the audience were undoubtedly predominantly Christians and, second, because few probably had the background (philosophical, scientific, or historical) to appreciate the arguments that he was making. For example, the denial of causation with the uranium-238 example needed greater explanation, though this forum does not promote that kind of lengthy exposition.

On the other hand, I believe that those who are curious, open-minded, reason-demanding people, who have a sufficient background to study the issues debated here, cannot reasonably believe in God, for the reasons I have stated above.<sup>28</sup> I agree with Professor Rosenberg that Professor Craig's arguments are weak and that existing scientific and historical explanations account for the signs that Professor Craig urges as indicators of God. That is not to say that there are not problems with scientific explanations of such matters, particularly the origins of the universe. But science is not trying to *prove* there is not a God; it is trying to figure out how natural processes work. Religion, in order to be religion, has to start with God and end with God; evidence that runs contrary to that belief must be dismissed or explained by theism's endless

supply of mysteries—such as Professor Craig’s insistence that God may be required to balance good and evil in the world. Such mysteries do not let in the light of reason. *God* is the ultimate terministic screen.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> McCroskey, James C., and R. Samuel Mehrley, "The Effects of Disorganization and Nonfluency on Attitude Change and Source Credibility," *Speech Monographs* 36.1 (1969): 13.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit., trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43 (I.2.18).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Thomas A. Hollihan and Kevin T. Baaske, *Arguments and Arguing: The Products and Process of Human Decision Making*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press), 102-103.

<sup>4</sup> Spinoza, of course, made God and the universe one, as others have done. Here I am dealing with the orthodox Christian view.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 45 (1959): 399-408.

<sup>6</sup> Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1969), 193-95.

<sup>7</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 114-16.

<sup>8</sup> George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer (1850; reprint, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963), 54-56.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1999), 80-82.

<sup>12</sup> President Rush Rhees, "Did Jesus Ever Live?" *The Biblical World*, 37.2 (Feb. 1912): 80-87.

<sup>13</sup> The Gnostic Gospels, first discovered in 1945 in Nag Hammadi in Egypt, are not contemporaneous with Jesus, though some may have been translations of texts written a generation after Jesus's death. See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny that there are ethical systems that can be systematically applied in most situations, such as utilitarianism or Kant’s categorical imperative. But even with these two examples, we certainly can choose to follow one and not the other, yielding different ethical requirements.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Frans de Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism among the Primates* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), which argues that ethical behavior can be found in primates and is the result of evolution.

<sup>16</sup> Among these are our alleged centrality in the universe (knocked out by Copernicus), our alleged angelic natures that put us far above animals (knocked out by Darwin), and the visions of the Oracle at Delphi (now explained by gases seeping up through the rock on the site of that ancient center of prophecy—see John Roach, “Delphic Oracle’s Lips May Have Been Loosened by Vapors,” *National Geographic News*, August 14, 2001, accessed May 11, 2013, [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/08/0814\\_delphioracle.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/08/0814_delphioracle.html)).

<sup>17</sup> This argument is typically referred to as the Weak Anthropic Principle.

<sup>18</sup> For analysis of why the likelihood of life on other planets is rising, see Conrad A. Istock, “Life on Earth and Other Planets: Science and Speculation,” *Journal of Cosmology* 5 (2010): 890-96.

<sup>19</sup> See Professor Rosenberg’s reference to the many non-Euclidean geometries in noting the mathematics of the unfitting.

<sup>20</sup> Chaos theory, which has gained ground in recent years, is an odd exception, though even here the *expectation* of chaos in complex systems itself becomes a new kind of regularity.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing*, Kindle edition (New York: Free Press, 2012). Although Krauss refers to “nothing” in his title, his book shows that this “nothing” is actually a complicated something, with virtual particles that pop in and out of existence in the strange world of quantum mechanics.

<sup>22</sup> See Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 9-13.

<sup>23</sup> Professor Craig does not rely on such appeals here, save a short statement about the benefits of his personal faith during his closing. However, they are lurking in the background of such discussions and are powerful appeals to the faithful.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Richard M. Weaver, “Language is Sermonic,” in *Language is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric*, eds. Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 201-26.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 47. See also *Conversations with Kenneth Burke* [videotaped interview] (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 1986): 0:23-0:25 (time index code).

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 255-61.

<sup>27</sup> This claim is associated with the Church of Christ.

<sup>28</sup> It is possible that other, better arguments for God might be offered to challenge my general claim here, though the history of theological argument has largely boiled down to many of the key contentions restated by Professor Craig.

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## REPLY TO OUR RESPONDENTS

“Thank you!” to our respondents for their comments on the debate! Many of them have sought, not so much to evaluate the debate, as to extend it, and I’m grateful for the stimulus of their remarks.

*Interpretation of the Question*

As the affirmative speaker, it was my responsibility to frame the question under debate. Like Drange and McGrew, I took the question to mean: Is it reasonable to believe that God exists? Thus I am not concerned with faith as Stenger represents it. In order to justify an affirmative answer to the question, I did not have to show that God exists. I had only to show that a person who believes that God exists can be reasonable in so doing (even if it should turn out that he is wrong!). Thus the question--which was not, *pace* Drange, chosen by me--placed upon me a very light burden of proof.

I chose not to define the term “God” but took it to refer to that entity which is implied by my arguments, just as in set theory the key term “set” is not defined but is taken to be that entity characterized by the axioms. So in the end God turns out to be the metaphysically necessary Creator and Designer of the universe who is the locus of absolute goodness and has revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth.

*Case for the Affirmative*

As several respondents observe, my statement of the arguments is frustratingly sketchy. They are but the tip of the iceberg. Readers wanting to go deeper should look, for example, at the discussions in *The Blackwell Companion for Natural Theology*.

Medhurst has completely misunderstood me in taking me to claim that my arguments show with certainty that God exists.<sup>1</sup> I have consistently said that a good deductive argument is one which meets three conditions: (1) the logical inferences are valid; (2) the premises are true; and (3) the premises are, in light of the evidence, more plausible than their negations. So I do not take the arguments’ premises to be certain but simply more plausible than not. I use the deductive formulation because of its simplicity and clarity, but as McGrew notes, these same arguments can be recast as inferences to the best explanation (like my seventh). Since the arguments’ logic is impeccable, the only question remaining is whether it is more plausible to think that their premises are true rather than false. If, as Ruse says, it is “not unreasonable” to think so, then it follows logically that it is reasonable to think so.

## Why Anything at All Exists

McGrew’s discussion of this argument is the most philosophically informed of the responses, and I commend its study to our readers. Note that the argument does not, *pace* Rountree, assume that there was nothing before there was something. We may ask why an eternal universe exists rather than nothing. Drange’s questions, “Why claim that

every contingent thing must have an explanation?” and “Why couldn’t a contingent thing come into existence uncaused?” are implicitly addressed by Taylor’s illustration on p. \*\*\* Rountree is wrong in thinking that Taylor’s illustration depends upon the ball’s being manufactured; we could have asked instead why a tree or a rock exists at that place. Does Drange or Rountree think that a rock needs no explanation of its existence? Do they think that merely increasing the size of the rock does anything to provide or remove the need for an explanation of its existence? Is the person who answers “No” being unreasonable?

I did not discuss the alternative that the universe is a metaphysically necessary being, since I knew that Rosenberg does not believe such a thing. Indeed, I can’t think of any contemporary atheist who believes such a thing. But I have elsewhere defended the argument against this alternative.<sup>2</sup>

The argument implies the existence of a metaphysically necessary being which is cause of the existence of the universe. Mathematical objects are putative examples of metaphysically necessary beings; but they do not stand in causal relations, as noted in my next argument. Here I give what I take to be a very persuasive argument as to why this cause must be a personal agent, namely, only the existence of an agent endowed with libertarian freedom of the will suffices to explain the production of a contingent effect from a metaphysically necessary cause. An impersonal, necessarily existing cause would produce its effects necessarily (or not all).

At this point Drange and Ruse throw up their hands in exasperation, claiming that the idea of a timeless person is incoherent. This response was fascinating to me because for eleven years during the 1990s the focus of my research was the relationship between God and time. I know the literature like the back of my hand, and I can confidently say that I know of no argument that demonstrates that timelessness and personhood are logically incompatible properties. The objection is based either on properties that are not essential to personhood or else on properties that can be possessed non-temporally.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it is not incumbent upon the theist to hold that God is timeless. When in this context I speak of transcending space and time, I mean *physical* space and time. I agree with Isaac Newton that metaphysical time, God’s time, is distinct from the *physical measures* of time which feature in various theories of physics. Most theist philosophers do not take God to be metaphysically timeless, even though he transcends our physical measures of time. My own studied view is that God is timeless sans creation and in time from the moment of creation, so that God exists right now, is causally active in his creation, and changes in various ways (like knowing what time it is). I have yet to see a demonstration of the incoherence of this view.

Thus, *pace* Ruse, we do not need to choose between the biblical conception of God and the Greek conception of God. Both traditions have something to contribute, and therefore, as Thomas Morris nicely put it, we may take God to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm. Because God is metaphysically necessary, absolute nothingness is, as Drange says, impossible, and God is the ultimate reality.

## The Origin of the Universe

Stenger is the key respondent here, since Drange and Rountree obviously have no profound understanding of cosmology. But Stenger errs in thinking that in order for this argument to be a good one its proponent must prove that a beginningless universe is *impossible*. As cosmologist Sean Carroll reminds us, “science isn’t in the business of proving things. Rather, science judges the merits of competing models in terms of their simplicity, clarity, comprehensiveness, and fit to the data. Unsuccessful theories are never disproven, as we can always concoct elaborate schemes to save the phenomena; they just fade away as better theories gain acceptance.”<sup>4</sup> Cosmological models without a beginning fail those very tests that Carroll is describing. Sure, we can concoct elaborate schemes to save them; but that only serves to underline their implausibility.

Past-eternal inflationary scenarios are excluded precisely by the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem which I mentioned. In the paper I cited Vilenkin shows *by name* why the Aquirre-Gratton and Carroll-Chen models cannot be past eternal. (You can watch a very accessible presentation of this paper on YouTube.<sup>5</sup>) It’s a pity that Stenger did not quote the full text of the letter from Vilenkin, which is fortunately available on the web:

You can evade the theorem by postulating that the universe was contracting prior to some time. . . . This sounds as if there is nothing wrong with having contraction prior to expansion. But the problem is that a contracting universe is highly unstable. Small perturbations would cause it to develop all sorts of messy singularities, so it would never make it to the expanding phase.<sup>6</sup>

Such models cannot therefore be past-eternal. What Stenger portrays in Figs. 4.1 and 4.3 is not a past-eternal universe but rather in each case two universes emerging from a common point of origin (as betrayed by the arrows of time in Fig. 4.3).

It’s hard to understand how any unprejudiced observer would not agree that the proposition *the universe began to exist* is more plausible in light of the evidence than the proposition *the universe did not begin to exist*. As Vilenkin says, *all* the evidence we have supports the former; indeed, I am not aware of *any* evidence for the latter proposition.

As for those who say that the universe popped into being without a cause, we should simply respond, “I see. So you’re O.K. with magic?” See McGrew’s essay for a salutary reminder of the irrelevance of quantum mechanics to the causal premise. In quantum mechanics we *never* get something from nothing. As for my argument for the personhood of the first cause, we can think of this as an inference to the best explanation. If someone has another explanation besides an abstract object or a mind, he is welcome to add it to the pool of live explanatory options, and we shall have to consider it. But it is not an explanation simply to assert that there may be some unknown explanation! Although Drange *asserts* that science has shown that minds cannot exist independently of brains, this is in fact untrue, since at most science can demonstrate that mental states are *correlated* with brain states in organisms. And although Drange *asserts* that

simultaneous causation by an intentional agent is incomprehensible, he does not offer any argument.<sup>7</sup> What could be more perspicuous than that the moment of God's creating the universe is the moment at which the universe comes into being?

### The Applicability of Mathematics to the Physical World

The applicability of mathematics to the physical world is one of the central questions in the philosophy of mathematics. It's therefore surprising how blasé our non-theistic respondents are about the question (well, on second thought, maybe not!). I'm gratified that at least Kaita has a keen appreciation of the problem. Drange, Stenger, and Rountree all seem to take an anti-realist or fictionalist view of mathematics. Fictionalism might explain why we can use mathematics profitably to describe the physical universe; but what it cannot do is explain why the physical universe is imbued with such a rich mathematical structure in the first place.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the universe had to have *some* mathematical structure (though couldn't the world have been a structureless chaos?); but that structure might have been describable by elementary arithmetic, *e.g.*, one thing and another thing make two things. But modern physics shows the physical world to be breathtakingly mathematically complex. For example, when Einstein was struggling to craft his General Theory of Relativity, he had first to go to a mathematician and learn tensor calculus before he could advance further to formulate an adequate theory of gravitation.

My claim is that this rich mathematical structure makes much more sense on theism than on atheism. On atheism it is just happenstance that the physical world is imbued with this rich mathematical structure. By contrast, on theism, as the ancient Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria saw, God has in mind a mathematical structure on which he chooses to construct the world. That explains why the world has such a structure and thus why mathematics is so effective in discovering truths about the physical world. Theism clearly seems to enjoy the explanatory advantage here.<sup>9</sup>

### The Fine-Tuning of the Universe for Intelligent Life

Again, let's focus on Stenger's critique.<sup>10</sup> Stenger's objections to the fine-tuning argument have been the subject of devastating criticisms by astrophysicist Luke Barnes and philosopher Robin Collins.<sup>11</sup> Some of the examples of fine-tuning examined by Collins include the cosmological constant, gravity, and the initial low entropy state of the universe. Stenger's response to the low entropy condition (*viz.*, that the universe had maximal entropy for an object that small) gets things "completely backwards," contradicting the standard Bekenstein-Hawking formula. His claim that the fine-tuning of gravity is explicable on the basis of the small masses of elementary particles "does not explain the fine-tuning but merely transfers it elsewhere." Similarly, Stenger never addresses the question why the universe has the right laws to make the cosmological constant fall into the tiny life-permitting range. Collins concludes, "The above cases of fine-tuning alone. . . show that the issue of fine-tuning is not likely to be resolved by a future physics. . . . The cases of fine-tuning are multiple and diverse, so even if one

cannot be certain of any given piece of evidence, together they provide a compelling case for an extraordinarily fine-tuned universe.”<sup>12</sup>

Remember: fine-tuning concerns only universes governed by our *same* laws of nature but with different values of the fundamental constants and quantities, so that physicists can predict the disastrous consequences that would ensue were these values to be appreciably changed. Most physicists recognize the fact of fine-tuning, and the remaining question is how it is best to be explained.

Stenger seems to hold out for chance. But in the absence of a World Ensemble the odds of fine-tuning are too small for fine-tuning to be plausibly explained by chance as opposed to design. Stenger’s comment, “He has no way of knowing that. . . . Perhaps the range of possible values of all the parameters is so great that even events with infinitesimal probabilities can happen” is baffling. The point is that the life-permitting range of values is incomprehensibly tiny compared to the range of physically possible values, so that even though universes finely-tuned for embodied, intelligent agents are *possible*, a dart randomly thrown at the range of universes would in all likelihood not hit one. That’s why multiverse proponents think that a World Ensemble must exist if chance is to account for fine-tuning. But as I explained, those who appeal to the World Ensemble hypothesis face the seemingly impossible task of proving that the majority of observable worlds are finely-tuned worlds, such that an observable world randomly selected from the Ensemble would be a finely-tuned one.

McGrew is right that for design to be taken as the best explanation we need to show that the design hypothesis faces no comparable defeaters. This I was prepared to do, had my opponent brought them up. But he didn’t.

#### Intentional States of Consciousness

We have here an exceedingly powerful argument for theism, since Rosenberg agrees that on naturalism states of intentionality do not exist, which is patently false. His claim that intentionality is an illusion is self-refuting, for an illusion is *itself* an intentional state. An illusion is an illusion *of* something. Hence, intentionality can’t be an illusion because to have an illusion of intentionality is to be in an intentional state.

In his two comments on this argument, Drange appeals in both cases to “thoughts” which are about things. But thoughts are the very intentional states whose existence is in dispute on naturalism. What Drange needs to show is that brains in the one case and abstract objects like propositions in the second case can be about or of things independently of minds. That he does not even try to do. Neither does Rountree, whose comments reveal that he doesn’t even understand the problem posed by intentionality for naturalism.

Of course, the atheist can try to avoid the problem by rejecting naturalism in favor of atheistic mind-body dualism. But that would be a spooky atheism, indeed! The problem for the atheist is well-captured by Ruse’s candid admission, “If I were pressed I

would probably say that I am a dualist, but then if I were pressed further I would probably say that one cannot be a dualist.” In contrast to atheism, on theism “consciousness and intentionality are built into reality on the ground floor,” to borrow McGrew’s phrase. Theism thus provides a better explanatory context for intentional states of consciousness.

### Objective Moral Values and Duties

Ruse is the key respondent here, since in my debates on the moral argument I have so often cited him in support of the premise that if God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist. The casual reader might think that in his response Ruse is affirming moral objectivity, when in fact all he affirms is that there are objective causes of the delusion among humans that there are objective moral values and duties. It is, as he says, “part of our biology.” That’s why the delusion is so persistent.

The fact that there are secular ethical theories which affirm the objectivity of moral values and duties proves nothing. For the question is the explanatory adequacy and, hence, the truth of such theories. In the absence of some ontological ground for moral values and duties, such theories’ affirmation of moral objectivity hangs in the air. Why think, for example, that, on atheism, bringing about the flourishing of sentient life or of *homo sapiens* on this planet is objectively good or that these relatively advanced primates actually have moral obligations and prohibitions to fulfill? As Rosenberg recognizes, such claims are groundless and arbitrary on naturalism.

So do objective moral values and duties exist? I see no reason to deny our moral experience that they do. As Louise Antony so succinctly put it in our debate, “Any argument for moral skepticism is going to be based upon premises which are less obvious than the reality of objective moral values themselves.” Therefore one can never be justified in being a moral skeptic.

Drange, like Rosenberg, should be ashamed of himself, trotting out the tired, old Euthyphro dilemma, which, as McGrew notes, has been superseded by the work of Divine Command theorists like Robert Adams, William Alston, and Philip Quinn. On such theories God himself is the paradigm of goodness, and moral duties are constituted by divine commands. So his commands are not arbitrary, but reflections of his own character, which is paradigmatic of goodness.

### The Resurrection of Jesus

With this argument we move beyond generic theism to Christian theism. Unfortunately, apart from McGrew, none of our respondents has any expertise in this area. It is marvelous how someone so ignorant of the New Testament documents as to think that they were originally written in Aramaic should presume on his own authority to correct historical scholars who are specialists in this field. Similarly, no historian would think that the three points made by Rountree against Campbell are sufficient to undermine the historical credibility of a document; otherwise we should have to give up

any knowledge, for example, of the life of Alexander the Great, along with most of ancient history. Similarly, *no* testimony in ancient history is “disinterested and objective,” but that does not prevent historians from establishing certain historical facts.

Consider, then, first, those three facts about the fate of Jesus of Nazareth which are accepted by the majority of New Testament historians, Christian and non-Christian. Their assessment cannot be breezily dismissed as due to Christian bias, since it stands in stark contrast to Christian scholarship of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and was forced by a re-appraisal of the evidence as the result of work by scholars like Joachim Jeremias and Hans von Campenhausen.<sup>13</sup> Drange evinces no familiarity with the state of current scholarship concerning these facts. He also demonstrates his lack of understanding in his failure to distinguish between the dates of the New Testament documents themselves and the dates of the early traditions on which they draw. Even Moser, who should know better, fails to make this important differentiation.

Ruse misrepresents N. T. Wright’s work when he says that Wright compares Jesus’ resurrection to the death of Augustus. He does not. He compares Caesar’s death to the empty tomb and post-mortem appearances, neither of which need be considered miraculous or supernatural. Ruse is conflating step 1 of my argument with step 2; whereas Wright’s work addresses almost entirely step 1. Rountree makes the same *faux pas*. The issue of miracles doesn’t arise until step 2 of my argument.

Unlike the stories of Joseph Smith and the golden tablets, the Gospel narratives cannot be plausibly written off as due to fraud. Will our intrepid non-theists be so bold as to affirm the hypothesis, beloved of 17<sup>th</sup> century Deism but now universally rejected, that the disciples stole the body and lied about the resurrection appearances?

Given, then, that these three facts are historical, the question which arises in step 2 is, what is the best explanation of these facts? It’s remarkable that our anti-theistic respondents are still appealing to Hume’s argument against the identification of a miracle, given the demonstration by philosopher of science John Earman, as well as by McGrew, that Hume’s argument is an “object failure,” that is to say, demonstrably, irredeemably fallacious, based as it is upon an incomplete understanding of the probability calculus.<sup>14</sup>

In my published work I have sought to show that, contrary to Drange’s assertion, the apparent death hypothesis and the theft hypothesis do not rival the resurrection hypothesis as a good explanation of the evidence. Drange prefers these, not because they are good explanations, but because he thinks that theism is hopelessly incoherent—but that merely takes us back to our earlier discussion of whether there can be a transcendent, unembodied mind who has created and designed the universe.

I hope that Christians will not take Ruse’s advice and abandon defending the historicity of the Gospel narratives. Not only have we never, since the first century, been better positioned to make such a defense than today, but such a defense is vital for commending the Gospel to thinking people today. Ruse is wrong that no one is

persuaded by such arguments. I receive a steady stream of encouraging letters from persons who have been brought to faith or back to faith through consideration of the evidence.<sup>15</sup>

### God Can Be Personally Known and Experienced

That brings us to my final point. I am truly disappointed that Moser, rather than celebrating my endorsement of the possibility of knowledge of God without argument, should have chosen instead to waste virtually his entire essay attacking a straw man. He *knows* that I reject “the view that one’s knowledge of God’s existence (if it is actual) depends on one’s having some argument or other for God’s existence.” But the fact that arguments are not necessary in order to know that God exists shows neither that (i) there are no such arguments nor (ii) they are not sufficient to know that God exists. Of course, mere propositional knowledge that God exists doesn’t suffice for a personal knowledge of God. That is precisely why I included my eighth point.

In fact, I am actually less committed to the need for arguments than Moser is! For he requires that the non-inferential evidence of God’s existence have no undefeated defeaters if belief is to be rational. For any thinking adult in Western society that will require a bastion bristling with defensive armaments. By contrast, my position is that the self-authenticating, inner witness of the Holy Spirit is an intrinsic defeater of any defeaters brought against it.

I agree that “Arguments can divert attention from, and obscure the importance of, this kind of experience,” which is precisely why I alerted our audience to this danger in my opening speech. Nothing Moser says, however, supports his claim that God wants knowledge of himself “without the dilution or distraction of philosophical arguments.” Moser asks, “If one can have a direct experience of God, and thereby have foundational evidence for God’s reality, we need to ask what value, if any, there is in an argument for God’s existence.” Much in every way! God can use such arguments to open the unbeliever’s mind to the possibility of God’s existence; such arguments can help to strengthen a believer’s faith in times of doubt and spiritual dryness; and a robust natural theology has a leavening effect upon culture, fostering a cultural milieu in which belief in God is regarded as a serious option for thinking men and women. People may not come to faith through the arguments; but the arguments give them the intellectual permission to believe when their hearts are moved. Indeed, I think Moser is living in fantasyland if he thinks that in modernist Western culture his non-argumentative approach is going to be more effective in building and sustaining the church than my approach of natural theology and Christian evidences along with an appeal to direct acquaintance with God.

So why do Rosenberg and Moser, in contrast to so many others from whom I hear every week, remain unconvinced by my arguments? God knows! What I can say is that the *reasons* they offer for rejecting those arguments (like Moser’s astonishing claim that the data surveyed do not yield abductively an explainer who is a *personal* agent) are not very good, and with that the philosopher’s job is done.

In sum, whether or not my arguments prove that God exists, they certainly show that belief in God is at least reasonable, *Q.E.D.*

### *Case for the Negative*

Because the stated topic for debate was not a proposition but a question, “Is Faith in God Reasonable?,” each side had a burden of proof to present a case in support of its answer to the question. As explained, the wording of the question placed upon me a very light burden of proof. All I had to prove was that it is reasonable to believe that God exists. By contrast Rosenberg was saddled with a very heavy burden of proof. It was not enough for him to prove that atheism is true or even reasonable. He had to prove that theistic belief is unreasonable. It should go without saying that he failed to carry his burden of proof.

### Naturalism

As I noted in my second speech, Rosenberg’s main justification for his atheism is naturalism. For that reason, I spent a good deal of time attacking his naturalism. If I could defeat his naturalism, I would remove his main argument for atheism and, hence, his main argument for the unreasonableness of belief in God. I first pried loose his epistemological naturalism from his metaphysical naturalism, which enabled me to concede for the sake of argument his epistemology while resisting his metaphysics. Then I launched into an eight point critique of his metaphysical naturalism, a series of arguments which were especially powerful because in each case the first premise was Rosenberg’s own assertion. In every case, in order to avoid the conclusion, he is forced to deny a premise which seems obviously true. This critique proved to be crushing, as neither Rosenberg nor any of our respondents has been able to rescue naturalism from absurdity. Thus, the main prop of Rosenberg’s atheism falls away.

### Problem of Evil

Rosenberg gestured toward the problem of evil as a defeater of theistic belief. Rhetorically, this was a shrewd move, and his family story of Holocaust victims definitely had a rhetorical advantage over my cold, philosophical reply. But philosophically I was correct. Rosenberg was pressing the old logical version of the problem of evil, which lays on him a burden of proof recognized by theist and non-theist alike to be unsustainable. As Brian Leftow has recently written, “If you think that evil currently provides any very strong argument against the existence of God, you have not been paying attention. Purely deductive (‘logical’) versions of the problem of evil are widely conceded to be ‘dead’ . . . The debate has shifted to ‘evidential’ versions of the problem of evil, . . . and these are pretty thoroughly on the ropes. . . .”<sup>16</sup>

Ruse’s move is the same as Rosenberg’s: tell a story, appeal to the emotions, and make no attempt whatsoever to justify the premises of an argument. Ruse says nothing at all to show that it is impossible or improbable that God could have a morally sufficient reason for allowing the atrocity described to occur. Drange’s example of a world without

human cancer fails because Drange has no clue whatsoever what such a world would be like (apart from its lacking cancer). In it people might freely commit all sorts of atrocities or fewer might find salvation and eternal life. It is Drange who bears the burden of proof to show that God could eliminate those other evils without incurring still others, which obviously Drange cannot do. As for creating people more like those in heaven, who never sin, I suspect that in heaven the freedom to sin is effectively annulled by God's removing the epistemic distance at which he has created us in order for us to pass through this vale of decision-making. The non-theist has no way of excluding this possibility.

### Drange's Argument from Unbelief

If you're interested in how I would respond to this argument, see our debate on this issue: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/craig-vs-drange-university-of-illinois>.

In sum, Rosenberg presented a pathetically weak case for thinking that it is not reasonable to believe in God.

### Conclusion

Obviously much more could be said by way of interaction with our six respondents. But I hope that enough has been said that the open-minded reader can agree that people like McGrew, Kaita, Medhurst, Moser, and myself are at least reasonable in believing that God exists.

### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I had to smile at the fact that our two rhetoricians cannot seem to agree whether the arguments I present are syllogisms or enthymemes. Technically, they are neither. They are just deductive arguments employing a variety of inference rules, such as *modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, and disjunctive syllogism. Both rhetoricians err in thinking that the premises of a good syllogism must be known with certainty.

<sup>2</sup> *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008), pp. 108-110.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Time and Eternity* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2001), chap. 3; a more scholarly treatment may be found in my "Divine Timelessness and Personhood," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998): 109-124.

<sup>4</sup> Sean Carroll, "Does the Universe Need God?" *Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, ed. A. Padgett and J. Stump (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 196.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXCQelhKJ7A>

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<sup>6</sup> A. Vilenkin to V. Stenger, cited by <http://arizonaatheist.blogspot.com/2010/05/william-lane-craigs-arguments-for-god.html>)

<sup>7</sup> In fact, some theorists argue that all causation is simultaneous (Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], chap. 5).

<sup>8</sup> See Tim Maudlin's remark: "The deep question of why a given mathematical object should be an effective tool for representing physical structure admits of at least one clear answer: because the physical world literally has the mathematical structure; the physical world is, in a certain sense, a mathematical object" ("On the Foundations of Physics," July 5, 2013, <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/philosophy-of-physics/>).

<sup>9</sup> Stenger's claim that the laws of nature are derivable from certain simple symmetry principles is based on equivocation and a faulty grasp of the relevant physics, as shown by the physicist Luke A. Barnes, "The Fine-Tuning of the Universe for Intelligent Life," arXiv:1112.4647v2 [physics.hist-ph] 7 Jun 2012, §4.1.

<sup>10</sup> Rountree is hopeless here. He seems to think that "fine-tuning" means that universe was made for man. He also fails to understand that the anthropic principle is useless in the absence of a World Ensemble.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes, "Fine-Tuning;" Robin Collins, "The Fine-tuning Evidence is Convincing," in *Oxford Dialogues in Christian Theism*, ed. Chad Meister, J. P. Moreland, and Khaldoun Sweis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); I've also had access to Collins' as yet unpublished essay "Stenger's Fallacies." They show that Stenger is, frankly, not a reliable guide when it comes to physics.

<sup>12</sup> Collins, "Fine-tuning." Because of the multiplicity and diversity of the constants and quantities involved, linkage such as Stenger envisages is highly unlikely, and compensating for the effect of altering one parameter by simultaneously altering another only augments the fine-tuning problem. See further Barnes and Collins.

<sup>13</sup> My ultimate appeal is to that evidence, which has convinced most scholars, not to the authority of the scholars themselves. For a survey of the evidence see *Reasonable Faith*, pp. 360-95.

<sup>14</sup> John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); McGrew and McGrew, "The argument from miracles: a cumulative case for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth," in *Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*. For a simplified discussion see *Reasonable Faith*, pp. 270-6.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/testimonials>.

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Leftow, *God and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 547.

## Replies to Critics

## Very Brief, Very Selective, Rather Snarky

I am not a debater. I am a philosophy professor. I agreed to participate in the latest of William Lane Craig's long sequence of attention-getting debates in order to place a few observations on the record that Biola University creates of such events. (Check them out at the on-line **William Lane Craig Store**, 22 item-packed internet pages of things you can buy, at <http://apps.biola.edu/apologetics-store/collections/all-william-lane-craig-products>).

First I wanted to emphasize that an eristic competition is not the appropriate forum for advancing our understanding of almost anything. The notion that a serious discussion of the existence of God should require pro- and con, response and rejoinder, time-keepers, votes of who "won," and judges of rhetoric is laughable.

Second I wanted to put on the record, the videotape-recorded record, that William Lane Craig has been recycling the same six arguments over and over for a decade in what one can only hope is the sincere conviction that nothing anyone has ever said gives him the slightest reason to revise any them. Actually he surprised me by adding two new ones, neither of which need detain us here. (But cf the last paragraphs of the present essay for brief comments on each). If you really want to come to grips with Craig's six standard arguments, it would suffice to read one of the transcripts or review one of the many online Craig-and-X (fill in the X with figures more famous than me) debates that Biola makes available.

In fact, attending an event in which the six arguments are merely repeated in rapid-fire speech is one of the worst ways to come to grips with these arguments. 4,500 people braved a frigid winter evening to attend such a gladiatorial spectacle, to cheer on their hero, and to vote for God. They could have been home reading St Thomas Aquinas or even C.S. Lewis. A serious treatment of the questions at issue was not really on the agenda that evening.

Since a debate is not the place for careful argument I didn't provide any. Rather I sketched with the broadest brushstrokes how in general atheism replies to

the hoary old chestnuts that warmed our discussion that night. I made no claim to originality in doing so. Nor could I make much of a claim for expounding them in the most apposite way. And since I am not a philosopher of religion, still less someone with serious theological interests, I am not much interested in confuting the counterarguments offered by some of the commentators in this volume. And naturally I endorse almost everything that has been said by the few voices recruited to agree with me, especially Victor Stenger. Here I make some comments on the papers of Moser, Ruse, Kaita, and McGrew.

Moser is a serious and influential epistemologist. He employs expertise in the area to identify an epistemic location from which you can defend a belief in God as responsible while ungrounded by justification. But then he adds to it a good deal of gratuitous and question-begging detail about his personal God, most of which I cannot follow, except when it is completely question begging. Moser defines God as a divine agent with perfect redemptive love who would actively seek what is morally and spiritually best for all agents, even those opposing God." [Moser, p. 2] Moser is remarkably confident for an analytic philosopher about the intentions such a God with respect to us. I suppose you can define God that way, but then it will be very difficult to prove his existence, even by means of the epistemic ploy Moser hits upon. Moreover, given the difficulty of fathoming human intentions, having as much confidence as Moser does about God's intentions seems somewhat unreasonable to me. Now under this definition, Moser holds, God has been directly observed by some of us, or a few of us, or maybe just Moser himself. And the mere fact of acquaintance suffices to justify Moser's belief in God in the absence of any argument in which, for example, an assertion of his/her/its presence would serve as a premise. Knowledge by acquaintance is a familiar device in epistemology. But what we can know by acquaintance are only particular objects. We cannot know by acquaintance any of the properties they bear, except perhaps the sensory tropes that bring them to our attention. If Moser holds that we can sense more than this, he is helping himself to a sensory organ there is no reason to suppose any one actually has.

“Given God’s perfectly moral character, we should expect God to be not only redemptive but also self-manifesting towards (at least) humans willing to cooperate with God.” [Moser, p. 10] More about God’s moral character later, but for the moment, ask yourself, is this a claim of analytical philosophy or Sunday morning worship? Why should we expect this? Because we are in a state of grace? Because our pastor has told us this as a bit of biblical exegesis? Where does a statement like this stand in an argument about God’s existence? Is it a premise, a conclusion, an enthymeme, a lemma? “As a causal agent, God could authenticate God’s own reality and character for humans. This self-authentication would include God’s self-manifesting his distinctive moral character to humans (perhaps in conscience) and producing traits of this character in the experiences and lives of cooperative recipients. So, as a self-manifesting agent with a unique morally perfect character, God could be self-evidencing and self authenticating towards humans.” And then again he could decide not to do so, right? How can we be sure which it is? And besides, what reason is there to assert that self-authentication, whatever self-manifesting is, includes self-manifesting a distinctively moral character? What is self-manifesting and what is it to manifest a moral character anyway? I cannot think that this kind of pious theobabble has much place in an argument with an atheist.

Moser concludes, “Rosenberg...offers no defeater of the kind of experiential evidence for God outlined here.” [Moser, p. 21]. Conveniently, however, Moser provides it himself nine pages earlier in his own paper: “Neither mere claims nor mere subjective experiences are self-attesting about objective reality.” [Moser, p. 12] Right. What’s more, and this goes for the bizarre invocation of *New Testament* evidence for God’s existence by Craig in our debate and many times previously, two decades of work by cognitive social psychologists have revealed that eye-witness testimony has all the reliability of the word of a used car sales man. As I mentioned in the debates a vast proportion of people on death row exonerated by DNA evidence were put there by first person “experiential evidence.”

Moser asserts, “Philosophers now widely recognize that, as the free will defense illustrates, there is no logical incompatibility between God’s existence and

the evils of the world.” [p. 21]. And McGrew chimes in, “It is now widely recognized that anyone attempting to resurrect the logical problem of evil shoulders an enormous burden of showing the evils we are aware of could have been prevented without thereby allowing equal or greater evils or preventing equal or greater goods.” Maybe this accurately reports the state of things among Christian philosophers eager to assuage their problem of guilt by association with the great perpetrator. But it doesn’t describe what the rest of us think about the free-will defense or other theodicies. What is more I shudder to think what a good Christian would have to say about this collection of rationalizations even if they could understand it. Now imagine trying to teach possible worlds semantics for counterfactuals or the intricacies of “agent-causation” to an audience of 4,500 people with the attention span, that night at least, of sports fans. McGrew suggested that “If he [me] hopes to use [the problem of evil] as a persuasive tool, he [me again] needs to engage at a serious level with the nuanced defense against that charge developed by Plantinga and others.” [McGrew, p. 3].

If the format had given me a couple of class hours, a chalk board (no power points please), I would have proceeded to establish the following points: To begin with, the notion of incompatibilist or libertarian free will either makes no sense, is plainly false, or doesn’t give the libertarian what he or she needs by way of an account of human agency and moral responsibility. Secondly, it doesn’t reach far enough into the natural evils to give us a start on why God would sit still for them. Finally, even if we pretend there is such a thing as free will, it’s just obvious that God could have cooked up the history of the world so that every morally right choice was as glitteringly obvious as the right answer in a first grade arithmetic test and as nakedly self-interested as dodging a car headed right towards you. Why didn’t he arrange things this way?

Michael Ruse begins his comment by announcing “I am absolutely convinced that the central notion of the Christian religion, that of God, is completely incoherent.” [Ruse, p. 1] 12 pages later he writes, “My position is that there are questions that science doesn’t answer—why is there something rather than nothing,

for example—and if the Christian wants to try his or hand at this, then I say go ahead. I don't think you have to take the Christian position. You can be a skeptic, like me. But I don't think science makes the Christian effort incorrect. It is not reasonable but it is not unreasonable." [Ruse, p. 13] But if, as Ruse thinks, the central notion of a Christian religion is incoherent, then there is no Christian position here. If a purported answer to the question Ruse mentions starts off with incoherence, science is not needed to make the effort incorrect. It's already mistaken. What, I want to ask Ruse, exactly is the *tertium quid* between "not reasonable and not unreasonable"?

Like some other commentators Robert Kaita spends a lot of time trying to deal with the inconvenient fact that 95 %  $\pm$  3% (?) of the members of the US national Academy of Sciences are atheists or agnostics. Of course I introduced this fact not as an argument from authority. Generally I am far too arrogant to invoke someone else's stature to support my own views. I meant it as part of an inductive argument to show that William Lane Craig's conclusion about what science shows—that there had to be a God of the Abrahamic religions—is not shared by those with a deeper and wider knowledge of science. Just add minimal psychological assumptions about smart people's use of modest principles of closure of beliefs under deduction, and the fact that so many of these scientists reject religious belief is a strong argument that Craig must be mistaken in what he thinks physics and the rest of science shows and doesn't show. Members of the NAS are not experts on the sociology, psychology, history or cultural anthropology of religions (except for a few of the rare social scientists among them). Still less do they know their catechism. They don't need to be, of course, in order to provide us with inductive evidence that science is incompatible with theism.

I share Kaita's willingness to let by-gones be by-gones when it comes to the evils experienced by our families. Having myself made a visit to Manzanar, the "internment" [sic] camp in which the United States of America imprisoned many hundred of American citizens because they were *Issei* or *Nisei*, I learned how difficult it is to forgive and forget institutionalized racism masquerading as patriotic

hypocrisy. It seems to me much harder to excuse cosmic harms inflicted on a world historical scale by One who should know better.

Let me conclude with one concession to mystery mongering. It will probably be a foolish one, as such concessions have a long record of being exploited shamelessly by those who consider the defense of theism to be a moral crusade in which the end always justifies the means.

I am an atheist because God's nonexistence seems to me to be an obvious consequence of the most well founded parts of natural science. It does so on roughly the same terms as we can derive the nonexistence of Santa Claus, the Easter bunny and leprechauns from science. Science doesn't not of course refute milk and water deism, but deism is not a thesis worth arguing with. I am also a naturalist—I hold that the nature of reality is revealed by science and only science, which also provides the only epistemology that is reliable. Now, as McGrew recognizes, naturalism is not the same thing as science, and it isn't from naturalism that I derive atheism but from science. So, as I noted in the debate, *pace* Craig, you can't refute atheism by refuting naturalism (one of Craig's new fangled arguments in our debate and not one of the original six).

Now, in my view the most serious fly in the ointment of Naturalism is mathematics. No one—not us naturalists, and certainly not the non-naturalists--understands the nature of mathematical objects—numbers, and no one has a satisfactory account of mathematical knowledge. These are two problems on the agenda of the philosophy of mathematics that have profound metaphysical and epistemological implications. Wigner's problem—which Kaita cites, and to which Craig's newest argument adverts--of why mathematics fits the world is small beer compared to these two problems. Some alternative (epistemically) possible ("for all we know at the moment") solutions would make knowledge of God's existence, character and providence easy to acquire.

Christian philosophers would do well to focus on these problems if they really want to convince any one but themselves that their views are not irrational. But it won't be enough to show that naturalism is saddled with these two problems

and the best solution to them also allows in the theistic God of the Abrahamic religions. The Christian philosopher will have to show that these two problems of the nature of mathematical objects and our knowledge of them are problems for science, not naturalism—a mere philosophy. And they will have to show that until solved the problems are so severe that they undermine the confidence science confers on atheism.

In all these matters it is well to remember a wise observation from David Hume. In the *Treatise of Human Nature* (book 1, part 4, section 7) he wrote, “Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous.”