

# **Choosing Atheism Or Theism? -- Entrenched Learnings (Vol. 1) --**

(An Essay Concerning Understanding Misunderstanding)

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## Abstract

An intention in this essay is to present the unfolding of disbelief as an “Entrenched learning,” and consistent with a philosophical construct that could be termed “Dyspistemology.” What factors would facilitate such entrenched learning? The framework I propose is straightforward with two major divisions: there are, firstly, *constraints* one faces—constraints conducive to disbelief. Secondly, there are *choices* one makes—choices conducive to disbelief. With respect to the *constraints*, some of these constraints are internal to the individual; some are external. The *constraints* can be structural (e.g., brain damage, development, social structures, or culture), psychological limitations (e.g., self deception, faulty learning and belief formation, or simply poor strategy selection or use), philosophical confines (e.g., reigning paradigms, using a selective, singular, and limited epistemology, or wading in logical fallacies, etc.), and theological problems (e.g., beliefs, models, hermeneutics, and narratives, etc.). The *choices* may be epistemologically flawed, premature, immature, shallow, appetitive, accretions, or simply biased—strategic or heuristic biases, or confirmation biases. The balance is read by the atheist as pointing away from theistic belief, hence the choice for atheism. The concluding inference that the best choice, all things considered, is the theistic Christian worldview, coheres. Yes, many face serious *constraints* against adopting such a worldview and the most prominent constraints are naturalism (along with its proxies, materialism, scientism, and evolutionism), shallow thinking, paradigmatic rigidity, and cultural pressures. Yes, many face serious limitations related to their choices. Choices that fail to grapple with personal earlier choices, fail to draw upon multiple epistemologies, and fail in reasoning are detrimental, and at least in part, our responsibility. Choices that avoid depth of analysis, evade diverse evidences, and suppress influential emotions and existential issues are detrimental and our responsibility. In the end, the prudential choice is theism, particularly Christian theism. Abduction!

Metaphorically, the *constraints* are like weeds in the garden or rocks in the soil. The *choices* are like the gardener’s poor attention to the garden—failure to tend to the weeds and the stones in the soil, a lack of toil evidenced by shallow thinking, singular thinking, non-virtuous epistemology, prodigality, imprudence, avoidance, self-deception, and the like. Essentially: those who will not work their soil, will soil their work.

## Preface

*Where am I coming from...*

Where am I coming from? There are several dimensions to this question. Firstly, where am I coming from *career-wise*? A large part of my career in education was oriented towards learning disorders (learning disabilities, learning problems, learning delays, learning deficits, learning differences, learning styles, and other descriptive labels differentiating desirable learning from deficient learning). The focus was primarily on the roots of learning in the individual, and the context was predominantly the school. Now, from the vantage point of a later stage in life, I find I have adopted an interesting flip in the focus from learning disorders to *entrenched learnings*. This reframing broadens the focus to include the particular and the general individual, the social milieu, the internal and external influences (e.g., biology, psychology, family, culture, media, politics, luck and chance, etc.), the historical context, the philosophical/epistemological context, and the existential issues one faces. Furthermore, “the school” is no longer the building, or the local system; rather, the school is life.

Secondly, where am I coming from *educationally*? For years, and prior to moving into a formal educational environment, I was driven to read broadly in psychology, philosophy, theology, science, literature, history, and beyond. My first major reading venture as an adolescent was Freud. From the local library I took out the collected works of Freud (by A. A. Brill) and devoured them all. I was smitten. So smitten was I that I could not bring myself to return the book to the library. I returned it about seven years later after becoming a Christian. Why? It was then that I found myself constrained to deal with the guilt bubbling up regarding my “theft.” I finally followed the better course and returned the book—frayed, unbound, and digested. Freud had linked me to sex, to self, to mystery, to healing, to perspective, to insight, and to others—a great, and not-so-great, cloud of witnesses in shrouds of endless cross-examination. That branching quickly spread to other “others” in diverse fields: psychology, history, theology, philosophy, literature, sciences, and even parapsychology.

Informal and independent learning was not enough. Formal education was necessary, and nothing more necessary than the proper attention to the cosmic, the existential, and the divine, which were surely the more important pursuits. After seven, or so, years of independent learning, and a committed step into the Christian camp, a degree in theology was sought. Four years later a degree in theology was not enough. One needed context—internal and external. A subsequent undergraduate major in history provided a broad external context, while an undergraduate major in psychology provided a growing internal context. Then another undergraduate degree in education was pragmatic, putting employment opportunities on the table. At the graduate level, MA and PhD, I was focused on learning disorders. At the PhD level we had to select a Major and two Minors. My selected Major was Neuropsychology; my minors were Cognitive Psychology and Psychological Assessment. The base was growing, as was my interest in empirical sciences. A scholarship—Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)—was a great assist with the PhD studies.

Thirdly, where am I coming from in terms of my own professional *research path*? My research interests ranged widely, but always there was a focus on personal interests, play, curiosity, and then learning—learning disorders, disabilities, differences, determinants, and

dangers. After some 50+ publications in science and social science journals, and retirement, my research focus shifted. That's where I'm coming from.

Now my focus in retirement has flipped; I'm still interested in personal items, play, and curiosity, but my interest in learning disorders is now configured as an interest in "entrenched learnings" as opposed to learning disorders. The latter, learning disorders, is rooted in the individual. The former, entrenched learnings, is rooted more broadly: in the individual, the environment, the culture, the institutions, the media, the academy, the politics, luck, chance, personal agency, free will, and choices made, all situated diachronically.

There are a number of *entrenched learnings* addressed now over the course of three essays. The first, addressed here in this logically first essay, is disbelief, and theological disbelief, in particular. It is a major existential issue given the theological implications. The second group of *entrenched learnings* are addressed in a second essay—albeit chronologically first. These *entrenched learnings* are free-will-based, or choice-based, problematic manifestations—particularly in the area of sexualities, eating problems, suicidality, and smoking. The third group of *entrenched learnings* addressed in a third essay are variants of love, popularizations of love—arguments about love and arguments purportedly arising from love!

In addressing *entrenched learnings*, as I see it, learning is brought back to the front, the frontlines. Education—training, self-taught prodigies, discipleship, schools, apprenticeships, reading, testing, examinations, criticism, failures, parents, and laws—gains a premier place in each developmental trajectory.

*In the beginning...*

This endeavour was begun with a belief in the primacy of reason—the belief that reason leads and that reason trumps the emotions (as well as intuitions, revelations, and authorities). I believed that reflective thought was more important than intuitive thought. I ended more balanced, equating and integrating the place of the heart with the place of reason, and equating and integrating the value of intuitive thought with reflective thought. I was weighting integrated reason on a par with revelation and authorities. I now adopt a methodology—triangulation—that honours equivalently: *reason* (epistemologies, science, intuition, logic, analogy, critical thinking skills, and emotion), *reflections* (i.e., authorities, scholars, histories, narratives, theories, hypotheses, systematizations, and speculations), and *revelation* (special and natural, at both a surface structure and deep structure level). Now, a particular saying—"faith in search of understanding"—makes more sense to me, as does "love 'knowing' the beloved." I made a mind-change.

In the beginning I faced the curious question: Why is it that people, smart people, knowledgeable people, good people, can be so foolish, so wrong? As the problems mounted I reached a point where I wondered how anyone can get it right. Roadblocks abound; there is a plethora of hindrances: (1) liabilities (internal influences like architectural damage, development, genes, epigenetics, predispositions, preferences, noetic structures, appetites, and sin), (2) constraints (external factors like peers, authorities, systems, fraud, deceptions, malevolence, and more), (3) interactions between various internal and external factors, (4) luck, chance, timing, entropy, accretions, and (5) ultimately, choices (intentions, desires, and commitments) that

impact us all. Worse still, at times, we think we see, when we don't; and on the flip side, we say we see not, when we do, in fact, see. Nevertheless, a framework for knowing about such "misunderstanding" offers a means to gain insight about, and understanding of, disbeliefs, particularly theistic disbeliefs. Such a framework reduces to a focus on *constraints* and a subsequent focus on *choices*.

### *Constraints and choices...*

In line with this focus on *constraints* and *choices* is the move to understand mind-change, the changing of one's beliefs—from good to bad, from bad to good, from bad to worse, and from good to better. Of interest, then, are faulty beliefs that lead one in the wrong direction: broken beliefs, beliefs that are wrong, beliefs ignored, beliefs denied, beliefs unripened, beliefs that are merely seminal, beliefs that are competitive, and beliefs that are hypothetical. Such beliefs, as potentially faulty beliefs, are bad beliefs in varying degrees.

Bad beliefs, or faulty beliefs, can be rooted causally along several horizontal axes and a vertical axis. On the horizontal axes, faulty beliefs are attributable to physical damage, psycho-social damage, immaturity, poor judgment, faulty strategy, deception, a dire environment, appetites, attitudes, emotions, self-immolation, heuristics, lack of virtue, idealism, partial knowledge, behaviour, and even theological entities like "principalities and powers," evil spirits, and God himself. On a vertical axis, faulty beliefs are linked to the self—choice, free will, and intentional behaviour, that is, personal agency. This framing situates problematic beliefs in three source-pools: the biological self, the self's environment, and in the self's active agency, or choices.

What impels a move from bad beliefs to better beliefs? For one thing: insight into the various sources of disbelief (internal and external) should, and could, enhance a move to better beliefs. That is, knowledge enlightens, education enlightens, and discipleship enlightens. But also driving the move from bad beliefs to better beliefs are such agency-factors as: (1) rationality (reason, common sense, arguments, good beliefs, experimentation, evidence gathering, sound epistemologies, authorities and testimonies), (2) intuitions (the heart, emotions, signals of transcendence, and wisdom), and (3) choices. Such drivers serve as elements of the framework developed in this essay.

Mind-change (i.e., metanoia), or mind-stability (i.e., stasis), is a product of environmental influences (external factors, like constraints and facilitators added or removed), cosmic influences (factors like chance and luck), and intra-personal attributes and liabilities (internal factors like biology, personality, psychological function, dispositions, cognitive abilities and strategies). While drawing upon philosophy and psychology, in part, the principal focus in this framework is theological—theistic belief and disbelief as functions of liabilities, constraints, and choice. These are the roots of disbelief, mind-stasis and mind-change.

### *Why the theological focus...*

Why the theological focus? At the forefront of an answer is the common sense notion that if there is a God, ignoring Him could be infinitely perilous. Nevertheless, this entire endeavour began as a tactic to address my own theism as a context for my young nephew's atheism; we

were considering discussing the case for atheism. So, theistic belief, disbelief, and mind-change in favour of theism, particularly Christian theism, surfaced as focal points. The examination of the issues, and the building of a framework, pushed me to posit the contention that there are overwhelming underpinnings for theism. Upon this framework for the underpinnings for my theistic beliefs I find my stance, my orientation.

Each particular area examined is not overwhelming on its own merits, but there are the continual “tilts” towards Christian theism. There are alerts to liabilities and constraints impacting belief; awareness of these support, somewhat, a tilt towards theism. There are areas of evidences, arguments, epistemologies, and graces that support theistic belief; hence more tilts towards theism. The concatenation of each area—building the framework—leads to the cumulative case, which supports the thesis that the inference to the best explanation is: Christian theism, not atheism, and not agnosticism. The conclusion aligns with Swinburne’s (2004) probability argument—the cumulative case argument—for the existence of God. There are epistemologies (existential, virtue, prudential, passionate, intentional, Gethsemane, obstinacy, light, and hopeful) which are reasonable alongside a variety of evidential and scientific approaches in facing disbelief and human misunderstanding. Then there is a prudential step, a step rooted in choice, in the mind, and in the heart. One ends by taking a stance, or rather a series of stances, ideally culminating in the best stance. My positioning aligns with the inference that the Christian theistic stance is the best stance. One ends with an orientation—the Christian theistic orientation. Or one ends with an espoused atheistic orientation.

### *My audience...*

When asked who my audience was, I initially didn’t have an answer. As I reflected for a few hours on the question (and then days later) I was surprised. I now see that I considered multiple levels of audience and in the following order of importance. Level 1: (1) God, I do write with God in mind, with God in earshot, and with God in the mix (no longer needing to write for contract renewals, tenure, and promotions, now that I’m retired). (2) I write with Self in mind, I am my audience as I do write to inform myself, increase my own understanding, and form character (a discovery in the process). (3) I write with my children in mind thinking that they may wish one day, after my death, to know me, and my thoughts, better. Level 2: (1) I write thinking Christians are, or might be, an audience if they wish to eavesdrop on the contents here. I see possibilities of edifying Christians and strengthening their noetic structures and defenses. (2) I write as if prodigals might eavesdrop and turn back homeward, taking the second look, the deeper look. (3) I write as if nonbelievers, the curious, and the seekers might eavesdrop as I envision some eyes being positively opened to roadblocks they face and the evidences before them. Level 3: (1) I write keeping in mind that an academic community might be a future audience as interested scholars may challenge or develop further ideas tabled here. As an academic treatise, however, clearly more precision, pruning, clarity and polish would be required. It might be forthcoming! (2) I write as if media might be an audience. I work to include sufficient information such that interviews would not be necessary. The written word is so much stronger than the spoken word.

## Introduction

*“QUESTION: Do you believe in God?”*

*FEYERABEND: I don't know. But I am certainly not an atheist or a conceited agnostic; it takes a whole life to find out about these matters. I have a feeling that some kind of supreme bastard is around there somewhere. I'm working on it.” –Paul Feyerabend (2011), *The Tyranny of Science*, pp. 26-27*

Some sound beliefs are instantaneous (e.g., perceptions, intuitions, common sense notions, and the *sensus divinitatis*), some take time to build (e.g., semantic memories, procedural memories, theory of mind, face recognition, rules of logic, and wisdom), and some are incomplete on principle (e.g., verisimilitude, scientific hypotheses, models and theories). Some are unsound!

Locke's classic tome on sound beliefs, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” had an inauspicious beginning. While meeting with a few friends the question of the limits of human-understanding was raised and Locke was sufficiently intrigued to pursue an answer over the years. In the edition of the Britannica Great Books the editor notes: “...what was thus ‘begun by chance, was continued by entreaty, written by incoherent parcels, after long intervals of neglect resumed again as humour and occasions permitted,’ and published after almost twenty years....” In fact, there were three more editions published as the ideas developed further. I like these notions of: “incoherent parcels,” the notion of a significant investment of time, and the notion of development over time. I started my own journey here into human misunderstanding—bad beliefs—with this meandering Locke as a key.

My concern, initially, was the flip side of human understanding, that is, my interest was *human misunderstanding*, hence the neologism “Dyspistemology” as the initial working construct: (1) ‘begun by chance’ following an inauspicious dialogue with my young nephew, (2) an imagined entreaty by ‘a few friends’ (i.e., agnostic and atheistic brothers-in-law), (3) definitely ‘written by incoherent parcels,’ then placed on an academic table in search of criticisms and a future coherent argument, and (4) ‘resumed again’ and again, and again, ‘as humour and occasions permitted’ .... And published? Perhaps!

Dyspistemology, as an initial working construct, or title, was in part lexically rooted in terms like dyslexia (i.e., difficulty reading as opposed to alexia which is an inability to read) or dyscalculia (i.e., difficulty with computations as opposed to acalculia which is an inability to calculate). Dyspistis would refer to difficulty believing, or dysfunctional believing, as opposed to apistis—one can't believe. In a religious sense, it is somewhat comparable to agnosticism as opposed to atheism with respect to belief in God. Philosophically, a study of dyspistis (disbelief) could be termed “Dyspistemology.” Philosophically, such a study could prove to have purposeful value related to the broader field of epistemology. In many ways, and for many beliefs, one chooses to believe (pistis), and more broadly, to disbelieve as a function of one's nature, luck, environmental influences, and intentional activities. Disbelief emerges as bad beliefs, faulty

beliefs, broken beliefs, or dysfunctional beliefs (dyspistis) contingent upon choices, at least in part.

What began as an original intention to gather data—or rather, “parcels of data”—that would facilitate participation in a dialogue with my nephew, my atheist/agnostic nephew, morphed into something more. It became: (1) an exploration of disbelief (philosophically, psychologically and theologically), (2) a meditation on theism which provided a personal reflective growth experience, (3) an emerging framework for human misunderstanding, (4) a consideration for an large essay on a broad topic that suggested the intriguing neologism “Dyspistemology,” and then finally (5) an essay that might have merit addressing atheism, agnosticism, theism, theisms (e.g., Islamism, Mormonism, pantheism, Buddhism, etc.) and mind-change. Dyspistemology can be viewed as the study of bad beliefs, better beliefs, and best beliefs, and the shift from one side of the coin to the other.

People mind-change! Of particular interest initially is the theistic mind-change, whether to atheism or to theism. The polemicists (like Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and Harris) along with the classic atheists (like Hume, Russell, or the early Flew), the apologetic atheists (like Draper and J. J. Smart), and the quasi-reasonable atheists (like Shermer or Nagel) became atheists for reasons. This is interesting. Others challenged atheism (like the challenges from Bahnsen, Craig, Lennox, McGrath, Plantinga, Collins, Lewis, Jordan, and many others) for reasons. This too is interesting. The mind-changes are intriguing. Curiosity naturally (and perhaps, intriguingly, supernaturally) impels one to further inquiry (Kashdan, 2009), and possibly another mind-change.

One wonders why people turned from Christianity to atheism. Was it a conflicted turn to a naturalist worldview (as perhaps with Shermer), was it purported problems with the foundational communications (as perhaps with Erhman), was it a problem with evil (as with Charles Templeton), was it a simple preference (as at one point espoused by some like Nagel and Wald), was it evidences (as with Russell) or was it a dislike of God (as was part of the apparent motivational pitch of Dawkins and Hitchens)? What my young nephew had claimed as his problem was a commitment to evidentialism (likely configured as “absolute evidentialism”). He claimed that there was insufficient evidence (much like the claim of Russell and others). I wondered: Is it really evidence issues that drive the mind-change?

The turn, the mind-change is likely for most people a slow process as a rule. Sound bites rarely bring a mind-change. Sound-bites are at best: seeds sown or stones thrown. As *seeds sown*, words might work to start a line of thought, but time, nurture, and resources are required for the seed to grow. As *stones thrown*, words might push one to dodge an idea, or hobble on an uncomfortable path when barefoot. But one wants more. One might wish for compelling “spectator evidence,” the absolute evidentialism of miracles; but that does not seem to be Love’s

way of wooing. Many epistemological positions note that point (e.g., see Moser, 2008, 2010 discussed later). Words can work to form correct beliefs or warn of bad beliefs. The effectiveness, though, is distributed over time! Indeed, arguments are built over time.

Do beliefs need to change? Who would argue against any move from bad beliefs to better beliefs, or from better beliefs to the best beliefs? When Jesus was queried about the collapse of the tower (i.e., the tower of Siloam) and the deaths of the innocent victims there, his response was telling: unless you change your mind you shall all likewise perish. He didn't address their question; he addressed the more pressing issue. Beliefs need to change when they are wrong, dangerously so, and destructively so.

Can a mind-change be brought about by the words in this present essay, these "parcels" of thoughts? Thinking so is consistent with the arguments and evidences developed in the essay! Such words can help one to see: (1) to see where non-believers, and believers, may get ensnared by bad beliefs, (2) to see why liabilities and constraints can lead to disbelief, and (3) to see ways to strengthen noetic structures that could facilitate resistance to challenges when such resistance is warranted.

Clearly crafted strands of evidence, and arguments, are better than scattered thoughts. Crafted positions are better than "parcels" of thoughts on a table! Thus, the approach to crafting a framework is highlighted and structured in two major parts. The first part, Part A, is designed to add elements for the building of a framework to recognize various sources of disbelief that human beings experience, that is, constraints and liabilities that can interfere with belief consideration, acquisition, consolidation, and retention. But then, given liabilities and constraints, there is the further issue of responsibility for our beliefs—theistic beliefs and disbeliefs. Part B of the text adds choice (thus responsibility) to the emerging framework. These latter elements of the framework, elements conducive to choice, arguably facilitate a move to theistic beliefs; yet, even here, many choose the view that the tilt is away from God.

The focus is on why people misunderstand, and more strikingly, disbelieve, or even choose to disbelieve. Is it astonishing to read of the Nobel-Prize winning physiologist, George Wald, expressing that "we choose to believe the impossible: that life arose spontaneously by chance?" Admittedly, as Flew (2007) noted, Wald changed his mind: "In later years, he concluded that a pre-existing mind, which he posits as the matrix of physical reality, composed a physical universe that breeds life... (p. 131)." The mind-changes! One chooses an original course, and later, perhaps, a different course.

### Starting Points

The focus on choice is the key element in a framework of disbelief. But choice is not the most logical starting point. One logical starting point is "evidence" for "belief."



*Evidence—Philosophy as a Starting Point?* This conventional starting point is a quote from Clifford, a quote reflecting his famous empirical position. In the Introduction to Clifford's 19<sup>th</sup> Century essay "The Ethics of Belief," Madigan (1999) leads off his Introduction with the famous Clifford quote: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence (Loc 36)." Such a position seems reasonable, given an adequate appraisal of evidential sufficiency. The claim then should focus on "evidential sufficiency." Moreover, such a position does clearly align with the notion of choice, and morality—volition and axiology.

Furthermore, one might flip this comment and express it as a converse: "*It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to reject a belief given 'sufficient' evidence.*" Now again the question becomes one of access to, and acceptance of, evidence and evidential sufficiency. Which is the hazardous problem: (1) accepting beliefs without sufficient evidence or (2) rejecting beliefs in spite of relevant evidence? Accepting beliefs without sufficient evidence, given Kahneman's (2011) System I level thinking<sup>1</sup> heuristics, biases, and intuitions, is problematic. Rejecting beliefs in spite of relevant evidence, given virtue-epistemologies related to cognitive laziness, self deception, denial, and so on, (e.g., Baehr, 2011), or given pragmatic epistemologies related to prudence (e.g., Jordan, 2006; Wainwright, 1995), is more problematic. Arguably the second option, premature rejection, is the key epistemic failure. At least with the former option, premature acceptance, one is in a position to get ideas onto the table, keep ideas on the table, and explore ideas on the table. Moreover, philosophically, the issue is not as simple as Clifford suggests. Challenges to absolute evidentialism exist—see, for example, Jordan (2006), Wainwright (1995), and the collection edited by Dougherty (2011). Myself, I ended up opting for the reasonableness of the cogent alternatives to absolute evidentialism, and thus the broadened starting point, and ending point.

*Belief—Psychology as a Starting Point?* A second logical starting point is the psychology of belief. Here developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, abnormal psychology, behavioural psychology would be in play. Rather than a starting point, though, psychological factors are better explored as they bear on issues raised. For example, an appropriate cognitive focus would be beliefs linked to Kahneman's cognitive infrastructure with System 1 thinking and System 2 thinking (Kahneman, 2003, 2011). See the focus on Kahneman as [discussed later](#). For now, some beliefs that are the purview of System 1 thinking are prior to choice. Other beliefs that are resident in System 1 thinking are currently beyond choice, but they were possibly a product of choices before they were transferred from System 2 to System 1. Most beliefs that have obvious elements of choice are products of System 2 level processing—reflective beliefs—and are resident in System 2 level processing.

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<sup>1</sup> See the later discussion and elaboration of Kahneman see [here](#).

Another appropriate cognitive focus would be the broad literature base on the psychology of belief, bad beliefs<sup>1</sup>, and belief-shifts. The psychological framing elements for beliefs and disbelief do mesh with the cognitive element of choice. Choice is an important element in the belief infrastructure.

One further psychological perspective involves the distinction between espoused beliefs (conscious, chosen, and posited) and beliefs-in-use (conscious or unconscious, but manifested—or betrayed—as actual by one’s behaviour). One might espouse the belief that she is a person of honour, courage, and good character, but then trample over women and children in her haste to get out of the room when someone yells, “Fire!” Espoused beliefs and beliefs-in-use are occasionally misaligned; indeed, some might say: often misaligned.

*Choice—Theology as a Starting Point?* Another possible starting point is choice. Jesus addresses inquirers about the meaning and justness of the death of those who fell with the collapse of a tower—the tower of Siloam in His case (Luke 13:1-5). He doesn’t address meaning directly, or justness; rather, He simply says: “Unless you change your mind you shall all likewise perish.” He doesn’t answer their question; he addresses their plight. The word for “change your mind” is *metanoia*. This is traditionally translated as “repent,” but, the etymological emphasis is on the mind, and the changing of the mind, a mind-change. The cognitive element of choice, linked to belief, is vital. Epistemologically, Jordan’s (2006) distinction between *acceptance* and *belief* allows for an important role for choice in belief and disbelief (further addressed in the section on [Preparatory Steps](#)).

Evidence, beliefs, and choice, are starting points. Why do people opt for atheism as opposed to theism, or conversely, why do they opt for theism as opposed to atheism? The framework developed here offers direction. The framework can be traced out in terms of the following six stances: the defensive stance, the common-sense stance, the inclusivist-epistemological stance, the evidential-charisms stance, the cumulative-case stance, and the science-based stance. As well, the six stances provide: (1) a rough outline of the essay, and (2) developmental steps in building to a cumulative case, a science-based positioning, a disposition, and a commitment.

The Six Stances In The Framework:

- **The Defensive Stance.** Here attention is focused on the liabilities, constraints, and threats to valid theistic beliefs. It is a broad academic stance. Understanding such threats allows for the defensive proactive posture. Part A of the essay addresses many of the elements of this defensive stance. It is a meaningful starting point as it situates belief in the context of a variety of factors that can interfere with belief formation.

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<sup>1</sup> See the later discussion on bad beliefs [here](#).

- The Common-Sense Stance. Here attention is placed on: (1) that which is properly basic, (2) the seminal/supernatural starting points for theistic belief, and (3) the reality and importance of choice in belief acquisition, formation, consolidation, and change. In the essay this stance is seen largely in the sections related to Basicity (properly basic beliefs), the Gaps (e.g., the nothing to something gap; the matter to life gap; the simple life to complex life gap), and Reid's notion of common sense. As well, the stance draws upon the former stance, the defensive stance. Part B of the essay addresses elements of this stance. Moreover, common sense is always a reasonable starting point.
- The Inclusivist-Epistemological Stance. Here attention is placed on a fuller range of epistemological positions and issues. In the essay this stance is encompassed by the broad attention to various epistemologies, and not just the absolute evidentialist stance so common with popular critiques. Part B of the essay addresses elements of this stance. As well, the stance builds upon the former stances, the defensive stance and the common sense stance.
- The Evidential-Charisms Stance. Here attention is placed on the full range of evidences often acquired as gracious confirmations of belief, and often as post-hoc influences. In the essay these are addressed as "evidential charisms," that is, principles, arguments, evidences, reflections, speculations, observations, hypotheses, theories, and historical facts that emerge in the supportive role. A grateful attitude, even love, naturally follows such graces. Part B of the essay addresses elements of this stance. As well, though, this stance builds upon, gratefully, the former stances—the defensive stance, the common sense stance, and the inclusivist-epistemological stance.
- The Cumulative-Case Stance. Here attention is placed on the full range of evidences, arguments, and probabilities. In the essay the cumulative-case probability factor (linked to Bayesian statistics, Swinburne, and Earman's critique of Hume) is addressed. The forceful cumulative case really draws weight from all stances addressed. Part B of the essay concludes with this composite stance.
- The Composite, Science-Based Stance. Overall the approach is science-based. Attention is placed on the full range of evidences, arguments, authorities, theories, models, and probabilities. Multiple hypotheses, theories, and models are placed on the table, and kept on the table, for consideration. Even weak hypotheses, and politically incorrect hypotheses, find a place at the table. Belief is allocated on the basis of evidence, argument, experiment, and coherence. A unilateral position is adopted only tentatively, and only in the context of competing models, theories, and hypotheses. The virtues of a scientific approach are practiced as a virtue epistemology. This composite stance is science-based.

## **Part A: Constraints On Theistic Belief**

Specific belief-constraints can bias one in a direction contrary to sound belief formation, and thus interfere with a belief like theistic belief. In the presence of such constraints attention can be directed away from theism, or tilt one away from a commitment to theism. So what are these belief-constraints?

### Psychological Structures And Belief Constraints

Malfunction (e.g., blindness, faulty belief) can result from numerous causes. Broadly, there are two major categories of causes: firstly, material or physical causes; and secondly, non-material, or psychological, psycho-social, and psycho-theological causes. In both of these broad categories the infrastructures underpinning malfunction may be: (1) damage or dysfunction (as in medical paradigms), (2) abnormality (as in psychological paradigms), (3) manifestations of opportunity- deprivation, or inappropriate learning (as in behavioural paradigms), (4) immaturity (as in diachronic, developmental, and developmental-delay paradigms), (5) contextual disadvantage (as in social and political paradigms), (6) simple differentiation with a focus on differences and diversity (as in ethological and multicultural paradigms), or (7) deception (as in religious/creedal paradigms drawing upon theological, cognitive, and psycho-theological factors).

### Damage

Damage is attributed to accidents (e.g., birth trauma, falls, toxins, mistakes), personal sins (e.g., smoking, drug use, disordered-eating), natural evils (e.g., earthquakes, famines, viruses), others (e.g., parents, peers, propagandists), or even bad luck. Damage can extend to the physical architecture (the brain), the cognitive architecture (e.g., memory, perception, attention, organization, integration, executive function, cognitive strategy, and more), the language architecture (e.g., processes related to semantic content of beliefs, lexicons, syntax, pragmatics, socio-linguistics, and paralinguistics), the noetic architecture (the noetic structures of one's beliefs, one's knowledge, one's intuitions, and perhaps one's opinions), and the spiritual architecture (e.g., *sensus divinitatis*, *synderesis*, teleology, "promiscuous teleology," etc.).

### *Damage to the Physical Architecture Constrains Belief*

Just as one's perceptual abilities can be impacted by brain damage, so too may deeper structures like the *sensus divinitatis*, conscience, and moral reasoning. Just as one's memory abilities can be impacted by brain damage so too may one's beliefs may be compromised by brain damage. The physical can impact the non-physical, and vice versa (Beauregard & O'Leary, 2007; Beauregard, Lévesque, & Paquette, 2004; Doidge, 2007; Schwartz & Begley, 2002; Schwartz, Stapp & Beauregard, 2004; Stapp, 2011). This seems to be a reasonable position.

Indeed, damage, dysfunction, deprivation, developmental delays, disadvantage, or depression (emotional or wilful suppression) can interfere with a properly basic function, whether perception, memory, or more spiritual faculties like conscience and the *sensus divinitatis*.

Damage to the infrastructure—say the brain—impacts our judgment of culpability. We are less likely to attribute culpability to those who are damaged. This is readily seen in the medical field, the legal field, and courts of public opinion. Such blindness is guilt-mitigated if not guiltless, one suspects, and argues. It is a little reminiscent of Jesus' comment:

John 9:39 And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind." 40 Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

"If you were blind you would have no sin..." This is an intriguing comment when considered in the context of a physically damaged brain, a brain that has seriously impaired senses, or memory, or reasoning. Is sin, and accountability, contingent upon a properly functioning brain? It seems reasonable to suspect that this is the case. Clearly the child born with serious brain damage is not accountable in our courts and our common sense judgments. Such a person has mitigated accountability for missing the mark. Even the young child with an immature brain is not accountable to the same degree as the mature adult.

Nevertheless, with damage as opposed to developmental lags, there is a context to consider, that is, a time variable. The drug addict with subsequent brain damage has a choice-history where the brain damage is a result of prior inappropriate behaviour, or in theological terms, his prior sins. This person might be considered more responsible, regardless of the brain damage, since he was the efficient cause of the problem even if the material causes, the formal causes and the final causes, were set in motion much earlier.

#### *Damage to the Cognitive Architecture Constrains Belief*

For theistic disbelief this may be the more serious damage when compared to physical damage. This damage, although also underpinned by sin, draws upon ego, will, choices, rebellion, and idolatry as causal influences. This belief-failure, this belief-constraint, is doubly dangerous in that one is drawn into the accountability issue for cognitions—opinions, beliefs, and knowledge.

A major problem for human beings is their vulnerability to deception by self, by others, by desires, and by situational belief-constraints. One can have a sound starting point in the *sensus divinitatis*, and rational consideration of the supernatural foundations for belief, but these can be undermined. Deception exists in many forms, and exits in few!

#### *Damage to a Noetic Architecture Constrains Belief*

Noetic structures are the web of one's beliefs. The beliefs in this structure are either properly basic beliefs or beliefs acquired concurrent with evidence for such beliefs (Plantinga, 2000). For interest's sake, think of a noetic structure along the lines of something like a spider's web. Some nodes and links near the center of the web are closely knit together and functionally strong, like "properly basic beliefs." Other nodes and links on the periphery are more loosely knit together, sometimes broken or frayed, and apparently prone to mitigated function. These are evidentially based beliefs. Damage to the noetic structure is more likely to occur at the weaker periphery, the extended reaches of the web. While damaged noetic structures may still serve the Christian believer well, serious damage leads to disorder.

Serious damage to beliefs—to a fully and properly functional noetic structure—can arise from many of the constraints identified in this essay, if not all of them. It is relatively easy to see that self-deception, psychological processes leading to bad beliefs, a worldview limited to naturalism, and so on, could damage a noetic structure. At this point, however, it is the damage that arises from human nature even a Christianized human nature that is in focus. For example, the atrocities perpetrated upon the Jews through the ages by Christianized cultures is bound to be damaging (for a history see Brown, 1990) to sensitive moral agents. Then there are the atrocities perpetrated by Christianized cultures on target populations (e.g., the indigenous, the racially different, the ideologically different, and the religiously different) by Conquistadors, Crusaders, Inquisitions, ethnic cleansing, and so on (see Rauser, 2011); these too are beyond the pale for the morally sensitive. Christianized positions on slavery, women's rights, and child labour can damage noetic structures when viewed synchronically rather than diachronically. The treatment of animals in the civilized west is shocking to the morally sensitive (Lindzey, 1994; Rifkin, 2009; Scully, 2002). Damage to a noetic structure could follow as night follows day.

Moreover, serious damage to one's noetic structure can arise from troublesome Biblical narratives, histories, stories, poetry, allegories and parables when encountered and considered in terms of surface structure and face validity. Genocide, cannibalism, Hell, "a chosen people," can leave one tangled in a frayed web. As *prima facie* evidence, the noetic structure can be seriously damaged. While the patient spider might continue building and repairing—aware of construct validity, concurrent validity, content validity, predictive validity, convergent validity, and other factors—the patient person is quite likely to abandon the web. One needs substantial defeater deflectors to continue with a damaged noetic structure in some cases.

Milder sources of damage to one's noetic structure as a function of exposure to a modern Christianized culture—and some modern Christians—arises from: Christian charlatans, thieves, propagandists, emotion-manipulators, Scripture-twisters, power-grabbers, exploiters, loveless, lascivious, pompous, intemperate, unkind, impatient, fools. For these also, one needs substantial defeater deflectors to continue with a damaged noetic structure in some cases.

Yes, human nature is destructive. Beyond the problem of evil which damages noetic structures is the more striking problem of the damages from the Christianized cultures and those who take the label Christian. A naturalist noetic structure is not so easily damaged. After all, such effects as cannibalism, infanticide, rape, incest, and more, occur in the animal kingdom with respect to many species. These can be simply natural. However, with a Christian noetic structure such effects serve to disrupt the web, weaken the web, break the links, discard the nodes, and argue against theistic belief. Building the sound web requires facing the constraints, and tuning in to the threads pieced together in the harmonious composition of a Christian noetic structure.

### Development

#### *Cognitive Developmental Trajectories As Belief-Constraints*

The idea presented here is illustrated by the fact that children show types of disbelief linked to their underlying cognitive architecture. At a certain developmental level (say 4 or 5 years of age) children focus on details; they can miss seeing the big picture. They are in effect blind to it, constrained. As Elkind (1974) notes: if you show these children pictures of objects (say a face constructed from vegetables, or a scooter constructed from candy-canes and lollipops) the child is likely to report seeing the vegetables or the candy. They don't perceive the global configuration; they attend to the details. The slightly older child, say one year older, is locked into perception of the global configuration, the gestalt. This child reports seeing the face, or the scooter, but misses the details. Now they are blind to the details and experiencing a different constraint. The following year these children have no difficulty seeing both the global configuration and the details. You find the same effect when children are performing other Piagetian-type tasks, like the conservation-of-number task. At one stage they focus on details; at a later stage they focus on the gestalt; then, at the next higher stage they can attend to both the details and the gestalt. In effect, there are normal cognitive constraints that influence what one believes one sees. There are blindnesses that precede cognitive maturity.

This developmentally-based blindness points to the fact that our cognitive underpinnings can influence what we fail to see, and that normally. This applies whether the focus is on developmental limitations (as with Piagetian development), activation limitations (we can fail to access the right memory, the right lexicon, the right axiom), strategic limitations (we can fail to use the best strategy, the correct algorithm, the wiser heuristic), or process limitations (we can fail as a function of impulsivity, uncritical processing, missed fallacies).

### *Decalage*

Related to normal developmental blindness, is the concept of *decalage*—a Piagetian concept that notes developmental irregularities that are dynamic. Vertical *decalage* is seen when a child appears to be regressing; the child can see something, or do a particular task, at a specific age but seems to have lost that particular ability several months later. Actually, the cognitive infrastructure underlying the tasks, is developing (i.e., changing, unfolding, maturing) and the apparent “blindedness,” or blindness-fluctuation, is based on this limitation. It aligns with normal development.

An equally valuable notion is horizontal *decalage*. Development is irregular, or uneven, across various domains; thus, the horizontal configuration. To illustrate: because a child is exceptionally verbal does not predict that she will also be precocious in psychomotor skills as well, or mathematics, or music. The pattern of development is typically uneven across domains.

What does this mean for the notion of belief-constraint or belief-failure? It points to the fact that cognitive architecture that is not functioning properly (as Plantinga stresses “proper function” ), that is, maturely, can lead one to not see key features, or the big picture. In effect, belief failures can be a function of immaturity. Belief failures can be normal, particularly with children who are subject to developmental belief-constraints.

#### *Narrative Developmental Trajectories As Belief-Constraints*

With adults, as well as children, there are aspects of narrative development that are also worth consideration. For example, the development of a doctrine, the development of a concept, the development of a history, the development of a story, the development of an algorithm, and thus the development of understanding are at times partial. Limited vision would be normal for various stages in the development of a story, an algorithm, a doctrine, an ideology, a political position, a theory, or a worldview.

#### *Example 1: Development of A Doctrine*

In the Christian tradition there is a clear case for doctrinal development. The distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament shows two stages—an old covenant and a new covenant. Others could point to Jewish history itself in the Old Testament as an unfolding of doctrinal development. The notion of history, and various covenants, underpins a position of doctrinal development.

How does this relate to belief-constraints? Well, it would be evident that there were times, earlier times, when the substance of certain doctrines was less clear. For example, the Bible has been attacked as supporting slavery by those who take a categorical perspective (Yes, No). In fact, from a developmental perspective there is a doctrinal, developmental progression



showing moral development respecting human equality. Revelation has a time-linked historical context. Essentially, the ideal (e.g., no human slavery) could often be masked by stages preceding the ideal (manumission, treating slaves via humane principles, indentured servitude, Jubilee freedoms, etc.). At times, the real (inhumanity, cruelty, greed, lust, and sadism) masked the ideal. These would be types of belief-constraints, or blindness, prior to flowering. Early points in the narrative are different from later points in the narrative.

Whether secular or religious, the position on slavery through history—to the current doctrine—has trekked through a long developmental sequence with slowly progressing changes to the current more mature approach to slavery that now characterizes the West. There was much blindness along the way.

Of course, there is still blindness. There is a propensity amongst many in the intelligentsia to find fault with the West, not recognizing the place of the West, and the “white,” in eliminating slavery (Sowell, 1999a, 1999b). Academics (e.g., O’Sullivan, 1999) can have a bias against the West and the “White,” a bias driven by a particular ideology. For O’Sullivan, the problem is framed as the West assuming it has a civilizing mission, an assimilating mission, or a suppression mission, with respect to other problematic races—people of colour. It goes back to the slave trade for O’Sullivan. O’Sullivan quotes Zarate favourably: “...‘This experience of eurocentrism and the misuse of power at the heart of racism includes justifying stolen land, a model of planned inequality, and a rationalization for continuing to disenfranchise minority groups (Zarate, 1994).’ (1999, p.152).”

But this just doesn’t align fully with the facts. Closer scrutiny and honest reflection often reveals an entirely different narrative with respect to the West. Sowell (1999b) adds some relevant, colourful facts to the mix:

- Brazil imported more blacks from Africa than the U.S. (six times as many)
- Islamic countries also imported slaves (more than all of the Western Hemisphere).
- “...blacks did it, whites did it, Jews did it, Gentiles did it. There was slavery in China and Russia and in the island paradise of Bali.” p.190
- “...thousands of free blacks in the antebellum south owned slaves (p. 165).”
- “Ironically, it was Western civilization which eventually destroyed slavery around the world, during an era when European imperialism reached every continent. Even autonomous nations which abolished slavery usually did so under pressure from the West or in order to avoid the national embarrassment of being regarded as uncivilized by the West. But this whole epic story—perhaps the biggest moral achievement in history—remains largely untold, because it does not fit the ideological vision of the intelligentsia.” p. 190

While the Christianized West was involved in addressing the slave trade, often quite dramatically via Wilberforce and Lincoln, the problem has not ended. The problem is likely

more covert today; it is not official government policy in civilized countries. In fact, slavery is illegal in every country. The doctrinal ideology has progressed, but the practice persists at covert levels. The problem is worse quantitatively. Today, as I understand it, that there are between 12 to 27 million slaves in the world ( <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery> ). Apparently that is more than existed across the 200-year span of the Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, the worth of a slave today is about \$90.00, whereas, the worth during the Atlantic slave trade was about \$40,000.00 in today's dollars ( <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19831913> ). The problem persists.

The next step is to eradicate the practice. Efforts persist to eradicate slavery. In view of the multi-lateral efforts to eliminate slavery some see that the tipping point has been reached ( <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19831913> ). There are grounds and arguments for optimism.<sup>1</sup>

### *Example 2: Development of Understanding*

Along similar lines to the development of a doctrine, there would be a development of understanding. We have a much better understanding today with respect to women, to slavery, to rights, to life, to dignity, to animals, to the planet, than people had in the near past and the distant past. Having sight restored is a historical process, at least in part, and a cognitive process, at least in part.

Understanding a historical and cultural context helps frame time-locked blindness, as well as the gradual move to better vision. We like to think that we contemporary human beings are particularly sensitive to suffering. Dealing with slavery, women's rights, child rights, and more recently animal rights, characterizes the contemporary shift to empathy (deWaal, 2009; Rifkin, 2009). Such development of understanding, of a narrative, exists along a developmental trajectory, however; it is not best viewed as the either/or, or categorical approach. History doesn't show shifts from real to ideal; it shows shifts from worse, to good, to better, to better still, and then to best. Attacks on Judaism, Christianity, the Bible, and the Church often seem to miss this developmental trajectory. It's a blindness!

Atheists like Dawkins (2006) and Hitchens (2007a, 2007b) find the Biblical accounts of God-directed genocide shocking. One can certainly empathize. It is shocking. Some, like Copan (2008, 2009) and Jones (2009), attempt to frame the issue developmentally, and in a much broader context—a cultural and historical context. Such reframing does seem to mitigate the knee-jerk rush to judgment. For Jones, pointing to Canaanite sins (e.g., idolatry, incest, adultery, child sacrifice, bestiality, and homosexuality) provides a context for tempered judgment. For

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<sup>1</sup> Is there anything to fear from the naturalist camp? Is there slavery modelled in the animal kingdom? Do red ants make slaves of black ants? Are drones slaves to the Queen Bee, or to the bee community? Do spiders enslave flies, at least for awhile? Does the alpha male enslave the females in many species? Does the naturalistic, secular humanist then treat this slavery amongst all animal domains as descriptive (what is), as prescriptive (what ought to be), or as primordial (we'll eventually explain human freedom and equality as emergent from natural selection principles)?

Copan, the context is broadened in terms of language, theology, the ancient near-east culture, timelines, and so on. The situation is more nuanced than what appears at first blush. There is development of understanding, attitudes, narratives, and knowledge-based wisdom.

We recoil from the divinely orchestrated destruction of human beings (whether by the Genesis Flood, natural disasters, the sins of others, armies acting under divine fiat, or Hell), to a point. There are times when destruction seems warranted and justified (see the later discussion on evil and Hell). When we remove emotions from the mix we are then left with the question of rights. Does God have the right to destroy his creation? I call it the Kafka problem. Kafka, on his deathbed, asked his friend to destroy two uncompleted manuscripts for him. Essentially, he didn't want them in the world as emanations from him. His friend agreed to destroy them. Kafka died; the friend did not destroy them as his view of value was different from Kafka's. The literary world finds much value in those manuscripts. As a result *The Trial* and *The Castle* survived. Did Kafka have a right to destroy those manuscripts? Yes! Did he have a right to expect his friend to carry out his wishes? Yes. Framed as the "Kafka Problem:" does God have a right to destroy his creative ventures? The reasonable answer that I see, logically, is "Yes." He does have that right.

### *Example 3: Development of Theistic Perception*

Personal communication between God and Christians seems stilted, artificial, or limited. Christians can wonder why one's personal relationship with God is not the same as a personal relationship with friends, and enemies—that is, verbal communicative give-and-take, arguments, perception, etc. Christians often feel God's distance or hiddenness and wonder why. If the relationship is supposed to be personal, and friendly, why is the conversation apparently so one-sided?

On the other hand, consider the relationship between a two-month old infant and the infant's parents. The relationship is personal; but the communication is very rudimentary, or elementary. Why? Answer: because the infant doesn't have the developed cognitive architecture to communicate at an adult level. Similarly, is it possible that our relationship with God, our Father, is personal, but severely limited by our own immature cognitive architecture? Yes. Perhaps, it is not that God is so much hidden as that we don't have the cognitive underpinnings yet to move into a stage of relationship that is beyond babbling, or single-word utterances—both expressively, and receptively. Developmentally, we are at the babbling stage or the one-word stage indicated by our use of nouns. We lack the syntax to mitigate the apparent hiddenness. The hiddenness is not ontological; it is perhaps linguistically hiddenness.

Is this an infant/adult disconnect a blindness that we transcend with patience and experience, and cognitive-spiritual development? Yes. Quite likely!

Another variant on the relationship limitation may be the political analogy. I have a relationship with the Prime Minister of Canada. In effect, I have taken the Canadian-stance, I am a Canadian. Communications between us are in writing, and heavily one-sided. There is much hiddenness. The conversation is largely aloof-like. There would be quite a bit of development required before the conversation between me and the Prime Minister reached the level of a fire-side chat.

Is this too a blindness that we could transcend with patience and experience, and cognitive-political development? Yes. Quite likely!

*Cultural Developmental Trajectories As Belief-Constraints*

As one tracks human cultural development it seems clear that some form of progress in the development of religion unfolds. The religious understanding of earlier primitive generations is strikingly limited, or so it seems from our 21<sup>st</sup> Century perspective. But the actual developmental trajectory may not be all that clear.

The major question is the order of the developmental trajectory. That is, “...did religion evolve from animism to polytheism to monotheism? Or was monotheism the primordial belief system, which then devolved into polytheism, animism, fetishism, idolatry, and the like (Varghese, 2011, Loc 696)?” Likely, the dominant view is animism-first. “Certainly the animism-to-monotheism thesis accords well with evolutionary theory and its idea of the simple evolving into the complex (Varghese, 2011, Loc 696).” But the facts are not clearly supportive of this evolutionary thesis. Following the review offered by Varghese he notes: “What emerges from a review of the different positions is that we cannot definitively affirm either purebred animism or monotheism at the start of humanity’s religious history. But the field research done over the last century and around the world point indisputably to one conclusion: primeval peoples and cultures that had no contact with the outside world believed in a high God and manifested an inexplicable awareness of the numinous (Varghese, 2011, Loc 713).” Thus, the evidence and argument for the transcendent—the high view of God—in spite of lesser tangential gods, or contemporaneous with lesser gods, is compelling in early cultural, religious, developmental trajectories.

Varghese (2011), for one, has argued that world religions had a preparatory function in laying a groundwork for the incarnation—the Jesus phenomenon. This could be the case for both developmental trajectories. The animism-to-monotheism thesis accords well with historical records, and evolutionary notions. Also, a monotheistic belief system which then devolved into polytheism, animism, fetishism, idolatry, and then back to monotheism accords well with

Biblical history, and anthropological evidence and arguments (Varghese, 2011). The turn to monotheism, or the return to monotheism, culminates with the “Phenomenon of Jesus.”

Nevertheless, it is certainly reasonable for a skeptic to see such a developmental trajectory (in fact, either developmental trajectory) as a belief constraint. It takes work to understand the theological implications of the cultural contexts of religion and religious development. At this point, the safeguard is analogy: one needs to frame cultural understanding as analogical to the understanding of the developing child. The child’s cognitive sophistication progresses over time; similarly, the human’s noetic sophistication develops over time. The demands upon an earlier culture’s beliefs would differ from a more mature culture just like the demands on a child are different from the demands on an adolescent. Mitigation is a factor in the mix. Even so, it is easy to see that a skeptic could view such a trajectory, either trajectory, as a belief constraint.

What is needed? A series of explanatory hypotheses and theories are needed. Evaluations of these hypotheses and theories are needed. Abduction is needed. Varghese (2011) has moved in this direction with his reflections. In some ways he allows for theistic belief to be unconstrained!

## Psychological Functions And Belief-Constraints

### Blindsight – Conflicted Beliefs As Constraints

There is a curious phenomenon in the psychological literature known as blindsight. A person will claim he or she is blind. They claim they cannot see anything in their visual field, and they are telling the truth. And yet, one could witness them, for example, walk across a room and step around a coffee table rather than banging their shins against it. How can this be? Brain damage! A damaged brain is preventing the information from their visual field getting into consciousness. Yet the information is functionally getting to unconscious or preconscious areas of the brain that can influence, at least partially, navigation in space. It is a physically-based disruption of sight. It is seeing without knowing one is seeing.

An analogical phenomenon at the psychological level exists as well. It is captured by a difference between *espoused-beliefs* and *beliefs-in-use*. People claim to believe one thing—their *espoused-belief*—yet they will do things, indicating by their behaviour, that they do not really believe what they espouse. Their *beliefs-in-use* betray them. Perhaps the more egregious form is seen in those who espouse relativism and then act to the contrary. As Lennox (2011) notes: “...the interesting thing about those who espouse various kinds of relativism: They all seem to end up by saying, essentially, that truth, perception, etc. are relative, except of course the truth they are passionately trying to get us to perceive. That is, they fail to apply their own relativism to themselves (p. 64-65).”

### MindBlindness – Prioritized Beliefs As Constraints

Three types of *mindblindness* are considered here. The differences are initially flagged by three different font formulations in the labels. The capitalization font indicates an enhanced degree of significance. The three types of *mindblindness* are: (1) a blindness to the priority of mind when encountering the cosmos generally and philosophical naturalism particularly (MINDBLIND), (2) a blindness to the mind in the other whether due to psychological development, damage, or perhaps culture or language (MindBlind), and (3) a blindness to the mind of God effected by elements in the self or the actions of God (MINDBlind).

#### *MINDBLIND (Blind to the Priority of Mind)*

This level of *mindblindness* with respect to the mind is the blindness one has to the independent reality of mind, and the priority of mind, with respect to matter. If, in effect, it is true cosmologically that mind precedes matter, then those who presuppose philosophical naturalism or materialism would be, by definition, blind-to-mind. For the naturalist/materialist, mind reduces to matter; mind is secondary to matter; mind is an epiphenomenal construct, or supervenient construct.

When bottom-up building processes from matter and physical laws are not sufficient to build the complex structures, forms, and ideas that emerge from such processes (see Denton, 1998) MINDBLINDNESS is a consequence. When these bottom-up building processes are not sufficient to explain such constructs (see Beauregard & O’Leary, 2007; Penfield, 1975; Schwartz & Begley, 2002), then MINDBLINDNESS is the consequence, or the stance.

Openness to the proper place and pre-eminence of mind is what Flew (2007) experienced in his turn from atheism. He sees such openness in many scientists (e.g., Newton, Einstein, Heisenberg, Planck, Schrodinger and Dirac, and current scientists like Davies, Barrow, Polkinghorne, Dyson, Collins, Gingerich, and Penrose) ([see Flew below](#)). Indeed, there is a very strong case that mind does precede matter, as Flew came to see the situation. Even an atheist like Nagel (2012) now sees an enhanced place for mind ([see Nagel below](#)).

#### Neuroplasticity

Mind impacts matter! The current view of neuroplasticity supports some rethinking of the notion of the “hard wiring” of the brain. The naturalist sees all effects (including the mind) as rooted in the brain. Clearly there is a wired infrastructure that humans bring to behaviours as well as the building of structures related to knowledge, beliefs, emotions, choices, and selves. This is in part bottom-up event causation and consistent with a naturalist’s approach. But equally interesting is the plasticity of this so-called “wiring.” The person can affect the wiring—a top-down, agent causation process, where mind impacts matter.

The current thinking on neuroplasticity points to scenarios where learning can trump wiring. In the not-too-distant past neuroplasticity was considered at two levels—one for the young, immature brain and the other for the mature brain. For the immature brain neuroplasticity

was accepted wisdom, but it was determined by the brain's inherent developmental programming power itself. It was bottom-up clearly, given that the brain damage that interfered with the developmental blueprint led to alternate wiring routes, functional routes. But it was also in some fashion top-down given the rewiring was occurring in meaningful ways. A most dramatic illustration would be the shift of left hemisphere processes to the right hemisphere following left hemispherectomy. But this occurred only if the patient was young enough. For the more mature brain, say late adolescence, neuroplasticity was viewed as minimal, if not impossible. Early efforts to retrain damaged brains by using, for example, a "patterning" technique advocated by therapists like Glenn Doman and Carl Delacato (Delacato, 1963) had a certain logic underpinning the practices, but not much in the way of research support, or theoretical coherence.

Now, nearly 50 years later, though "patterning" is still practiced in some quarters, and still suspect, the issue of neuroplasticity for the mature brain is resurfacing in interesting venues. Consider, for example, the following authors and titles:

- Doidge (2007): "The brain that changes itself;"
- Schwartz and Begley (2002): "The mind and the brain;"
- LeDoux (2002) "Synaptic self;"
- Beauregard and O'Leary (2007): "The spiritual brain."
- Beauregard (2004): "Consciousness, emotional self-regulation and brain."

These are indicators of the renewed interest in applications linked to neuroplasticity in the adult. In chapter 8 of the Schwartz and Begley book they deal with the "Quantum Brain," in a fashion that argues for getting ideas onto the table for consideration. They offer an interesting reconsideration of materialism and naturalism. Similar critiques are found in Beauregard and O'Leary (2007), and Beauregard (2004). There is a case for entertaining these new ideas on the table placed there by the top-down group—ideas that the mind does affect the brain. That the mind is not simply epiphenomenal or emergent aligns with these new directions empowering the mind. Indeed, "...a whiff of dualism is once again rising..." as Schwartz and Begley phrase it (2002, p. 49).

Keep all views and worldviews on the table. This is a principle advocated repeatedly in this essay. Structure competition! Of the basic worldviews, hopefully one emerges as sufficiently compelling, sufficiently interesting, and sufficiently reasonable, to be on the table as a challenge to the notion of "hard wiring," as the sole determinant of change. Moreover, the challenger might be the next Galileo, Newton, or Einstein.

In formulation, the two basic worldviews can be configured as follows: (1) Matter precedes Mind (cosmologically, and personally, or ontologically), that is, philosophical naturalism; or (2) Mind precedes Matter (cosmologically, and at the personal level: teleologically, atemporally, and qualitatively), that is, philosophical idealism. In this second view the phenomenon of "mind over matter" is seen as a serious consideration. The acts of the mind are real and transcend the brain. But more dramatic, the acts of the mind impact the brain and

change the brain. Thus, for those operating in this idealist camp the view is that the mind can be instrumental in healing the brain and changing the brain, educationally and morally.

For those who adhere to the philosophical naturalist's camp, with matter preceding mind, there are various configurations of explanation. Four are drawn from Schwartz and Begley (2002) as they report the differences in "The Mind and The Brain." The first is *Functionalism* (or "mentalistic materialism" as Bogen terms it). Here the mind is viewed as just brain states. The Churchlands and Dennett would be representatives of this configuration according to Schwartz and Begley (2002).

The second formulation would be *Epiphenomenalism*. The mind arises from the brain, it is viewed as a real phenomenon, but phenomena can have no effect on the physical world. Consequently the mind, as a phenomenon, cannot affect the brain which is part of the physical world.

The third formulation is moving towards a more empowered mind. In *Emergent Materialism*, or Emergent Mentalism, "mind arises from brain in a way that cannot be fully predicted from or reduced to brain processes" (Schwartz & Begley, 2002, p. 41). In this view some mental states can generate new mental states, change mental states, shape mental states as well as impact cerebral states, and apparently cerebral structure. Schwartz and Begley see the pioneer Roger Sperry, as far back as the 1960s, noting causal efficacy in ideas and ideals. The causal potency "...becomes just as real as that of a molecule, a cell, or a nerve impulse" which they report as a direct quote from Sperry (Schwartz & Begley, 2002, p. 43).

Sperry does indeed seem to attribute causal power to the mind. He writes "...the emergent properties in the present view are not interpreted to be mere passive, parallel correlates, or passive aspects or by-products of cortical events, but as active causal determinants essential to the normal cerebral control (Sperry, 1990, p. 384)." Consciousness is not reducible to, nor identical with, neural events, or as it is phrased in a colourful manner by Sperry, "The meaning of the message will not be found in the chemistry of the ink (p. 385)." He further notes that it is not mystical; rather it is a system function where the power of a system is different from the parts. He writes: "The whole has properties as a system that are not reducible to the properties of the parts, and the properties at higher levels exert causal control over those at lower levels. In the case of brain function, the conscious properties of high-order brain activity determine the course of the neural events at lower levels (Sperry 1990, p. 384)." In this configuration there does seem to be a case for the claim that wiring is transcended, or can be transcended by mind.

The fourth configuration, *Agnostic Physicalism*, seems to have a tentative component. Schwartz and Begley write of this view: "...those who subscribe to this worldview do not deny the existence of nonmaterial forces.... Rather, they regard such influences, if they exist, as capable of affecting mental states only as they first influence observable cerebral states (2002, p. 44)." They note that William James would fit in this camp.

Finally, there is *Dualistic Interactionism*, a configuration that moves to the worldview stressing mind. Mind is not reducible to the brain, but it uses the brain for expression. Noting adherents of this view Schwartz and Begley (2002) write: "John Eccles who along with the philosopher Karl Popper for many years gallantly championed this view, put it this way not long



before his death: ‘The essential feature of dualistic-interactionism is that the mind and the brain are independent entities ...and that they interact by quantum physics’ (p. 45).” This view attributes clear power and agency to the human person. Consistent with this view, Beauregard, Levesque and Paquette (2004) argue for “...a new view in cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience that recognize the human agentic capacities and take into account these capacities and self-consciousness to explain the interaction between mind processes and brain processes (p. 186).” Schwartz, Stapp and Beauregard (2004) argue that “...neuropsychology is greatly simplified by accepting the fact that brains must in principle be treated quantum mechanically. Accepting that obvious fact means that the huge deferred-to-the-future question of how mind is connected to a classically described brain must, in principle, be replaced by the already resolved question of how mind is connected to a quantum mechanically described brain (p. 234).” See also Stapp (2011).

Implications extend to mental healing of brain-based problems (Doidge, 2007), spirituality (Beauregard & O’Leary, 2007), and the modifiability of any existing wiring in the brain. There is a case, then, that wiring is plastic, and malleable. Learning changes brains. Minds change brains. Persons change brains. That choosing changes brains, changes wiring, is not a big step from here.

### *MindBlind (Blind to the Mind in Others)*

*Mindblindness* is not only a philosophical blindness to the priority of mind, it is a psychological blindness. Theory-of-mind is the psychological notion that humans develop a theory that others have a mind much like one’s own mind. It is a properly basic belief. This MindBlind variant addresses relationships, inter-personal blindnesses, and the blindnesses characteristic of faulty relationships. That is, and more specifically, the situation here is the particular blindness that fails to sense the mind in others. Failing to see the mind in others is a failure to truly value the other, to ascribe the imago dei to the other, and to believe in the other. If theory-of-mind, that is, truly seeing the other is an inference it is an inference from self, or from properly basic belief, rather than a scientific principle, empirical fact, or empirically-derived theory.

At one extreme of such blindness consider autistic individuals on the far end of the autism spectrum. There is a difficulty in relating to the mind in others. A case can be made that autistic individuals have a compromised theory-of-mind (ToM). They often have difficulty in acknowledging the other, empathizing with the other, communicating with the other, and understanding the other. In effect, they appear blind-to-mind in the other. Such blindness is rooted, it would seem, in defective neurological wiring in the autistic individual.

In normal functioning individuals we might assume one is wired correctly to acquire an accurate theory-of-mind, but there still could be a problem at the secondary stage, the “acquiring” stage. That is, an individual could be hampered in the acquisition of an accurate understanding of the other as one who thinks, feels, values, understands, loves, communicates and reciprocates. If the wiring is correct, what else could block appropriate acquiring? Normal blockages might be: immaturity, lack of experience, diversions, preoccupations, the constraint of

action-identification theory, shallow processing, and so on. Even culture might be in play. Everett (2008, 2012), for example, sees the possibility of culture and language interfering with the development of a theory-of-mind. He notes a poor theory-of-mind in an Amazonian group (the Pirahãs) that he worked with for years.

Then there are the malevolent blockages. These could align with Baumeister's (1997) four roots of evil (also Baumeister & Vohs, 2004), what could be called here: rewards, ego, ideology/idealism, and sadism/schadenfreude. To illustrate, narrowed-thinking which focuses on getting rewards, or preoccupation with rewards, could blind one to the true value of the other. The other is viewed instrumentally, or objectively, as a source of rewards, or means to rewards, or reward-in-itself. Secondly, a narrowed-focus on Ego, self, and self aggrandizement, situates the other as an "It" rather than a "Thou," in which case mind is mitigated. Third, one's ideology can place the other in the wrong camp. The other again is objectified. And fourthly, sadism and schadenfreude are a source of pleasure (i.e., in seeing the sufferings of the other) at the expense of a mindful view of the other—a view that aims to edify the other.

### *MINDblind (Blind to the Mind of God)*

As we can be blind to the mind in others, we can be blind to the MIND of God. The same developmental and malevolent blockages that hamper human-to-human mindful relations could also interfere with human-to-divine relations. To illustrate, a penchant for rewards or a preoccupation with rewards could blind one to the inherent value of God, the reality of God, and thus the loving Mind of God. Of course, one might view God instrumentally or objectively as a source of rewards, or means to rewards, but this too likely misses the mind of God, and is in fact MINDblind.

Secondly, a focus on Ego, self, and self aggrandizement is situating the other as an "It" rather than a "Thou." With respect to God such a focus would align with a form of idolatry. Idols don't have minds!

Thirdly, one's ideology can place God in the wrong camp. Comparing God to the tooth fairy, or a created being, or even as a "part" is not mindful. Seeing God as contingent-on-one's-ideology rather than contingent on the entirety of who God is (e.g., seeing God as avenger is seeing God in-part, and that is independent of the total being of God) is missing the big picture of who God is because of one's ideology. Ideology can be *mindblinding*.

And fourthly, sadism and schadenfreude with respect to the mind of God are a source of pleasure at the expense of God and his suffering. Is it possible that humans are angry with God ("for what he didn't do for me, others, and animals," and/or "what he did do to me, others, and animals")? With such anger would one take some kind of pleasure in seeing Him attacked? Was there any delight at that foot of the cross? Any delight in the coliseum? Any delight at the sin and fall of particular Christians today? Any delight in the Holocaust? Any delight in 9/11? Is there a MINDblindness here with respect to the mind of God?

## The Will and Belief-Constraints

### *(Akrasia—Will Depletion)*

Adults can experience a phenomenon of will-depletion if they are fatigued, or have depleted cognitive resources (Baumeister and Tierney, 2011). Sources of will depletion noted by Baumeister and Tierney are various control efforts: (1) control of emotions or affect regulation, (2) impulse control, and (3) performance control. These efforts at control, or investments in control, draw upon a resource pool that is limited. As the resources are depleted one loses the willpower to assess accurately, thus to believe correctly, to choose correctly, and to do rightly.

Each of the control objectives noted can logically link to aspects of disbelieving. A person attempting to control emotions, or affect, could pursue involvement in self-distraction strategies (TV, music, shopping sprees, and so on) all of which are diversions. A person trying to control impulses is likely investing major amounts of resources in this task with little left over for other “important” tasks—like thinking things through adequately. Here the disbelief is a by-product. It could be the same scenario for the person focusing on their performance control. Focusing intently on one area can leave one in the dark with respect to other relevant areas.

Furthermore, attention to one pressing area—say performance-control—can blind one in more than one way. As discussed in a later section, [action-identification theory](#) explains how adults can be pushed to narrow their perceptual fields, and explanatory fields, in the face of constraints (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987). Such narrowing constrains the will and belief. Equally interesting is how efforts to control can actually backfire—a “backfire-blindness”—in line with [ironic-effects theory](#) (Wegner, 1994, 1997).

### *(Akrasia—Will Conservation)*

Baumeister and Tierney (2011) contend that people can withdraw attention and cognitive resources in an effort to conserve willpower. They note: “People often conserve their willpower by seeking not the fullest or best answer but rather a predetermined conclusion. Theologians, and believers filter the world to remain consistent with the nonnegotiable principles of their faith. The best salesmen often succeed by first deceiving themselves. Bankers packaging subprime loans convinced themselves that there was no problem giving mortgages to the class of unverified borrowers classified as NINA, as in ‘no income, no assets.’ Tiger Woods convinced himself that the rules of monogamy didn’t apply to him—and that somehow nobody would notice the dalliances of the world’s most famous athlete (p. 36).” Such faulty beliefs are self-generated blindnesses—will-based disbeliefs! Will conservation can be a form of the ‘willful blindness’ that Collins (2006) admitted to, and Lewis flagged as a problem.

In Nicholi's (2002) examination of the conversion of Lewis (and others) the will is prominent. "We know when we awake, as Lewis knew when he came to believe in Jesus Christ. He knew what people and events influenced that process just as we know what events—the daylight, the alarm clock, and others—influence when we wake. But how the actual process of this change from unbelief to belief occurred—like our process of change from sleep to wakefulness—remains largely undescribed by the articulate Lewis (p. 92)." Further: "Once Lewis made the conscious decision to overcome his 'willful blindness' and examine the evidence, and a second decision to surrender his will, only then did he pass from what he described as the darkness of unbelief and into the light of reality. He awakened (p. 92)." He was *investing will* rather than *conserving will*.

With Lewis there was a relationship between belief, will, and knowledge. Nicholi (2002) notes of Lewis: "He realized his lack of knowledge formed the basis of his unbelief (p. 93)." He sought knowledge. But that too involved the issue of the will. Nicholi (2002) comments on Lewis and the student conversions he studied "...both Lewis and each of the students made a conscious exertion of their will to open their minds and examine the evidence. Lewis began to read the New Testament in Greek; the students tended to join Bible study groups on campus. They became convinced of the historical reliability of these documents and came to understand the Central Figure not as one who died two thousand years ago, but as a 'living reality' who made unique claims about Himself and with whom they had a personal relationship (p. 93)." It seems that a sage piece of advice is: Invest the will, and willpower, in knowledge rather than 'willful blindness;' it is a good investment.

The effort to conserve willpower, while expedient on one level shows a strong relationship with "blindedness" on another level. Perhaps a lesson here is to invest to the point of exhaustion in order to mitigate blindness, or at least some forms of blindness. Perhaps a better lesson is in seeing blindnesses. Or better yet: just seeing!

*(Akrasia—Will Under the Influence of Wants)*

Human beings have many *wants*. These various *wants* compete for attention, resources, and commitment. There may be conflicts. There may be foolish choices—choices that do not align with knowledge, truth, health, wisdom, reality, and best interests. To illustrate, from the theist's perspective: for many, there is a preferential option for atheism and naturalism (e.g., Nagel, Lewontin, Dawkins, and Rees). In effect, atheism is what some *want* to be true, or wish to be true, as discussed above under [authorities and principled deception](#).

Some people *want* certain things in their bag of possessions. They have multiple *wants* often in competition for attention. They acquire certain "goods" often at the expense of other "goods." They might be driven to fulfil *wants* via malevolent means. They might be driven to fulfil *wants* in spite of the damage, or harm, to self and others. Our *wants* can be dangerous. Our *wants* can be blinding!

*Wants* can be evil when considered in the light of Baumeister's (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) four roots of evil: (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure. For a fuller description of the four roots of evil see the [discussion below](#). Here note that each root is linked to gaining something that one *wants*. This influence of *wants* can be a liability or constraint blocking belief.

### Weak Deflector-Beliefs as Belief-Constraints (Plantinga, 2011)

The focus here is the "belief-deflector" which can be a *good blindness* or a *bad blindness* depending upon the truth of the situation, and the various beliefs in play. A belief-deflector is a belief one holds that can interfere with the acquisition of another belief. Consequently, the newer belief cannot be acquired because the belief-deflector serves as a blockade. The newer belief then fails as a defeater of the belief-deflector, and as an attack on one's current noetic structure.

Plantinga (2011) frames it as: "A defeater D for a belief B is another belief I acquire, such that as long as I hold that belief D, I cannot rationally (given my noetic structure) continue to believe B (and a partial defeater requires that I hold B less firmly). A belief deflector D\* for a (potential) belief B, is, roughly speaking, a belief I already hold such that as long as I hold it (and given my noetic structure) I can't rationally come to hold B (p. 260)."

As a concrete example: the Naturalist (like Crick, for example), given his commitment to naturalism (i.e., belief B), cannot, or will not, permit a defeater like intelligent design (i.e., belief D) to carry any weight or credibility. Consequently, belief B serves as a defeater deflector for belief D. For the theist, this would be an example of a *bad belief deflector* as it is a blindness that prevents one from seeing what is true. For the atheist it is viewed as a *good belief deflector*.

In a similar fashion, the theist (like Dembski, for example) given his commitment to theism (his belief B) cannot, or will not, see a defeater like naturalism (i.e., belief D) as carrying sufficient weight or credibility. Consequently, belief B serves as a defeater deflector for belief D. The theism belief is strong enough to serve as a defeater deflector for naturalistic claims. For the theist, this would be an example of a *good belief deflector* as it is a blockade that prevents one from abandoning what is true.

The efficacy of the defeater deflector depends upon the full scope of what one's beliefs are, the strength of one's beliefs, the strength of one's reactions to potential defeaters, and the strength of the proposed defeater. A well integrated, coherent, and rational theistic belief will be quite resistant to proposed defeaters; it will serve as a good defeater deflector. Of course, the same can be said of the Naturalist worldview; it too is very good at deflecting criticisms.

If the deflector beliefs are weak, immature, or poorly developed, they will not serve as adequate defeater deflectors. This is contiguous with a form of blindness—a *good blindness* if the defeated belief is false, a *bad blindness* if the defeated belief was true, that is, true yet weak in its immature form of seed, root, sprout, or sapling.

### Faulty Deflector-Beliefs and Belief-Defeaters as Belief-Constraints (Logical Fallacies)

The focus here is the belief-deflectors and belief-defeaters tied to logical fallacies. The notorious “red herring” can deflect a sound belief-defeater, or side-track a sound belief-deflector. One’s attention is drawn to irrelevancies. Likewise, one’s attitude to a person can deflect a sound belief-defeater or suppress a sound belief-deflector. The person who dismisses a belief because he or she doesn’t like the source of the belief is vulnerable to the genetic fallacy—that person has experienced a “belief-deflector,” but not for a good reason. One’s attention is drawn to irrelevancies. The person confronting a concept loaded with a specific definition, can be deflected from a good course when the deflector, or the proposed defeater, is loaded with an alternate definition—the equivocation fallacy. Such formulaic blinders, though weak deflector beliefs or defeater beliefs, are strong contenders for blinding. One’s attention is drawn to irrelevancies. Attending to the non-relevant, or the relevant at the wrong time, or the relevant but in the wrong context, are forms of blindness and liability with respect to theistic disbelief.

### Self-Deception As Belief-Constraint

Self-deception is a form of blindness. Self-deception is one possibility to explain how or why someone might abandon a belief, even a properly basic belief (Plantinga, 1983, 2000), or what Barrett (2009) terms a non-reflective belief.

Self-deception has many access routes. It seems strange that self-deception would saturate human nature but it does seem pervasive. Self-deception is a prominent aspect in psychological literature; human beings can fall prey to a range of defense mechanisms like denial, rationalization, suppression, repression, and projection. Self-deception makes both psychological and theological sense. As applied to belief in God, and the absence of belief in God, several frameworks are of interest here.

### *Bahnsen’s View -- Reformed-Based*

Bahnsen wrote his doctoral dissertation on self-deception. His dissertation is available as a pdf with a Google search. As an alternative, and also a shorter read, one can access his article in the Westminster Theological Journal (1995) based on his dissertation:  
<http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA207.htm>

Self deception is framed by Bahnsen as a critically important consideration to understand the human situation. Bahnsen’s call to focus on self-deception is based in: (1) his research examining the nature and existence of self-deception, (2) the theology of self-deception one sees in Paul (Romans chapter 1), and (3) the arguments of Van Til related to his transcendental argument for God. Quoting Bahnsen (1995) here:

“So then, far from being a species of ‘fideism,’ as it is so often misconstrued by writers like Montgomery, Geisler or Sproul, Van Til’s approach to the question of God’s existence offers, I believe, the strongest form of proof and rational demonstration - namely, a ‘transcendental’ form of argument. He writes, ‘Now the only argument for an absolute God that holds water is a transcendental argument... [which] seeks to discover

what sort of foundations the house of human knowledge must have, in order to be what it is.’ To put it briefly, using Van Til’s words, ‘we reason from the impossibility of the contrary.’

In *The Defense of the Faith*, Van Til explains that this is an indirect method of proof, whereby the believer and the unbeliever together think through the implications of each other’s most basic assumptions so that the Christian may show the non-Christian how the intelligibility of his experience, the meaningfulness of logic, and the possibility of science, proof or interpretation can be maintained only on the basis of the Christian worldview (i.e., on the basis of Christian theism taken as a unit, rather than piecemeal).

The self-deception emerges with respect to espoused-beliefs and beliefs-in-use. It seems the argument is that one’s “beliefs-in-use” presuppose theism. When espoused-beliefs conflict with beliefs-in-use self deception must be in play. Bahnsen (1995) expresses it as:

“The charge is made, you see, that presuppositionalism implies that unbelievers can know nothing at all and can make no contribution to science and scholarship since belief in God is epistemologically indispensable according to the presuppositionalist. And it is right here, right at this crucial point in the analysis, that the notion of self-deception by the unbeliever enters the picture.

Van Til always taught that ‘the absolute contrast between the Christian and the non-Christian in the field of knowledge is said to be that of principle.’ He draws ‘the distinction... between the regenerated consciousness which in principle sees the truth and the unregenerate consciousness which by its principle cannot see the truth.’ If unbelievers were totally true to their espoused assumptions, then knowledge would indeed be impossible for them since they deny God. However the Christian can challenge the non-Christian approach to interpreting human experience ‘only if he shows the non-Christian that even in his virtual negation of God, he is still really presupposing God.’ He puts the point succinctly in saying: ‘Anti-theism presupposes theism.’ The intellectual achievements of the unbeliever, as explained in *The Defense of the Faith*, are possible only because he is ‘borrowing, without recognizing it, the Christian ideas of creation and providence.’ The non-Christian thus ‘makes positive contributions to science in spite of his principles’ - because he is inconsistent.”

The self-deception is a given.

### *Garver’s View -- Working Hypotheses*

Garver offers a critique of Bahnsen and presents a richer elaboration on self-deception which springs from Bahnsen’s original formulation. Garver’s critique may be found here: <http://www.joelgarver.com/writ/phil/bahnsen.htm>

For one thing Garver finds Bahnsen *too rationalistic*. He asks: “Why not just come out and say that sometimes people believe contradictory propositions? His analysis seems to me to be caught in the same kind of dynamics that prevented Plato’s Socrates from seeing the

possibility of a person knowingly doing what she believes to be wrong.” A possible sequence is: (1) knowingly doing wrong, (2) suppressing the knowledge of wrongdoing, and (3) living with the repression in an unconscious state. The first two steps involve choice. It is at the second and third steps that the self-deception solidifies.

The point Garver makes is consistent with the contrast between beliefs-in-use and espoused beliefs. This framing is useful. People, especially postmodern academics, frequently advance a set of espoused beliefs. Yet, somewhat ironically, you often catch them doing things, and saying things, that indicate they do not use their espoused beliefs, or truly believe their espoused beliefs. Their cognitive surface structure (espoused beliefs) does not align with their noetic deep structure, their real beliefs (beliefs-in-use). It is a form of self-deception. This self-deception doesn't need to be of the profound calibre. Such self-deception can be a product of one's working-worldview, one's game-playing, one's preferences, and so on.

A second suggestion in Garver relates to the notion of a *working hypothesis*. It is common practice in science and research to adopt a working hypothesis. Garver expresses the notion of a *working hypothesis* in several ways, seen as follows:

- “Cases of accepting not-*p* as a working hypothesis by resolving to act as if not-*p* were true.”
- “Cases of taking a policy of action to bring oneself to believe that not-*p*.”
- “Simply asserting that not-*p*, despite underlying belief to the contrary.”
- “Aligning oneself with others who are committed to not-*p*.”

Then, as Garver notes: “None of these cases would count as full-blown belief that not-*p* (and thus would not count as cases of holding contradictory beliefs), but they might look very much like it.” It is conceivable, however, that a process could be operative here; in effect, working hypotheses could morph into actual beliefs as a function of habit, lack of self-examination, or simple preference. Self-deception would be a product of earlier choices.

A third suggestion is related to *existential awareness* as opposed to propositional knowledge. Garver notes that there are “forms of knowledge” that one must consider when flagging self-deception. He writes: “...according to Bahnsen, unbelievers ignore and deny through a process of rationalization” but this “... is not always best analyzed in terms of the subject's *propositional* knowledge--a belief in certain propositions. There are forms of knowledge (personal awareness or acquaintance, practical know-how, intuition, etc.) which are not exhausted by propositional knowledge. For example, can a couple's knowledge of how to dance the Lindy Hop be best analyzed in terms of a set of beliefs about the dance? Or does it involve some kind of practical feel for the steps, an embodied awareness of the movements that cannot be fully exhausted propositionally? If so, then there may be kinds or instances of knowledge that do not in any way involve the subjects believing certain propositions. Thus, rather than knowledge ‘*that* God exists,’ the knowledge of God may sometimes be better theorized in terms of an existential awareness of the divine presence, a fundamental openness of the human person to the Person of God, or the like.”



Then there is the issue of *trust*, a key feature of the Reformation view of faith as “knowledge, assent, and trust.” Garver writes: “There may also be unbelievers who quite consciously believe that God exists and assent to that proposition, but still lack the requisite faith *in* God--a trusting reliance upon God, working itself out in love. According to James, the demons have such a faithless belief in God.”

Consider also that there are self-deception drivers like *levels of consciousness*. Garver asks: “What about unconscious beliefs? Levels of consciousness? A multiplicity of competing wills? Compartmentalization? Sure, these are complicated, but so are people in the image of an infinite God.”

The *messy side of things* is also flagged by Garver: “Rather, not to put too fine a point on it, we are pulsing, hot, smelly bodies, whose hearts are revealed in emotions, desires, gestures, positions, poetry, music-making, and relationships and who are equipped with conceptual, linguistic, and symbol-transforming capacities that are thoroughly embedded and enmeshed within habits, family, society, and culture. Epistemological analyses that don't make room for these kinds of considerations, it seems to me, either falsely portray experience or provide accounts so general as to be vacuous.”

The *heart* has reasons, alluding to Pascal. Garver writes: “The question is, given Bahnsen's emphases and the overall shape of his apologetic, what do you do with a person who basically offers no intellectual reason why he rejects Christ? In such cases it is often a far more complex matter of desires, personal identifications, emotional configurations, past experiences, idols, unrighteousness in lifestyle, and so on. Even when intellectual reasons are given, they are more often than not, I think, less intellectual rationalizations and more the epiphenomena of practical rationalizations that arise from the heart.”

So what is happening in this area of self-deception? Rationalization, denial, projection, suppression, and so forth, lead to self-deception; this is a dangerous self-deception. The fact of the existence of self-deception, and the case for self-deception, calls for careful consideration of beliefs. Clearly, such self-deception factors do indeed influence rejection of properly basic beliefs, fundamental beliefs, epistemologically sound beliefs, common sense beliefs, and prudential beliefs. Self-deception is a darkness, a blindness, a state in need of light.

### *Trivers' View -- Evolutionary Selection Principles*

For Trivers (2011) self-deception is viewed as preferentially excluding from consciousness true information, yet including false information. Why? Adaptive advantage! Trivers' hypothesis is as follows: “...this entire counterintuitive arrangement exists for the benefit of manipulating others. We hide reality from our conscious minds the better to hide it from onlookers (2011, p.9).” The self-deceived person has an advantage in the deception of others. Trivers posits a threefold advantage to this. First, a self-deceived person, being unconscious of their deception, does not give off tells or cues that signal deception. Second, the self-deceived person does not have an increased conscious cognitive load to maintain the deception, and

consequently the brain has more access to resources for other tasks. And third, if the deception is revealed, the self-deceived person has an excuse, an escape hatch—they can blame it on something other than the self, the willful self. In effect then, the self-deceived person potentially has an advantage over others in manipulation which serves to propagate one's genes. An interesting evolutionary take! Natural selection selects for deception, and ultimately self-deception.

Such a view, though, is not particularly truth-friendly. As it is certainly consistent with Darwinian notions of development, and the principle of natural selection, those wishing to advance knowledge and truth (as correspondence with reality) have a major battle ahead of them in dealing with deception and self-deception. As Trivers frames the issue: humans are not truth-seeking, nor truth oriented. The lesson seems to be that we should not look to humans for truth; and that would hold for the naturalists, the scientists, the evolutionary biologists, as well as the politicians, theologians, atheists, and moralists we encounter.

Several challenges to Trivers' thesis parallel challenges to naturalism. First, Trivers' position is somewhat consistent with the naturalism that Plantinga (1993b, 2002) challenges as self-refuting. Plantinga would agree that: on naturalism, humans are not truth seeking. See the discussion [below](#) on Plantinga's contention that naturalism is self refuting.

Second, naturalism as presented by Rea (2002) argues that there are ontological consequences of adopting naturalism, “unpalatable consequences” as he labels them. Particularly, naturalism fails at saving two key ontological views: the realism of material objects (RMO), and the realism of other minds (ROM). That people believe in the realism of material objects and the realism of other minds points to beliefs-in-use that do not align with a particular espoused belief, an espoused belief in naturalism, as Rea (2002) sees it. An aspect of the blindness, it seems, is partly in not seeing the problems!

Thirdly, leaving aside for the moment the fact that Triver's natural selection predisposes one to be deceived about natural selection, there are other substantive challenges. Behe's (2007) challenge to the mechanism of natural selection gives one pause here. If Behe is right, and given the empirical data he examines he seems to have a case one should consider, then natural selection apparently can get one only a few steps along the way to creating the phylogenetically new (Behe, 2007, 2010). Natural selection might work well within species but the construction of new structures is a bridge too far at the moment (see also Mazur, 2009)). Even one like William Provine questions natural selection as discussed later [here](#). Natural selection for deception, even self-deception, may work very well within species, but if natural selection fails to generate new structures additional bases should be on the table for understanding self-deception. If so, then self-deception is open to other roots; those roots are sin, evil, self-preservation, malfeasance, “principalities and powers.” These may be stronger roots than self-propagation driven by natural selection.

Fourth, Smith (2009) offers a challenge linked to rights. He asks: “Does moral belief in universal benevolence and human rights fit well with and flow naturally from the facts of a naturalistic universe (2009, p. 294).” He then adds: “The answer I will consider is: No, if we are intellectually honest we will see that a belief in universal benevolence and human rights as a

moral fact and obligation does not make particular sense, fit well with, or naturally flow from the realities of a naturalistic universe (p. 294).” While not a refutation of Trivers’ position, Smith puts more information onto the table for consideration. In the broad context of these challenges suggested here, the issue of self-deception, human misunderstanding, is elaborated.

Fifth, common sense acknowledges the deceptive side of human nature, and common sense accesses the position that humans are indeed truth-seeking at a transcendent level, in spite of the deception. On the one hand, there is the override of the sciences pushing for truth. Further, there is the theological override, the call of truth. Strikingly, Reid makes the common sense case (see [below](#)), the case that humans are basically truth-seeking. I tilt towards the Reidian, hence truth, hence theism.

What then of Trivers’ claim? It is a rich resource for the study of our current state, a state of self-deception. Even if Trivers is wrong regarding the evolutionary source as the sole source, he is often quite right in elaborating on the blight of self-deception. The blindness! His nine categories (see Trivers, 2011, pp. 15-27) of self-deception offer various sources of blindness that open eyes: (1) self-inflation, which has as an intention the blinding of others, is consistent with a type of self blinding, (2) derogation of others, is a blinding to others, and reflective of blindness-seeking, (3) “out-group” derogation and targeted hostility is a type of blindness, (4) power blinds, it blinds the self as seen in cognitive studies using power primes, (5) a sense of, or positioning of, moral superiority shows the judging of others more harshly than the judging of self, signalling our blindness to both others and the self, (6) the illusion of control, (7) biased social theory construction: here our theories of marriage, employment, society, and so on, are such that we are then able “...to persuade self and others of false reality, the better to benefit ourselves (p. 24),” that theories might be adopted, or constructed to self-blind is a challenge to science, (8) the creation of false personal narratives and histories are designed to make one more attractive (with regard to power, physicality, morality, intelligence, etc.) which is a deception of others, and self, and (9) personal psychological modules that are unconscious and deceptive, such as, the module Trivers confesses to: a mild kleptomania. Blindnesses ironically can be seen.

Further insights from Trivers (2011) that flesh out the pandemic state of self-deception can be seen in his treatment of the rewriting of historical narratives (e.g., The Japanese travesties during World War II, the Armenian genocide, Zionism, etc.), the justifications of war, the practices of religions, the treatment of women, male-female relations, and more. Particularly fascinating are the biological links attempted to correlate religious diversity with parasitic load in a geographic area. Interesting, but likely one is still more inclined to see religious diversity linked to cognitive processing rather than the processing of parasites.

#### *Mele’s View -- and Subsequent Cognitive Construals*

For Mele (1997) self-deception is viewed as not intentional; rather, it is largely the product of biases, particularly motivationally biased beliefs. We can be biased to believe what we want to be true. For Mele, one cannot hold that a belief is true and false at the same time, at least in light of current cognitive research.

“In stock examples of self-deception, people typically believe something they *want* to be true: that their spouses are not involved in extramarital flings, that their children are not using drugs, and so on. It is a commonplace that self-deception, in garden-variety cases, is *motivated* by wants such as these. (Mele, 1997, p. 93).”

The motivation influences cognitive behaviour selectively: attention, hypothesis-generation, evidence-gathering, hypothesis-testing, types-of-inferences, selective memory search, beliefs placed on the table, theory consideration, and theory construction are utilized in support of self-deception. The goal is to support a particular conclusion, a confirmation bias, and a conclusion that aligns with what one wants to be true, or hopes to be true. The overall case for not believing  $p$  is greater than the case for believing  $p$  yet one opts for believing  $p$ , or commits to believing  $p$ .

“Should it turn out that the motivated nature of self-deception entails that self-deceivers intentionally deceive themselves and requires that those who deceive themselves into believing that  $p$  start by believing that  $\sim p$ , theorists who seek a tight fit between self-deception and stereotypical interpersonal deception would be vindicated. Whether self-deception can be motivated without being intentional – and without the self-deceiver’s starting with the relevant true belief – remains to be seen (Mele, 1997, p. 93).”

There are many who offer additional considerations for Mele, additional factors that when placed on the table seem to show that self-deception is a construct not yet fully formulated or grasped. For the present purposes, in addressing “understanding theistic misunderstanding,” the fact of non-intentional self-deception is sufficient to make the case that the psychology of self-deception shows self-deception functions as a belief constraint.

Broadening the issue of constraint, one can draw upon the comments from the Open Peer Commentary on Mele’s arguments. These comments add cognitive construals that enrich the construct of self-deception, and the outcome of disbelief. A few comments are added here as a list:

- “‘Self-deception’ usually occurs when a false belief would be more rewarding than an objective belief in the short run, but less rewarding in the long run. Given hyperbolic discounting of delayed events, people will be motivated in their long-range interest to create self-enforcing rules for testing reality, and in their long-range interest to evade these rules (Ainslie, 1997, p. 103).” (*Note the importance of rewards short term and long term.*)
- “Mele views self-deception as belief sustained by motivationally biased treatment of evidence. This view overlooks something essential, for it does not reckon with the fact that in self-deception the truth is dangerously close at hand and must be repeatedly suppressed. Self-deception is not so much a matter of what one positively believes as what one manages not to think (Bach, 1997, p. 105).” (*Note the importance of proximity to truth.*)

- “Mele’s analysis of self-deception is persuasive but it might also be useful to consider the varieties of self-deception that occur in real world settings. Instances of self-deception can be classified along three dimensions: implicit versus explicit, motivated versus process-based, and public versus private (Bornstein, 1997, p. 108).” (*Note the importance of a broadened perspective.*)
- “The simultaneous possession of conflicting beliefs is both possible and logical within current models of human cognition. Specifically, evidence of lateral inhibition and state-dependent memory suggests a means by which conflicting beliefs can coexist without requiring ‘mental exotica.’ We suggest that paradoxical self-deception enables the self deceiver to store important information for use at a later time (Brown & Kenrick, 1997, p. 109).” (*Note the importance of various models of cognitive processing that are supportive of self-deception.*)
- “In an analysis of the role of emotion in self-deception is presented. It is argued that instances of emotional self-deception unproblematically meet Mele’s jointly sufficient criteria. It is further proposed that a consideration of different forms of mental representation allows the possibility of instances of self-deception in which contradictory beliefs (in the form  $p$  and  $\sim p$ ) are held simultaneously with full awareness (Dagleish, 1997, p. 110).” (*Note the potential importance of emotional factors.*)
- “The mechanisms invoked to demonstrate how self-deception can occur without intention or awareness imply that self-deceptive beliefs are nevertheless the outcome of inappropriate and often egoistically driven processes. In contrast, models of pragmatic reasoning suggest that self-deception may well be the “reasonable” output of a more generalized, adaptive approach to hypothesis testing (Friedrich, 1997, p. 113).” (*Note the possible importance of types of reasoning.*)
- “A major worry in self-deception research has been the implication that people can hold a belief that something is true and false at the same time: a logical as well as a psychological impossibility. However, if beliefs are held with imperfect confidence, voluntary self-deception in the sense of seeking evidence to reject an unpleasant belief becomes entirely plausible and demonstrably real (Gibbins, 1997, p. 115).” (*Note the importance of calibrating beliefs.*)
- “As understood by neodissociation and sociocognitive theorists, hypnotic responses are instances of self-deception. Neodissociation theory matches the strict definition of Sackeim and Gur (1978) and sociocognitive theory matches Mele’s looser definition.

Recent data indicate that many hypnotized individuals deceive themselves into holding conflicting beliefs without dissociating, but others convince themselves that the suggested state of affairs is true without simultaneously holding a contrary belief (Kirsch, 1997, p. 118).” (*Note the insight from hypnotism.*)

- “Contrary to Mele’s suggestion, not all garden-variety self deception reduces to bias-generated false beliefs (usually held contrary to the evidence). Many cases center around self-deceiving intentions to avoid painful topics, escape unpleasant truths, seek comfortable attitudes, and evade self-acknowledgment. These intentions do not imply paradoxical projects or contradictory belief states (Martin, 1997, p. 122).” (*Note the importance of function ends or goals in self-deception.*)
- “An important way to become self-deceived, omitted by Mele, is by intentionally ignoring and avoiding the contemplation of evidence one has for an upsetting conclusion, knowing full well that one is giving priority to one’s present peace of mind over the search for truth. Such intentional self-deception may be especially hard to observe scientifically (Perring, 1997, p. 123).” (*Note the importance of peace of mind in belief-selection.*)

The value of such Open Peer commentary serves to keep self-deception in the forefront of belief constraints, and disbelief. Thus self-deception becomes an important source of disbelief, in various forms, levels, and scenarios.

## Psychological Beliefs as Belief-Constraints

Beliefs impel thinking and, subsequently, actions. Beliefs underpin causation whether the cause be a choice (agent causation), a cluster of determinants pushing one in multiple competing directions with the strongest determinants winning the competition (event causation), or a composite of influences like biology, environment, interactions, chance, time and choice with a decision emerging (event plus agent causation). Beliefs and subsequent choices impel bad thinking and, consequently, bad actions.

Belief-based thinking fosters the pursuit of coherence and consonance. Belief-based thinking leads to explanation, psychological constructs, hypotheses, and theories. Belief-based thinking facilitates building an orientation, an identity, and a self. In these processes beliefs are seminal, beliefs are dynamic, and beliefs are forceful.

Yet, beliefs are in a process of development themselves. Beliefs, like trees, follow a course of development from seed to sprout, to sapling, to tree. As the seed, sapling and tree oscillate with circadian and circannual rhythms of their own so too do beliefs fluctuate with rhythms—biological, psychological, developmental, situational, temporal, seasonal, and even theological. Some beliefs unfold in their time. Some beliefs are constructed just in time.

If beliefs emerge over time under the interactive influence of biology and environment at one level (growth factors) and thinking and choosing at another level (constructive factors), then education is critical. Yet education has, in some ways, been the “poor country cousin” in discussions of causality for such topics as IQ, sexual orientation, smoking, drug addiction, obesity, suicidality, musicality, athletic prowess, and so on. Education often takes a back seat to nature, or biology, as the preferred causal force. Nevertheless, education/learning is prominent and, perhaps, the most important player in the mix as one considers the primacy of the person.

Since the acquisition of many beliefs occurs via learning, then clearly education is formative with respect to beliefs learned. Education advances information, formation, and reformation. Beliefs can serve as *material* cause, *formal* cause, and *final* cause. The person then functions as the *efficient* cause, the chooser, in the formation of the belief-based person.

The person is an aggregate of personality, preferences, orientations, skills, aptitudes, strategies, likes, habits, and more. The person is formed under the influence of biology and environment, as well as the influence of beliefs and choices. Some persons make wise choices, or smart choices, via their beliefs (as *material* cause, *formal* cause, and *final* cause). Good beliefs impel the behaviour, channel the behaviour, and craft the behaviour in good ways.

Bad beliefs, as well, are formative of the emerging person. People can make foolish choices because of foolish beliefs, or fragmented beliefs, or faulty beliefs. Such bad beliefs function as formal causes, final causes or just material causes. Bad beliefs lead to disbelief!

Consider the smoking analogy. The problem of smoking is tied to problematic beliefs about smoking (glamourized rebel, peer status, weight-control mechanism, not-really addictive, has a calming effect, escape, etc.) and problematic self-regulation (see Baumeister and his associates, 1997, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2011). Both beliefs (as material, formal and final causes) and self-regulation strengths (as material causes), in the form of cognitive resource pools, would be prominent. Why would intelligent people make foolish choices, frail choices, or familiar or unfamiliar choices with respect to smoking? Why do some fail to regulate their thinking, belief-formations, and behaviour in wise ways? An answer to the problem is framed in terms of having both problematic beliefs and resource limitations for acting upon beliefs.

Failures to self-regulate wisely are due, at times, or in part, to lack of knowledge, lack of strategies, failure to activate appropriate strategies, lack of resources, resource depletion, developmental immaturity, past experiences, personality, simple preferences, motivation, or just simple hedonism. These factors are tied to problems with belief—actual beliefs, conflicting beliefs, fragmented beliefs, or messy beliefs that exist in the belief substrate? Such a case can reasonably be made. If so, then belief is a key construct in problematic trajectories.

### Bad Beliefs—Commonplace Thinking

That people do “stupid” things finds a place in most worldviews. An exception might be made for the worldview of the ethologists and philosophical naturalists. This group is likely to view what some call “stupid” behaviour as simply “different” behaviour. That is, they see differences as natural diversity and, in fact, potentially valuable behaviour in terms of the

survival of the species. To illustrate the point, consider that over-eaters are not judged as gluttons, they are just “different” eaters. In fact, they could survive a catastrophic famine given the fat reserves they have accumulated. As another example, suicidality could free-up scarce resources in a particular impoverished community in which case this “difference” could be seen as socially valuable in a particular context. As a third example, consider that an aversion to heterosexuality leaves a segment of the population isolated and independent with no bonds (or weaker bonds) functioning to keep them tied to familial responsibilities in the locales of say, the more dangerous lower ground, or familiar ground, when the tsunami rolls in. Again, this could have survival value, in that some in the species survive. Drug addictions might generate genetic change that has survival value—like the malaria resistance related to sickle cells, in some locales. Perhaps there could be survival value in “stupid behaviour.” What would be evident in such a naturalist worldview though would be either an absence of traditional moral judgment, or the presence of mitigated moral judgment.

Regardless of the philosophical naturalists’ positive outlook, most people function with a worldview that typically defaults to the commonplace notion that people often show bad thinking, stupidity, and foolishness at all levels of society, and academia. Most people default to this commonplace notion that certain behavioural manifestations are wrong. Moreover, this “stupidity” is seen as fundamentally emerging from “bad thinking” or its precursor, bad beliefs. In effect, bad beliefs blind.

Comedians thrive on such failings, as do psychologists, politicians, researchers, and lawyers. The entertainment industry—film, TV sitcoms, magazines, books, and comedians—depends on bad thinking. Media depend on bad thinking and bad beliefs for material to fill columns and nightly news programs.

Deception by self, by situation, and by others is a primary source of bad beliefs, and bad thinking, and by extension, blindnesses. Of particular interest here is the self-deception that leads to bad thinking, bad choices, and bad behaviour. When people fail to regulate their behaviour in intelligent or wise ways some type of self-deception, or epistemic failure, is operative. Self-deception pushes them off course, or allows them to veer off a more prudent course. Yet self-deception, denial, projection, rationalization, and epistemic failures, are only part of the story.

Self-regulation is another part of the story. Self-regulation, first of thinking, then beliefs and behaviour, underpins learning, doing, and identity formation. On the flip side, our learning and our identity underpins our self-regulation. They operate in a reciprocal relationship. It is learning and education that influences self-regulation; at the same time self-regulation influences learning and education.

Why are there failures in self-regulation? Why are there failures in beliefs? Why do we at times regulate our thinking, beliefs and behaviours, in a manner that leads to good ends, and at other times suspect ends? Various approaches to this question have been advanced—philosophical, theological, and psychological. Each explains beliefs and disbelief.



## Bad Beliefs—Philosophical Thinking

Plantinga addresses why we at times fail to self-regulate our thinking, and behaviours, in a manner that leads to good ends. Two answers link bad beliefs to lack of warrant on the one hand, and bad architecture (i.e., a defective neuro/cognitive infrastructure generating brains/minds that are not functioning properly) on the other hand. This philosophical position (Plantinga, 1993a, 1993b) serves as a foundation for addressing the “disbelief” question, generally, and also for consideration of subsequent psychological models which focus on bad beliefs.

With respect to warrant (i.e., the rational support for a particular belief) and proper function, Plantinga (1993b) presents his basic claim: “As I see it, a belief has warrant if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no malfunctioning) in a cognitive environment congenial for those faculties, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth (p. ix).” In addition to a “presupposition of reliability” (Plantinga, 1993a, p. 214), there are qualifiers, or caveats, such that there is a need to acknowledge (1) co-existing plans (what he terms the design plan versus the max plan), (2) by-products, (3) functional multiplicity (4) purpose versus design, and (5) “trade-offs and compromises” (See Plantinga, 1993b, p. 21-40) as relevant constructs impacting belief.

## Bad Beliefs—Psychological Thinking

Readily seen from psycho-history are the monumental failures in the beliefs, opinions, and knowledge claims of individuals—whether based on first-person knowledge, memory, argument, research, coherence, or theory. A plethora of explanatory models and variables are advanced in psychology to explain failures in beliefs and failures in subsequent self-regulation.

Psychological theories, and models, offer explanatory approaches and also grounds for caution in trusting beliefs and knowledge claims. Caution is warranted when assuming one completely understands the mechanisms involved in such problem beliefs, behaviours and preferences as: problematic eating patterns, smoking, sexual preferences, racism, phobias, and so on.

Sternberg (2002) compiled a number of perspectives to address the question of why smart people do stupid things. Having multiple models on the table provides a range of potential explanations, and insights. Many of these perspectives reduce to the issue of belief—faulty beliefs, immature beliefs, competing beliefs, fluctuating beliefs, unwise beliefs, or just plain “stupid” beliefs.

### A Simple Beliefs Model

Dweck (2002) argued that incorrect beliefs or a failure to fully use one’s beliefs, stunt the intellect, and subsequently, impact one’s behaviour negatively. For example, believing that ability is fixed, or that potential cannot be developed, or that there is no meaningful value in effort, can be detrimental. It is a faulty belief to believe there is no value in effort, if indeed there is value in effort, and if indeed ability is not fixed. In fact, cross-cultural approaches to learning

that consider such attributions as ability, effort, or luck, do point to the significant value of effort (e.g., Stevenson, 1992). Such empirical research would support Dweck's contention that incorrect beliefs are like blindnesses leading to faulty self-regulation, and less-than-smart behaviour—behaviour that interferes with development.

The solution for poor self-regulation in this attribution-theory framework is acquiring, or developing, a better belief, or a correct belief—a belief in the value of effort, for example (Dweck, 2007). Such a belief can lead to substantive effort, better knowledge construction, and better cognitive processing, all of which would presage better choices. Better beliefs and subsequently better behaviours are more likely to lead to wiser behaviour. Thus, it is a *belief-thinking-choice* applied sequence which drives poor behaviour (and smart behaviour) with the fundamental problems (and solutions) rooted at the belief level. This might be considered as influenced by nature and nurture, but the solution is nurture, that is, nurturing beliefs that will facilitate better thinking, insight, and self-regulation.

This simple beliefs model does tie quite easily to the philosophical underpinnings offered by Plantinga (1993a, 1993b). That which undermines warrant for beliefs, whether improperly functioning cognitive architecture, bad beliefs, or cognitive aberrations, will predispose one to building poor constructs, making poor choices, applying poor self-regulation, and becoming a poor fool.

#### An Activity-Switching, Self-Regulation Model

An approach which goes beyond simple beliefs as the mechanism of bad behaviour is the activity switching model proposed by Perkins (2002). Perkins targets folly as a psychological construct linked to a recurring failure to self-regulate appropriately, in spite of an apparent ability or potential to self-regulate. He advances the notions of *blind folly* and *plain folly* as informative categories to frame poor thinking. *Blind folly* is characterized by oblivion or “deep self-deception.” It might be seen in practice when one’s “espoused theories,” or “espoused beliefs,” fail to align with one’s practices or “theories-in-use.” To illustrate, consider the following academic: George, in his postmodern garb, espouses the belief that knowledge is “impossible,” then he turns and argues for the claim, expecting the reader to come to know this “fact.” Or, that same person, George, will turn and look to see if there is a bus coming before he crosses the street. Clearly, his “beliefs-in-use” do not align with his “espoused beliefs.” There is a “belief” problem here. Blind folly!

Then there is the smoking example. Whether or not a smoker can reach the stage of deep self-deception, or *blind folly*, is not clear, as one suspects all smokers know, at some level, there are major problems with smoking. If one argues that smoking is harmful and foolish, yet uses the belief, an espoused belief, that smoking helps control weight, to justify the behaviour, this is a different kind of folly. *Plain folly* exists when we know a particular behaviour is foolish, unwise, risky, or wrong, yet we persist in it<sup>1</sup>. It is a form of rationalization. Perhaps *blind folly* could be viewed as an unconscious disconnect, whereas, *plain folly* is a conscious disconnect.

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<sup>1</sup> It would seem possible as well that plain folly would morph into blind folly at some point, at least for some beliefs. Such a transition would be worth investigation with respect to self-deception, rationalization, suppression, repression, denial and so on.

On a mild end of various connect-disconnect continua we could list actions like over-eating, smoking, procrastination, speeding, jumping the orange/red light, and sexual experimentation. On the more serious end we could list drinking and driving, unprotected sex, street racing, racism, or even extremes like the “stupid” behaviours (or what we label as inhumane behaviours) seen in sociopathic behaviour, pogroms, the holocaust, and genocides. For an example of foolish thinking (*plain folly*) in this area one could refer to Gross (2006) for his analysis of the Kielce pogrom in Poland following World War II. With *plain folly*, people knew they were doing something wrong. In this pogrom the Poles who participated knew they were doing something wrong regardless of the rationalizing. *Blind folly* does not seem to rise to the conscious level. Or perhaps it does not rise to the conscious level any longer.

Rather than defer to explanations like “weak-will,” or emotions, Perkins develops the notion of “emergent activity switching” where “...drivers in a system increase in intensity, eventually reaching a tipping point that reorganizes the system into another pattern of activity... (Perkins, 2002, p. 66).” *Plain folly* transforms into *blind folly*—like water to ice. One innocuous analogy offered by Perkins is thirst. It is not difficult to imagine that a rational pursuit to quench a thirst can be restructured into frenzied and apparently irrational behaviour as the thirst builds. Stealing a bottle of water as desperate thirst increases is perhaps an example of a shift to *plain folly*; whereas, leaving a baby in a hot car in the summer to search for a bottle of water to purchase is thinking so focused as to be considered closer to *blind folly* and irrationality.

When would *plain folly* switch to *blind folly* in the area of smoking? Perhaps when smoking has regressed to the level of automaticity—a thoughtless activity with respect to both benefits and harms. When would *plain folly* switch to *blind folly* in the area of over-eating? Perhaps when eating has regressed to the level of automaticity—a thoughtless activity with respect to cognitive input or controls. When would *plain folly* switch to *blind folly* in the area of pedophilia, homosexuality, pornography, zoosexuality? Is it when automaticity overpowers cognition, social conscience, or synderesis? There seems to be a loss of conscious control. When would *plain folly* switch to *blind folly* in the area of suicidality? Perhaps *plain folly* switches to *blind folly* when the suicidal act, as opposed to ideation, or parasuicidal acts, takes place.

A pursuit of knowledge—by an academic—morphs into lying, cheating, fraud, and subversion. *Plain folly* it would seem! Indeed, fraudulent research has been attributed to the likes of prominent people like Newton (Broad & Wade, 1982) and Sir Cyril Burt (Hearnshaw, 1979). With respect to Burt it seems he reached the state of *blind folly*. Then there are fraudulent biographies which have been attributed to people like Edward Said (Weiner, 2000), or, more famously, people like Wilkomirski and his “Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binjamin\\_Wilkomirski](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binjamin_Wilkomirski)) or the Nobel Prize winning “I, Rigoberta Menchu” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigoberta\\_Mench%C3%BA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigoberta_Mench%C3%BA)). Which of the above would be examples of *plain folly* (conscious) and which would be examples of *blind folly* (unconscious, or post-conscious)?

Honourable pursuits (e.g., a livelihood, raising a child, winning a hockey game, gaining property, selling a product, getting the trains running on time, helping a native population, correcting a historical injustice, and so on) are admirable, desirable, and exemplary. But, such pursuits can morph into *plain folly*, and then worse, *blind folly*. Does *plain folly* and *blind folly* reduce to unwarranted beliefs in one form or another? It seems so.

Emergent activity switching is normally an effective mechanism for meeting needs and normal functioning. But it can function as what Perkins calls “an engine of folly.” It can generate things like impulsivity, neglect, procrastination, vacillation, backsliding, indulgence, overdoing, walking the edge, and so on. Perkins attributes these problems to: (1) mistuning (key parameters are “not well tuned to generate adaptive behaviour”), (2) entrenchment (counterproductive patterns persist, perhaps habitually), and (3) undermanagement (such that low level conditioning processes are dominant rather than more rational cognitive and metacognitive strategies). He also argues that more typical excuses which fall in the category of folk-psychology (e.g., weakness of will, overwhelming emotions, mindlessness, and irresponsibility) can actually serve as “a barrier to effective self regulation (p. 84).” Thus, again, better knowledge construction, better thinking, and better management are seen as the route to better beliefs and better choices. However, a constructivism that advances a particular knowledge construction independent of the precursors of that construction (history, development, trajectory, transitions, choices, or as Perkins might say “without examining the mistuning, entrenchment, and undermanagement”) is potentially an “engine of folly.”

When a thinking philosopher, who prized thinking, like Heidegger (or Feyerabend) adopts the ideology of National Socialism, is this a problem with emergent activity switching? Did such thinkers fall into “deep deception,” or *blind folly*, as a result of initial, honest aspirations for German development? Was there a defaulting to an “engine of folly” through mistuning, entrenchment and undermanagement?

Thinking is the problem when it leads to faulty beliefs. If so, it is not better thinking generally that is the solution, nor is it better thinking on a particular topic that is the solution. Rather, it is good thinking on a topic that leads to correct beliefs, or at least warranted beliefs in a belief-panoply.

From the perspective of Plantinga’s approach to warranted belief and proper function what has gone awry? For Nazi thinkers like Heidegger and Feyerabend are we dealing with glitches, or trade-offs, or compromises, or competing functionalities, or competing design plans? For Perkins, is it *plain folly* or *blind folly*? Is it surface deception or deep deception? Is it reasonable ignorance, or self-deception? It is surely, in the end, bad beliefs.

### An Imbalance Model

Sternberg (2002) advances an imbalance model as a theory of foolishness. He contrasts foolishness with wisdom, as opposed to the stupid/intelligent contrast. It seems—admittedly taking a little interpretive liberty—the imbalance can apply to *deficits*, *dispositions*, and *desires*. Sternberg sees the beginning of foolishness in a problem with tacit knowledge which is considered to be in a *deficit* state. Tacit knowledge is procedural (i.e., knowing how), instrumental (i.e., strategy tools for achieving goals and valuables, or what one desires in the context of competing desires), and indirectly acquired (e.g., via pragmatics, socio-linguistics, or dispositions). In this configuration the “beginning of foolishness” is dependent on beliefs, knowledge, skill and personal agency.

The three *dispositions* that interfere with tacit knowledge use are: a sense of omnipotence, a sense of omniscience, and a sense of invulnerability. Such dispositions would indicate a psychological state that was out of balance. Such dispositions are unreasonable for

human beings. Such dispositions can be found in youth, in the socially powerful, in authoritarians, in the wealthy, in the arrogant, in the criminal, and in those in positions of prestige.

Finally, there are *desires* out of balance. This might be seen in a selective focus on an interest, a timeframe, or an action.

Wisdom involves balance: (1) between INTERESTS, intrapersonal interests (e.g., growth, knowledge, security, etc.), interpersonal interests (e.g., friendships, love relationships, Teacher-student relationships, etc.), and extrapersonal interests (e.g., city, country, God), (2) between TIMEFRAMES (the short term and the long term), and (3) between ACTIONS (adaptation to an environment, shaping an environment, and selecting a new environment). Foolishness is seen in an imbalance in one or more of these areas. While Sternberg's balance theory does provide a descriptive framework, a very real question is: what pushes the *deficit* in tacit knowledge? Is it a failure to learn? Is it incorrect learning? Is it an inability to learn? Does it reduce to belief? What pushes problematic *dispositions* to the surface? Are these just problematic beliefs? Are desires entangled with beliefs?

Sternberg's focus on balance can reduce to a focus on beliefs. Beliefs underpin tacit knowledge, dispositions, and desires. Beliefs underpin interests, objectives, and actions. Beliefs underpin restoration of balance, personal agency, and responsibility.

Sternberg applies his model to Clinton, Nixon, Chamberlain, Judge Wachtler, and War, for examples. Perhaps even the foolish choices of Heidegger and Feyerabend supporting a Nazi agenda would fit here. In terms of *dispositions* these individuals could be viewed as having a sense of omniscience, omnipotence and invulnerability, at least arguably to some degree. In terms of *desires*, these individuals likely did show an imbalance in interests (personal through to extrapersonal), an imbalance in timeframes (immediate, distant), and an imbalance in objectives (reactive, stasis, and proactive). But doesn't everyone? In terms of *deficits*, these individuals may have opted for strategies that revealed they really did not have good knowledge regarding "know-how," at least in some areas. So again, it would seem that the problem is in a select area. And, are there some individuals we consider wise who showed such imbalances (e.g., Jesus, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, and so on)?

Applying Sternberg's model to smoking we start with the *dispositions*. Young smokers just beginning their smoking trajectory do seem to have a disposition characterized by a sense of omnipotence, a sense of omniscience, and a sense of invulnerability. They don't see the harm they are open to encounter.

Secondly, these young smoking neophytes clearly have *desires* out of balance: (1) between INTERESTS, intrapersonal interests (e.g., health, athletic ability, status, peer approval), interpersonal interests (approval from parents, teachers, peers, etc.), and extrapersonal interests (e.g., fitting into city, country, and religion), (2) between TIMEFRAMES, (i.e., the initial dabbler in the short term and the addict in the long term), and (3) between ACTIONS, adaptation to an environment, shaping an environment, and selecting a new environment. They don't see the variables in play.

Finally, with respect to *deficits* in tacit knowledge, they have them. They lack the procedural and instrumental knowledge necessary to deal appropriately with situations, dispositions, interests, timeframes, and aspirations. Foolishness is seen in the behaviour of the

smokers. But it is also seen in the beliefs of the smokers. Arguable, the imbalance in beliefs precedes the imbalance in behaviour.

Though Sternberg's model contains a great deal of detail and direction for thought it too does seem to reduce to faulty beliefs, competing beliefs, or bad beliefs, and, equally importantly, the choices such beliefs sustain. Deficient beliefs and imbalances walk together.

### An Illusory Thinking Model

An illusory thinking model (Piattelli-Palmarini, 1994) can be tied to mistakes in knowing, or illusions about what we think we know, and thus bad beliefs. Piattelli-Palmarini argues for seven deadly sins, or dangers, that lead us to wrong conclusions and bad beliefs.

- The first danger is “overconfidence.” Many people show an unrealistic overconfidence in their answers to questions, even factual questions. Indeed, “...the discrepancy between correctness of response and overconfidence increases as the respondent is more knowledgeable” (p.119). The more you know, the more you need to guard against overconfidence.
- The second danger is “illusory correlations” or magical thinking. The person convinced of a “positive correlation...will always find new confirmations and justify why it should be so (p.122).” “We are naturally... verifiers rather than falsifiers... (p. 123).”
- The third danger is the "Historian's Fallacy" or “predictability in hindsight.” In essence, “...we all honestly think we could have predicted what happened, as long as we know, or think we know, that it actually did happen (p. 124).”
- The fourth danger is “anchoring.” Our beliefs and opinions get arbitrarily "anchored" to such things as "first impressions," original opinions, contexts, propaganda, news reports, authorities, and emotions. These first impressions are quite resistant to change. It is almost as if pride gets in the way.
- The fifth danger is “ease of representation.” For example, when asked which is greater, death from suicide or death from homicide, homicide usually gets the nod. People typically report a greater death rate via homicide, as “...the more the occurrence impresses us emotionally, the more likely we are to think of it as also objectively frequent (p. 128).” Be wary of your imagination!
- The sixth danger is “probability blindness.” “Any probabilistic intuition by anyone not specifically tutored in probability calculus has a greater than 50 percent chance of being wrong (p. 132).” We are "blind not only to extremes of probabilities, but also to intermediate probabilities... (p. 131).” Is our reaction to genetic engineering, nuclear power, pharmaceutical test demands rational? We have a non-rational “...peremptory desire that there be no risk at all... (p. 131),” and thus small risks can gain greater proportions than warranted.
- The seventh danger is “reconsideration under suitable scripts,” or what Piattelli-Palmarini calls the “Othello Effect.” In essence, “...our judgment of probability allows itself to be influenced by fictions, including scenarios we know to be pure inventions

(p. 134).” As Othello was influenced by the script, the fictitious script, offered by Iago, so we are vulnerable to alternate scripts.

In essence, the entire notion of illusory thinking simply reduces to bad beliefs, or faulty beliefs. What Piattelli-Palmarini offers, and the offerings are valuable, are psychological sources of bad beliefs. What is developed here is a psychology of bad beliefs—belief-based disbelief. As seen earlier Plantinga contributes to this psychology as do Sternberg, Dweck, and Perkins. Indeed, all of the models hover around the key construct of “beliefs.”

Applied to smoking: (1) are smokers “overconfident” in their initial ability to control their smoking, and their judgments about the value of smoking? Yes! (2) Are smokers prone to “illusory correlations,” focusing on the social, sedating, and slimming benefits of smoking only? Yes! (3) Are smokers’ beliefs and practices “anchored” to their primary experiences with smoking (i.e., the cool, the rebel, the rush)? Yes! (4) Are smokers subject to “ease of representation” which emerges from their smoking peer group? Yes! (5) Do smokers experience the “Othello Effect” via the information (scripts) they receive from their “friends” and the more distant commercial nicotine pushers? Yes!

Asking the same questions of those formulating opinions on their homosexual orientation, or their over-eater’s image, can generate similar affirmative answers. Are homosexuals “overconfident” in their natural disposition, and their judgments about the nature of a homosexual orientation? Often! (2) Are homosexuals prone to “illusory correlations,” focusing on social preferences, mannerisms, and interests as orientation markers? Often! (3) Are homosexuals’ beliefs and practices “anchored” to their primary experiences with sexual activities? Often! (4) Are homosexuals subject to “ease of representation” which emerges from their peer group? Often! (5) Do homosexuals experience the “Othello Effect” via the information they receive from their “friends” and society? Often! Can one argue that the answers are often Yes? Yes!<sup>1</sup>

### A Strategic Self-Regulation Model

Also targeting failures in self-regulation as the road to stupidity is the model offered by Ayduk and Mischel (2002). Close to home, there was a Coroner’s Inquest in Windsor, Ontario (Canada) regarding the murder of a nurse by her rejected lover (a doctor in the same hospital). That these two—the victim and the murderer—were “smart” people would be a safe inference given their education and their career paths. How is it that a smart person does such a stupid thing?

A parallel to the above scenario is presented by Ayduk and Mischel (2002) as the “... fall of Sol Wachtler, chief judge of the State of New York and the court of appeals, to incarceration as a felon in federal prison. Judge Wachtler was well known for advocating laws to make marital rape a punishable crime, and he was deeply respected for his landmark decisions on free speech, civil rights, and right-to-die issues. After his mistress left him for another man, however, Judge Wachtler spent thirteen months writing obscene letters, making lewd phone calls, and threatening

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<sup>1</sup> For further consideration and elaboration of these illusory effects, and related cognitive dangers, see the later discussion on the [“confirmation bias.”](#)

to kidnap her daughter. His descent from the court's bench as the model of jurisprudence and moral wisdom to federal prison testifies that smart people are not necessarily consistently so across different areas of their lives... (p. 86)". Why the stupidity in cases like these, cases in the highest of professions?

Ayduk and Mischel (2002) note many contributing factors (construals, expectations, beliefs, values, and so on, that factor into such behaviour). A sense of entitlement, a sense of immunity, a sense of assured privacy, might contribute. Or akrasia (i.e., the notion of the weak-will of a person) might be a rationalization. Furthermore, it is not a major hurdle to acknowledge that the person might want to do the right thing, and that the person might know what the right thing is, yet the person defaults to do the wrong thing. A weak-will might serve as an explanation as it seems to fit with common observations, personal experiences, and some psychological research. But is the weak-will a personality trait, a character flaw, a failure of reason, an overpowering emotion, or a slippage of reasoned self-regulation?

While Ayduk and Mischel note that construals, expectations, beliefs, values, and so on, factor into such behaviour, how do these play out in terms of relative importance. Which is most important? Which is the foundational factor? Which is the prior factor? Is it values? Is it beliefs? Is it personality? Is it will power? A logical and temporal case can be made that beliefs are prior—beliefs support values, beliefs undergird the motivation for willful acts, beliefs can be formative of aspects of personality (e.g., kindness, patience, sociability, on the “right” hand, and bullying, intolerance, bigotry, racism on the other hand, the sinister hand). Beliefs seem to be foundational.

Whether the source of the tendency to stupidity is a belief, a problem tied to a brain-based personality trait, a problem with human nature, or simply a cognitive failure in self-regulation, what Ayduk and Mischel attempt to do in the text is to offer understanding to help people “...outsmart their own tendencies to behave stupidly...(p. 88),” ....

A list of mediators (as might be inferred from the research cited and textual comments) which could help people “outsmart their own tendencies” would include:

1. Learning delayed gratification strategies. Manage rewards to capitalize on the value of distance and abstraction (i.e., long term and higher order rewards), perhaps by activating the negative or aversive aspects of immediate desirable distractions.
2. Understand “Systems of Thinking” (hot vs cool) and focus attention on the “cool” systems which emphasize informational and abstract aspects.
3. Avoid thinking about the dangerous topic by purposeful self-distraction. This might be accomplished by attending to fun-filled and pleasant distractions (not aversive distractions, or sad thoughts, as these, apparently, don't work as well).
4. Implementation plans can be set. A plan can initiate goal-directed behaviour automatically; a plan can facilitate action initiation; and a plan can drive action blockage (e.g., “no food after dinner” as a plan or rule can preemptively serve as an action blockage for eating too much).
5. Strategies to resist (e.g., to resist distraction planned rewards help— “...temptation-inhibiting, and reward-oriented implementation plans facilitated self-control better than task-facilitating plans...” (p.94)



6. Recognize dispositional vulnerabilities (e.g., rejection sensitivity...) and apply cognitive reappraisal. That is, reconstrue problems as differences of opinion, or situationally induced, or transitory, etc. (transforming, or reframing temptations and obstacles...)
7. Focus on long term goals as opposed to short term goals (long term is better)
8. Recognize there are levels of motivation in which case strategies to increase motivational level could help.
9. Control and self-efficacy beliefs influence effort, optimism and a coping style that can lead to more positive outcomes.
10. Awareness of neuropsychological underpinnings might facilitate the engagement of frontal lobes and hippocampal connections to override the amygdala-based responses—in effect, having “cool” reason trumping “hot” emotions.

The list is based on empirical research, and does explicate the case for failures in self-regulation as a source of stupidity. In effect, the entire list could be characterized as “eye-openers.” The intent is to counteract blindnesses.

Would such a list of mediators of self-regulation have helped Judge Wachtler, one wonders? How one would get Judge Wachtler to practice such strategies is not clear in terms of the details. For one thing, though, he would have to believe in them, at least as possibilities, to consider them, to try them, and to use them; so we are back to the importance of beliefs.

In terms of the big picture there is a need for clear, cool, calm thinking, and strategies like those listed above to facilitate thinking dispositions and thinking skills. However, that prominent thinkers—people like Heidegger and Feyerabend—would be cool, calm, thinkers raises the possibility that thinking is not enough. While there is a place for good thinking and good arguments, what we seem to need is better thinking, better arguments, indeed, the best arguments, on the one hand.

But on the other hand, we need ways to circumvent “bad beliefs.” The high priority regarding good thinking in this approach does point to the fundamental importance of methodology, but the essential focus, the more fundamental focus, should be belief—good beliefs as opposed to bad beliefs. Good thinkers can end up with bad beliefs. Moreover, at times what appear to be good beliefs turn out to be bad beliefs. There are times when we think we have the right belief, but we don’t; those are the dangerous times.

#### A Doing-Good Model (Problematic Self-Regulation)

There is a paradox in the failure to do “the good” by “doing a good” (i.e., doing what is stupid, albeit intending to do what is good). A bad belief of which one is not aware, arguably! One consideration of this phenomenon can be seen in Sowell’s (1999) book “The Quest for Cosmic Justice.” He presents a number of cases where intentions to do the good—that which one believes is the good—end up causing harm. People implement policies and practices intended to help the poor, for example, and end up doing more harm to the poor. Good intentions, bad consequences! Such do-goodery is framed by Sowell’s term “The Tyranny of Visions.” We need

a careful examination of our vision (our beliefs) to avoid such tyranny. We need good beliefs as a basis for self-regulation to pursue a wise vision.

To illustrate how doing good can be a failure to do good, Sowell points to the nineteenth century housing reform in the US. Slum conditions were dreadful with immigrants packed into rooms (three or more per room) with poor ventilation, and poor, or no, indoor toilet facilities. “To the reformers, it followed as the night follows the day that laws should ban such conditions and set standards for the way apartment buildings were built as well as standards for how much space must be allowed per person and other desirable features that all housing must have (Sowell, 1999, p. 128).” Reforms were set in motion—the tyranny of the reformers’ vision—blind to the more pressing needs of the slum-dwellers. The slum-dwellers, were saving money with often more than half of meager earnings ending up in the bank. Or they were sending money to relatives to assist their move to the US. They were making choices. “The kinds of reforms being promoted in the nineteenth century did not expand the slum-dwellers’ options but reduced them. Since better housing mandated by law cost more money, immigrant slum-dwellers now had to devote a higher percentage of their incomes toward purchasing more expensive housing with features that would be more pleasing to third-party observers, rather than make the trade-offs that they themselves would have preferred with their own money (p. 128).” The reformers were blinded by their beliefs, by their good-intentions, by their do-good model.

From a psychological perspective, Baumeister and his associates (Baumeister, 1997; 2005; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004a, 2004b) argue for a focus on self-regulation as a mechanism for understanding stupidity, foolishness, misbehaviour, and even evil. With this focus it is possible to reframe their approach with a question: Can one end up doing what is stupid or wrong, albeit with the intention of “doing good?” Yes! Doing what one believes to be “the good” can end up obviously doing what is stupid, along the line of Sowell’s claim (1999). In fact, it might be the case that all stupidity is driven by doing what one believes to be good.

While termed a “doing-good” model for the present discussion, it is an approach that links to the roots of evil—the four roots of evil as identified by Baumeister (1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). The four roots are: (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure. These roots of evil can be configured as “doing good:”

- (1) when good is defined as getting what one wants (Instrumentality for gain),
- (2) when good is defined as dealing with threats to the ego, the self (e.g., responding to an attack on honour, image, self esteem, etc.) and therefore image enhancement (self-protection, and the development of self-esteem),
- (3) when doing good is defined as doing what one believes to be right (idealism), and,
- (4) the Law of Effect (i.e., behaviour that is followed by a good effect tends to be repeated), when doing good is defined as obtaining reinforcement (even when the reinforcement emerges from such suspect sources as sadism, schaudenfreude, or a vengeful, vigilante-justice).

Applying Baumeister’s four roots of evil (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) on either a macro level or a micro level is informative. On a macro level consider the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Was this “doing-good” with respect to the following four sources: (1) gain, (2)

egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure. Yes. These roots of evil can be configured as doing good: (1) *gain*, when good is defined as getting what one wants (revenge, attention, the will of Allah, jihad, submission, etc.), (2) *egotism*, when good is defined as dealing with threats to the self (an attrition of honour, image, self esteem, culture, religion, etc.) and therefore image enhancement (self-protection, and the development of self-esteem, as with the image enhancement evident in much of the Islamic reaction), (3) *idealism*, when doing good is defined as doing what one believes to be right (idealism, particularly religious idealism), and, (4) *the Law of Effect* (behaviour that is followed by a good effect tends to be repeated), when doing good is defined as obtaining reinforcement (even when the reinforcement emerges from such suspect sources as sadism, schaudenfreude, or revengeful justice, as in the rewards which followed previous terrorist acts).

On a micro level consider the robbery of the local 7/11. Was this “doing-good” with respect to: (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure. Yes. These roots of evil can be configured as doing good: (1) *gain*, when good is defined as getting what one wants (money and cigarettes), (2) *egotism*, when good is defined as dealing with threats to the self (an attrition of honour, image, self esteem, etc.) and therefore image enhancement (self-protection, and the development of self-esteem, as with the image enhancement that money and crime can buy), (3) *idealism*, when doing good is defined as doing what one believes to be right (a sense of entitlement, or a retributive sense of dealing with Marxist injustice), and (4) *the Law of Effect* (behaviour that is followed by a good effect tends to be repeated), when doing good is defined as obtaining reinforcement (even when the reinforcement emerges from such suspect sources as sadism or schadenfreude, as in the rewards which followed previous criminal acts). At the macro level and the micro level “doing good” appears malevolently intertwined with doing evil.<sup>1</sup>

Opposed to such causal influences one hopes there is a self-control or self-regulation mechanism that ideally serves to police the lower or lesser “goods.” Unfortunately, one often defaults to lower level or lesser goods as a function of poor self-regulation. Baumeister (1997) makes a very good case for the conceptual and practical importance of self-regulation. And the explanations offered for failures in self regulation are informative, particularly since he is integrating thinking from various sources. For example, he argues, and presents empirical evidence, for the claim that self-regulation is tied to a limited resource (or power). When we are involved in a self-regulatory activity we can deplete that resource and thus fail at a subsequent task that requires self-regulation in another area. On the positive side, he offers a case for strengthening that resource much like one might strengthen a muscle.

Further, Baumeister considers the possibility that failures to self-regulate may be tied to a shift in thinking towards low-level thinking in a manner proposed by Vallacher and Wegner (1987). Such low-level thinking fixates on the periphery, on mundane details, and on irrelevancies when higher level thinking encounters constraints (see the discussion of [action identification theory](#) in a later section). People can miss the big picture, or avoid the morally taxing questions, or switch from cognitively demanding rationales, when constrained. They default to addressing the more mundane, albeit in an efficient way. There is a shift to belief

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<sup>1</sup> Is smoking viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Is homosexuality viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Is over-eating viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Is suicide viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Yes, in all cases?

deterioration or, at least, a shift to deterioration for “beliefs-in-use” if not espoused beliefs. It is an intriguing belief-limitation that sets in.

In another variant on thinking-shifts, he draws on Solomon and Corbit’s (1974) opponent-process theory which helps explain how a person can be drawn in to aversive conditions. Using examples like sky-diving, or bungee-jumping, one can see how opponent-processes could combine—the aversive sensation of falling is opposed by the subsequent pleasant sensation of safety, or relaxation. In effect, a failure to self-regulate to avoid an aversive situation can be facilitated by the reward associated with the subsequent situation, the favourable opponent-process. Afterward, one might choose to confront an aversive situation to attain the reward which follows. Indeed, there is the possibility that both the process, and the opponent-process, are rewarding but in different ways—one showing decreasing potency, while the other shows increasing potency. In such a scenario we can see how bad beliefs, or risky beliefs, can be rewarded, just like bad actions, or risky actions, can be rewarded. For a fuller discussion of the [opponent-process theory see the later section](#).

If there is a limitation in Baumeister’s claims it is likely linked to the source of self regulation. Worthington and Berry (2005) question Baumeister’s “...explicit attempt to rely solely on scientific data (p. 157)...” in which case the “virtue” of self-control is a resident attribute (whether innate, acquired, learned or developed). Having self-regulatory competence, like having a good memory, doesn’t point one in the direction of where the application of the skill would be appropriate. Indeed, wisdom would be a more descriptive, and more functional, master virtue. Wisdom would draw upon Convention, Synderesis, Social Conscience, Law, Deontology, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, Altruism, Selflessness, Self-interest, Moral Development, Character, and so on. In essence, a failure in wisdom would seem to be a more important problem than a failure in self-regulation since wisdom underpins sound self-regulation. In this scenario a failure in wisdom would correspond to a failure in belief.

Is there an ideal or universal standard that is tied to deep knowledge or a hardwired synderesis? Is there a knowledge that we can’t not know? According to some there are universals, or shared moral norms or principles like “courage is a virtue” (Beis, 1964). As well, arguably, there are things we “can’t not know” (Budziszewski, 1997, 1999, 2003). Such hard-wired “deep knowledge” typically tied to natural law theory is not simply religious. In fact, George (2001) carefully maps out the links to Socrates, Plato, Cicero and Aristotle providing a philosophical underpinning that coexists with the Judeo-Christian religious foundation. However, as a source of self-regulation, this hard-wired knowledge (or belief) is not a sufficient cause. Indeed, we often act contrary to our better knowledge, and better self.

Baumeister and Vohls (2004) term a problem with self control as a proximal cause. It is more informative to see it viewed in Aristotelian terms as a problem with a material cause, or efficient cause, or final cause, or formal cause. To illustrate, when one does not exercise a particular self-control option, one is responding to competing final causes, and “the other cause” won. One may be hampered by a lack of the material resources (e.g., peer, parent, or social institutions) to support exercise of a particular self-control option. As an efficient-causal agent, one is choosing a particular self-control option. The notion of competing final causes and personal agency is a key consideration here.

Rather, than focus on the presence of evil, or source of evil, it is equally informative to address the absence of good, or absence of the better good. If evil is the absence of good (or the

better good) such a focus is appropriate. The solution to the problem, then, is, in part, to formulate a policy on the good in terms of definition and rank. The purpose of focusing on rank is to flag the notion that some “goods” are more important than others. The good associated with a full stomach (and thus a long term focus on preserving life) is less important than the good associated with a life preserved in the immediacy of a flailing, drowning-victim. There are competing goods, and one should forego the lesser for the better good. In terms of competing final causes, some final causes are better than others.

So, failures to self-regulate are linkable to competing beliefs about competing goods (final causes)? Likely we are facing a failure to self-regulate in part only. At least one configuration of a failure to self regulate emerges from an *inappropriate belief* about the most appropriate good to choose, or *competing beliefs* about the most appropriate good to choose. One chooses the wrong level of good in the hierarchy. Why? Is it simply as Woody Allen says, "The heart wants what it wants?" Or, is this, rather, the defaulting to lower level thinking, and lower level beliefs?

#### A Naturalism Model

Shermer (2004) presents an approach to evil that frames it in terms of what is, or what exists, in which case it is natural. Observational terms, and descriptive terms, would dominate thinking here. Moral terms would be sidelined, or secondary. His approach to evil is tied to observations made by anthropologists who note descriptively the behaviours of various cultural groups. Even so there can be a shift to moral terms with the emergent myths of the “noble savage” or the notions of the fundamental “goodness” of people. Shermer calls this the Beautiful People Myth (BPM)—“When it comes to how humans treat other humans and the environment, the Beautiful People have never existed except in myth. Humans are neither Beautiful People nor Ugly People, in the same way they are neither moral nor immoral in some absolute categorical sense. Humans are only doing what any species does to survive; but we do it with a twist (and a vengeance)—instead of our environment shaping us through natural selection, we are shaping our environment through artificial selection (p. 95).” In Shermer’s view, consistent with the worldview of naturalism, the bottom line is description—what is, is. It is the one model that does not default to the importance of beliefs. Indeed, beliefs themselves are just conglomerations of random events—products of particles in motion.

The naturalist’s approach to evil when tied to real-world observations pushes for another level of analysis, and another level of reality. We act as if there is something more than just chance operative. For example, Solzhenitsyn’s famous observation that the line between good and evil runs right through the middle of each human heart, is instructive. For Solzhenitsyn it was something like a coin toss that determined his victim status as opposed to his perpetrator status. This acknowledgment of chance would be a variant of the naturalism model. Is it really just a matter of chance?

There is a common sense notion that there are elements of chance in life events, but it is not “just chance” that explains behaviour. If it is just chance then beliefs and choices are minor epiphenomena as in the determinism models [discussed here](#) (hard determinism and compatibilism) with respect to personal agency and responsibility. Solzhenitsyn saw the function of chance but he also saw that some acts are good and some are not. Writing about this issue was

the thrust of his life. There is a hierarchy of good acts and bad acts. This additional level of reality, beyond nature and chance, supports attention to beliefs as a source of conventional morality and even objective morality—real good and real evil.

In a similar vein to the naturalist and the quasi-naturalist, a challenge to the reality of evil emerges from Hannah Arendt's famous phrase on "the banality of evil." After witnessing Eichmann on trial in Jerusalem she concluded that evil was banal. Her claim has the ring of the "just chance" claim. Was Eichmann a pathetic little man rather than a monster of epic proportions? Or to put it another way: were Eichmann's beliefs (beliefs-in-use and espoused-beliefs) of Type A (i.e., surface-level beliefs linked to the pragmatic, the political, the practical, the contingent, the expedient, the culture) as opposed to Type B (deep-structures, beliefs more in line with absolutes, *synderesis*, common sense)? Do we simply default to describing him and describing his beliefs? To view Eichmann this way is instructive—it casts evil as natural, normal, or just a chance variant, which would align with the portrayal Shermer offers—but it is also what might be called "abstractive," in that, it leads one away from moral reality. While observations like those of Arendt and Shermer mitigate evil by mitigating beliefs as Type A level beliefs, there is an intuitive reticence to abandon the notion of evil—Type B level beliefs. In essence, if one is going to posit evil, one is positing beliefs, and the importance of beliefs.

Independent of moral categories we have only observations of the way humans behave. Why do we humans behave this way? We behave this way because we are human. It's natural. Is there a better way to behave? It would depend on the consequences of the behaviour for individuals, for groups, for species. Other worldviews offer different answers and different conceptual analyses; and worldviews are founded on beliefs. Ironically, even the naturalist's worldview posits beliefs.

### A Religious Model of Human Nature

Religious models frame issues by drawing in worldviews and worldview-based morality. Religious worldviews contain beliefs about human nature largely in the context of a creator, a teleological purpose, an ideal, a prescription, a developmental trajectory, and a standard. Such ideals or standards are objective and real, as a given assumption. Such standards make demanding restraints, or call for controls, upon unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour. These religious worldviews offer explanations for the genesis of unacceptable behaviours. They offer solutions for dealing with behavioural violations of standards. They drive beliefs.

A religious worldview both incorporates and transcends the more naturalistic worldview by acknowledging that there is a broad spectrum of control mechanisms for behaviour. Control mechanisms may be configured in, at least, three ways: (1) *biology*, innate internal controls (like the biological internal control mechanism which sends a signal to stop eating, for example), (2) *environment*, external restraints (punishments, denial of rewards, embarrassment, shunning, penalties, laws, and so on), and (3) *self*, self-regulation (via choices based on beliefs, knowledge, wants, desires, learning theory, social-learning theory, hypotheses, hypothesis-testing, deduction, induction, abduction, and common sense). The restraints related to *self* and self-regulation strategies are coupled to beliefs and were addressed in arguments like those advanced by Ayduk and Mischel (2002), Perkins (2002), and Baumeister and associates (Baumeister, 1997, 2005;

Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004). They all seem to default to faulty beliefs, competing beliefs, or competing belief/decision hierarchies.

To illustrate the latter claim consider the following belief: *it is morally neutral to torture animals*. Is there any blindness here? A naturalist, in support of such a belief, might point to numerous descriptive facts of animal torture. First, pointing to Nature: at times a cat will seem to torment a mouse which is a form of torture evident in nature. Second, pointing to Child Development: at times a child intentionally kills an ant and most child psychologists are not likely to be too concerned. Third, pointing to human history: at times adults flocked to the abuse of animals in the Coliseum, to bear-baiting, cock-fighting, dog-fights, and more. Arguably, it is normal, natural, and conceivably immature. Does this place the torture of animals, for naturalists, in the “banality” category?

At another level, pointing to the academy: researchers shock animals in learning studies. Researchers can inflict pain on animals to study the neurological and neuro-chemical responses to pain. Researchers can inflict pain in toxicity studies. It is argued that such “torture” of animals is a necessary and expedient exploration, but does this transcend the “banality” category?

At a moral level we are concerned. Where is the empathy? Is it increasing in society as some contend (de Waal, 2009; Rifkin, 2009)? Are humans developing in such sensitivity? When one obtains descriptive information for the behaviour of those who are more cognitively mature, there is likely to be an increase in concern regarding the torture of animals, where ends are not seen to justify actions. What does one think about formal-operational thinkers torturing animals? We have empirical data showing a portion of a male sample of 137 university students (adolescent/young adult) have killed an animal (less than two percent have killed a pet, and five percent have admitted killing a stray or wild animal) (Daly & Morton, in preparation). Do we judge this behaviour from a purely descriptive worldview (naturalism), or do we judge this from a more moralistic worldview (creedal)?

Where is the blindness? Yes, these are interesting observations to which a naturalist could point as evidence of different practices and “different beliefs” in a population. It is descriptive. Yes, the psychologist could point to cognitive or developmental immaturity. However, a simple moral, or religious, overlay on this notion of torture suggests there is something faulty in attributions to nature (the ethologist) or immaturity (the psychologist). Such beliefs are limited, or partial. So now we have competing beliefs, and partial beliefs, and immature beliefs; and we look to the strength of the arguments for each belief to address the blindnesses.

At an intuitive level one would suspect it is indeed wrong to torture animals, and quite likely many, if not most, people would subscribe to this notion. But appeals to the majority, or to emotions, are not likely to stand as valid arguments. In addition, there is arguably empirical evidence supporting the notion it is wrong to torture animals (Lindzey, 2009) since such practices are precursors to human violence (although this is not an uncontested view: see Arluke, Levin, Cartier, & Ascione, 1999). Moreover, there are conceptual cases being advanced regarding the treatment of animals from a theological perspective (Lindzey, 1994), a legal rights perspective (Regan, 1983/2004), a moral theory perspective (Rollin, 2006), or a logical perspective (see Singer, 2006). Even among those with dissenting views (Cohen & Regan, 2001; Smith, 2010) there are none who argue for the claim that it is morally neutral if one tortures animals. On second thought, perhaps a stringent and notable naturalist like Ruse might point out there is possibly no immorality here; to elaborate, Craig (2008), for example, has pointed out

how Ruse's famous question "Is rape wrong on Andromeda?" easily gets an answer like "possibly not," if values have merely evolved.

The definitions of unacceptable behaviours are worldview driven. Killing and torture (of animals and humans) as basic principles are wrong, for example, in the Judeo-Christian worldview. With respect to animals one is expected to show care, stewardship, compassion, and kindness (Lindzey, 1994; Scully, 2002). With respect to humans there is the fundamental acknowledging of human dignity, human empathy, love, and moral commandments. I suspect there is a case to be made that cruel behaviours are wrong in other religions like Hinduism or Buddhism as well, although, the rationale might be different (e.g., reincarnation, detachment, or karma).

Then we hear the budding caveats like, "sometimes" when asked the question: "Are killing and torture wrong?" This applies to human relations with animals, and also to human-human relations. There are decision hierarchies at play. For example, it is argued that it is wrong to torture an animal for a film project designed to entertain, but it is acceptable to torture an animal to test a scientific theory (Smith, 2010). A competing hierarchical arrangement (say from PETA) would argue it is wrong in both cases. A third hierarchical arrangement might argue it is okay in both cases if there is no physical, lasting harm. Philosophically, the analysis requires one to address faulty beliefs, competing beliefs, and competing belief/decision hierarchies, and this is before one gets to similar hierarchies applied to military interrogation protocols.

Is bad belief (faulty beliefs, competing beliefs, and competing belief hierarchies) a fundamental attribute of human nature? Yes, in traditional Christian theology, and Christian anthropology. The problem is tied to a sinful nature (see Paul in Romans 7:14-24).

Rom 7:14 "For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15 For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16 But if I do the very thing I do not wish *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that it is good. 17 So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. 19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (NASB version)

So, in Paul's reflection here, why does one belief (I believe course A is the good path) fall victim to the other belief (I'll choose the bad course, course B)? It seems there is an impasse between belief and ability, or belief and choice. There are competing final causes. Paul contends it is a problem with human nature, a problem with the ability to choose what we know to be the right choice. In this scenario, problems with self regulation reduce to (1) problems with ability, in part, (2) problems with conflicting final causes, in part, and (3) problems with propensity and appetites, in part. We are not apt or even able to make the right choices consistently; and it seems we therefore tend to deny what the right choices are (a form of rationalization). In traditional Christian theology the proper course is viewed as: (1) acknowledge what the right choices are,



(2) admit we can't make those choices consistently, or truly, (3) accept grace and forgiveness, and (4) respond graciously. This too then reduces to belief—and the first step is acknowledging the correct belief.

All of the models considered at key levels reduce to beliefs. Beliefs underpin choices. Thus the caliber of choice is further complicated by the caliber of one's belief. This is not to claim that choice corresponds with belief. Rather, choice functions on a different axis although it is clearly tied to belief. The caliber of choice for the person who chooses to smoke at Time 1 is different from the caliber of choice for the person who chooses to smoke at Time 4 (after 10 years of the addiction) even if the caliber of the belief (e.g., smoking is bad for one's health, smoking is relaxing, smoking is image enhancing) is the same at both choice-points. The caliber of belief axis, nevertheless, is a vital consideration, as choices are belief-based, and logically influenced by belief-shifts. The ideal belief-shifts are away from bad beliefs, blindnesses.

### *Bad Beliefs—Biological Thinking*

It is a commonplace notion that bad behaviours generally are underpinned by bad beliefs, at least in part. So, just as one asks: “Are bad behaviours biologically determined?” one can ask: “Are bad beliefs biologically determined?” The source of those beliefs, and the consequent behaviours, at a surface level, or rash level, might be assumed to be societal or personal. In that case one typically looks for environmental causes (e.g., parenting, poverty, peers, power structures, politicians, etc.); as well, one postulates personal causes evident in the ascription of blame, penalties, and praise. Yet, it is biology that is prominent in the mix currently—biology *plus* environment, or biology *times* evolutionary psychology.

### *Biology plus Environment*

Possible biological underpinnings for bad behaviour arise naturally in discussions of the causality of behaviour. While environmental determinants, and personal responsibility, typically get first level consideration at a popular level, biology is in the mix at the researcher's level. As Rowe (1983) notes: “Since the 1930s, twin studies have consistently indicated a genetic liability toward criminal behaviours (p.474).” There are empirically evident biological determinants for behaviour pervading academic journals. Criminal behaviour, then, as a pretty good indicator of bad beliefs, could be grounds for inferring a biological basis for bad beliefs, at least partially.

Rowe's (1983) own study of monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twins and delinquent behaviour, noted effects for heredity (genes), common environment, and specific environment. He also noted interaction effects, although he wasn't sure if an interaction effect was due to measurement issues, or if it was a real phenomenon. What was clear was that environmental models (common environment or specific environment) did not fit the twin data with which he was dealing. Adding a genetic component fitted. Two models (a genetic model, and a genetic plus shared environment model) fitted the twin data equally well. The genetic substrate was thus the important factor. Nevertheless, while acknowledging both biological and environmental determinants, Rowe does note that “delinquent acts must be learned.” So a learning component is important as well. Biological sources, then, are seen to be important for Rowe, and while environment is taking something like a “back seat,” learning is recognized as instrumental.

One danger in linking beliefs to biology is in defaulting to a biological position and attributing it all to genes (Hubbard & Wald, 1999)—that is, adopting an essentialist position

regarding beliefs as opposed to a more constructionist position or an interactionist position. The essentialist position is logical for the naturalist as all causation would be brain-based, and event-caused. In this framing, exploring the biology of beliefs would be paramount as everything is rooted in biology in the naturalist worldview (Bailey, 1995, 2003). But, biology is only a causal component, at one level. It is biology plus environment that paints the real picture.

Yes, biology is a factor, but it is a factor in danger of masking other factors. Plomin (1989) also noted this problem: “The wave of acceptance of genetic influence on behaviour is growing into a tidal wave that threatens to engulf the second message of this research: These same data provide the best available evidence for the importance of environmental influence (p. 105).” Reporting concordance rates (for various traits, attitudes, orientations, beliefs, behaviours) from MZ twin studies of say 20%, 30%, 40%, can signal a weighty biological influence; but, at the same time, these same data, as Plomin flags discordance rates, point to something more important than biology, something else that is influential—at the very least, environmental influences.

Moreover, a similar danger exists if the focus is limited to a combination of both genes and environment. That is, such a focus on genes and environment could mask other contributors like luck, time, and chance (Kagan, 2010). Beyond Kagan’s focus on genes, environment, time and chance, one could ask: is something else, something equally important, possible masked? Are we blind to something else? Yes. Personal agency and intentionality can be masked.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that personal agency and intentionality have a way of resurfacing and making their presence evident. Even if they seem to be ignored or denied, personal agency resurfaces in the literature as apparent minor considerations, or as afterthought add-ons, or as a tip-of-the-hat. It is a recurring feature in reported studies that personal agency is implied if not acknowledged (e.g., Martin, Eaves, Heath, Jardine, Feingold, & Eysenck, 1986; Rowe, 1983). We know at some basic level that agency, intentionality, and choices, are important.

Shermer (2011), as a naturalist, addresses the biology of belief in his recent book while drawing upon both biological and environmental influences. With respect to the biological substrate Shermer incorporates, and discusses, the neurological and neurochemical correlates of a belief; he is implying some form of fundamental causality here, in that, the belief is a product of the neural activity. He also references research on twins which does point to the importance of a biological (genetic) influence as a causal factor. Arguably, there is an influential biological infrastructure for belief, and the consequent behaviours emerging from beliefs.

Yet, with respect to beliefs there are some caveats to consider. Shermer draws from research that uses general constructs such as “interest in religion” or “interest in a religious career path” as proxies for belief (Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1990). He also cites research that draws upon more specific items from a conservatism scale (e.g., Bible truth, Church authority, Divine law, abortion, etc.) as proxies for belief (Martin, et al., 1986). But belief may be more complex than indicated by such proxies. Nevertheless, the research referenced is foundational at least for examining biological influences underpinning beliefs.

Moreover, Shermer (2011) does include a causal perspective beyond biology. He acknowledges the importance of the environment and mechanisms linked to evolutionary selection processes. He also looks to luck and chance as sources of belief when attributing beliefs

to one's parents, one's culture, and one's history. Given his psychological background it would be fair to assume he acknowledges time (a la Kagan, 2010), and thus development, as a factor, as well. Nevertheless, it all (biology, environment, evolutionary selection, and so on) reduces to event causation, which further reduces essentially to biology as the source of beliefs. Some naturalists admit up front that it all reduces to biology (e.g., Bailey, 1995). Such a position does seem to be a logical inference in Shermer's text as well. The naturalist ultimately seems trapped by a determinism which, in the final analysis, reduces causality to biology.

The problem is: behaviours, or beliefs, are rooted in more than Kagan's (2010) determinants (i.e., the fundamental biological determinants or the secondary epiphenomenal or chimerical determinants—luck, environment, time, and chance), whether independent, additive, or interactive. The root of intentionality and personal agency is masked, for the naturalist. Or personal agency and intentionality are reduced to biology (Wegner, 2002).

Shermer's (2011) biological case for beliefs is really no different than the case advanced for the biological substrate for homosexuality, or for eating problems, or for smoking, and so on. In fact, biology is a component, as is the environment. However, as has been stressed in this text the load-bearing wall is not biology, nor is it environment; the load-bearing wall is learning and agency. Choices and choice-points are pivotal.

The importance of learning, and personal agency, was acknowledged by Martin et al (1986) in their study of twin data, even though their findings heavily favoured the biological. They examined the transmission of social attitudes via genetic models and cultural models. Their model incorporated both social and genetic components for transmission but they note: "...we have obtained estimates of the cultural parameter that do not differ significantly from zero in many cases (p. 4368)." While they admit their model might be wrong they intriguingly note: "The alternative possibility is that geneticists and social scientists have misconceived the role of cultural inheritance and that individuals acquire little from their social environment that is incompatible with their genotype (p. 4368)." So, on the one hand they give a great deal of weight to the genotype. Yet, on the other hand they posit the importance of personal agency when they add: "In no way does our model minimize the role of learning and social interaction in behavioural development. Rather, it sees humans as exploring organisms whose innate abilities and predispositions help them select what is relevant and adaptive from the range of opportunities and stimuli presented by the environment (p. 4368)." Agency is important.

A biological, or environmental, focus on beliefs—alone or in combination—is informative, but potentially distracting. A biological influence driving attitudes, beliefs, and contingent behaviours, should not preclude an environmental influence. Similarly, such influences, whether separate or additive, do not preclude the possibility of change, and it is change that aligns with intentionality and agency. In a large twin study of the cause of stability and change (in religious values and religious attendance) Button, Stallings, Rhee, Corley, and Hewitt (2011) reported that change in religious values was due to genetic and non-shared environment influences. In terms of proportions they note: "The source of change was almost equally attributable to genetic and nonshared environmental variance for religious values, and to a similar magnitude of genetic, shared environmental, and nonshared environmental variance for religious attendance (p. 209)." Change has biological and environmental influences.

Most importantly, such influences (genetic and environment) do not preclude the place of personal agency. Rather, arguably, personal agency is most important. The importance of

personal agency is readily acknowledged at the common sense level, and by those who are not locked into the naturalist worldview. Thus, the main inferences to draw from a biological focus on bad beliefs are (1) there are a multitude of factors influencing the formation of a belief, and the change of beliefs, (2) biological influences are important, and (3) biological infrastructure is not the most important factor. Rather, the educational environment, learning, intentionality, choice, and change are equally important, or even more important, focal points than either one's biology alone, or one's environment alone. To miss this is a form of blindness.

#### Biology *plus* Evolutionary Psychology

Shermer (2011) did draw upon the stories of evolutionary psychology as part of the biological substrate he advances as one committed to the biological. Even evolutionary psychology emerges from biology, somewhat ironically, as everything is rooted in the biological. If so, Shermer's thinking, and his position, may be premature. If it is truly rooted in the biological, biological influences could push him in new directions in the future in homage to adaptations, exaptations, or even spandrels.

Focusing on evolutionary psychology, particularly with respect to the formation of religion, that is, religious beliefs like beliefs in supernatural agents, is interesting. More importantly, such thinking has informative contributions to offer regarding the nature of beliefs and belief-formation, in the context of belief categories (Barrett, 2004, 2009; Murray, 2009), warrant for beliefs (Plantinga, 1993a, 1993b), and the truth-value of beliefs (Plantinga, 2009).

#### Bad Beliefs—Creedal/Cognitive-Science Thinking

The term Creedal/Cognitive-Science is a variant on the field of the Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) as used by researchers like Barrett (2004, 2009, 2011). The shift to a focus on creeds here, as opposed to religion, is related to: (1) the fact that creeds are in some cases non-religious, and (2) the fact that creeds are considered in this essay as paradigms paralleling what is often the default creed of naturalism.

Furthermore, the formation of beliefs, and belief systems (i.e., creeds), is a topic that aligns with both cognitive science and religion; thus, the fields overlap. It is reasonable, then, when considering beliefs, to attempt to address both a naturalist paradigm, the default paradigm at times, along with other creedal paradigms, that is, the competing paradigms at times.

#### From The Cognitive Science Side

On the cognitive science side of the framing, a case is formulated for two cognitive systems involved in human information processing (see Kahneman, 2003, 2011; Sloman, 2002). In fact, there are numerous two-system models (see Sloman, 2002) including such configurations as deductive versus inductive systems, or analytic versus non-analytic cognition systems, or even the Freudian formulation of primary processes (seeking gratification) versus the secondary processes (dealing with limits, constraints, obstacles, and boundaries via the "reality principle"), as Sloman (2002) notes. The two cognitive systems considered here, however, are labeled as System 1 and System 2, and structured as: (1) the Intuitive versus the Reasoning systems—that

is, System 1 versus System 2—(see Kahneman, 2003, 2011), or (2) the Associative versus the Rule-Based systems (see Sloman, 2002).

### **Kahneman**

As Kahneman presented his two-processing system in 2003, there is an Intuitive system—System 1—which displays processing characterized by: fast speed, parallel processing, automaticity, effortless, associative, slow-learning, and emotionality. The other system—System 2—is a Reasoning system and is characterized as: working at a slow speed, using serial processing, under executive control, requiring substantial effort, rule-governed, flexible, and showing emotional neutrality.

In the Intuitive system, System 1, one suspects that bad beliefs (and blindnesses) could be linked to: (1) associativeness, if the associations are defective or limited, (2) emotions or affect, which could overpower cognition, and (3) automaticity, where that which is automatic is a learned dysfunction or bad habit precluding better learning, or the automatic response is premature, precluding the better response. Further, sources of faulty beliefs can be linked to biases, and the use of “a limited number of heuristics, such as representativeness and availability” (Tversky & Kahneman, 2002, loc 419).

People make “natural assessments” routinely. “Such natural assessments include computations of similarity and representativeness, attributions of causality, and evaluations of the availability of associations and exemplars (Tversky & Kahneman, 2002, loc 421).” These assessments impact judgments. We rely on these natural assessments to produce an estimate or a prediction. This judgmental heuristic can lead to “the relative neglect of other considerations (loc 428)” and possibly error or bad beliefs. Judgmental heuristics can also lead to “predictable biases,” misinterpretation of the task, and inappropriate anchoring. Faulty beliefs surfacing, then, are quite believable!

A judgment from the Intuitive system “will be modified or overridden if System 2 identifies it as biased (Kahneman, 2003, p. 711).” These corrective operations by the Reasoning system can be somewhat desolate, however, if certain constraints are in play. Blockages identified by Kahneman from existing literature (p. 711) are:

- *Time*-“time pressure,”
- *Load*- “concurrent involvement in a different cognitive task,”
- *Time-of-day*-“performing the task in the evening for morning people and in the morning for evening people”
- *Mood*-“surprisingly, by being in a good mood” can impair corrective operations. One wonders if this is being too relaxed.

Facilitators identified by Kahneman from existing literature (p. 711) are:

- *Intelligence* –more intelligent processors can use System 2 overrides
- *Cognitive Drive*-“need for cognition” Some individuals have a need to engage cognitively. They enjoy it, they seek it out. Intricate thought is fulfilling for some (see Shafir & LeBoeuf, 2002).
- *Expertise*-“exposure to statistical thinking”

With respect to beliefs, then—which are the underpinnings of judgments and behaviour—it is clear how beliefs can go awry via System I or System II processes. Heuristics and biases can interfere with beliefs—distorting beliefs—as can a host of constraints such as time, load, mood, intelligence, expertise, cognitive style (drive or need), and even time-of-day. Motivations and emotions can be constraints as Kahneman notes under the label “The Affect Heuristic” (2003, p.710). Even that great recent boon to human knowledge, the Internet, can be a heuristic with serious constraints for using the Reasoning system (see Carr, 2010 for discussion of what might be called “the shallowing of thinking” as a result of the Internet).

## **Sloman**

Sloman’s (2002) two systems of reasoning are similar. He terms them as an Associative system and a Rule-Based system. The Associative system shows automaticity and has certain illustrative cognitive functions (e.g., intuition, fantasy, creativity, imagination, and associative memory). The Rule-Based system draws upon language, culture, logic, concrete and abstract concepts, and strategy, etc. Illustrative cognitive functions drawn from Sloman are: deliberation, explanation, formal analysis, verification, ascription of purpose, and strategic memory.

In Sloman’s model the systems are interactive. They work together to solve problems, but utilize their own unique cognitive resources. In the Rule-Based system there are three sources of rules: culture, self-made rules, and discovered rules (in nature and logic).

Sloman contends: “The associative system encodes and processes statistical regularities of its environment, frequencies and correlations amongst the various features of the world (location 5895).” Further, “...associative thought uses temporal and similarity relations to draw inferences and make predictions that approximate those of a sophisticated statistician. Rather than trying to reason on the basis of an underlying causal or mechanical structure, it constructs estimates based on underlying statistical structure (loc 5899).”

One piece of evidence that Sloman (2002) finds quite compelling for two forms of reasoning is the fact that a person can hold two simultaneous contradictory beliefs. He uses the whale as one example. “A whale is simultaneously both a mammal (technically) and a fish (informally) (loc 5951).” Obviously the label “fish” comes from the Associative system, while the label “mammal” comes from the Rule-Based system. There are situations where “...people first solve a problem in a manner consistent with one form of reasoning and then, either with or without external prompting, realize and admit that a different form of reasoning provides an alternative and more justifiable answer. Judges are often forced to ignore their sense of justice in order to mete out punishment according to the law (loc 5955).” Again, the Rule-Based system is seen to exist with the Associative system, albeit, the Rule-Based system trumps the Associative beliefs. This would be a good move, however, only if the Rule-Based system gets it right. Two systems of reasoning are in competition!

Developmentally, on the one hand, it seems the rule-based system precedes the associative system; over time rational inferences become intuitive. Sloman (2002) writes: “The claim is that people first figure the world out deliberately and sequentially and only with time and practice does the knowledge become integrated into our associative network (loc 6101).” At the same time: “Evidence also suggests that people rely on associative processes when they do not have knowledge of or access to rule-based ones (Quine, 1977, said that we fall back on our ‘animal sense of similarity’ when a lay theory is not available) (loc 6104).” In this scenario, the

Associative system is primary. In actuality, there are two systems of reasoning in interaction, developmental interaction!

Sloman (2002) contends that associative responses are automatic and persist even when the person tries to ignore them. They remain compelling even when faced with rule-based arguments. Nevertheless, “The rule-based system can suppress the response of the associative system in the sense that it can overrule it (loc 6055).” The associative system might be primary, temporally, but the rule-based system is primary, authoritatively. This can be a good thing if the associative system is wrong; it would be a bad thing, a blinding, if the associative system was right.

In one scenario, problems obviously arise if one engages in shallow processing, that is, one reacts from the intuitive associative system, almost impulsively, and proceeds no further. Interestingly, as noted earlier, Carr (2010) makes the case that the computer (particularly the Internet with hyperlinks and linguistically terse text like e-mail) is propagating a generation characterized by impulsive, shallow, and surface-level processing. Failure to get to rule-based thinking could clearly be a source of bad beliefs, and blindness. Thus, preferential positioning of the associative system could be a source of bad beliefs. The intruding of the associative system on the rule-based system could be a source of bad beliefs. The fact that people are pulled in two directions at once is a potential source of bad beliefs.

In another scenario, problems arise if the associative system is right and the rule-based system overrides it. As mentioned earlier the override of the “promiscuous teleology” of system 1, by the Darwinian rules in system 2 (e.g., by Darwin himself, by Francis Crick, by others) are seen by some as a blindedness.

Both of the two-processing frameworks (i.e., Kahneman and Sloman) clearly point to mechanics for generating bad beliefs which then underpin bad judgments. And clearly it is a complicated field. The bottom line is the need for thinking at higher levels: reasoning, rule-based thinking, slow thinking, methodical thinking, linear thinking, and ferreting out potential constraints and biases related to heuristics, culture, and personal psychological characteristics. Harmonizing the two systems is not just getting two eyes working together it is getting two eyes operating in the presence of light.

#### From the Creedal Side

One important idea that can be drawn from the cognitive science of religion as developed by Barrett (2004, 2009, 2011), with respect to beliefs, is that there are two, or perhaps three, key categories of beliefs. Barrett has termed two of the categories: non-reflective beliefs and reflective beliefs. Non-reflective beliefs would align with Kahneman’s (2003) Intuitive thinking (System 1), and Sloman’s (2002) Associative system. Reflective beliefs, on the other hand, would align with Kahneman’s (2003) Reasoned thinking (System 2), and Sloman’s (2002) Rule-Based system.

Rather than posit a possible third belief category which would be basic beliefs, perhaps even common sense, these could be folded into System 1 level beliefs and processing. Appraising current thinking on evolutionary psychology, albeit outside of the biological box (e.g., Barrett, 2004, 2009, 2011; Murray, 2009, Murray & Goldberg, 2009; Plantinga, 2009),

challenges some of the more naturalistic accounts of belief formation, or even naturalism itself (Haught, 2009; Plantinga, 2009). The challenges offer insights regarding beliefs and belief-formation relevant for many arguments regarding beliefs of interest in this book (i.e., beliefs which underpin a stupidity, blindnesses, a smoking orientation, a homosexual orientation, addictive thinking, suicidality, and so on). The beliefs in System 1 are important; the beliefs in System 2 are important. Integration of the two systems, philosophically, epistemologically, psychologically, and theologically, is important.

Using Barrett's (2009) distinction between non-reflective and reflective beliefs, as well as the possible separate category of properly basic beliefs, provides a three-category system of beliefs: properly-basic beliefs, non-reflective beliefs, and reflective beliefs. There are times when the categories overlap; for example, a reflective belief that has gained automaticity, or habit-status, will function as a non-reflective belief. A properly basic belief (e.g., "I think therefore I am," or my senses are generally trustworthy, or my memory is generally trustworthy, ...) can also function as a belief in the non-reflective beliefs category. At this point, though, the emphasis is on Barrett's two category system (reflective beliefs and non-reflective beliefs) as these neatly map onto both Kahneman and Sloman.

Barrett includes the following list as non-reflective beliefs:

- People act in ways to satisfy desires.
- Rainbows exhibit six bands of color.
- Raccoons and Opossums are very similar animals.
- People from outside my group are more similar to each other than people inside my group.
- Animals have parents of the same species as themselves.
- Unsupported objects fall (Barrett, 2009, p.78).

There are mental tools, or cognitive tools, that lead to such non-reflective beliefs. Foremost would be a belief along the lines of basic beliefs:

- belief in one's existence
- trust in one's senses generally
- trust in one's memories generally
- trust in the rules of logic generally
- trust in one's intuitions generally, and
- trust in reason generally
- perhaps even a trust in common sense

The first four mental tools that Barrett advances from various sources are: (1) Naïve Biology ("Naïve Biology generates the non-reflective beliefs that animals bear young similar to themselves, and living things act to acquire nourishment..."), (2) Naïve Physics ("Naïve Physics generates the non-reflective belief that objects tend to move on inertial paths, cannot pass



through other solid objects, must move through the intermediate space to get from one point to another, and must be supported or they will fall...”), (3) an Agency Detection Device (“The Agency Detection Device automatically tells us that self-propelled, goal-directed objects are intentional agents...”), and (4) Theory of Mind (“Theory of Mind gives us non-reflective beliefs concerning the internal states of these intentional agents and their behaviors: agents act to satisfy desires, actions are guided by beliefs, beliefs are influenced by percepts, and satisfied desires prompt positive emotions...” ) (Barrett, 2009, p.79). These mental tools lead to non-reflective beliefs.

There are more mental or cognitive tools that generate non-reflective beliefs. For example, “Intuitive Morality,” Intuitive Dualism,” and Intuitive Teleology or “promiscuous teleology” have been posited (see Barrett, 2009) as drivers of non-reflective beliefs. As well, there is the intuitive “Contagion Avoidance” (Murray, 2009) that strikes one as consistent with non-reflective belief.

Before moving on to Barrett’s reflective beliefs it is worth noting that McCauley (2011) divides System 1 thought (Kahneman’s Intuitive system, Sloman’s Associative system, and Barrett’s Non-Reflective system) into two systems, two types of naturalness: (1) practiced naturalness (e.g., writing, riding a bike, playing chess, and more), and (2) maturational naturalness (e.g., chewing, walking, deep structure of language). As he notes: “The distinction between practiced naturalness and maturational naturalness applies no less readily to intuition, thoughts and beliefs. Cognition too can seem natural simply because it is well-practiced and because it is culturally well-supported or, on the other hand, because it emerges, independently of any cultural distinctive influences, in the course of human development (p. 26-27).” Some intuitions align with practiced naturalness and result from schooling, from exercise with routine problems, and from domain-specific experience—expertise. Other intuitions align with maturational naturalness and are typified by descriptors like innateness, hard-wired, modularity, unlearned, non-cultural, species-specific, nativistic, knowledge.

Barrett posits reflective beliefs as conceptually distinct from non-reflective beliefs. Reflective beliefs are beliefs we acquire through reflection: deliberate reflection, or reading, or authorities, or induction, or deduction, or abduction, or confabulations, or gossip, or mere opinion-formulation. Quoting Barrett: “... when people say they believe that insects are more plentiful than mammals;  $E = mc^2$ ; bananas are yellow; Lance Armstrong is the reigning Tour de France champion; or Tom Cruise is six feet five inches tall; they are expressing reflective beliefs. Whether a belief is reflective does not bear on its truth-value or whether it is justified (2009, p. 78).” . . . Reflective beliefs are beliefs that emerge from the interplay of bottom-up information processing using cognitive tools and top-down applications of executive cognitive processors. The products are reflective beliefs.

Reflective beliefs are not necessarily true beliefs. False beliefs, and bad beliefs, are constructions, or reflective beliefs, that might be adaptive. By the same token, false beliefs, and bad beliefs, are reflective beliefs, that might be maladaptive. At the extremes, theft might be adaptive, or maladaptive. Rape might be adaptive, or maladaptive. In a naturalist worldview there is such a case to be made for various adaptive and maladaptive scenarios. In a credal worldview there is the greater likelihood of challenging adaptive and maladaptive formulations. In credal worldviews there is a call to change one’s belief, to adopt a better belief, a good belief, a true belief.

With respect to reflective beliefs, thinking can go awry as a result of: (1) logical fallacies, (2) various heuristics and biases (see Gilovich, Griffin, & Kahneman, 2002; Kahneman, 2003; Kahneman & Miller, 2002), (3) perceptual, conceptual, and memory limits on processing, and (4) context-specific biases. Barrett illustrates context specific biases by flagging what can go awry in the face of testimony. We trust others generally, which aligns with a credulity principle (see also Reid, 1818/2011). The trust is undergirded by a conformity bias (we conform to the beliefs of those around us), a prestige bias (we trust those with status, power and celebrity), and similarity bias (we trust people like us). With such biases things can go awry! Bad beliefs and blindnesses can follow.

There are other cognitive constraints that serve as interferences, as well. In fact, the list seems endless, and one wonders how clear reflective thinking is at all possible. In this current project a number of cognitive traps and dangers are advanced for consideration (e.g., Kahneman, 2003; Piattelli-Palmarini, 1994; Sternberg, 2002; Twerski, 1997). Paradoxically, we can see the blindnesses, our blindnesses, all around us, if we look.

Reflective thinking is hard work. As McCauley expresses it: “Natural cognition is what comes to all of us easily (2011, p. 13).” But the reflective, higher order, scientific thinking is hard; it is unnatural. There is a seeing that comes naturally, spontaneously, basically. There is a seeing that takes effort, work, and guardianship.

With respect to non-reflective and reflective beliefs, thinking can go awry as a result of (1) limitations on perception, memory, and attention, (2) responses to limitations like change-blindness, illusions, confabulations (Gazzaniga, 1985), (3) intrusions from long term memory systems, (4) content-specific biases, and heuristics (Kahneman, 2003), and (5) personal factors like fatigue, time-of-day, and mood (Kahneman, 2003). Barrett (2011) presents three content-specific biases as samples of the “tip-of-the-iceberg” of biases that impact non-reflective beliefs: face detection, fear of snakes, and categorical colour perception. This “hard-wiring” aligns with innate biases which have the potential to impact our beliefs. He writes: “...our minds preferentially attend to and differentially process some types of information over others, handling different domains of information in different ways (p. 38.)” Back to McCauley’s (2011) claim: it’s going to be hard work. It takes effort to get good reflective beliefs, theories, science, verisimilitude, and truth.

### *Choice and Responsibility for Beliefs*

Bad beliefs in this Creedal/Cognitive Science framing are rooted at one level in reflective beliefs (System 2 thinking). At this level “deliberate choice heuristics” are used to help deal with conceptual and cognitive load limitations, or “computational and memory limitations” (Frederick, 2002, loc 8460). Here the person’s responsibility is obvious, although mitigating factors are not out of the question. People can make choices, rule-based choices, reasoned choices at time-one (T1), and then, given practice, unconsciously transfer that particular belief to the more automatic systems—the Intuitive system (Kahneman), or the Associate System (Sloman), or the level of non-reflective beliefs (Barrett). Habits transfer from System 2 to System 1, apparently routinely.

Thus, here the assignment of responsibility gets murky. The person would not appear to be responsible for the automatic belief, the associative, intuitive belief, at time-two (T2).

However, upon reflection, their responsibility cannot be abrogated entirely as their reasoning, effort, and choices were involved at the earlier stage of acquisition—the Reasoning stage. In a cross-sectional examination at T2 they appear to lack responsibility; in a longitudinal examination, the responsibility moves from the penumbra to the spotlight.

Other scenarios that point to personal choices, albeit unripe choices, in belief formation might be: opting to succumb to the affect heuristic, choosing the shallow processing prompted by the Internet (i.e., laziness, or impulsive response style, or choosing the default position, or following the familiar). This likely occurs at the non-reflective level, but it interferes with System II level thinking—the formation of sound reflective beliefs.

Bad beliefs can be rooted in non-reflective beliefs as well as reflective beliefs. Such heuristics as the affect heuristic, choosing by liking, choosing via familiarity, choosing by norm theory, or choosing by default are more automatic and therefore clearly System 1 (Intuitive, Associative and non-reflective) choices. As Frederick writes: “Defaults may be established via historical precedent, perceptual salience, conspicuousness, or some other feature that qualitatively distinguishes one option from the rest (2002, loc 8554).” That said, there is a case for an epistemic, even moral, override on System 1 level beliefs via System 2 level belief processes (Reasoning, Rule-Based thinking, and Reflection). This is science; this is knowledge-building; this is philosophy; this is theology; this is psychology; this is generating good beliefs, and culling bad beliefs.

Asking the question: “What is the place for choice, and culpability, in the acquisition of bad beliefs?” leads one to preferential weighting for System 2 thinking. System 2 thinking is an epistemic obligation. In a court of law, one suspects System 1 thinking would be no excuse for “sins of omission or commission,” although such thinking could be entertained as mitigating. In “higher courts” a greater focus on excuses is warranted, a greater focus on choice is incumbent.

### Applications

Applying the Creedal/Cognitive-Science framing (regarding non-reflective beliefs, and reflective beliefs) to smoking, for example, is relatively easy. Smoking aligns with various reflective beliefs in the initial stages—the smoker believes, upon reflection, that he can experiment with smoking, that he can value smoking, and that he can quit smoking. He believes his smoking is a choice. It is. His curiosity pushes him to choose an experience. As the smoking habit becomes entrenched, however, the belief shifts to the more non-reflective category—the smoker, with a smoking orientation, after successive and painful attempts to quit, now believes he cannot quit smoking and he believes this with a degree of automaticity. The beliefs have fragmented somewhat: at the beliefs-in-use level the smoker believes, habitually, that he cannot quit smoking. This component of the belief is largely non-reflective. At the espoused-belief level, he might say he can quit, it’s just that he doesn’t want to quit (a rationalization?). So this latter component of his belief is still at the reflective level. Another type of smoker may be functioning with the complete belief (non-reflective and reflective) that he can’t quit—a belief that is fully non-reflective. Do you see ...a blindness?

Similarly, applying the Creedal/Cognitive Science framing to a more dramatic belief, pedophilia for example, is relatively easy. “Intergenerational sex” ideation and practice aligns with various reflective beliefs in the initial stages—the pedophile believes, upon reflection, that he can explore, experience, make choices, entertain pedophilic ideation and behaviour. He might

believe his pedophilia is an inner drive, a curiosity, or even a choice at times. As the pedophilia becomes entrenched the belief shifts to the more non-reflective category—the pedophile now believes he cannot influence his pedophilic beliefs (his orientation) and he believes this with a degree of automaticity. The beliefs have fragmented somewhat: at the beliefs-in-use level the pedophile might believe, habitually, that he is innately pedophilic. This component of the belief is now non-reflective—habitual. At the espoused-belief level, he might be wrestling with an identity; so this component of his belief is still at the reflective level. Another type of pedophile, the “out-of-the-closet” type—may be functioning with the original reflective belief now transformed into a belief that is fully non-reflective. Do you see ...a blindness?

### Psychological Processes Leading To Belief-Constraint

There are theories to explicate belief-shifts. Such theories facilitate thinking about belief in the context of psychology (e.g., the Opponent-Process Theory, the Action-Identification Theory, the Ironic Effects Theory, the Dissonant-Thinking theory and the Ideomotor-Effects theory). Theories address the importance of belief, on the one hand, but equally importantly, they address what happens when beliefs shift, fail, atrophy or vary as a function of thinking-shifts and behavioural shifts. An additional theory, a “Darkened-Mind” theory, addresses the issue from a more philosophical or theological position.

#### *An Opponent-Process Theory*

The Opponent-Process Theory of Motivation was advanced by Solomon and Corbit (1973, 1974) at a time when behaviourism was a prominent force in thinking about learning and learning theory. Utilizing principles of operant and classical conditioning they captured important aspects of learning that, even now, inform understanding of the topics considered here. By elaborating on operant conditioning with respect to both processes and opponent-processes a more complex view of motivational influences can be constructed than that which has been offered by introductory behaviourism. To illustrate the mechanism and dynamic of opponent-processes an example like sky-diving is utilized. Sky-diving shows an aversive sensation (to falling) which as a process is opposed by a subsequent pleasant sensation (safety or relaxation); this subsequent pleasant sensation is an opponent-process. In effect, this plays out as follows with respect to behaviourist thinking: choosing to suspend, or circumvent, normal self-regulation-restraint to avoid falling (i.e., avoidance of an aversive situation) is subsequently facilitated by the reward associated with the consequent situation of exhilaration, relaxation, and safety. The suspension of normal self regulation is rewarded. Choosing is rewarded.

Even more intriguing, both the process, and the opponent-process, are rewarding but in different ways—one (the process) shows increasing potency via operant conditioning and the “rush” of the jump (a reward), while the other (the opponent-process) shows stable or decreasing potency, over time, via habituation or satiation. In effect, the sense of safety as a reward would diminish over repeated trials as one learns the danger is not so dangerous after all. The change as a function of time is important for learning, and therefore for consideration in changes in the caliber of knowledge, the caliber of belief and the caliber of choice over time.

The sky-diver is doubly rewarded (by the rush of the process and the safety of the opponent-process). Similarly, bad beliefs, or risky beliefs, can be rewarded, particularly when the beliefs turn into bad actions, or risky actions—there is the rush of the risky belief entertained, the process, and the safety of the opponent-process, as in the sky-diver scenario.

Before considering the “smoking” analogy more closely, understanding can be enhanced by considering processes and opponent- processes more closely for various other scenarios. In both the 1973 and the 1974 papers Solomon and Corbit presented multiple examples of phenomena related to behavioural patterns that tapped into opponent processes (i.e., dogs receiving shocks, sky-diving, opiate usage, love, and so on). Four of the seven samples they present are framed in the following chart (Table 1) in a manner that captures learning sequences and the responses at various stages in the sequence.

Table 1. Selected Samples of Motivational-Emotional Phenomena and the Responses to Stimulations at Various Stages of the Process					
Consequence	Example	First Stimulations		Later Stimulations	
		State A (input present)	State B (input gone)	State A' (input present)	State B' (input gone)
Aversive	Dogs receiving 10 second shocks	Terror	Stealth	Unhappy	Joy
Aversive	Sky-diving	Terror	Stunned	Tense and eager	Exhilaration
Hedonic	Opiate use	Euphoria	Craving	Relief	Intense craving
Hedonic	Love	Excitement	Loneliness	Comfort	Grief and longing

Note. The lightly shaded cells indicate clear rewards. The darker shaded cells (craving and longing) would have a reward-component.

The theory does provide a rather interesting mechanism for the process of moving toward entrenchment for stimuli that have positive and/or negative qualities or consequences (i.e., both hedonic and aversive). Considering the smoking analogy we can see how it could parallel both aversive phenomena and hedonic phenomena. There is something aversive about smoking (at

least initially<sup>1</sup>), at the same time there are psychological and physical things about smoking that are hedonic.

Table 2. Smoking As Paralleling The Aversive Phenomena				
	First Stimulations		Later Stimulations	
Example	State A (input present)	State B (input gone)	State A' (input present)	State B' (input gone)
Dogs receiving 10 second shocks	Terror	Stealth	Unhappy	Joy
Sky-diving	Terror	Stunned	Tense and eager	Exhilaration
Smoking	Terror, form of Disgust, Shame, Nausea	Stunned, use of stealth	Tense, eager and ambivalent	Satisfaction, Exhilaration

Table 3. Smoking As Paralleling The Hedonic Phenomena				
	First Stimulations		Later Stimulations	
Example	State A (input present)	State B (input gone)	State A' (input present)	State B' (input gone)
Opiate use	Euphoria	Craving	Relief	Intense craving
Love	Excitement	Loneliness	Comfort	Grief
Smoking	Excitement and Euphoria (psychological and physical)	Craving, Longing	Relief, Reward, Comfort	Intense craving, Longing and even Grief

Does it seem reasonable to propose that smoking can reach entrenchment via both a hedonic route and an aversive route in combination? Yes, it is a credible proposal. In fact, in an opponent-process theory both State B and State B' could be viewed as rewarding for the aversive condition. For the hedonic condition all four states would be conducive to entrenchment—both

<sup>1</sup> In fact, there are those legendary stories about parents who caught their children smoking and decided to force them to smoke a cigar, or force them to smoke multiple cigarettes to the point where they became physically ill. As the story goes, such children could never look at a cigarette again. Such an event would introduce the notion that the caliber of aversion is also a factor in motivation, and may be relevant in an opponent-process theory.

State A and State A' would be viewed as rewarding for the hedonic condition, and State B and State B' would be motivationally pushing one to repetition. In effect then, entrenchment is not a particularly difficult state to reach through learning. What about other acquired behaviours: zoophilia, fetishes, pedophilia, pornography-addiction, homosexuality, journaling, golf, running, musicianship, etc? Surely these also would be amenable to similar learning processes, and eventual entrenchment.

Now the question is: how do beliefs link to these learning sequences? In the absence of restraints (peer, parent, cultural, legal, religious) is it only strong beliefs, or better beliefs, that can inhibit the learning process for maladaptive or inappropriate outcomes? An adolescent experimenting with smoking might believe simultaneously (1) smoking is wrong, disgusting, shameful, and (2) smoking is exhilarating, pleasurable, and status-enhancing. He believes both basically at the same time at the State A level. So, two or more beliefs are in competition. At the State A' level he would believe that smoking is good in that it reduces tenseness offering relief and comfort; plus, it helps keep weight in check. At the State B' level it would be logical to assume a belief that smoking offers potential exhilaration and grief reduction.

So what is it that stops some adolescents from becoming smokers? What blocks the learning to the point of entrenchment? Constraints and beliefs! *Externally*, one might argue for the importance of social constraints, legal constraints, parental constraints, a controlled environment, diminished advertising, and so on. *Internally*, it would be beliefs; it could be models (e.g., athletes, actors, musicians) who feed beliefs, or it could be educators (e.g., schools, teachers, PSAs, Medical Community) who feed beliefs, or it could be peers who feed beliefs, or it could be the religious community representatives who feed beliefs, and so on. The bottom line in terms of prevention is either barriers or beliefs. Bad barriers can have bad outcomes. Bad beliefs can have bad outcomes. People end up blind. Ideas have consequences. Subscribing to bad ideas, or defective ideas, or fragmented ideas, or regressive ideas has consequences.

### *An Action Identification Theory*

Vallacher and Wegner (1985) developed a theory of action identification where actions are identified in multiple ways, and at different levels. Three processes (or principles) are advanced as in a state of interplay to drive action identification. There are lower level identities where details of an action or specifics regarding how an action is done, are in view. Higher level identities gravitate to cognitive explanations regarding why the action is done along with consequences, implications and applications. Which level do people use to identify an action, low levels or high levels? It depends on "prepotent identity," according to Vallacher and Wegner (1987), and the three principles advanced to describe the function.

The three principles of action identification related to prepotency are as follows:

1. People have in mind an idea of what they want to do when they generate an action. What they want to do is the prepotent identity.
2. When both low level and higher level descriptors are available, expressed, or conscious, the higher level identities are prepotent, generally.
3. When a higher level identity fails, a person defaults to a lower level identity to identify an action, and that lower level identity becomes prepotent.

To illustrate from Vallacher and Wegner (1987) consider the act of phoning home. Moving a finger is a low level act; dialing the number is a higher level act; phoning home is a still higher level act. Phoning home is the prepotent action identified. Thus principles #1 and #2 are clear. Suppose the call is not connected (perhaps one is out of cell phone range, or one makes a transposed entry). The action identification now defaults to a lower level—I am dialing the phone—and that becomes the prepotent action (principle #3). The constraints of reality manipulate the action identification. It is the shift to a lower level action-identification that is particularly of interest for topics like smoking, over-eating, suicidality, homosexuality, addiction to pornography, gambling, and so on. Examining such belief-shifts helps frame the mechanics of a belief hierarchy—worst beliefs, bad beliefs, good beliefs, better beliefs, and best beliefs.

Of further interest, the theory does not apply to self-identification of action identities only. It seems we attribute low level and high level action identifications to others as well (Kozak, Marsh, & Wegner, 2006). Particularly interesting, the level of attribution to others may be influenced by such variables as liking, perceived victimhood, perceived suffering, and identification with the other. Thus, action identification, applied to both self and others, is amenable to blurring and blinding effects. Blindnesses!

The theory of action identification has merit when considering such topics as smoking, sexual orientation, suicidality, eating behaviours, and so on. What do people think they are doing (action identification) when they implement actions like smoking? And what do others think they are doing when they implement such actions? And, finally, what do we (or I) think they are doing when they implement such actions?

With respect to smoking how might a smoker label such an action? The following table contains several speculative possibilities regarding smokers' action identifications.

Table 4. Possible Action Identifications a Smoker Might Make	
Low Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Removing a cigarette from the package</li> <li>-Tapping the end of the cigarette</li> <li>-Simulating smoking</li> <li>-Striking a match</li> <li>-Lighting up</li> </ul>
Intermediate Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Having a smoke break</li> <li>-Completing a meal</li> <li>-Relaxing</li> <li>-Socializing</li> <li>-Image (Rebelling or imitating an Artist)</li> </ul>



High Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Supporting an industry</li> <li>-Making a political statement of defiance</li> <li>-Keeping my diet in control and weight down for health reasons</li> <li>-Alleviating stress</li> <li>-Avoiding an old-age home (i.e., by ensuring an early death)</li> </ul>
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In line with the three principles of Vallacher and Wegner (1987), a prepotent reason would likely be tied to diet control or alleviating stress. As arguments accumulate to show how reality places a serious constraint on such high level action identifications one reverts to lower level identities—just socializing, puff patrol, having a break, a few drags, etc. As rationalizations are uncovered, beliefs shift lower. Eventually, the rationalization might lead to very low-level action identification such as: “I’m tapping the end of the cigarette to compact the tobacco.”

What about eating behaviours that are problematic? What action identifications might fit in the three levels of the table?

Table 5. Possible Action Identifications a Problem-Eater Might Make	
Low Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Removing food from the fridge</li> <li>-Pouring chips into a bowl</li> <li>-Placing a variety of cookies on a plate</li> <li>-Smelling the chocolate</li> </ul>
Intermediate Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Alleviating stress</li> <li>-Boosting energy</li> <li>-Altering mood</li> <li>-Satisfying a craving</li> <li>-Minimizing a craving</li> </ul>
High Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Stabilizing blood sugar levels</li> <li>-Preparing a meal</li> <li>-Enjoying cuisine</li> <li>-Socializing</li> <li>-Nurturing body and soul</li> </ul>

A prepotent action identification like “Enjoying Fine Cuisine” when facing the constraints of reality (e.g., the scale, the obsession, the nagging parent, the friends’ “Intervention,” the secrecy) would likely push one to default to a lower level action identification like “Boosting energy.” “Alleviating stress,” or “Altering a mood.” Not recognizing the shift would be consistent with such strategies as rationalizing, projection, denial, and so on. Cognitively, these “rationalization” could be considered as low level action identifications. Ironically, in this case, recognizing the shift to lower level prepotent identities seems to be a high level prepotent understanding. As rationalizations are uncovered beliefs shift; but the ideal would be to ensure wise, honest, and rational shifts. Thus, one needs clear thinking, and high-level action identification, to ensure good beliefs, or better beliefs.

What about questionable sexual practices or sexual orientations? When one adopts a sexual action, how does one identify that action? The prepotent action identification would be from a high level category, say, pursuing personal virtues, pursuing familial virtues, or it’s all about the ideal of love. If one runs into reality constraints from one’s family, one’s community, one’s psychology textbook, one’s religious authorities, one might revert to lower level action identifications (e.g., loving, or following natural inclinations), or even more basic identifications (i.e., it’s just caressing). At the lowest level it might simply be identified as just an outlet, or “one needs release.”

Low Level	-Touching -Caressing -Attaining Orgasm -Physical Release or Outlets -Sharing
Intermediate Level	-Alleviating stress -Following natural inclinations -Emoting -Satisfying a craving
Higher Level	-Creating -Loving as pragmatics -Making political statements
Highest Level	-Pursuing social and familial virtues -Pursuing personal virtues

	<p>-Loving as Ideal</p> <p>-Nurturing body and soul</p>
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Normally, one argues to maintain the higher level action identifications as prepotent causes. This raises the issue about the quality of the arguments—the rationales versus the rationalizings. Again, the bottom line is beliefs, and the warrant for such beliefs.

Action identification theory is important for the current investigation on four levels—a psychological level, a social level, an academic level, and an epistemological level. On the psychological level we are interested in “what people think they are doing when they do something,” particularly something that is controversial, like smoking, opting for atheism, adopting a pedophilia orientation, pursuing disordered eating, etc. In essence, what do they believe? On a social level we are interested in what social critics, social commentators, and social networks (whether families, peers, coworkers, etc.) offer as “what they think the other is doing when the other does something.” On an academic level, there is an interest in the psychological level, the social level, and the epistemological level—the arguments for what people are doing. On an epistemological level there is an interest in the epistemological stance of the individual making the self, action identification, and the person making the action identification of the other. Does one’s epistemological stance impede seeing? Are the action identification claims good claims? Are the arguments sound? Or are they rationalizations? Since there are competing high level action identifications, and shifts between levels of action identification, the fundamental question is: which action identification (belief) has the higher ground—psychologically and epistemologically?

*An Ironic Effects Theory*

This theoretical position advances the notion that good intentions (and actions) actually may predispose one to bad consequences. Basically, “...the use of mental control can backfire.... A person innocently engaged in what seems to be a program of self-improvement may unwittingly create the very psychological problem he or she is working to overcome (Wegner, 1997, p. 148).”

The theory is premised on two processes: an operating process and a monitoring process. The operating process is intentional, conscious, and effortful—a mind filled with thoughts that facilitate success. The monitoring process is largely unconscious—a mechanism searching for signs of failure in order to implement the operating process. The monitoring process, in the presence of certain conditions, can overwhelm the operating process leading to failures of the intended control—and it is an ironic overwhelming. Wegner illustrates our common observation as follows: “Why is it that trying so hard sometimes seems to guarantee not just a failure of control but its ironic reversal? It is not just that we cannot sleep, for instance, or that we cannot stop thinking about food when on a diet; the problem is that the more we want to sleep or to banish food thoughts the more we fail (Wegner 1994, p 34).” What is it that distinguishes times of effective control from times of poor control? Capacity?

Capacity! When capacity is reduced (i.e., the conscious capacity for the operating process), perhaps by simple distractions, or anxiety, or stress, then problems arise. When capacity is reduced by cognitive load then problems can arise. When capacity is reduced by time pressures, or a sense that one “must” succeed, typically, problems arise. The problems that arise,

however, are not necessarily just simple failure. As Wegner notes "...the intended control does not just reduce to some uncontrolled baseline or zero level. Rather, mental control exerted during mental load will often produce ironic effects, resulting in mental states that go beyond 'no change' to become the opposite of what is desired. Desired happiness becomes sadness, desired relaxation becomes anxiety, desired interest becomes boredom, desired love becomes hate, and so on (Wegner, 1994, p 35)." In effect, the unconscious monitoring process is intruding into the conscious operating process domain; and since there is a capacity problem interfering with the operating process, the monitoring process overwhelms the operating process.

Wegner (1994) offers interesting parallels from history to support his theory. He considers phenomena like divining rods, Ouiji boards, and automatic writing as examples of ironic effects where movement opposes will. This evidence he offers, and argument he advances, carries weight—he is convincing here. These phenomena are quite illustrative of his notion of ironic effects.

He also considers Freud's notion of the "counter-will" where the exact opposite of intention is the effect. Indeed, the notion of "weak-will" actually is reframed by Freud as a "perversion of will." Intentions and actions, surprisingly, and ironically, often do not align.

Finally, Wegner acknowledges the work of Baudouin in 1921 on "the law of reversed effort," which again stresses the peculiar phenomenon of counter-intentional effects. Thus, the idea of ironic effects is not novel, or original to Wegner; the idea does have intriguing substantive precursors. And the notion is sufficiently compelling to warrant consideration in relation to the analogy of smoking and homosexuality, particularly with respect to the quitting process.

One interesting application that Wegner points to is the study by McFall (1970) on quitting smoking. Is there a difference in quit rates for smokers who count the number of cigarettes they smoked versus those who count the number of times they thought about smoking but didn't? In the former case the focus is on the bad behaviour; in the latter case it is on the good behaviour. Although the sample was small (N=16) and the design was the typical in-class university course experiment, the effects were dramatic. Smoking rate increased over baseline for those counting cigarettes smoked, but decreased for those counting cigarettes not smoked.

Applications to areas like racism, sexism, ageism, and so on, would suggest that the formulation of one's attention can be critical. Similarly, applications to problematic sexual thoughts, study habits, suicidal ideation, character education, and so on, would argue for the need for a carefully crafted approach. The more one tries to quit smoking, to quit homosexuality, to quit over-eating, to quit suicidal ideation, the more likely one is to fail given ironic effects mechanisms. Implications for parents, educators, and therapists are profound.

In terms of belief-shifts, the belief that one can change can be nullified, or circumvented, by the action of trying to change. The lesson to be gleaned here is that one who wants to change needs a wise change protocol.

#### A Darkened-Mind Theory—Psychological

This thinking posits that a certain aspect of mind can fail to function normally in which case the subsequent actions are flawed. In a sense, it aligns with Plantinga's notion of warrant requiring "proper function" to attain a level of adequacy for the support of belief. A cognitive architectural component that is not functioning, or not functioning properly, is not likely to

provide a sound foundation for belief or confidence. For example, in states like sleep-walking, somnambulism, hypnotism, altered states like religious ecstasy or trance, drug-induced states, and so on, any beliefs advocated, or truth-claims made, would be suspect. In fact, it is likely that many of the behaviours and beliefs would have the earmarks of irrationality, or “stupidity.” It would seem like important critical functions are suspended—a part of the mind is “missing in action.” Such dispositional atrophy would “darken” judgment, and support an inference of a darkened mind.

Less striking, but possibly more important, examples emerge in social influence research—research that addresses the power of situational factors as opposed to dispositional factors in the generation of “evil” behaviour (Zimbardo, 2004). Zimbardo lists a number of situational factors that one would be well advised to consider: “...role playing, rules, presence of others, emergent group norms, group identity, uniforms, anonymity, social modeling, authority presence, symbols of power, time pressures, semantic framing, stereotypical images, and labels, among others (p. 47).” These all have the power to push. If they push one into faulty constructions, flawed inferences, premature conclusions, bad behaviour, and so on, it is a condition easily characterized as a “darken mind.”

Something as simple as inducing a small first step can be quite powerful. Zimbardo (2004) lists ten ingredients in a recipe for apparent evil compliance in Milgram’s (1974) studies of obedience to authority where subjects can be induced to commit to serious levels of electric shock to their fellow human beings. Ingredient #7 is: “Starting the path toward the ultimate evil act with a small, insignificant first step (only 15 volts) (p. 29).” People easily agree to a small initial step like a few puffs on a cigarette, or one or two cigarettes. They can agree to a simple sexual caress, or curious prod. But small steps, like multiplier effects, can cascade.

People agree to minor things, which then seems to draw them more easily in to subsequent commitments to major things. Wegner (2002) uses such research to explain compliance even in such a phenomenon as hypnotism. He refers to the early study of compliance by Freedman and Fraser (1966) where researchers ask home owners for permission to place a large “Drive Carefully” sign on their lawns. Most home owners refuse. However, those who were first asked to display a small “Be a Safe Driver” sign in their windows, and agreed to do so, were more likely to agree to the large lawn sign when asked later. Progressive sequential involvement is the proverbial story of the camel getting his nose in the tent. The first cigarette is a small step into a big tent. The first sexually curious activity is a small step that can lead to the dark side of curiosity (Kashdan, 2009).

Even an organization as sinister as the Ku Klux Klan seems to have had innocuous roots neither political nor racial. It was rooted in “fun,” initially. “At first they played jokes on one another and then on members of the public in general. Then gradually they began to aim their pranks at black people (Baumeister, 1997, p. 239-240). Baumeister’s speculations are a reasonable reconstruction of how pranks escalate to cruelty as a function of small step-by-step social interactions. Seemingly decent people can be led to do indecent things by small steps (Freedman & Fraser, 1966) by authority figures (Milgram, 1974), by rewards, by good intentions, by egotism, by curiosity (Kashdan, 2009), by simple fun (Baumeister, 1997), by time pressures (Zimbardo, 2004), and by a host of other innocuous situational factors.

The social influence research does seem to offer a mechanism to explain the progress from “commitment to do the innocent small things” to “commitment to do the stupid” or evil things. Of interest, the ten ingredients for change that Zimbardo (2004) lists in discussing Milgram’s research may have implications for dispositions related to smoking, over-eating and homosexuality. Consider the information in Table 7.

**Table 7. Zimbardo’s (2004) Ten Ingredients For Implementing Seduced Behaviour.**

Milgram	Smoking	Eating	Homosexuality
<u>Cover Story</u> -Present an acceptable rationale or justification -An Ideology	-artist -rebel / radical	-genes -slow metabolism -models	-genetic / hard-wired -born that way -natural/normal -models
<u>Contract obligation</u>	-peer acceptance	-one must get nutrition	-clubs, -parent groups -counseling groups
<u>Meaningful roles</u>	-artist -rebel / radical	-cook, chef, waiter -consumer, shopper -connoisseur	-mate, spouse, partner, parent, priest,
<u>Basic rules</u> -Justify mindless compliance			-love, pleasure -fidelity
<u>Alter semantics of act</u> -hurt to help	-calming -image-enhancing	-calming, nutrition	-love, fidelity
<u>Diffuse responsibility</u> -authorities	-to advertisers -to peers / parents	-advertisers, magazine -fast foods -cafeterias	-biology -parents
<u>Small innocuous first step</u> -start	-a few drags -a butt -just one cigarette	-snack -diet coke	-play, fun -pleasure
<u>Gradual steps</u> -progress	-1, 5, 10, a pack -two packs	-graze	-experiment, -try it,
<u>Gradual shift of image</u> -good to bad	-health damage -loss of stamina -social ostracism	-overweight -obese -bulimia	-first fun and affection -then problems (social, health, moral...)
<u>Exits costs</u> -high	-physical and psychological addiction -social networks	-starvation -time constraints -ironic effects	-physical and psychological addiction -social networks -therapeutic rejection or peer rejection <sup>1</sup>

*A Darkened-Mind Theory—Religious*

In a Christian worldview there are arguably three sources proposed for the darkened mind: (1) the human self, (2) Satan, or the god of this world along with principalities and powers, or (3) God. The biblical case seems to attribute causality to all three sources with God being the more prominent source. Thus a fourth option—considering various influences in combination from the three key sources—would be a prudent consideration in this worldview. Again, drawing upon various components of causality (i.e., material cause, final cause, formal cause, efficient

<sup>1</sup> Goldberg (2008) cites two case studies where one senses the “exit costs” from either pressure from a homosexual “peer group” in the case of Jeff who was subject to undue pressure, or pressure from the therapist in the case of J (again undue pressure). For struggling adolescents the “exit costs” were just too high.

cause, proximate cause, sufficient cause, direct cause, and so on) can facilitate integration and coherence.

God blinds certain people. God can be the direct cause of a darkened mind (i.e., that God is the final cause, and perhaps involved in the formal cause) (for biblical evidence see Isaiah 6:9-10; Rom 11:7-15).

Satan, or various principalities and powers can blind the mind. Whether blinding from the god of this world (II Cor 4:3-4) is a direct cause from a malevolent source, or a permitted cause, or material cause, to mediate either directly, or confluently, God's intent, is not clear. Seeing God as the final cause, however, and in fact as "the god of this world," has been argued richly by Hartley (2005).

People are blinded as a result of their acts. As evident in Paul's argument in Romans (Rom 1:18-25), people are viewed as instrumental in the darkening of their minds, even if God is the final cause. Conversely, people seem to be viewed as instrumental in the removal of the blindness—they have a veil removed as a result of their actions (II Cor 4:14-16).<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the cause of the darkened mind, it seems fair to root it biblically in beliefs. In Romans 1:18-32 one gets the impression that Paul sees certain individuals with a darkened mind opting for beliefs they "know" are inferior, positions they "know" are wrong. Such beliefs interfere with belief shifts. In fact, the religious call to repentance (metanoia) is a call to a belief shift—a changed mind.

### *Dissonant Thinking Theory*

Dissonant thinking can be approached in either a *medicalized* fashion (focusing on the pathological aspects of thinking problems, like schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorders, suicidality, addictions, and so on), or a *normalized* fashion (focusing on the thinking problems that seem to periodically, and developmentally, pester all humans). Both approaches are consonant with dysfunctional thinking; both approaches aim for better thinking, better beliefs—belief-shifts. Considered here in the *medicalized* genre is that which is aligned with learning, that is, psychological dysfunctions as opposed to biochemical dysfunctions. Belief shifts that have a biochemical underpinning, though important, are beyond the scope for consideration at this point.

A *medicalized* approach. This framework closely aligns with the smoking aspect of analogical thinking because it targets substance use, abuse, and addictions. This medicalized approach to thinking problems, as related to addictions, has been termed "addictive thinking" by Twerski (1997). An Addictive Thinking framework also has merit in the consideration of a homosexual orientation if there is a case for analogizing homosexuality and addiction, and if there is a case for treating homosexuality as learned. The approach is based on Twerski's (1997)

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<sup>1</sup> A point of interest here is the comment from Jesus that "if they were blind they would have no sin." It seems to be a stretch to assume that God could blind people as an act of grace so that they would have no sin, and thus less judgment to face. Moreover, the blinding by God might be somewhat congruent with the gracious Divine hiding of God (Moser, 2008).

informative analysis of the self-deception that happens in the thinking of the addict, particularly the alcoholic, but not just the alcoholic. It applies to the pre-alcoholic and the co-dependents as well.

The first point to make is that Twerski (1997) contends addictive thinking is a state that precedes the use of chemicals (Time 1) as well as a state that is a consequence of using chemicals (Time 2), albeit with perhaps some differing characteristics. The addictive thinking is defective at both points in time. Thus, addictive thinking can exist entirely independent of actual substance use or abuse. As such, the ideas and principles can be applied to a variety of behaviours, for example, sexual curiosity, pornography, zoophilia, pedophilia, video gaming, golf, and so on.

Basically, the point to make from Twerski is that addictive thinking involves self-deception. There is an apparent “blindness” to one or more of the following: logical arguments, logical fallacies, simple reason, harm, others, rules, and so on. This self-deception is achieved via mechanisms and practices of denial, rationalization, and projection. It is characterized by delusions, poor self-esteem, a sense of omnipotence, lying, and so on—qualities that often indicate faulty perceptions and a disconnect from reality.

Further, there is a process problem where the addictive thinker begins with the conclusion, and then builds a case for it. The thinking is not deductive, inductive or abductive; rather, it might be termed, facetiously, “conductive.” That is, there is (1) a “con-game” going on with one’s self, and others, (2) a person acting like an orchestra conductor organizing all the instruments, the practices, the score, for an end product and performance, and (3) an invisible current, or covert current, flowing along the electrical conductor that can be quite shocking, at times. The “con,” the orchestration, and the invisible current capture such *conductive* thinking.

The third point is the fundamental importance of self-esteem. Addictive thinking is closely allied with major problems in self-esteem. The self-deception is often designed to protect the self via denial, rationalization, and projection, or create a grandiose self for public consumption.

One of the important features of Twerski’s approach is that change is possible. There are times when people indicate they “came to their senses.” Change is often a function of a change in worldview. That worldview change might involve acknowledging a higher power as in the Twelve-Step programs. At times it involves a change of goals. As Twerski puts it “To effectively prevent chemical use among young people, we would have to establish (1) ultimate goals in life other than sense gratification and (2) tolerance for delay. Our culture is not likely to embrace these changes. Instead our culture embraces addictive thinking (1997, p. 16).” A key change-point is encountered with what has been termed “rock-bottom.”

The “rock-bottom” experience. This is the event that pushes one to change their thought system—change their belief. Can such experiences be crafted? Yes, if one refuses to be an enabler, a co-dependent, or a gnosiphobe. The prospect of a divorce, loss of a job, hallucinations, looming death, can be rock-bottom for some, and if crafted by concerned-others, can push one to choose change. What must change is the thinking, the worldview—the beliefs.



Other change agents are seen when one continues to offer evidence, argument, and hope. These can chip away at defenses. A hair in the eye, a stone in the shoe, a nose in the tent, an acorn in the soil, can seem like small things for much of the time but the end thereof can be a beginning. Belief-shifts are possible.

A couple of additional points from Twerski (1997) are worth noting—making mistakes, and expressing anger. He comments on the reluctance to admit errors or mistakes which is characteristic of addictive thinking. In addictive thinking there is a perception of being right. Twerski writes: “One of the features of addictive thinking is the addict’s perception of always being right. Many of the other traits prevalent in addictive thinking—denial, projection, rationalization, omnipotence—are brought into play to bolster the insistence that the person has always been right (1997, p.75).” The explanations they offer can sound logical, and reasonable or possible, but the explanations are merely ingenious rationalizations and projections.

The second point is anger. Twerski proposes three phases of anger: the first phase is the feeling of anger (anger proper, or normal anger), the second phase is the reaction to anger (he calls this “rage,” and one suspects it is disproportionate to the trigger), and the third phase is the retention of anger (he refers to this as “resentment”). Those involved with addictive thinking can have severe rage problems, and carry resentment regarding injustice, offence, humiliation, constraints, controls, etc.), but the problem is typically linked to their distorted perception—that is, basically distorted belief. Smokers can feel an injustice, or humiliation, in being sent outside to smoke (rather than focusing on the reasons for the policy). They might then label those on the inside as “wimps” or “holier-than-thou, goody two-shoes,” as a reaction. Similarly, homosexuals can feel an injustice or humiliation from a culture that reacts disapprovingly to homosexuality. “Homophobia” may be a formulaic expression offered as a manifestation of the anger—anger related to faulty perceptions.

Where some of Twerski’s arguments fail, or require questioning, are with respect to the disease model for an addiction like alcoholism. It is premature to reject the character model. There is room for the character model at the table. Twerski (1997) writes: “People who think of addiction as a moral failure, rather than a disease, see failure to control drinking or using drugs as a character weakness (p. 72).” Actually, there is another possibility. What he terms “character weakness” can be a “character construction,” the product of a learned condition due to poor choices, or failures, early in the learning process. The moral failures were much earlier in the learning process, when cognitive resources were limited, or immature.

Moreover, one could make the case that what Twerski calls “addictive thinking” is primarily a functional label when one is dealing with alcoholism. However, such addictive thinking is simply faulty thinking and would apply quite easily to the examination of all learning processes. Would it be better termed “distorted thinking” or “dysfunctional thinking,” or even “busted thinking” ...? If these more descriptive labels fit, then the construct could easily be applied to the analogies under consideration here—smoking, homosexuality, suicidality, eating-problems, and so on. What are they thinking? Likely, they are thinking something along the lines of self-deception—denial, rationalization and projection. And their beliefs are somewhat disordered; belief-shifts would be in order.

*A normalized approach.*

Framed as distorted thinking, or cognitive dissonance, as opposed to the *medicalized notion* of “addictive thinking,” such thinking is common. Festinger (1957) proposed a theory of cognitive dissonance—an unpleasant feeling-state that exists when there is discord, or better, inconsistency, in our cognitively-based ideas, beliefs, or thoughts. This would be a valuable state if it pushes one to resolve the discrepancy by seeking the truth. It could be a dysfunctional state if it pushes one to merely deny the discrepancy, or rationalize the chosen path to reduce the discomfort.

An example of cognitive dissonance relevant for this text is related to smoking. The dissonance is evident in the example given by Tavis and Aronson (1997) with respect to positions that are “...psychologically inconsistent, such as ‘Smoking is a dumb thing to do because it could kill me’ and ‘I smoke two packs a day.’ ...the most direct way for a smoker to reduce dissonance is by quitting. But if she has tried to quit and failed, now she must reduce dissonance by convincing herself that smoking isn’t so harmful, or that smoking is worth the risk because it helps her relax or prevents her from gaining weight (and after all obesity is a health risk too), and so on (p. 13).” The elimination of the cognitive dissonance can be a good thing or a bad thing depending upon the truth value or the merit of the outcomes. Whether good or bad, cognitive dissonance and dissonance reduction, both seem to be typical and normal processes.

Normal people can be led to do things that society considers to be abnormal (e.g., see the obedience to authority studies of Milgram, 1974). Individuals can face challenges that create dissonance, and they end up doing things, when trying to reduce dissonance, that are clearly out-of-character, or even beyond their normal ethical standards. The abnormal can seem trivial. One wonders if even “monsters” can be seen as examples of the “banality of evil” (Arendt, 1963). Again referring to Tavis and Aronson these researchers comment on the number of perpetrators of evil (see p. 197-208) and their claims that they were doing it for “good,” typically for the “good of their country.” The rationalizations are strong, and common enough to be considered normal, though certainly not moral in various religious worldviews.

Dealing with cognitive dissonance has been experienced by everyone at some point in their development. While Tavis and Aronson (1997) tie such mistakes (and the failure to own up to such mistakes”) to cognitive dissonance theory they also link such failures to self deception, pride, prejudice, confabulated memories, and so on. In this formulation bad thinking seems to be normal and pandemic rather than non-normal and pathological.

There are a numerous cognitive processes that can impel one towards bad thinking, irrational, or self-deceptive, positions—positions that strive to avoid dissonance at some level. Baron (2008) explores a number of these processes. For example, primacy effects can bias one to a position, or argument, encountered first. Such a bias can be a problem for juries; the first argument they hear sets up a bias. It might even be a variant of the Iago effect; Iago gets his malevolent message to Othello, and then a confirmation bias sets in. Similarly, early hypotheses can push one to the “myside bias” (or commitment to a position) where one seeks confirmatory evidence rather than disconfirming evidence and argument. A failure to adopt open-mindedness, or a two-sided protocol (as in the competing-hypothesis-testing of science), can be a strategy to avoid dissonance and ultimately self-deceptive. Yet, even with a two-sided investigative protocol

built into a system (as in juries who hear both sides of the issue, or scientific research where competing theories are tested), both primacy effects, and recency effects can still contribute to a bias.

Further, even “neutral evidence” can lead to bias, or rather strengthen an existing bias. Baron (2008) presents a study by Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) where subjects who either favoured or opposed capital punishment for its deterrence effect were tested. These two groups read two reports on evidence for deterrence: one pro and one con, albeit fabricated evidence, yet it appeared scientific. The evidence was basically constructed to be neutral. “The results were manipulated so that only the first report showed deterrence for half the subjects and only the second report showed deterrence for the other half. The effect of each report on the subject’s belief was stronger when the report agreed with the belief than when it did not. The authors call this *biased assimilation* of evidence.... In the end, subjects *polarized*: that is, they became stronger in their initial beliefs, regardless of their direction. If anything, mixed-evidence should have made subjects less sure of their beliefs (p. 209-210).” It didn’t. It made them more sure of their initial belief.

This is something like a variant on the “When Prophecy Fails” phenomenon (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). When a prophecy fails the believers become more entrenched in their beliefs rather than abandon their beliefs. Such belief entrenchment can be a problem in many areas: smoking, drug use, gambling, excessive eating, uncontrolled shopping, pornography, pedophilia, and so on. Yet, at the same time belief entrenchment can be valuable regarding attributions to effort, musical ability, artistic flare, mountain climbing, and completing a marathon. The judgment regarding the value of the entrenched belief depends on the particular belief.

Other processes facilitating irrational belief persistence that Baron (2008) considers are worth elaboration. Two categories may be considered here. Both have value for framing cognitive dissonance with respect to topics like smoking, eating problems, and sexual orientation. First, there are the “beliefs about thinking” where one might believe: (1) “commitment” to a belief is admirable, a form of persistence in spite of problems, or (2) the “expert,” who has a side already staked out for a belief, is superior to the multiple-perspective-taking researcher, or (3) the “advocate” (as in the lawyer) is more of an ally than the ivory-tower thinker. These beliefs about thinking are heuristics that can interfere with better thinking. Applied to smoking, for example, an adolescent’s peers can serve as the advocate, the expert, the admirably committed hero, and push beliefs. Applied to homosexuality, for example, the APA can serve as the advocate, the expert, and the admirably committed authority, and push beliefs. What is really needed is the two-sided protocol and multiple-perspective-taking. That is, what is needed is the scientific approach. Not needed are processes like “selective justification,” “belief-overkill,” “elastic justification,” “accommodation” to others, and even “groupthink” (see Baron, 2008, p. 219-225).

Second, there are the effects of desires on beliefs, or “distortion of beliefs by desires.” As potential influences on beliefs, Baron presents the following: self-deception, wishful thinking, dissonance resolution, desire to be viewed as a good decision-maker, and desire to be viewed as a good belief-former. Striking here, is Baron’s (2008) concluding inference after reviewing a series of supportive empirical studies: “When a person runs into evidence against the belief,

evidence suggesting that a bad decision may have been made, the person changes his beliefs about his own desires ('I must really have wanted it, or I wouldn't have done it for so little money,' or 'put in so much effort,' and so forth). These beliefs about desires, in turn, may influence the desires themselves, as we have just seen (p. 219)." In this formulation, it seems beliefs precede desires. Suppose one has the belief that they are of a heterosexual orientation; this then precedes the subsequent desire for a heterosexual relationship and orientation. Later one runs into evidence challenging such a belief/desire (say prepubescent or pubescent same-sex, sexual play, or simply sexual arousal coterminous with the presence of same-sex playmates). These events could serve to generate a recency effect, a source of dissonance, or a subsequent biased-selection protocol for new experiences. What happens? What can be inferred from Baron's change: "When a person runs into evidence against the belief, evidence suggesting that a bad decision may have been made, the person changes his beliefs about his own desires .... (2008, p.219)." If Baron is right, this is telling: we can change our beliefs about our desires. In fact, with Baron, there seems to be a reciprocal relationship with, firstly, beliefs influencing desires, and then desires influencing beliefs. In effect then, if we change our beliefs we might very well change our desires. With respect to the acquisition of a heterosexual orientation beliefs come first; they lead to desires; if the beliefs are not thwarted by evidence, argument, dissonance, recency effects, elastic justification, groupthink, and so on, then the heterosexual orientation (belief) is firmed up, and the desires follow. If dissonance is generated by various encounters, beliefs can change; and then changed desires can follow.

With respect to smoking the application is less clear. Nevertheless, we can detect the fact that one has beliefs about smoking at the seminal stage (e.g., I'm a rebel, smoking will keep my weight in control, smoking gives me a hit, smoking is the price-of-admission to a desirable peer group, etc.). The beliefs are formative of an identity; then, the beliefs are formative of the desires that follow.

With respect to eating problems, what happens? One believes that one is a normal-eater or an over-eater; dissonance follows. Desires to eat follow. The strongest desires to eat follow the principal orientation. Unfortunately, dieting doesn't change the belief; one still believes that one is an over-eater by orientation, and the fight against desire will, more often than not, fail. Change the belief—the orientation—and the changed desire will follow. How does one change an orientation? Worldview change! Paradigm shift! See the light! Adopt a new identity! Conversion experience! All of which involve the learning of a new identity. All of the routes involve choices. If there is an actual belief-shift learned, the shift in desire will follow, if Baron (2008) is right.

As discussed in Chapter 4 change can be a slow and generally tedious process. With respect to a new eating orientation, one needs a new set of competing causes: *material* causes (e.g., healthy foods as opposed to fast-foods, etc.), new *formal* causes (i.e., exercise, portion size, routines, habits, automaticity, strategies, and life-style models) and new *final* causes (i.e., health, energy, athletics, appearance, holiness, freedom, your child's image of you, etc....). A changed mind, by choice!

Either way—whether bad thinking is framed as *medicalized*, that is, "addiction thinking," or as *normalized*, that is, normal cognitive dissonant thinking—the need for change is evident. There is a need for: (1) putting multiple-perspectives and hypotheses on the table for testing and

evaluation, (2) developing a comfort level for admitting mistakes, and (3) developing self-regulation strategies for dealing with mistakes. All three support belief-shifts. In all three, better beliefs are better, in which case belief-shifts to better beliefs is better. Ultimately, belief matters!

### *Ideomotor Action Theory*

This theory addresses a unique aspect of ideas, or beliefs, and consequently belief shifts. Initially, the primary interest is on the functional relation between a belief/idea and subsequent action. It is claimed that an idea, any idea, actually impels one to action associated with the idea. The idea triggers action. This is a type of action that is distinct from action after deliberation. Ideomotor action is independent of deliberation, or it precedes deliberation, or it is altered by deliberation.

The theory originated with Carpenter (1888/2010); it was addressed and extended by James (1891/1952); and, it has re-emerged in the current discussions of the problem of free will (Wegner, 2002), and responses to Wegner (see Mele, 2009). Carpenter was interested in esoteric behaviours linked to the popular fascination with spiritualism (e.g., automatism), and how to explain them in psychological terms. As Wegner writes of Carpenter: “In essence, he said the idea of an action can make us perform the action, without any special influence of the will (2002, p. 121).” This is more than the notion that ideas have consequences—indirect causation. Rather, the idea itself was viewed as having a motor effect in line with direct causation, bypassing consciousness, intention, and will. However, if ideas lead to the inception of the action, why don't all ideas so function? That is the obvious problem readily raised in many considerations of Carpenter's claim. In fact though, one can conceive of the possibility that ideas do impel, it is just that, as James (1891/1952) argued, the impelling can be blocked.

Wegner noted that James accepted the theory and added to this theory to help explain why all ideas do not lead to the imagined action. Essentially, there can be competing ideas which serve to block the motivating idea. It is the absence of competing ideas that frees the person to follow the motoric impetus of an idea, independent of consciousness, and perhaps, will. The absence of a competing idea might occur in hypnotism, for example, or in automatic writing, so that the idea does clearly lead to the action.

An absence of ideomotor action can occur in the more mundane behaviours as well. To illustrate the point, James uses the graphic example of getting out of a warm bed on a very cold morning:

“Probably most persons have lain on certain mornings for an hour at a time unable to brace themselves to the resolve. We think how late we shall be, how the duties of the day will suffer; we say, ‘I must get up, this is ignominious,’ etc.; but still the warm couch feels too delicious, the cold outside too cruel, and resolution faints away and postpones itself again and again just as it seemed on the verge of bursting the resistance and passing over into a decisive act. Now how do we ever get up under such circumstances? If I may generalize from my own experience, we more often than not get up without any struggle or decision at all. We suddenly find that we have got up. A fortunate lapse of consciousness occurs; we forget both the warmth and the cold; we

fall into some revery connected with the day's life, in the course of which the idea flashes across us, 'Hollo! I must lie here no longer'—an idea which at that lucky instant awakens no contradictory or paralyzing suggestions, and consequently produces immediately its appropriate motor effects (1891/1952, p. 792)."

James goes on to consider deliberate action where reasons, motives, indecision, impatience, "the dread of the irrevocable," equilibrium, testing our reasons, and so on, come into play. What gets masked in this higher level processing is the fascinating notion that an idea itself impels behaviour. Ideas are ideas-in-motion!

So, two important issues surface here. First, how the idea is attained is more than just a curious interest, it is an interest with implications. We know ideas have consequences at a cognitive level, but with ideomotor action we see implications at a precognitive motoric level; both the cognitive and the precognitive can lead to behavioural consequences. "How does one obtain an idea?" is a question with comparable weight to "How does one obtain a virus?" At the very least caution is an offshoot.

A few possible options for the acquisition of an idea follow: (1) it is *put* there (by society, books, parents, peers, etc.), (2) it is *assimilated* by the self into consciousness following a choice of some sort, (3) it is *sought* via a reasoning strategy and then placed onto a table for rational consideration, (4) it is *entertained* on the couch of one's mind by the curious side of the self, (5) it is *dragged* into consciousness as the baggage of other thoughts, (6) it emerges from induction, abduction, or scientific experimentation, model building or theorizing, (7) it emerges from analogizing, and (8) probably many other sources. The notion of an idea-in-motion calls for careful, critical evaluation.

The second issue addresses where one situates will and choices in the process of acting on a belief or idea whether prior to deliberation or not. Normally, choice functions in various aspects of acquisition (initiation, rumination, evaluation, experimentation, exploration, etc.), and different calibers of choice at these various choice-points makes sense. With acquisition, choice functions as a critical sentry to evaluate ideas, or pursue ideas. One distinguishes between the choice-to-acquire the idea (cognitive), the choice-to-act given the idea acquired (cognitive), and the idea-in-motion (ideomotoric). When the idea is set in motion via this ideomotoric mechanism there is no choice-to-act initially; however, there are prior and subsequent choice-points that can facilitate or block the idea-in-motion. Given the different routes to acquisition (e.g., curiosity, baggage, and entertainment), the caliber of choice at such choice-points would vary considerably.

Ideomotor action does not negate will and choices; rather it is positioned with will and choice. To illustrate this claim, it is reasonable to assume a choice may be involved in entertaining the idea of an action. Some thoughts (ideas) are spontaneous, others we choose to entertain, or choose to construct, or choose to defend. An idea, whether spontaneous or constructed, sets implementation in motion according to the ideomotor theory. But this idea-in-motion is contextualized by choices with all the issues of the calibers of choice, the developmental sequences of choice, and the critical feature of choice-points. It could appear that our will, our intentions, are not involved, but this is only at the ideomotor level.

Applying this theory to various behaviours of interest is intriguing. In smoking, we see that the very idea (thought) of smoking would be impelling one, via motor planning and action, to smoke at a seminal stage. Similarly, the very thought of eating would be impelling one via motor planning and action to eat. The very thought of sexual activity would be impelling one via motor planning and action to implement that sexual activity. If so, it is easy to suspect ideas can be dangerous, especially when there are no competing ideas—forthcoming, permitted, or explored. The idea impels successfully when there is no competing idea, a weak competing idea, or a strong competing idea that is denied, suppressed, repressed, or rationalized.

What might be consistent with a loss of, or an absence of, competing ideas? Things like fatigue, or chance, or regression along the lines of action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987) could contribute to a loss of blockage. Suggestion (as in hypnotism) can nullify blockage from competing ideas. Suppression can nullify the blockage of competing ideas. Baumeister's four sources of evil (gain, egotism, idealism, sadistic pleasure) might nullify blockage from competing ideas. What is needed is belief shifting. Belief shifts via cognitive interventions like rational argument to deal with rationalization, denial, suppression, or bad ideas, could implement blockage for the bad ideas-in-motion.

The key point to draw from the theory is that ideas impel action, and may in fact be viewed as synonymous with action-initiation. Choice comes into play. There seems to be at least two obvious choice-points: first, in choosing to entertain the idea (either initially in bringing it into consciousness, or subsequently keeping it in consciousness), second, in choosing to discard, or disregard, competing ideas, and veto-arguments—a form of rationalization.

### *Ideo-Ideology Action Theory*

This speculative variant on ideomotor action theory is interesting because of the potentially profound effects on beliefs, ideologies, and worldviews. The rudiments of such a theory already exist. Ideas cognitively activated impel motoric action as described above; but ideas cognitively activated also can impel ideology, the ideology thought-about. This is seen in studies of confirmation bias (see Nickerson, 1998). To illustrate: An idea one is asked to imagine can set cognitive confirmation activities of that idea into fulfillment-seeking. An idea one considers first can set confirmation of that idea into cognitive motion (a primacy effect).

### *Synthesizing The Theories*

A synthesis of the theories with respect to smoking, homosexuality, eating-problems, suicidality, and so on, is framed along the lines of four key concepts: *inception*, *learning*, *entrenchment*, and *change*. First, *inception* points to the motivating power of an idea regardless of how it is attained as discussed above with respect to ideomotor theory. If the idea is socially or psychologically suspect, then possibly it has been attained by the dark side of curiosity (Ariely, 2008), or the dark side of creativity (Cropley, Cropley, Kaufman, & Runco, 2010), simple exposure, or just plain intrigue. The idea impels. The darkened mind postulate with Zimbardo's (2004) ten ingredients for implementing suspect behaviour portrays triggering protocols and

maintenance protocols that can lead to behaviours that appear contrary to nature. Then comes *learning* which draws upon the opponent-process theory (Solomon & Corbit, 1973, 1974) to portray a mechanism for learning that incorporates the formative influence of both the aversive and the hedonic aspects of the targets under implementation. The ideomotor action, if not blocked, can be rewarded.

The third concept is *entrenchment*. All theories offer mechanisms, or principles, or illustrations of entrenchment—the solidification of the target behaviour. Learning theory laws seen in the opponent-process theory (Solomon & Corbit, 1973, 1974) lead to entrenchment of behaviour. This holds with respect to both aversive and hedonic aspects of the behaviour. The contribution from ironic effects theory (Wegner, 1994, 1997) illustrates how intentions to change can actually lead to further entrenchment of the behaviour. One intends to implement certain behaviours, and ends up doing the opposite, ironically. The darkening mind postulate draws upon Zimbardo’s (2004) ten ingredients to illustrate how the entrenchment unfolds. The action-identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987) points to the defaulting to lower level thinking that can occur in the presence of constraints. And finally, Addictive Thinking theory demonstrates the place of self deception in adopting certain behaviours and orientations. The entrenchment is evident in the resistance to change because of the prominent influence of denial, rationalization, projection, and lying. The thinking is delusional.

The fourth concept is *change*. The theories portray the potential difficulty of change. In the opponent-process theory one can be dealing with loneliness, craving and grief (see Table 8) which would serve to push for the maintaining of entrenchment.

Consequence	Example	First Stimulations		Later Stimulations	
		State A (input present)	State B (input gone)	State A' (input present)	State B' (input gone)
Aversive	Dogs receiving 10 second shocks	Terror	Stealth	Unhappy	Joy
Aversive	Sky-diving	Terror	Stunned	Tense and eager	Exhilaration
Hedonic	Opiate use	Euphoria	Craving	Relief	Intense craving
Hedonic	Love	Excitement	Loneliness	Comfort	Grief and longing

Note. The lightly shaded cells indicate clear rewards. The darker shaded cells (craving and longing) would have a reward-component.

In action-identification theory constraints (social, psychological, situational, imagined) push one to lower levels of thinking not to wholesome change. Lower levels of thinking would



not likely be conducive to the quality of thinking needed to actually plan and implement a change-protocol of sophisticated self-regulation.

In ironic effects theory, change efforts are notoriously problematic. In effect, planned change typically backfires.

The darkened mind postulate illustrates the power of a cover story, the power of semantics, the dangers of a gradual shift of image, and finally the rising problem of exit costs. The exit costs can be too high to actually work out a change. If there is to be change, the addictive thinking framework points to the rigour required, the therapy required, the insight required, the supports required, the shifts in beliefs or worldview required, in order that one might move in the direction of even small changes. Belief shifts!

## Academic Opposition Constrains Belief

### Deception by Others—A Constraint For Belief

Deception by others is an avenue of deception that one must guard against, diligently. Deception by others can impact the unwary in the form of research fraud, in the form of “authorities” who betray the truth for a variety of overt and covert reasons, in the form of principled deception, and in the form of unconscious, good-intentioned, iatrogenic deception.

#### *Research fraud*

Rigging, fudging, fabrication, altering data, intentional misinterpretation, are not unknowns in science.

- i. An article surveying readers of *New Scientist* (a group of scientists re knowledge of fraud) reported:
  1. Over 90% knew of, or suspected, fraud...
- ii. Recent meta-analysis of research fraud...
  1. <http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0005738>
  2. about 2% rate for admission of fraud, 33% rate for admission of questionable research practices. Regarding perception of fraud amongst colleagues it is up to 72%.

Such statistics indicate that there is element of fraud that exists in the sciences. The data, and research findings, are best considered as suspect until further notice. The idealistic belief that peer review and replication studies will protect the science community against such fraudulent behaviour is a dream. Replication studies are not particularly appealing to journal editors. Peer review is a policing mechanism that itself needs review (Tipler, 2003).

#### *Authorities and Devilish Deceptions*

The following list of resources capture the tip of the iceberg of the wide ranging and pervasive deceptions that plague (1) the academic community, (2) the knowledge-building that humans value, (3) human culture and (4) hope.

- Broad, W. & Wade, N. (1982). *Betrayers of the Truth, Fraud and Deceit in Science*. London: Oxford University Press. (even Newton makes the list!)
- Russell, J. B. (1997). *Inventing The Flat Earth*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.
- Grafton, A. (1990). *Forgers and Critics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Katsoulis, M. (2009). *Literary Hoaxes*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing.
- Carlson, S. C. (2005). *The Gospel Hoax, Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
- Gross, Levitt & Lewis (1996). *The Flight From Science and Reason*. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol 775.
- Hamilton, R. F. (1996). *The Social Misconstruction of Reality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Altman, E. & Heron, P. (1997). *Research Misconduct*. Greenwich, England: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Hearnshaw, L. S. (1979). *Cyril Burt: Psychologist*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Sommers, C. H. (1994). *Who Stole Feminism*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Phillips, M. (2010). *The World Turned Upside Down*. New York: Encounter Books.
- Jonathan Wells, (1999) Second thoughts about peppered moths. *The Scientist*, 13 (11):13

*Principled Deception -- Imprimatur of Authorities (e.g. Nagel, Ayer, Lewontin...)*

The previous catalogue of deceivers focused on unprincipled deception, or malevolent practices. There is a type of deception, however, that springs from honourable principles. That is, there are principles that one holds with good intentions, intentions that nevertheless can align with a type of deception. Consider Nagel, Ayer, Lewontin, and others, who express principles designed to preclude theism. If they are wrong, their hopes, principled hopes, are blinding them, and blinding their disciples.

Nagel:

“I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.” --Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament* –2005

Ayer:

Nagel is not alone in wanting atheism to be true, or at least a finality in death. A. J. Ayer writing about his near death experience (see Hitchens, 2007b) concludes: “So there it is. My recent experiences have slightly weakened my conviction that my genuine death, which is due

fairly soon, will be the end of me, though I continue to hope that it will. They have not weakened my conviction that there is no god (p. 275).” It looks like atheists have hopes, as do theists.

Lewontin:

“Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compell us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our prior adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover that materialism is absolute for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door.” -- Lewontin, R. (1997). Billions and billions of demons. The New York Review of Books. January 9, 1997, 31.

Naturalism precludes theism. This claim as presented by Rea (2002) is clear; however, he presents the case explaining more than just how naturalism precludes theism by definition, or commitment. Naturalism is tied closely to materialism, empiricism, and scientism. As Rea contends naturalism is better viewed as a research program rather than a view. Rea (2002) argues that naturalism has “unpalatable consequences” ...particularly, naturalism fails at saving two key ontological views: the realism of material objects (RMO), and the realism of other minds (ROM). Naturalism leads to blindnesses!

Prominent naturalists do seem to have blindnesses that are philosophical. Moreover, these naturalists are open to spreading blindness in others. Plantinga (2011), for example, comments on apparent blindnesses of Dawkins and Dennett who are prominent representatives of naturalism. In the context of discussing defeaters, particularly rebutting defeaters, and considering Paley’s design argument, which some believe has been rebutted by Darwin, Plantinga writes of Dawkins and Dennett: “...they believe that evolutionary science has shown that as a matter of fact eyes and other biological structures have not, in point of sober truth, been designed. ...Richard Dawkins believes contemporary evolutionary science ‘reveals a universe without design’; ...Daniel Dennett apparently thinks current evolutionary science includes the claim that this process is unguided (p. 252).” Then further Plantinga summarizes his conclusion: “As we also saw Dawkins’s argument for this conclusion, however, is unsound in excelsis; and Dennett, for his part, simply assumes without argument that current evolutionary theory includes the proposition that the process of evolution has not been guided (by God or anyone else), despite the fact that the proposition looks much more like a metaphysical or theological add-on than a part of the scientific theory as such (2011, p. 253).” If Dawkins and Dennett are wrong, as I believe they are given Plantinga’s (2011) analyses and arguments, then their authoritative imprimatur will lead others to blindness.

*Iatrogenic Deception--Professional Blindness*

The term “iatrogenic” has a number of interesting applications. In medicine an iatrogenic illness is an illness actually caused by the best intentions of the medical profession. The medical profession intends to help, but they can end up causing serious problems, illnesses, and even death. Someone reads the medical X-Ray backwards and ends up amputating the wrong foot. The prescription calls for 10 mg, and some careless script, or hasty pharmacist, sees 100mg; the patient dies. In education, teachers can have the best of intentions but introduce concepts or tasks before the student is developmentally ready; then, you can end up with an iatrogenic learning disability subsequent to the child’s frustration, learned helplessness, and hopelessness.

In the area of knowledge and belief formation a similar phenomenon can occur—call it iatrogenic deception. The intentions of the helpers—the authorities, the knowledge disseminators, the caretakers, and the intelligentsia—can be good; but the consequence can be a form of deception—professional-deception. Professional blindness!

In the Rosenhan (1973) study in *Science*, sane people (albeit researchers) get themselves admitted to a psychiatric facility as part of an experiment. They fake illness, with a presenting symptom of hearing voices. When asked what the voices said the pseudo-patients replied “...that they were often unclear, but as far as he could tell they said ‘empty,’ ‘hollow,’ and ‘thud.’ The voices were unfamiliar and were of the same sex as the pseudo-patient (p. 251).” Once inside the institution, they then act perfectly normal. Will they be seen to be normal and discharged by the medical professionals? No.

Why not? The psychiatrists want to help, they have good intentions, but they are deceived, in part, by their professional background, professional training, and professional paradigms. They experience a type of professional blindness anchored to the initial deception of the researcher—that is, their initial perception of mental illness. Of interest, Rosenhan notes that other patients on the admissions ward often detected the fraud. He reports that at one point in the process, 35 out of 118 patients “...voiced their suspicions, sometimes vigorously (p. 252).” The cause of the blindness could be (1) anchoring to initial perceptions, (2) the role of labelling, (3) constructivism or confabulation in an attempt to achieve consistency, or (4) power differentials. Rosenhan does note the problem of labelling, the influence of the environment, powerlessness and depersonalization of patients, and even the monetary factors impacting resources and workload, but does not attribute the problem to “...malice and stupidity on the part of the staff (1973, p. 257).” It is a professional blindness. Solutions he suggests are increased sensitivity and basic awareness of the problem: “Simply reading materials in this area will be of help to some such workers and researchers. For others, directly experiencing the impact of psychiatric hospitalization will be of enormous use (Rosenhan, 1973, p. 257).”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an elaborative review and development following Rosenhan (1973) check the commentary here: <http://thesituationist.wordpress.com/tag/rosenhan-experiment/>

Applied to theism, initial propositions, and perceptions, formed by encounters with authorities like media, teachers, parents, academics, professors, and so on, can blind us to the reality. We have our own “professional aura” or quasi-professional aura. For example: (1) I’m a teenager, and more informed than my parents as a result of personal reflections and discussions with peers, or (2) I’m a university student, and have arrived at knowledge given my first two courses. The consequence: this quasi-professional aura can blind us. Catholic theologians can be blinded to Protestant protestations (and vice versa) because of professional blindness. The modern church children can be blinded with respect to the early Church Fathers—a professional blindness. Anchoring, labelling, power, environment, resources, and more, can affect the sight of the professional, the quasi-professional, and the mere professor.

### **The Reigning Paradigm (Philosophical Naturalism/Materialism) Constrains Belief**

#### Reigning Paradigms

Historically, there are various reigning paradigms—in the political arena, in religious framings, in the sciences, and even in the arts. These paradigms might be pervasive or at times, localized. In *politics*: two thousand years ago one might have held that Pax Romano was the reigning paradigm. In medieval Europe Christianity was the reigning paradigm. More recently Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Nazism, and Pax Americana have served as reigning paradigms. In *religion*: polytheism, was replaced by monotheism; now theism is on the rise. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam can be seen as reigning paradigms in more specific locales. In the *arts*: realism, impressionism, Dadaism, cubism, held sway at different times. In *science*: the ancient Greeks (e.g., Aristotle) held the dominant position for quite some time. European rationalism and British empiricists then moved to the high ground. Though experimental science can be seen as a reigning paradigm today there are guises in the form of Darwinism, or physics, or materialism that can be seen to place Naturalism as the reigning paradigm.

With respect to entrenched learnings (e.g., atheism), the reigning paradigm it seems is naturalism and its offshoots or proxies: materialism, reductionism, scientism, evolutionism, Darwinism, and humanism. The reigning paradigm drives the learning; if the reigning paradigm is seriously flawed the learning outcomes will be seriously flawed—disordered.

#### *The Reigning Paradigm (Kuhn)*

The standard formulation from a science perspective is seen in Kuhn’s (1962, 1970) classic work “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.” What does a scientific revolution look like? The primary context is a scientific paradigm that reigns across scientific disciplines. There are competing views, alternate theories, and empirical challenges bubbling up regularly but rarely are these seen as threats, revolutions, or usurpations. More often than not such challenges are viewed as refining the dominant paradigm.

However, some serious challenges can arise in both quantity and quality; at this point Kuhn sees the dominant paradigm in science under revolutionary attack. The threat builds prior to a revolutionary change. There could be a plethora of views arrayed against the dominant paradigm prior to a major paradigm shift. Typically, the establishment would band together to protect the dominant paradigm (Lakatos, 1970), often at all costs—obfuscation, suppression, denial, or even fraud. Nevertheless, a boiling point can be reached and a major shift occur—the old paradigm falls, and the new paradigm rules the day.

Of particular interest are the blindnesses that characterize the professional in the dominant paradigm when under attack by the new school. People have a vested interest in the traditional way of looking at things, doing things, and valuing things. There is a reluctance to adopt a mind-change, particularly a change that they have been fighting for years. It can be humbling to admit oneself a fool, and thus it is the willingly humble who experience the growth spurt.

#### *The Establishment and Control of the Reigning Paradigm (Expelled)*

It is interesting how systems react to change and threat. The challenge to the reigning paradigm—naturalism—that is growing from those in a broad-based camp, a camp that is at least open to Intelligent Design, is rabid—it seems to breed deception, misrepresentation, ad hominem arguments, and suppression. It is echoing Kuhn’s pointers to a paradigmatic upheaval. This can be seen quite clearly in the recent DVD, hosted by Ben Stein, and titled aptly: “Expelled.”

It can also be culled from the growing philosophical literature addressing challenges to the major paradigm—a literature not limited to theists (see for example the atheist, Monton, 2009; the agnostic, Berlinski, and the former atheist, Flew, 2007). Nor is the paradigmatic challenge limited to one domain of science. It spans cosmology, biology, physics, information sciences, mathematics, engineering, and more.)

#### *The Heuristic Response to Challenges to the Reigning Paradigm (Lakatos)*

An informative and elaborate approach to resistance to change is seen in Lakatos (1970). To address the resistance to change consider a configuration proposed by Lakatos (1970) that offers an epistemological approach, or methodological rules, for knowledge building. Lakatos argues with respect to research programs that we have three aspects to consider: a hard core, negative heuristics and positive heuristics. It is probably fair to assume that the “hard core” is constructed to include the basic assumptions, beliefs, principles, knowledge, and so on that we accept as firm and foundational.

The methodological technique he terms “negative heuristic” is the principle, and practice, of protecting the “hard core.” “The negative heuristic of the program forbids us to direct the

modus tollens<sup>1</sup> at this ‘hard core’. Instead, we must use our ingenuity to articulate or even invent ‘auxiliary hypotheses’, which form a protective belt around this core, and we must redirect the modus tollens to these (Lakatos, 1970, p. 133).” While such an approach is clearly scientific, and potentially valuable, one must be open to allocating doubt to these auxiliary hypotheses proportional to the evidence, lest one be blinded to more credible hypotheses.

The “positive heuristic” involves plodding along with knowledge building in spite of the problems. “The positive heuristic of the programme saves the scientist from becoming confused by the ocean of anomalies.... He ignores the actual counterexamples, and available ‘data’ (Lakatos, 1970, p. 135).” A selective sight is a form of blindness.

While the focus of Lakatos is on the methodology of science, and science programs, it seems that the formula applies equally well to the psychology of personal knowledge building, whether psychological, religious, political, moral, or pragmatic. Our basic “hard core” beliefs are often immune from critique; instead we build auxiliary hypotheses as a protective belt. Then we plod along with knowledge building in spite of the problems. Of course this applies to both sides of an issue—the pro-smoking faction and the anti-smoking lobby, the pro-homosexual agenda and the traditionalists, the healthy eaters and the eaters-of-the-healthy, the neo-Darwinist ramp and the Intelligent Design camp, the carnivores and the herbivores, and so on. Both sides have their “hard core” immune from the negative heuristics; both sides have their positive heuristics for knowledge building. Such opposition should be eye-opening, not blinding.

### Naturalism/Materialism As Principle—Constrains Belief

Naturalism holds the basic presupposition that the natural is all that exists. Naturalists, for the most part allow no room for any explanation other than naturalism (e.g., see Lewontin below). As such, the general tenor in science is that naturalism presents a prevailing academic opposition to the religious, and then to the supernatural. This could be termed “hard-naturalism.” There are some softer versions of naturalism: One goes by the name of methodological naturalism where naturalism is practiced as a method but the practitioner might not hold to philosophical naturalism, or the hard-naturalism. Another could be termed open-naturalism; here there are exceptions as when challenges to hard-naturalism are open for consideration. There are times when naturalists like Gould and Nagel, appear to strive for a form of openness.

#### *Lewontin*

“Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific

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<sup>1</sup> In logic the modus tollens is configured as If P then Q; not Q, therefore not P. But this is not necessarily true if P is bivalent. For example the claim “where there’s smoke, there’s fire” is not necessarily true; thus, the claim that there is no fire, does not support a denial of the claim “there is no smoke.”

community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our prior adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover that materialism is absolute for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door.”

--Lewontin, R. (1997). Billions and billions of demons. *The New York Review of Books*. January 9, 1997, 31.

### *Gould*

Gould (1999) attempts to keep science and religion separate with his non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA); but he does admit there is an overlap at points. Moreover, he doesn't seem to portray a belligerence when considering the non-naturalist positions associated with religion historically. His treatment of the politicized outliers is admirable. For example, his examination of the flat earth stereotype is scholarly and appropriately critical. Moreover, his treatment of the Scope's trial and William Jennings Bryan is scholarly—that is, fair and balanced.

Given that there is an overlap in the two authorities, a different framing seems appropriate. Simultaneous Overlapping, Discrete Authorities (SODA), is a takeoff on Stephen Jay Gould's (1999) notion of NOMA—"Non Overlapping Magisterial Authorities." While Gould presents a clear and interesting case for considering two legitimate authorities (science and religion), his labeling of them as non-overlapping was seen to be too limiting. Gould does actually make the claim that these two authorities do overlap in some ways. He writes: "...all human beings must pay at least rudimentary attention to both magisteria of religion and science, whatever we choose to name these domains of ethical and factual inquiry (1999, p. 58)." Further, he noted: "The magisteria will not fuse; so each of us must integrate these distinct components into a coherent view of life (1999, p. 58)." This is seen as actually supporting some form of overlapping.

In a later publication Gould (2003) makes a further foray into a reconciliation of science and the humanities. For one thing he contends that the Scientific Revolution was not a 17<sup>th</sup> century categorical event; it was a continuous phenomenon—a developmental unfolding with many historical precursors underpinning a historical change. This view is somewhat radical and unconventional, yet clearly scholarly, and correct.

### *Nagel*

Nagel does seem open to consider the limits of naturalism, and the challenges to naturalism although [naturalism is his preferred position](#). But, see his 2005 paper. Albeit there are



a couple of interesting differences in the published version of the paper: see comments [below re Nagel](#).

### Naturalism/Materialism As Paradigm—Constrains Belief

#### C. S. Lewis's Argument Against Naturalism

C. S. Lewis seems to have the most reader-friendly and cogent argumentation against naturalism (and its proxies like scientism, materialism, and evolutionism) of the past 100 years. The problem is the arguments are scattered throughout his writings. Yet, in his address titled: “Is Theology Poetry?” (Lewis, 1949), he does capture the essence of the issue.

“Long before I believed Theology to be true I had already decided that the popular scientific picture at any rate was false. One absolute central inconsistency ruins it...The whole picture professes to depend on observed facts. Unless inference is valid, the whole picture disappears. Unless we can be sure that reality in the remotest nebula or the remotest art obeys the thought laws of the human scientist here and now in his laboratory—in other words, unless reason is absolute—all is in ruins. Yet those who ask me to believe this world picture also ask me to believe that Reason is simply the unforeseen and unintended by-product of mindless matter at one stage of its endless and aimless becoming. Here is flat contradiction. They ask me at the same moment to accept a conclusion and to discredit the only testimony on which that conclusion can be based. The difficulty is to me a fatal one; and the fact that when you put it to many scientists, far from having an answer, they seem not even to understand what the difficulty is, assures me that I have not found a mare's nest but detected a radical disease in their whole mode of thought from the very beginning. The man who has once understood the situation is compelled henceforth to regard the scientific cosmology as being, in principle, a myth; though no doubt a great many particulars have been worked into it (Lewis, 1949/1980, p. 135-136).”

Fortunately, a group of scholars have recently collated much of the related thinking of Lewis in a collection of essays edited by West (2012). The essays are quite compelling in positioning Lewis's views of naturalism. It is clear that for Lewis naturalism fails. It fails with respect to the big gaps (like getting something from nothing), the source, priority, and role of reason (naturalism undercuts reason), the nature and reality, of morality, the role of logic (the equivocation fallacy), the function of the laws of nature (which never produced anything), the shallow views of historical, religious and biblical genre, free will, the prior influence of worldview on theory and attention to facts, and much more. Lewis quite clearly flags the serious problems with naturalism and adopts the proper attitude to science. Naturalism fails.

The basis of the Lewis argument for the failure of Naturalism has been compared with the argument as developed by Hasker and Plantinga (see Goetz, 2013). The argument as developed by Lewis, according to Goetz, is deductive. He frames it as follows:

- (1) “If naturalism is true then we do not reason
- (2) We reason. Therefore...

(3) Naturalism is false.”

“Given that we know we reason, Lewis concluded that naturalism must be false. It must be false because reasoning (making inferences) violates the causal closure of the material world according to which the explanation of a mental event can include nothing other than what is material in nature. And if naturalism is itself a philosophical position that is arrived at on the basis of reasoning, then the game is up. Naturalism ends up being self-defeating because those who espouse it typically arrive at it on the basis of reasoning (Goetz, 2013, p. 50).” More problematic is the implication for science. “Indeed, Lewis believed not only that naturalism is doomed by the fact that we reason but so also is science, which naturalists believe is the discipline upon which all others should be modeled. Science, too, is doomed because it is a discipline whose very existence depends on making inferences (Goetz, 2013, p. 51).” The deductive argument is quite compelling!

The argument as developed by Hasker (according to Goetz, 2013) is a “Best Explanation” argument—abduction—rather than a deductive argument. Even so, the bottom line is the still very compelling case that naturalism is best viewed as false.

The well developed form of the argument is Plantinga’s version. On naturalism—a construct denying God, and thereby affirming the only other explanation, naturalistic Darwinism—we have no reason to think our cognitive faculties are reliable, or that their deliverances are reliable and valid, for the most part. “...one’s belief that naturalism and Darwinism are true gives a defeater for that very belief; ‘that belief shoots itself in the foot and is self-referentially incoherent; therefore [one] cannot rationally accept it’ (Goetz, 2013, p. 56).” Here Goetz is quoting Plantinga. The different starting points for Lewis (an epistemological internalist) and Plantinga (an epistemological externalist) serve to enrich the challenge to naturalism. Naturalism seems to fail on all fronts.

### Plantinga’s Argument Against Naturalism

The early formulation of the argument in Plantinga’s (1993b) book “Warrant and Proper Function” was compelling. In chapter 12 he asked, and answered affirmatively, the question: “Is naturalism irrational?” Plantinga has not backed off his argument. The argument basically is as follows in a slightly updated form in 2002.

“Take *philosophical naturalism* to be the belief that there aren’t any supernatural beings—no such person as God, for example, but also no other supernatural entities, and nothing at all like God. My claim was that naturalism and contemporary evolutionary theory are at serious odds with one another—and this despite the fact that the latter is ordinarily thought to be one of the main pillars supporting the edifice of the former. (Of course I am *not* attacking the theory of evolution, or the claim that human beings have evolved from simian ancestors, or anything in that neighbourhood; I am instead attacking the conjunction of

*naturalism* with the view that human beings have evolved in that way. I see no similar problems with the conjunction of *theism* and the idea that human beings have evolved in the way contemporary evolution science suggests.) More particularly, I argued that the conjunction of naturalism with the belief that we human beings have evolved in conformity with current evolutionary doctrine—‘evolution’ for short—is in a certain interesting way self-defeating or self-referentially incoherent. Still more particularly, I argued that naturalism and evolution—‘N&E’ for short, furnishes one who accepts it with a *defeater* for the belief that our cognitive faculties are reliable—a defeater that can’t be defeated. But then this conjunction also furnishes a defeater for any belief produced by our cognitive faculties, including, in the case of one who accepts it, N&E itself: hence its self-defeating character (Plantinga, 2002, p. 2-3).”

Plantinga defends the argument against a series of critics in 2002. See *Naturalism Defeated* (Beilby, 2002). Further defences are seen in 2009 in his paper titled “Scientific games scientists play” in “The Believing Primate.” While he might not be pushing the irrationality of naturalism here, he does flag the point that naturalistic evidence seems to be a small part of one’s personal evidential base. As a minimalist evidential base, such a base doesn’t function, for the most part, as a defeater for those who argue against naturalism/materialism.

The discussion and arguments continue. For example, there is the discussion with Dennett in their recent book (Dennett, D. C. & Plantinga, A., 2011) “Science and religion, Are they compatible?” (New York: Oxford University Press). But Plantinga’s richest discussion is in his recent book *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*, which was published in 2011.

#### Naturalism is a Research Program with “Unpalatable” Consequences (Rea)

Naturalism is integrated philosophically with materialism, empiricism, and scientism. Naturalism precludes theism. These claims are clearly explicated in Rea (2002). Rea presents the basics of naturalism attending to historical, philosophical, and consequential issues. In making his case he is explaining more than just how naturalism precludes theism (the supernatural) by definition, or by commitment. Rea’s (2002) argument is that naturalism is more appropriately approached as a research program rather than a view. He makes a reasonable case. And to be fair, he also sees supernaturalism as a research program.

Rea (2002) argues that naturalism has “unpalatable consequences” ...particularly, naturalism fails at saving two key ontological views: the realism of material objects (RMO), and the realism of other minds (ROM). The blindness, it seems, is in not seeing the problems!

Where Rea ends up is close to the same place as Paul: “By the lights of the apostle Paul and many other theists, embracing supernaturalism and refraining from suppressing the experiential evidence that everyone has for the existence of God will in fact be sufficient for having warrant for believing in God (Rea, 2002, p. 223).”

Then Rea asks: “But is warranted belief in God enough? Probably not all by itself. To avoid the ontological consequences of naturalism, it appears that we need not only belief in God but also some reason to think that God has ensured a reliable connection between what is theoretically useful for us to believe and what is true, or that God has endowed biological organisms with empirically or intuitively detectable proper functions, or that God has endowed us with the ability to form reliable IMP-beliefs<sup>1</sup> on the basis of intuition and to be able to tell at least in some cases when cognitive conditions are suitable for the reliable exercise of such intuitions (Rea, 2002, p. 223).”

Rea’s discussion in his book had the intent “...to show that one cannot simply dismiss without argument the possibility that one might have scientific or intuitive evidence for the existence of God. But suppose it is impossible to have such evidence. In that event it would appear that some brand of supernaturalism offers the only real hope of avoiding the consequence of naturalism (Rea, 2002, p. 221).” The consequences of naturalism as noted above are the loss of two key ontological views: the realism of material objects (RMO), and the realism of other minds (ROM). At this point Rea, who had argued that naturalism was best viewed as a research program, now seems to be offering supernaturalism as a research program alternative. He writes: “Supernaturalism is a research program which treats at least the methods of science and religious experience as basic sources of evidence (2002, p. 221).”

Rea admits to various theories built upon religious experience. Some of these theories “...have a supplemental story *s* to tell such that one’s rational degree of confidence that religious experience is reliable in light of  $B_{t\&s}$  (where *t* is a proposition describing religious experience’s sorry track record) is high (2002, p. 224).” While there is a typical response by some to think that the sorry track record for religious belief, or various theories of the supernatural research program, is a defeater for the evidential merit of religious experience, Rea thinks not. Why not?

One reason for caution is the analogous situation with vision. “You find that many of those around you have visual beliefs that contradict yours. Further, you find that each of these people, like yourself, can find many others whose visual beliefs corroborate their own, despite the fact that they can also find many whose visual beliefs contradict theirs. Finally, there is no vision-independent way of resolving the matter. Again, it seems as if, upon sufficient reflection in accord with the standards taken for granted by your research program, you find that you have a story to tell that explains why the population of human beings might divide into groups some of whose visual beliefs are generally true and others of whose visual beliefs are generally mistaken (though often in the same way), and if you also have a story to tell that locates you in the group of people whose visual beliefs are generally true, then you do not have a defeater for RV, the thesis that vision is reliable. ...it is perfectly sensible for you to accept RV and to keep trusting your visual faculties. Likewise, it may also be perfectly sensible for those who disagree with you to keep trusting their visual faculties, even though everyone has beliefs arising out of

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<sup>1</sup> “...IMP-beliefs are beliefs expressible by a sentence satisfying schema IMP: (IMP) In any region containing matter arranged *x*-wise, there exists a material object that has intrinsically the nontrivial modal property *p* (Rea, 2002, p. 97).” This is what Rea calls the Discovery Problem. The problem is: “...intrinsic modal properties of material objects, if they exist at all, seem to be undiscoverable by scientific methods (p. 97).”

their own research programs that imply that many other people are badly mistaken (Rea, 2002, p. 225).” This is a quite compelling analogy.

For Rea (2002) naturalism fails as a view and as a research program that precludes the supernatural. He is not just tentatively convinced, or possibly convinced that supernaturalism should be on the table for consideration. He writes” “But in light of the arguments presented in this book, I am entirely convinced that some supernaturalistic story along the lines presented above offers our only hope of saving RMO, and perhaps also our only hope of saving ROM. That to my mind, is pretty powerful reason to take seriously at least the prospect of some such story being true, even if, in the end, one cannot bring oneself to accept it (p. 225).” His treatment of naturalism clearly tilts one away from naturalism and towards theism.

### Naturalism is Inconsistent with a Case for Benevolence and Rights (Smith)

Smith’s chapter in “The Believing Primate” (chapter 15) explores the issues of benevolence and human rights in the context of naturalism. One question he addresses is: “Does moral belief in universal benevolence and human rights fit well with and flow naturally from the facts of a naturalistic universe (2009, p. 294).” He then adds: “The answer I will consider is: No, if we are intellectually honest we will see that a belief in universal benevolence and human rights as a moral fact and obligation does not make particular sense, fit well with, or naturally flow from the realities of a naturalistic universe (p. 294).” It is a bridge to far! One, it seems, must have a prior commitment as opposed to a reasonable commitment to a naturalistic explanation of benevolence and rights. Naturalism unravels.

An interesting application is seen in a citation of Smith for both a New York Times article by David Brooks and a reflection on that article by Dennis Prager.

[http://www.dennisprager.com/columns.aspx?g=b5f5f8f2-7c6f-4c41-a48c-cfb8b97d48bb&url=why\\_young\\_americans\\_cant\\_think\\_morally](http://www.dennisprager.com/columns.aspx?g=b5f5f8f2-7c6f-4c41-a48c-cfb8b97d48bb&url=why_young_americans_cant_think_morally)

The focus of the article is the atrophy of moral standards, thinking, and sensibilities in this generation. Is it traceable to naturalism via euphemisms, or proxies—secularism, leftism, liberalism, and atheism? Prager seems to think so.

### Nagel—An Atheist With A Substantive Argument Against Naturalism

As noted earlier, Nagel has a preferential leaning towards atheism, and one would infer from that: a preferential leaning towards naturalism. To turn from atheism is to turn from naturalism, at least philosophical naturalism.

“I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to

be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that." --Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament* –2005

A position like that adopted by Nagel has the effect of weakening the reasons for adopting naturalism as a worldview, or as a research method. That said, one must admire Nagel for his insightfulness, and willingness to place potentially controversial ideas on the table.

Nagel is one who seems to wrestle with atheism and naturalism. Reading his 2005 paper "Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament" (here: <http://records.viu.ca/www/ipp/pdf/2.pdf>) gives one a particular view at a particular point in time. The view is tempered at a later point in time.

In 2005 Nagel seems to opt for the absurd at the end of his reflections—a wilful option, even a preferential option. He writes:

"But if the Platonic alternative is rejected along with the religious one, we must go back to the choice between hard-headed atheism, humanism, and the absurd. In that case, since the cosmic question won't go away and humanism is too feeble an answer, the absurd has my vote."

In 2010 we see Nagel's Revision: Interestingly, he tones down this commitment to the absurd in his published version (2010) of the paper (Nagel, 2010, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament*, Chapter 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press.). There he writes: "But if the Platonic alternative is rejected along with the religious one, we must go back to the choice between hard-headed atheism, humanism, and the absurd. In that case, since the cosmic question won't go away and humanism is too *limited an answer, a sense of the absurd may be what we are left with* (p.17)." The italicized text is different. He seems to now uplift "humanism" a little, and downshift "choice" a little. A further disappointment in 2010 was his cutting of several sections of the paper for the published version (noticeable absent was text where he acknowledges Plantinga).

It seems that naturalism just can't carry the weight for Nagel in 2005. His honesty is admirable, particularly in the 2005 draft; as is his courage in venturing into the absurd. I also found his courage admirable in daring to suggest Stephen Myers' book "Signature in the Cell" gets a nod for book-of-the-year.

Most striking now is Nagel's (2012) further move away from traditional naturalism which may be seen in his recent attention to mind. He itemizes the failure of psychophysical reductionism believing the "weight of evidence favors some form of neutral monism over the traditional alternatives of materialism, idealism, and dualism (p. 4)." Further on he writes: "It is prima facie highly implausible that life as we know it is the result of a sequence of physical accidents together with the mechanism of natural selection (Nagel, 2012, p. 5)." It is contrary to much, too much: "it flies in the face of common sense (p. 5)," it is surrounded by "independent empirical reasons to be skeptical (p. 5)," and it confronts a "nonnegligible probability of being true (p. 5)." What psychophysical reductionism is not: it is not contrary to orthodoxy and political correctness.

So what does Nagel recommend as the alternative to orthodox naturalism as the typical alternative seems to be logically, theism? Nagel recommends a middle ground in attempting to explain consciousness, reason and value. The alternatives are: (1) causal (along the lines of contemporary naturalism), (2) teleological (albeit qualified as natural), or (3) intentional (along the lines of contemporary theism) (Nagel, 2012, p. 58). He recommends expanding the traditional view of natural law “to include teleological elements (p. 32)” without going as far as the intentional, or theism. The teleology is not viewed as a front-loaded creation, or fully-gifted creation, as espoused in some theistic views. Perhaps he leaves it at the level of mystery, but rooted in the laws of nature. There are “possibilities” inherent in the universe. “A satisfying explanation would show that the realization of these possibilities was not vanishingly improbable but a significant likelihood given the laws of nature and the composition of the universe. It would reveal mind and reason as basic aspects of a nonmaterialistic natural order (p. 31).”

In the final analysis: “It would be an advance if the secular theoretical establishment, and contemporary enlightened culture which it dominates, could wean itself of the materialism and Darwinism of the gaps—to adapt one of its own pejorative tags (Nagel, 2012, p. 127).” The move to a middle ground position which incorporates teleology would permit such a move for those not wanting to go as far as the “intentional,” and theism.

Nagel is on the right track with his critique, his broadened perspective, and his bet: “I would be willing to bet that the present right-thinking consensus will come to seem laughable in a generation or two—though of course it may be replaced by a new consensus that is just as invalid (Nagel, 2012, p. 128).” I too would make that bet. Such a position is not inconsistent with the empirical stance. In fact, it brings the thinking of van Fraassen (2002, 2011) to the fore, facilitating understanding, and adjustments, in the presence of paradigm shifts.

Is there a darkening that happens over time? Nagel’s shift from 2005 to 2010 seems to be a weaker position to me—a darker position. But his search for the middle ground in 2012 is brighter; it seems to have two drivers: the problems he acknowledges in naturalism, and his preferential option for atheism. Darker than Nagel’s middle ground is the apparent preferential option for atheism evident in the shift in Steven Hawking in his recent book, *The Grand Design*. He seems to be showing a substantial darkening with respect to God, somewhat evident in his treatment of philosophy, reason, commonsense, and perhaps natural laws (for example, see the analysis by Lennox, 2011).

### Rosenberg—An Atheist With An Inadvertent Argument Against Naturalism

The challenges to naturalism that one can draw from Rosenberg (2011) are captured early in his first chapter. There he gives the surface level answers to the big questions. His conclusions are: there is no God; there is no purpose related to the universe; there is no meaning of life; we are here because of luck; there is no soul; there is no free will; there is no moral difference between right and wrong; the reason to act morally is because it makes you feel better; on behaviour, anything goes; history has no meaning or purpose, it’s “bunk.” Why is there something rather than nothing? “...the correct answer to this question is: No reason, no reason at

all (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 37.” Then one must be comfortable with some nihilism, giving up “consciousness as a guide to truth about us,” acknowledging the idea of a continuing self as a fiction or illusion, abandoning the attribution of any causal power to the nonphysical, abandoning teleology, and more. This list could turn some from naturalism: “...science shows that the stories we tell one another to explain our own and other people’s actions and to answer the persistent questions are all based on a series of illusions (p. 8).”

The claims and arguments offered by Rosenberg are only forceful if one accepts philosophical naturalism. But as Lewis, Plantinga, Rea, and others have argued this naturalism is too limited, too weak, too caustic, to offer reasonable hope for truth-finding. Rosenberg’s (2011) honest admissions of the limitations serve to tilt some away from naturalism. “Taking physics seriously has the surprising consequence that you have to accept Darwin’s theory of natural selection as the only possible way that the appearance of purpose, design, or intelligence could have emerged anywhere in the universe (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 17).” If all the important things are “...based on a series of illusions (p. 8)” is there hope? Is natural selection the sixth “sola?”

### The Objects of Reason Are Inconsistent With Physicalism

With reason there are rational relations between the objects of reason—the “abstract logical co-mathematical objects.” These objects of reason are functional in mathematical and logical proofs. “*Entailment* is a prime example of one such relationship, holding between propositions in valid deductive arguments. *Probability functions* from propositions to real numbers in the interval [0, 1] provide another, importantly involved in the confirmation of scientific theories by empirical evidence (at least if degree of confirmation is understood in probabilistic terms) (Lowe, 2013, p38).”

How does one account for these non-material yet ontologically real objects of reason? “Here, however, I think the theists have a distinct strategic advantage over the physicalists, because they can seek to explain the existence of objects of reason by appeal to *God’s* existence, whereas the physicalists face the seemingly hopeless task of explaining the existence of objects of reason solely by appeal to the existence of the concrete, physical universe in space and time—for the latter alone is what, in their view, exists *fundamentally* (Lowe, 2013, p. 39).” These objects of reason are “necessary beings.” All physical things are “contingent beings.” Unless one gets things backwards—the cart before the horse, in a manner of speaking—it is clear that “...no merely contingent being can explain the existence of any necessary being (Lowe, 2013, p. 39).” Lowe seems to have a good case, a compelling case, if not the right case. It is a significant challenge to naturalism.

### The Antinaturalistic Argument (ANA)

Hasker (2013) frames the *antinaturalistic argument* as follows:

- (1) “Human beings are capable of achieving conscious knowledge and awareness of many aspects of the world through their interaction with the world and their reflections upon it.
- (2) The fact stated in (1) has, and must have, an adequate explanation.
- (3) If naturalism is true, there can be no explanation of the fact stated in (1).



(4) Therefore, naturalism is false.”

To deny (1) is to deny knowledge. That’s not plausible. In fact it seems self-refuting.

To deny (2) is egregiously problematic. “A philosophic perspective that would deny (2) posits an enormous explanatory gap, one which by hypothesis could never be filled. It may be, however, that there are some naturalists who would be willing to accept this... Hasker, 2013, p. 29).”

With respect to (3) “The only naturalistic explanation for (1) that has been seriously proposed is found in evolutionary epistemology (Hasker, 2013, p. 29).” The method proposed is a natural selection process. But there is a major problem. “Evolutionary epistemology cannot explain the truth of (1) because, on naturalistic assumptions, mental events have no causal consequences and are thus invisible to evolutionary selection. A mental event consists of some substance instantiating a mental property or entering into a mental relation. Causal closure, however, guarantees that the physical characteristics and responses of the organism are completely accounted for by other physical events, so there is no independent role left for mental events to play (Hasker, 2013, p. 30).” The two strategies offered to circumvent the problem (i.e., supervenience, and event identity for mental and physical events) have metaphysical problems as Hasker addresses the argument. His own conclusion is that “theism is the most plausible of all the worldview options available to us (Hasker, 2013, p. 34).”

### The Waning of Materialism

The challenges to naturalism and its proxies (i.e., materialism, scientism, evolutionism) continue to grow. A recent collection of challenges is presented under the editorship of R. C. Koons and G. Bealer (2010) as “The Waning of Materialism,” Oxford: Oxford University Press. Arguments against materialism are advanced (Menuge, 2010), epistemological objections are considered (Koons, 2010), dualism in various forms is being reconsidered (Leftow, 2010, Lowe, 2010), and consciousness gets stuck in the craw (Horgan, 2010).

The paradigm shift is on the horizon. It is on the minds of many.

### Naturalism And Idolatry

Does the notion of idolatry find room for consideration here with respect to naturalism? Does naturalism as an “entity” have any of the properties of a god? Is naturalism worshipped? Is there a Greek god for naturalism? Say, Gaia perhaps? Or, what about Mother Nature, does she fit the picture? Is there a positing of life for the entire universe (say along the lines of Lee Smolin, 1997)? Many of the qualities that are in play in theism (e.g., omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence) are also in play in Naturalism. Naturalism and its appendages have some similarities to idols. One appendage, *scientism*, has qualities of *omniscience* for many naturalists. All knowledge is scientific knowledge. Knowledge keeps growing exponentially. Knowledge of the furthest reaches of space, time, brain, and everything else, is in reach.

Another appendage, *evolutionism*, has qualities of *omnibenevolence* for many naturalists. Evolution has brought a plethora of good things: good ideas, good tools, good feelings, and good goods. The good things are trumping the bad things, albeit, slowly.

A third appendage, *natural selection*, has qualities of *omnipotence* for many naturalists. When one looks at the cosmos, the world, the biological strata, and the beauty of creation, the diversity of life, the complexity of niches; one is struck with the awesome power of natural selection. *Omnipotence?*

A fourth appendage, *materialism*, has qualities of *omnipresence* for many naturalists. The basic building blocks are everywhere. Particles and waves! Fermions and bosons! Electrons and protons! Matter and energy!

Perhaps it isn't that atheists "believe in one less god than theists" as is so often repeated in a cavalier yet thought-stopping fashion; rather, they—the atheists—believe in one less attribute of God: Personhood. As with ancient idolatry, idols may not have been persons so much as powers—principalities and powers. Even the gods that N. T. Wright sees rushing into the atheist's vacuum (i.e., Mammon, Eros, and Mars) are not real persons so much as axioms—seminal principles.

So is it conceivable that atheists are actually caught up in a very subtle form of idolatry? It is at least a possibility. There might be a case for developing a psychology of idolatry.

### A Speculation on Idolatry

A person is both an ontological reality and a phenomenological reality. The person exists at all times ontologically but only transiently at a phenomenological level. There is a combinatorial problem at the phenomenological level. The phenomenological person emerges when certain attributes align correctly. Hence: the difference between sleeping and waking, the difference between fully conscious and somnambulism, the difference between a fully conscious state and a state of hypnotism, and so on. The combinatorial problem concerns the determination, or attainment, of the right attributes aligned to permit the person-emergence, or the person epiphenomenon.

In idols, at least as traditionally viewed, person-emergence is typically imposed by the observer; such emergence is in the mind of the observer. The observer, in a sense, creates the person of the idol. Or the "other" communicates to the observer who or what the person of the idol is. A state collapses onto a particular component as a function of the observer.

If naturalism, with its attributes (scientism/omniscience, materialism/omnipresence, natural selection/omnipotence, and evolutionism/omnibenevolence), coalesces with the right combinatorial alignment, what would the emerging person look like? A golden calf? A bull? A Murti? Simulacrum?

Simulacra

Baudrillard (1981) offers up an intriguing scenario with implications for a modern version of idolatry. He addresses the substituting of signs for the real. The simulation of the real (e.g., by a map so detailed it duplicates the actual geographical territory, or by an icon with the divine powers the historical iconoclasts feared, or by a model duplicating minutely a reality, or by pretending one is ill, or by pretending one is homosexual or mad to escape military duty where the symptoms of the illness or the orientation are real enough to be indistinguishable from real illness, madness, or orientation) becomes indistinguishable from the real. The image goes through successive phases as Baudrillard sees it. In the first phase the image is a reflection of a profound reality. In the second phase the image "...masks and denatures a profound reality (p. 6)." In the third phase the image "...masks the absence of a profound reality (p. 6)." In the fourth phase the image "...has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum (p. 6)." The image reigns. The image is now the real, or as Baudrillard terms it a "hyperreal."

Baudrillard (1981) writes: "Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself (p. 3)." This image, this hyperreal, this simulacrum, does seem to have elements of an idol.

Naturalism can be a simulacrum of a divine reality—God. Like a model, like a map, like an icon, like a pretense, like a symptom, naturalism does map onto God in multiple minute detail. If Baudrillard is onto something here the "masking and denaturing of a profound reality," the veiling of a profound reality, the denying of a profound reality, by naturalism-as-simulacrum, is something to fear.

## Theological Belief Constrains Beliefs

Disbelief, like blindness, can be attributable to physical damage, psychological factors, the "other" in various forms (e.g., peers, authorities, politicians, institutions, and so on) and self (e.g., avoidance, rationalization, self-deception, denial, path-chosen, and so on). Disbelief also has a theological aspect where failure-to-see is a product of Self and/or God in various combinations, with various weightings attributed to God as the source versus Self as the source. This can be seen in Paul's presentation in Romans. We see it with Hartley's analysis of the spiritual cause of blindness in 2 Cor 4:4. We see it when analyzing the theological purposes of blindness. We see it when reflecting on theologically shallow sight. We see it when reflecting on malevolent influences as with the "Iago Effect."

Self Constrains Belief (A Pauline theological position that humans blind themselves)

In the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans there is the foundational biblical base which he offers for failure-to-see: a blindness following upon sightedness, and contingent upon *choosing*—choosing to suppress the truth in some way related to unrighteousness. The case is not limited to Paul in Romans, but Paul's comments here are striking.

**Rom 1:18-25** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of a corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonoured among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

In this latter part of Romans chapter 1 one sees the weight of responsibility for blindness is upon the human. God is involved with the blinding, but secondarily. We see three times the statement “God gave them over...”. God gave them over to “impurity,” to “degrading passions,” and to a “depraved mind.” It is like He is allowing nature to take its course for those who so wish to follow their natural course. This reads more like an indirect judgment than a direct judgment.

God Constrains Belief Because of Belief (Hartley and the theological case that God blinds):

<http://rdtwot.files.wordpress.com/2007/10/2cor-44.pdf>

Hartley's argument is worth reading to get a particular view onto the table, the view that God blinds people, directly. Hartley makes his case referencing Biblical texts, patristic views and modern views. Given his analyses one should at least consider that “the god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), the god who blinds, is Yahweh. Hartley's case is initially based on the link to Isaiah 6:9-10 where it is clear God blinds. His review of the patristic views of the four basic positions regarding the identity of the “god of this age,” as well as the modern views, leaves the reader open to his case.

Hartley offers six cogent reasons for his claim: “The *hardening* of the mind (of 2 Cor 3:14) is evidently attributed to Yahweh and this leads to the conclusion that the agent of *blinding* in 2 Cor 4:4, an effect of hardening, refers to Yahweh not the devil/Satan (p. 18).” The first, and perhaps most important reason, and the reason considered sufficient here, is the link to Isaiah 6:9-10. Regardless of the final resolution of the identity of the “god of this age,” it is still evident scripturally that God blinds. As a blindedness to consider, then, it is biblically credible to consider God as a cause of, at least, some failures-to-believe.

A Causal Structure for Theological Failure-to-Believe

It could be the case that there are permitted *material causes* for theological disbelief (e.g., philosophies, psychology, culture, media, ideologies, churches, schools, self, development, others, Satan, and God) that one should consider. Further, it could be the case that there are various permitted *formal causes* for disbelief (e.g., designed by circumstances, designed by chance, designed by self, designed by others, designed by Satan and designed by God) that one should consider. Finally, it could be the case that there are permitted *final causes* for disbelief (designed by self, others, Satan and God).

On *final causes* rooted in God there are at least three worth considering here. To illustrate: one *final cause* is condemnation. Here failure to believe (disbelief or blindness) is a form of judgment and justice. A second *final cause* for disbelief or blindness could be deliverance; in effect, the disbelief could lead to a push to repentance, an incentive for repentance, or a motivation for repentance. Here blindness would be an act of God to facilitate some better outcome, some deeper reflection, or some important restraint. In both of these scenarios God sets the *final cause*. Choice and personal responsibility are still operative at the level of *efficient cause*, and perhaps *formal cause*, but the blindness is teleological—it moves one towards a specified outcome of condemnation or deliverance. A third *final cause* could be grace (i.e., “if you were blind you would have no sin”). Here blindness is a cognitive attribute (e.g., physical blindness, mental disability, developmental immaturity, or psycho-social damage) of a person that totally circumvents choice and responsibility.

Biblically, these three forms of *final cause* can be seen in the following texts:

#### *Condemnation*

Is. 6:9 And He said, “Go, and tell this people:  
 ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive;  
 Keep on looking, but do not understand.’  
 10 “Render the hearts of this people insensitive,  
 Their ears dull,  
 And their eyes dim,  
 Lest they see with their eyes,  
 Hear with their ears,  
 Understand with their hearts,  
 And return and be healed.”

#### *Deliverance*

John 9:1 AND as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Judgement has two sides: condemnation and deliverance.

John 9:39 And Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.”

*Grace*

John 9:41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin;... Does this in anyway presage a form of grace? Would God blind people to mitigate their guilt, and culpability? Possibly!

Do such blindnesses offer a tilt towards theism? All three forms serve to fortify a coherent theology. All three forms are open to a dialogue with God. They don’t need to push one away from God; even condemnation has a unique, and hopeful, trajectory before finality. Moreover, the fact that God blinds is a good reason to be on guard, to apply a virtue epistemology, to act prudentially, to act to consider a relevant proposition, at least as a preparatory step to belief.

On *formal causes* of blindness, that is the blueprints of how blindnesses are built, these seem to be rooted primarily in sin at the basic level. At a higher level—yet built upon a fallen nature—analyses for *formal causes* are rooted in psychology (i.e., cognition, personality, belief formation, preferences, appetites, learning, choices, and intentionality), sociology (i.e., culture, groups, parents, peers, politics, media, and education), biology, theology, time, and chance.

Simply Shallow Sight Constrains Belief

## A Limited Search-Protocol (A Theological Example)

When the crowd wanted to raise the issue of paying taxes with Jesus he offered them a question. He raised a coin and asked: whose image and inscription do you see. They respond: “Caesar.” Jesus responds: “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesars.” Nice and neat, or so it seems.

However, it might be fair to wonder: Is there a *surface structure* and a *deep structure* here in his question and response? I would wager that there were: (1) some Jews present who saw immediately (and only) the image of Caesar, the *surface structure*, (2) some Romans there who saw the image of God (after all, Emperors were close to divinity status), but again *surface structure*, and (3) some more pensive Romans there who saw the image of God and man venturing a little beyond mere *surface structure*, and (4) perhaps some deeply pensive Jews who saw the image of man, which bears the image of God (the *imago dei*), that is, a *deep structure*. The *surface structure* is the image of a man, Caesar; the *deep structure* is the image of a man, which bears the image of God. So, was Jesus speaking to two, three, four, or more different groups, with different levels of understanding? I don’t know but I put that hypothesis, that consideration, that possibility, on my table.

The same issue can arise regarding the inscription on the coin—the name of Caesar. Man named the animals, but who named man? Who is sovereign? At a *surface structure* level such naming, as the name on a coin, is a simple lexical phenomenon. At a *deep structure* level, some more pensive types would see the backdrop, the “name” of God there underpinning everything. Language itself, the very act of naming is pointing to, and revealing, the nature and involvement

of God. Language itself allows some to see God: the gifts of God in language, the communication from God in language, perhaps the judgment of God on language at Babel, perhaps the praise of God in language (Psalms), perhaps the revelation of God in language (prophecy), perhaps even the mystery of God as Word, the Logos. There are *surface structures* and possibly *deep structures* drawing attention beyond the mere inscription on a coin. Some see farther!

#### A Limiting Learned-Search-Protocol (A Technological Example)

Shallow sight is important as a theological phenomenon, but it is broadly rooted in much of contemporary society. Carr has argued that the Internet breeds a cognitive shallow sight or shallow processing (Carr, 2010). The computer, and the Internet, with the hyperlinks and linguistically terse text as in e-mails and tweets, leads to flighty hyper-jumping, impulsive processing, partial processing, shallow processing, and heuristic-driven processing. This is propagating a generation characterized by impulsive, shallow, and surface-level processing. Such shallow processing—shallow sight—can be a type of cognitive blindness, and belief constraint.

Aboujaoude (2011) as a psychiatrist links the consequences to more pathological type behaviours. He sees effects such as delusions of grandeur, narcissism, desensitization, cruelty, groupthink, impulsivity, infantile regression, language deterioration, addiction, and the illusion of knowledge surfacing on the Internet—a move in the direction of mindlessness and the dark side of things.

With respect to mindlessness: “Yes, the great equalizing effect of the Internet wipes out out differences in experience, stature, and roles by erasing discrepancies in our access to information. But instead of seeing our democracy truly enhanced by this, we risk moving toward demagoguery, where everybody is equal—equally misinformed (Aboujaoude , 2011, p. 212).” This is not good. This shallowing leads to disbelief, and constrains belief.

With respect to the dark side: “The troubling statistics, and the radical responses being considered, are evidence that the Internet is now the primary realm for ‘dreaming dark’ (Aboujaoude , 2011, p. 93).” In Freudian terms he wonders if there is an “id fest,” the id unleashed from the controls of ego and superego. This is not good. This shallowing, this suppression of our more rational angels, like the ego (reason, thinking, and critique) and the superego (authorities, laws, and codes) can lead to disbelief.

Like Aboujaoude and Carr, Rosen (2012) sees many similar effects with respect to mind-change and technology. “As I have shown in this book, many of us are on the verge of an iDisorder as our daily interactions with media technologies may be imbuing us with signs and symptoms of one of many psychological disorders, including narcissism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, addiction, depression, attention-deficit disorder, social phobia, antisocial personality disorder, hypochondriasis, body dysmorphic disorder, schizo-disorders, and voyeurism (p. 201-202).” The iDisorder is an issue of mind-change; “...avoiding an iDisorder is an issue of ‘mind-change’ (Rosen, 2012, p. 202).” Technology can be a serious mechanism for constraint, shallow thought, and then disbelief. It can preclude sound beliefs and mind-change.

Carr, Aboujaoude, and Rosen are not alone, nor seminal, in pointing out technology-driven limitations and problems. Postman (1992) earlier saw the computer as a metaphor for this age, and problematic. Even earlier, the grandfather of technological concern was more alarmed: Ellul (1964, 1980, 1981) had a broader vision; for him technology/technique was more than metaphor, and more than method. The place occupied by “capital” for the past 200 years has now been supplanted by “technology/technique,” as Ellul saw it. Power, therefore, has a new substrate; it has shifted to “technology/technique.” In addition to this profound social and political effect, there are epistemological effects. Ellul contends that technology/technique has two major epistemological effects—it suppresses the subject, and it suppresses meaning. “The means has entirely replaced the meaning (Ellul, 1980, p.254).” For Ellul it is not just the loss of substantive thinking, or deep thinking, then, it is the loss of the person as well. The technology blinds one to meaning, and blinds one to the person. Meaning is superficial; the perception of persons is superficial—shallow sight. One ends psycho-socially hampered, but more importantly, epistemologically and theologically constrained.

### The Malevolent Teacher Constrains Belief (The “Iago Effect” – Malevolent Scripts)

The Iago Effect is a spin-off of the Othello Effect. The Othello Effect was proposed by Piattelli-Palmarini (1994) as the seventh danger driving “inevitable illusions.” It involves “reconsideration under suitable scripts,” as in what Othello did regarding Desdemona’s fidelity. He reconsidered Desdemona’s fidelity under the influence of an alternate script provided by Iago. This alternate script that Othello encountered led him astray, led him to the wrong inferences. In essence, “...our judgment of probability allows itself to be influenced by fictions, including scenarios we know to be pure inventions (p. 134).” We are vulnerable to reconsidering facts in the context of a script that can actually distort the fact, or even hide the facts.

The Iago Effect shifts the focus to Iago, noting that there are various sources of scripts, scripts designed to lead a human astray as Othello was led astray. These sources of such alternate scripts in Christian theology are: “principalities and powers,” evil forces related to Satan, fallen angels, malevolent human beings, proud human being, wilful human beings, and silly human beings<sup>1</sup>. Such an acknowledgment properly situates some of the bad beliefs that pervade human history and diverse cultures.

Considered cognitively, with reference to [Kahneman’s two stages described at a later point](#), where is the Iago Effect most likely to be found operating regardless of the causal source? Is it in Kahneman’s (2011) System 1 thinking (intuitive, automatic, etc.), or his System 2 thinking (reflective thinking)? As a preliminary suggestion, the System 2 locale is most reasonable. Our scripts are easily housed in System 2 level thinking. Influences of new scripts enter System 2 thinking and target System 2 level reflective thought. That System 2 level thinking can override System 1 level thinking positions these incoming scripts in positions of power.

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<sup>1</sup> As examples of disruptive human beings consider “the lovable trickster” in many cultures, the “used-car salesmen,” those savvy computer geeks who delight in spreading viruses, the laughing-bullies, the artists ripping off the elderly “suckers born every minute,” and the more innocent practical-jokers.



To illustrate: It is reasonable to consider that our “promiscuous teleology” pushes us to accept intelligent design at the System 1 level; it is intuitive, automatic, and a basic belief to accept design at System 1 level processing. Even Darwin’s observation, and sensation, of a place for Mind in the design of the orchid would be an example of what type of thinking resides in System 1 level processing. Yet the influence of Mind was overwhelmed or shelved by System 2 level reflection in Darwin’s case. The new script—the Iago script (so designated when a bad script)—overpowered the older script from System 1 level processing.

Another illustration would be Crick’s well known notion that one must fight the propensity to infer design. Fighting the propensity to infer design would be a script, a different script—the Iago Effect script—accepted and then housed in System 2 level thinking. For Crick he pushes this script to counteract, and overpower, the System 1 level influence.

Plantinga likewise sees what amounts to System 2 and System 1 level processing. Regarding the design inference, he writes: “But there is a quite different way of interpreting it: this so-called design inference isn’t a matter of inference or argument at all. I encounter something that looks designed and form the belief that it is designed: perhaps this isn’t a matter of argument at all (anymore than in the case of perception of other minds). In many cases, so the thought goes, the belief that something or other is a product of design is not formed by way of inference, but in the basic way; what goes on here is to be understood more like perception than like inference (Plantinga, 2011, p. 245).” Indeed! System 1 level processes see design. The Iago Effect, which occurs at System 2 level processing, overrides System 1 level thinking, or properly basic beliefs. This makes a case for pursuing additional System 2 level thinking involving serious reflection, serious safeguards, and serious “script analyses,” at least. It shouldn’t matter whether the source of the Iago script is Satan, fallen angels, malevolent human beings, or silly human beings. What truly matters is critical script analysis!

### Religious Narratives Constrain Belief

The manner in which religious narratives can serve to constrain belief could be viewed as threefold: (1) situating people into a system, (2) pushing people away from a system, and (3) dismantling a system.

#### *Religious Narrative Beliefs That Situate One In A System And Constrain Belief*

Certain religious narratives are typically seen as the source of religious beliefs, and such beliefs are usually construed in contemporary society as bad beliefs, ill-conceived beliefs, or poorly-based beliefs. Such a position is not unreasonable. Such a position could very well lead to the possibility of precluding correct beliefs. The following list is typical of how many see the source of beliefs as a function of one’s religious narrative context.

- Beliefs of one’s Parents
- Beliefs of one’s Cultural
- Beliefs triggering the confirmation bias
- Beliefs offering material rewards
- Beliefs offering ego rewards

- Beliefs offering ideological rewards
- Beliefs offering emotive rewards (schadenfreude, vigilante justice, humour, vengeance, venting, gloating, ...)

Indeed, context situates one in a belief system.

*Religious Narrative Beliefs That Push One Away And Thereby Constrain Belief*

Certain religious narratives are typically seen as the source of theistic misunderstanding. They inadvertently are dysfunctional. They can lead to possibly precluding correct beliefs.

Consider the following push-narratives:

- A narrative that there is a prominent, singular, interpretive principle (e.g., literalism, allegory, myth, blind faith, “warming in the bosom,” Qur’an, Bible, reason, science, etc.), or interpretive institution (Roman Catholic Magisterium, Papacy, Watchtower society, etc.).
- A narrative with egregious problems (e.g., silliness, fantasy, imaginings, illogical claims, refuted claims, etc.)
- A narrative with philosophical problems (e.g., problem of evil, myth-type miracles, textual errors, etc.)
- Methodological narratives like Prioritizing
  - The priority of reason and absolute evidentialism
  - The priority of science, and scientific methodology
  - The priority of a magisterial authority criterion (e.g., Nihil Obstat, Imprimatur, ...papal infallibility, etc.)
  - The priority approach to scriptural revelation involving full plenary inspiration, error-free status, the priority of special revelation over natural revelation, etc.)

*Religious Narrative Beliefs That Don’t Make Immediate Sense*

There are some religious narrative beliefs that seem particularly troubling. Deconstructing such beliefs shows problems with coherence, logic, reasoning, and consistency. As such, it seems reasonable to suspect these problematic narrative beliefs are thereby possibly precluding correct beliefs. Consider the following sample candidates:

- Transubstantiation
- The Immaculate Conception
- The Position of Mary
- Icons
- Polygamy
- Predestination
- Indulgences
- Slavery
- Role of Women

- Genocide
- And more

Of course some of these beliefs might find cogent and reasonable supporting arguments. That takes work. So initial reactions, initial deconstructions, could serve to push one away from a correct belief. The problem then is the fact that a religious belief can undermine theistic understanding; it can constrain belief. Ultimately, however, the one who has the better argument should win. The one with the better argument is in the better position to support correct understanding.

### *Religious Narrative Beliefs That If True Are Conducive To Correct Belief*

In Christianity there is a somewhat different narrative, a God-prescribed, and God-powered narrative. It could be viewed as a para-natural narrative! The sequential components of this narrative could be itemized as follows:

- First: There is a *natural revelation* of God. The God above the gods is part and parcel of this revelation. This form of monotheism (one God, or highest God) seems to be universal as argued by Varghese (2011).
- Second: There is a *sensus divinitatis*. We have a sense of the divine (Plantinga, 2000). It is hard-wired in a sense. It is properly basic knowledge in a sense.
- Third: There is the *conscience* seen in the law written on the heart (Jer 31:33); seen in the honouring of prayer and alms (see Cornelius in Acts 10:1-4); and seen in the good response of some generated from an inner nature (see Rom 2:14-15).
- Fourth: There is the *divine draw*, or draws. The draw: (1) of the Father (Jn 6:44), (2) the draw of Jesus (Jn 12:32-33) (Jesus indicated that if he was lifted up he would draw all men unto himself), and (3) the reciprocal drawing (Jas 4:8) where a step towards God draws God towards oneself.
- Fifth: There is the *work of the Holy Spirit*—leading, teaching, convicting, comforting, and so on.
- Sixth: There is the *fruit of the Holy Spirit*. One key fruit here being faith. He produces faith—that is, He would be producing knowledge, assent, and trust.
- Seventh: There is the *discipleship* offered by the church. The charge to the church was to make disciples. The church then is a repository of knowledge building. The gifted authorities, the epistemological authorities, the scientific authorities, and so on are emergent from the church. That the monasteries were church-driven disciple-makers is informative. That the first universities were church-driven disciple-makers is informative. That pretty much all early universities in the United States were church-driven disciple-makers is informative. The academic disciplines, and the knowledge generated there, are for building Christians.

In Christianity we see a religious narrative where God is the operative agent for the most part. If true, this para-natural narrative offers forces that circumvent the constraints of mere religious narratives. These basic drawing forces can exist in “mere Christianity” and hence cross denominational boundaries—religious narrative boundaries. In Christianity this is a major

difference from traditional religions. Of course, in many religious narratives (although not all) one could resist the drawing forces that are offered.

## Models Constrain Belief (Prodigals Leaving Christianity)

### Templeton

A famous Christian who opted for agnosticism when encountering this problem with faith was Charles Templeton. Templeton, at one point teamed with Billy Graham, but had abandoned faith, for agnosticism, partly because of the evil he saw in the world: a mother holding her dead child because there was no rain in Africa; partly because of the incongruity between a God of love and the notion of hell; and partly because of his own Alzheimer's disease. His rationale was picked up for a chapter in Hitchens' (2007b) collection of essential readings for the non-believer. Reading Templeton's reasons for the turn to agnosticism might be persuasive if he also dealt with any of the cogent challenges to his reasons offered by the Christian scholarly community. He doesn't, at least not in the chapter in Hitchens (2007b). His list as presented in Hitchens (2007b) is framed as a series of questions one should ask oneself, but could be organized as the following claims:

- Where you were born, and when, and what your parents believed, predominantly determines your religious beliefs.
- The existence of natural evils like earthquakes and floods, and human diseases like leprosy, are not consistent with a loving, omnipotent God. Why does he not send rain to eliminate famine?
- An endless Hell, with people consigned there by God and tormented by Him forever, is not consistent with a loving God.
- The diversity of Christian denominations is not consistent with revealed truth (i.e., the Bible as true).
- Prayers are so seldom answered.
- Creation (six, days, evolution, man fashioned from dust, women from Adam's rib).
- Method for incarnation, virgin birth...
- Jealousy on the part of God seems illogical given His nature.
- Money. Money spent on cathedrals rather than the poor and suffering.
- A chosen people? Why favour them over others?
- Why would God condemn adultery and permit Solomon 300 wives (blessing him, honouring him and allowing him to prosper)?
- Why is the largest Christian church controlled by men?
- The command to go and preach the gospel—"...but billions of men and women have never so much as heard the Christian gospel. Why?"

Surely Templeton knows there are answers offered by the Christian scholarly community. He might not like the answers, or find merit in the answers, but there are answers. His questions seem agenda-driven rather than attempts at theological exploration. Admittedly, he might deal

with the relevant attempts to address the questions he raises in his book, “A Farewell to God.” I find more interesting questions are:

- Personally, why don’t these questions tilt me towards atheism?
- Broadly, why don’t these questions tilt a host of Christian scholars towards atheism?
- What are some alternate hypotheses that should be on the table for consideration?
- Are there creative and compelling theological constructs out there for consideration?
- What blindnesses might be operative in such objections?
- What psychological underpinnings might be operative in such questions?

Templeton’s voiced questions seem to parallel those reasons offered by Lobdell (2009), Loftus (2007), and Shermer (2011), who might be better representatives of the changed-mind, in that they offer arguments.

### Lobdell

Lobdell (2009) traces his trek from Christian believer to non-believer over the course of many years (about 25 years), and many events (a dozen, or so, are listed below). His end point in his book is not clear given the use of such self-descriptors as: “sceptical deist,” or “wavering deist,” or “reluctant atheist.” He disliked the term “agnostic,” yet seems to toy with it. Interestingly, he still leans in the direction of a creator for life, albeit with the undeveloped question haunting him of “who created the creator?” My interest is in exploring the types of “blindnesses” that Lobdell may be experiencing.

The events that seem to turn Lobdell away from Christianity were: (1) the sex abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church, (2) the fleecing abuse scandals in televangelism, (3) the failure to see regenerative change or sanctification, (4) the failure to see empirical experimental evidence of the efficacy of prayer, (5) the propensity of humans to believe silly things, as with Mormons, which was then extrapolated to his analysis of his own Christian beliefs, and the suspicion of rationalization with respect to his own beliefs, (6), Scriptural miracles, (p. 126-127), (7) the lack of current miraculous cures as in “Why does God hate Amputees?” (8) Hell, (9) Evil, the suffering of the innocent, the lack of protection for Christians, ...and why bad things happen to good people, (10) the hiddenness of God, (11) science, naturalism, and the “who created the creator line?” and (12) abduction, the cumulative case. The cumulative case seemed to Lobdell to leave him in the psychological situation of believing he had “no choice” but to disbelieve.

To consider the case that Lobdell advances—the twelve points presented above—I would reduce his concerns to six more manageable general categories: (1) scandals, (2) sanctification or bettering, (3) silliness, (4) suffering, (5) silence, and (6) science. Can these be addressed in a manner that satisfies common sense, cognitive integrity, rational thought, critical thought, logical and theological coherence, and explanatory power? Can these be addressed in a manner that shows the fundamental weaknesses in Lobdell’s purported obstacles? With respect to both questions many have found the answer “No” to be a No-No!

### *The Scandals and Sanctification*

The first two events mentioned above that impacted Lobdell (2009) could be considered under the heading scandals—sex abuse and fiscal abuse. And, surely one could add to the scandals list. Consider the past with the Inquisitions, the Crusades, the Christian wars, the treatment of witches, the treatment of parishioners to finance cathedrals, the treatment of women, slaves, and children. Consider the acidic anti-Semitism that has characterized Christianity for 2000 years (Brown, 1991). Those wearing the name “Christian” have bloody hands. There are scandals! In terms of a taxonomy, however, there are the *intentional* scandals (abuses perpetrated with purely evil motives, whether psychological evils like greed and sadism, or theological evils sourced in “principalities and powers”), the *iatrogenic* scandals (abuses perpetrated with good intentions linked to idealisms like residential schools, or strict education), and the *human* scandals (abuses linked to the complex, fluctuating, and varied motives of human beings, in the context of “principalities and powers.” I suspect many priests had good intentions for some acts—like building programs, education, charities, hospital visits, and so on—and convoluted intentions for other acts—like satisfying sexual appetites, manifesting ego, and pursuing power. I suspect many priests were influenced by the confluence of good intentions, convoluted psychological intentions, and demonic influences. That said, they are, we are, sadly culpable for our convoluted intentions....). This taxonomy permits a closer look. Looking defeats blindnesses!

Law! With respect to such scandals law is critical—criminal law, civil law, canon law, and what we could call Jesus’ reiteration of the law—“you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and your neighbour as yourself.” Bringing such laws to bear on such scandals is complicated. Vision is necessary. Vision is more important than the blindnesses which co-exist in the penumbra of a narrowed vision. The issue now is: how does the Christian deal with these classes of scandals as threats to faith? Are they really defeaters of one’s faith?

### *Intentional Scandals*

Abuses perpetrated with purely evil motives if *psychological evils* are in view, evils like greed and sadism (Baumeister, 1997), are readily explainable. Such evils are part and parcel of human nature. Sanctification for the Christian is a slow process, a shaky process, and a process that reaches fruition in the next life. For Biblical illustrations consider the carnal Christians being addressed by Paul at Corinth. Consider Paul, himself, addressing his own failures in Romans chapter 7. Consider the relatively short list of moral goals itemized in Luke 15:20 (“...abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood...”). Sanctification occurs in small steps; it is developmental; it is often a few lines of paint on the artist’s canvas; it is a few notes in the composer’s symphony!

Intentional evils that are *theological evils* likely sourced in “principalities and powers” are another matter. There are intention-confluencies operative here, that is both human intention

and demonic intention intertwined. This confluency could be manifested for *outsiders* like Elymas the magician or Demetrius the silversmith, or *insiders* like Judas, Ananias and Sapphira and Simon the Sorcerer. Even Peter was charged with being under the influence of Satan (Matt 16:23) at one point.

This broader view of evil, *theological evils*, allows that human intentionality is real, and human beings are culpable. Nevertheless, there can be mitigating factors: psychological factors (the influence of human nature) and theological factors (the influence of principalities and powers). A regenerate human nature is not the equivalent of a mature human nature, an angelic human nature, an impeccable human nature, or a divine human nature. The best we are promised in this life is the ability to get better, and the propensity to do better. The sanctified state is future in most variants of Christian theology.

In a sense then, the scandals that Lobdell finds so offensive are not defeaters of the Christian position. In fact, they seem to be expected. A question to ask is a big picture question: is a culture under the influence a better culture or not?

### *Iatrogenic Scandals*

Scandals that are the consequences of Christian acts can be iatrogenic. That is: abuses can be perpetrated with good intentions. One intends to help but ends up doing harm. Forced conversions of the Jews in medieval Europe were undertaken with good intentions. Residential schools in Canada were the product of good intentions. The Crusades were undertaken with good intentions. The Inquisitions were underpinned with good intentions. Burning heretics and witches was intertwined with good intentions.

It is more difficult to find good intentions in the sex abuse scandals in various organizations. However, there are some who argue such intergenerational sex is not necessarily harmful. Such claims might be made on the following bases: (1) it is natural as it occurs in every society, (2) it is natural as it occurs in the animal kingdom (Bagemihl, 1999), (3) earlier societies like Greece treated it as normal, (4) empirical research published in psychological journals presents a scientific challenge to the notion of harm (e.g., Rind, Tromovitch & Bauserman, 1998, who had difficulty separating “slightly less well adjusted” harm from sexual abuse from family environment confounds), (5) it is an orientation with supportive advocacy groups, and (6) pedophiles seem to function in society in others ways showing good health, work, interests, and so on, that are non-pathological. Myself, I find Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:6 more haunting, and more forceful: “...but whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Likewise, it is difficult to find good intentions in the fleecing of the sheep. Robbing the poor! However, drawing funds from the poor to build a building one holds as glorifying God

may be easier to categorize as iatrogenic. There may be good intentions, but bad consequences in such a scenario.

Good intentions causing harm may be politically neutral. However, such effects have been associated with the left, and leftist ideology. For example, one can believe that Marxists, and even Lenin and Stalin, had good intentions in implementing Communism in Russia. And the Soviet experience was appealing to many on the left outside of the Soviet Union. Yet, the harm that followed was catastrophic. Thomas Sowell, writing from the right, sees leftist ideology as often the source of harm. This phenomenon can be seen in Sowell's (1999) book, "The Quest for Cosmic Justice." He presents a number of cases where intentions to do good end up causing harm. People implement policies and practices intended to help the poor, for example, and end up doing more harm to the poor. Good intentions, bad consequences! Such do-goodery is framed by Sowell's term, "The Tyranny of Visions." We need a careful examination of our vision (our beliefs) to avoid such tyranny. Harm is also seen in well-intentioned mental health practices. Wright and Cummings (2005) have compiled a selection of chapters in their recent book that note the consequence of harm following well-intentioned, good intentions (i.e., political correctness, cultural sensitivity, the psychology of victimhood, labelling homophobia, research on intelligence, pseudo-science, and more). These can lead to harm—iatrogenic problems, in spite of good intentions.

So again, in a sense, the scandals that Lobdell finds so offensive are not defeaters of the Christian position. In fact, scandals seem to be often enmeshed with good intentions gone awry. These scandals are complex and require careful analysis in psychological contexts, sociological contexts, and theological contexts.

### *Human Scandals*

As seems to be unfolding here, abuses are linked to the complex, fluctuating, and varied motives of human beings, in the context of "principalities and powers." Human beings have bad intentions and good intentions that are fluid, changing, interactive, and unbalanced. They can do great goods like building homes, homeless shelters, teach, give of their money, give blood, visit those in hospice, hospitals, and prisons, and more. At the same time they can be satisfying sexual appetites, stealing money, defrauding a friend, manifesting ego, and pursuing power. Prima donnas, priests, and presidents are vulnerable.

were influenced by the confluence of good intentions, convoluted psychological intentions, and demonic influences. That said, they are, we are, sadly culpable for our convoluted intentions....)

### *Silliness*

Lobdell (2009) sees the silliness in many of the Mormon claims. Many Mormon claims do not stand up to scrutiny with respect to archaeology, language study, mitochondrial DNA studies, possibilities, alternate explanations, evidence, reason, and so on. Logically, Lobdell



applies the same critical approach to purported Christian claims that are characterized as silly. Admittedly, such stories as Jonah in the whale, Noah and the animals on his ark, a talking snake, an Exodus without footprints, the creation of a woman from a rib, sound a little silly.

Are there reasonable explanations for the problems with Mormon claims? The default resort to explanation seems to be the appeal to the “warming in the bosom” which confirms the truth of a Mormon claim.

With Christianity the counter arguments are more complex appeals. There could be an *appeal to genre*, and the use of metaphor to make a point. Jonah, Noah, Adam could be fictitious people but are presented in a particular metaphorical genre to make a key point. Or, Jonah, Noah, and Adam could be actual people but are presented in a particular metaphorical context to make the key point. The solution, hermeneutically, is to discover the author’s intent.

There could be an *appeal to contrasts*: which is more unreasonable: (1) that man was made from nothing, or to kick it up a notch, from particles floating around aimlessly, and via bumping and grinding together by chance, along with a seriously challenged selection process. Poof! Finally, what emerged was a man. Or, (2) that a designer put together human beings according to a design plan? Is there something informative about the selection of a rib—bone, marrow—as opposed to a cell, for example? Pluripotency is in the marrow!

There could be an *appeal to possibilities*. Could a human being survive the digestive tract of a whale? Are there any examples of such an event in non-biblical literature? Would Jonah have been bleached white? Would such a bleaching have served to shock the Ninevites into attending to his message when he went to Nineveh to call for repentance? The one story of survival found in the extra-biblical literature (i.e., James Bartley) doesn’t seem to stand up to critical scrutiny; it’s more likely a tale. Although, a natural process seems like a very small possibility, there is the possibility of a miracle. Jonah died!

There could be an *appeal to additional information*. Additional information could broaden the analysis. Noah, the ark and the flood, is often treated as global, which raises the unreasonableness of the ark hosting all animal species. In a broader analysis, some could venture to claim a local flood (global in the sense of capturing all humanity which was localized at that time) which makes the story of the ark and the number of animals on the ark more manageable. Or given the universal acceptance of microevolution just a few master body-plans (say 30+) would need to be on the ark to again set the unfolding of the Cambrian Explosion in motion again. A couple of hundred animals on the ark could be workable; it does not seem to be a spatial stretch, or logistical stretch. The fair approach is “belief allocation,” that is, to put various explanations on the table, allocate a proportion of belief to each position (along with its converse, doubt) and continue on, continue on collecting evidence, reading, thinking, exploring the world, considering the knowledge constructions, the revelations, and the possibilities.

There is something about these biblical stories that crosses a threshold for me, a threshold that the Mormon stories do not cross. The hermeneutical principle, I think, is that Jesus gave weight to these biblical stories. That keeps them on the table. Jesus is influential as offering a hermeneutical principle. And it is the case for the resurrection of Jesus (Wright, 2003) that is the keystone. If that falls, it all falls, as Paul himself admitted.

### *Suffering*

Are there really no satisfactory answers to the problem of suffering? Strobel too was distraught by suffering. He sought out Peter Kreeft, from Boston College, to see if he could get some answers to calm his own questions. He did get answers. Further the arguments related to suffering and evil are addressed under the topic of [Evil, earlier](#). Suffering and evil are not defeaters for theism, not even partial defeaters when a broader context, or a richer noetic structure, is in play.

### *Silence*

The silence of God seems puzzling to many, particularly those committed to absolute evidentialism. Why doesn't God, if he exists, do something dramatic and compelling, forcing acceptance? Why the hiddenness? Are explanations of the hiddenness of God merely rationalizations? It is a phenomenon addressed by numerous Christians with a philosophical bent (e.g., Pascal, Morris, Jordan, Moser, and others). The case advanced is more than satisfactory to permit acceptance of silence. Consider the discussion related to Jordan (2006) at a [later point](#), and Jordan's contribution to his debate with Schellenberg (Jordan, 2007/2008)—here: <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/debates/great-debate.html>. It is a sufficient challenge to Lobdell.

Jordan (2008) ends his contribution to the debate with Schellenberg as follows: "Let me end by way of a point made earlier, a point worth repeating as it has been widely neglected: the divine hiddenness argument rests on the shaky foundation of absolute evidentialism. Absolute evidentialism, recall, implies that one should refrain from believing or accepting any proposition that is not rendered more likely than not by the evidence. Quite apart from quibbles about theistic faith and ultimistic faith, the vulnerability of absolute evidentialism to easily constructed counterexamples is the bane of the divine hiddenness argument. With the collapse of absolute evidentialism, the divine hiddenness argument topples into irrelevancy, as there is overwhelming reason supporting theistic faith as compared to atheism, naturalism, or ultimistic faith, even in the fog of religious uncertainty." The tilt is still towards theism.

### *Science*

Science is framed as a defeater of religion. Or, if science is not an outright defeater of religious belief, it is (1) a master that consigns religious belief to a cognitive ghetto, or other

worldliness (Gould, 1999), or (2) a younger brother venturing out from the father's farm (McCaughey, 2011). So, the question to be asked here is: Is science a defeater of religious belief, theism? Many, like Lobdell think so. When science is rooted in Locke, Hume, the logical positivists, and a naturalistic worldview, it does stand as representative of absolute evidentialism, and a serious challenge to religious belief. However, such a view of science, or absolute evidentialism, is too limited. There are philosophical challenges to such a view (see Jordan, 2006; Wolterstorff, 2005). There are scientific challenges to such a view (see Meyer, 2009).

### Shermer

I suspect Shermer's turn from Christianity was due, in part, to a change in worldview—a shift to naturalism. In his 2011 book “The Believing Brain” he presents his most thorough discussion so far regarding his changed faith (see Chapter 3, “A Skeptic's Journey”). My read on the change agents Shermer encountered could be listed as: (1) diversity (the encounter with other denominations, and religions), (2) scholarship encountered in the form of (a) philosophy, which pushed analyses of basics, (b) experimental psychology, which pushed a scientific methodology, and (c) evolutionary biology, and the subsequent study of ethology, which pushed the alternative worldview of naturalism, and cultural anthropology, which stressed the importance of diversity and cultural influence, (3) scepticism as a stance (a) in conversations with non-Christian fellow students, (b) in science as a basic principle of the method, and (c) in the sceptical challenges, reason-driven, to the paranormal, (4) the major problem of the “problem of evil,” (5) the unanswered prayer, (6) he'd “rather not” spend an eternity with Yahweh, and (7) he sees behaviour as more important than belief.

How to approach an evaluation of Shermer's position? Does his position, evidence and argument, push me away from theism, from Jesus, from Christianity?

I would consider Shermer with respect to six themes: (1) scholarship, (2) materialism (cf dualism, mind, and spirit), (3) Paradigmatic Filtering, (4) the Problem of Evil, (5) the problem of prayer (cf desire, including that for God), and (6) merit (cf. The preferential option for behaviour over belief, albeit a simplistic form of belief that fails to factor in knowledge, assent, and trust).

### *Scholarship*

More than most prodigals, Shermer has an underpinning of scholarship. His undergraduate studies at Pepperdine seem to have provided a solid grounding, at least in basic Christian thought. Then, subsequent knowledge and skills acquired from philosophy, experimental psychology, evolutionary biology, ethology, and cultural anthropology, would indicate an impressive knowledge base. But scholarship and knowledge is not enough. As Shermer himself acknowledges, one's worldview filters perception, and a selection bias operates in fact-selection. “What happens is that the facts of the world are filtered by our brains through

the colored lenses of worldviews, paradigms, theories, hypotheses, conjectures, hunches, biases and prejudices we have accumulated through living. We then sort through the facts and select those that confirm what we already believe and ignore or rationalize away those that contradict our beliefs (2011, p. 36).” Listening to Shermer in debates (e.g., with Stephen Meyer, or Greg Koukl) shows that he is vulnerable to such a phenomenon, and is aware of it. Given such biases, and filtering mechanisms, in worldviews and paradigms, the real issue comes down to the best case for a particular worldview. Abduction!

### *Materialism*

Shermer has aligned with the naturalist worldview. Everything traces down to the material underpinning. There is no spirit and no mind for the naturalist. Only material! The dualism we sense is intuitive, but not real. The free will we sense in “an illusion”.

Claims, such as Shermer’s claims regarding dualism, and the illusion of free-will, are premature. See the discussion on the [option for free will above](#).

### *Scepticism*

Shermer’s call for scepticism is entirely warranted. It is a call for critical thinking. It is a call for analysis, testing, debate, reason, and abduction. Perhaps scepticism is always warranted, but there comes a time when hypotheses, paradigms, and theories become: working hypotheses, pragmatic paradigms, and dominant theories.

### *The Problem of Evil*

See the discussion below on [evil](#) and suffering.

### *Unanswered Prayer*

This is quite a personal account from Shermer. It seems he had already made the paradigm shift away from Christianity, but came back briefly in the hope that a prayer for the healing of his girlfriend would work—that God would heal her. The unanswered prayer seemed to be a “final nail in the coffin” in a manner of speaking.

### *The Attraction to God*

It is understandable that some do not want theism to be true. Or they do not want Christianity to be true. Dawkins liked Darwinism because it offered the prospect of being an

atheist, and intellectually fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> Nagel doesn't want there to be a God to whom he would be accountable.<sup>2</sup>

Shermer, likewise, is not enamoured of Yahweh. He writes: "If it turns out that I am wrong and that there is a God, and it is the Judeo-Christian God more preoccupied with belief than behaviour, then I'd rather not spend eternity with him and would joyfully go to the other place where I suspect most of my family, friends, and colleagues will be, since we share most of the same principled values (2011, p. 44-45)."

### *Behaviour vs Belief*

For someone who has thought and written extensively on belief, it is surprising that Shermer's theological view of belief is simplistic. He doesn't seem to get beyond a surface level view of belief when framed in Christian thinking. He doesn't seem aware that a Biblical view of the mind-change (metanoia) involves a behaviour change. Biblically, behaviour precedes faith and follows faith. As the Reformers saw it, preceding faith was the groundwork which involved knowledge, assent and trust. Knowledge acquisition requires behaviour; assent to the knowledge constructions built requires behaviour; and finally trust in the knowledge built, and assented to, requires behaviour. Following this faith, there is the behaviour that testifies to the existence of such faith, the works that the apostle James noted (James 2:14-26).

### Erhman

#### *Textual Criticism*

Although, Erhman's approach to the textual criticism of Biblical texts, perhaps, was the most instrumental factor in his drift away from Christianity. Given that so many others find the textual-criticisms arguments weak, and insufficient as a defeater of Christian faith, one wonders: what else is an operative event driving Erhman's turn?

In their recent book "The Heresy of Orthodoxy," Köstenberger and Kruger (2010) contextualize the recent popular criticism of Christian beliefs offered by Erhman (). They show how Erhman is reviving Bauer's thesis that heresy preceded orthodoxy. They present a brief history of this thesis and its revision under the influences of postmodernism, Erhman, Pagels,

<sup>1</sup> "Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist" (Dawkins 1986, 6).

<sup>2</sup> "I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that." Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament* –2005.

and the Jesus Seminar. Then they present a sound critique of the Bauer-Erhman thesis, admitting that Erhman acknowledges Bauer was wrong at various points.

Reading Erhman alone might tilt one away from Christianity; some of his comments are quite dramatic regarding errors. Such comments almost seem too dramatic for simple scholarly consideration. They seem more polemical than ivory-towerish. However, reading Erhman in the context of his critics can provide a substantial tilt towards Christianity. Consider the following conclusion of Köstenberger and Kruger (2010) following their scholarly review:

“Did the battles over heresy and orthodoxy in earliest Christianity affect the transmission of the New Testament text? Yes. No doubt a variety of scribal changes are due to these early theological disputes. But do these changes affect the text in such a way that we cannot be sure what it originally said? Not at all. Since the New Testament is a historical book that has been passed down to us through normal historical means (copying manuscripts by hand), then it inevitably contains the normal kinds of scribal variations that we would expect from any document of antiquity. No doubt some of these scribal variations were intentional and motivated by the theological debates of the day. However, the New Testament is different from most other ancient texts in a fundamental way: the wealth of manuscript evidence at our disposal (both in quantity and date) gives us good reasons to think that the original text has not been lost but has been preserved in the manuscript tradition as a whole. Given the fact that the vast number of textual variants is ‘insignificant,’ and given that our text-critical methodology can tell which ‘significant’ readings are original and which are secondary, we can have confidence that the text we possess is, in essence, the text that was written in the first century (p. 230-231).”

I cast my lot with Erhman’s critics.

### *Naturalism*

Erhman, like Shermer, seems to be driven largely by the naturalist worldview. His approach to history is as a naturalist.

### Loftus

Loftus (2007), like Shermer, has had substantial exposure to Christian thinking. Yet he opted out. Why? In his own presentation he indicates three initial causes, or big causes, that he links to people: Linda, Larry, and Jeff.

### *God’s Protection (the Linda Problem)*

Loftus indicated that he was involved in a complicated problem with a woman, a work associate. It was a problem that led to adultery and subsequent further complications. He makes no excuses at one expressed level, but, at another level, he claims elements of both weakness (his

fault) and entrapment (her fault). He further finds disappointment and a letdown on the part of the Church—a failure of the fellow Christians to offer support. Finally, he seems to see a failure on the part of God to protect him—protection from self, from others, and from the church.

Reading his account of the events and his attempts at honesty, one is reluctant to judge too harshly. He is cast, by himself, as both sinner and victim. An interesting question here is: Is it the sense of victimhood that is an instrumental determinant in his mind-change? He is a victim of his human nature. Yes. He is a victim of the woman bent on entrapping him. Yes. He is a victim of a weak church community. Yes. He is a victim of God's failures to provide what he supposed were expected constraints. Perhaps this latter point would be better framed as: He is a victim of God's protocol to not provide what he, Loftus, supposed God should provide in the form of constraints.

Given the recurring notion of victimhood, perhaps victimology might have some explanatory influence here in contributing to the mind-change. Cummings and O'Donohue (2005) present the contrast as: resiliency is replaced by victimhood. Resiliency is an admirable character trait, and admirable goal. In victimhood, learned helplessness, "...promoted inadvertently by victimology, can prevent or retard the individual from emerging from adversity, trauma, loss, or disability (2005, p. 13)." In essence, traumas can have two totally different consequences: (1) post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) manifested as a form of helplessness (victimhood), or (2) post traumatic growth manifested as dramatic growth (e.g., Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998) and benefit (resiliency). I wonder which stream Paul seems to be pulling for with comments like: "...knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed..." (Rom 5:3-5)? Is the mind-change of a prodigal like Loftus in any way linkable to victimology?

Zur (2005) presents a framework for understanding victimology that includes, firstly, *external influences* (a culture of victimization, blame games, a diminished emphasis on personal responsibility and choice, biology, celebrity victims like Oprah, feminist analyses of patriarchy, rights movements, recovery movements, legal awards that incentivize victim status, and more). There are powerful external drivers pushing victimhood. One could add, given the present focus, the influence of religion—the stereotypes of Jewish children and their guilt, Catholics recounting horror stories of their catholic education, recovering Protestant fundamentalists (do a Google search on recovering fundamentalists and see the plethora), Moslem girls trapped in the hijab (Ali, 2007, 2010). Victimology? What about the resilient ones—those like Ali who grow from the Islamic trauma, those Jews who master so many domains in spite of their trauma, the Catholics and Protestants who find the Christian fundaments gateways to the stars?

Then there are the *internal influences* like personality, locus of control, learned helplessness, self-pity, self-inefficacy, lack of success, low self-esteem, "...an internal sense of 'badness,' and feelings of shame, guilt, helplessness, and hopelessness are integral elements in

the psychology of those who perceive themselves as victims (Zur, 2005, p. 54).” In terms of cost/benefit analyses there are benefits that outweigh costs. As Zur phrases it: “...as long as the cost of being a victim is less than its benefit, or when victim behaviour is rewarded, the individual will maintain the behaviour. Although the costs and suffering of victims are apparent, the benefits are much more subtle and, for the most part, unconscious. They may include the right to empathy and pity, lack of responsibility and accountability, righteousness, and even relief as the ‘bad self’ is punished (2005, p. 54).” These internal influences represent faulty beliefs, from faulty learning, and faulty choices. Arguably, the mind-change required is not away from Christianity to atheism, but away from bad beliefs to better beliefs within Christianity.

### *Evolution (the Larry Problem)*

Loftus recounts his dialogues with his cousin Larry, who teaches biochemistry, and would argue the case for evolution. The subsequent shift towards evolution served as a filter for reviewing scholarship and Biblical revelation. Loftus notes two initial problems that “started me down the road to being the honest doubter...” His *first problem* was not the age of the universe but the order of creation; he had trouble with the Genesis account indicating the earth existed before the creation on the fourth day of sun, moon and stars.

Of course others have noted this problem. And the attempts to offer credible, and valid, explanations are an interesting aspect of scholarship. They draw upon language study, literary genre, authorial intent, hermeneutics (ancient and modern) without immediately defaulting to myth as the best explanation. Van Til (1986) doesn’t see it as a problem at all as the author’s intent is not chronology. He writes: “...the puzzle should not be solved. It should instead be summarily dismissed. It needs no solution because the question itself is unwarranted. The question presupposes that the order of events in the Story of the Creator has some physical basis. It does not. It may have a cultural basis, but surely not a physical or material basis. Bringing a question of chronological order to Genesis 1 is like bringing a question of meteorology to Psalm 139 (p. 90).” Others are willing to place possible chronological variants (e.g., see Schroeder, 1990, on time stretching), and considerations or explanations, “on the table.” They are up for consideration as many find these to be reasonable hypotheses, or interesting hypotheses, (e.g., see Ross, 1998; Lennox, 2011). These alternate re-framings of explanations could appear to be rationalizations to those with a committed position—an exit strategy—but they can be reasonable and interesting hypotheses to the sceptic, the scientist, and the student. In my analysis, Loftus’ doubt is reasonable but not sufficient to push one to rejection of the Genesis account, nor to atheism.

His *second problem* was the time duration for the creation of human beings. He sees it as reasonable to infer that the creation of human beings occurred over a large time span, just like



the creation of the habitable earth. Possibly, at least in part, if many of the basic constituents of the human being were developed from primates. Theistic evolutionists follow such a course. However, as Lennox comments: “There is probably more controversy today over the origin of human beings that there is over the origin of the universe... (2011, p. 67).” Human beings are special if they bear the image of God. If so, the gulf between animals and human beings is as great as the gulf between nonlife and life. Lennox sees such a gulf: “God has to speak His creative Word in both instances (Lennox, 2011, p. 70).” Some special gulf existed between animal and human beings. Both development over time for the primate components of the human being, and a special creation event with respect to the God’s image-bearing nature of the human being, are conceivable. For Loftus, however, there were just “too many problems.”

*Regeneration Issues (the Jeff Problem)*

This problem, the regeneration problem, might be phrased as follows: Christians who are supposed to be changed, regenerate, and loving, more often than not miss the boat. The operation of the Holy Spirit in guidance, regeneration, and sanctification, didn’t seem evident, at least not to a degree that Loftus deemed was reasonable to expect. Different Christians had different interpretations of Scripture, and different positions on church doctrines, debates, and disciplinary actions. “But it sometimes still surprises me what people who are of the Christian faith will do with what they consider a clear conscience. I wonder to myself how these consciences can differ so widely, especially when Christianity is the only faith that claims God the Holy Spirit actually takes up residence in their being. I often ask myself why Christians don’t seem to act any better than others when they alone claim to have power, wisdom and guidance of God right there within them. Apparently, the Holy Spirit didn’t properly do his job here. This was the last blow to my faith and one of the reasons why I am an atheist today (Loftus, 2007, p.27).”

Points for my reflection on Loftus’ concerns:

- *On Conscience*: Does deep conscience (synderesis) and surface conscience (culturally and personally conditioned) factor into the analysis here?
- *On Christian Behaviour*: Does either history or Scripture teach that Christians will be no better behaved individually? Is there a difference between individual improvement and corporate improvement?
- *On the Residency of the Holy Spirit*: Is there a different functional operation of the Holy Spirit in the apostles, and the later Christian converts? Is there a different functional operation of the Holy Spirit in the individual Christian and in the Church local, and the Church total?

My answer to all of these questions would be, at least, a tentative “Yes.” *On conscience*, there is a well recognized philosophical and psychological distinction to be made between deep conscience (e.g., “that which we can’t not know”) and that which is formed from our culture, our church, our parents, our schools, our media, our government, and so on—our surface conscience. Moreover, there are additional considerations that possibly come into play here in attempting to understand Christian limitations: immaturity, self-deception, denial, cognitive dissonance, avarice, greed, lust, stupidity, rationalization, biases, heuristics, paradigms, and competing beliefs. Reasonably, it seems that both special revelation and natural revelation indicate that sanctification is a seed, or at best, a sprout. The context of the seeds, and human nature effects, offer a challenge to Loftus’ high demands for *Christian Behaviour*. There seems to be Christian corporate growth over hundreds, or thousands, of years, but individual successes and church successes, are more often masked by the shafts of weeds and shards of shade.

What about the *Residency of the Holy Spirit*? I’m not convinced that the promises in the Gospels voiced to the apostles also extend to subsequent church members. Can we read the promise about being led into all truth as a promise to the apostles to assist with the formation of the Church and the Scriptures. Can we read the promise about asking for various things in prayer, and receiving the requests, as applying to the apostles. Can we read the promise about “greater things will you do” as applying to the apostles. Can we read the baptism of the Holy Spirit as both individual and corporate. After all, the gifts, or charisms, are divided amongst church members. Access seems fragmented.

#### *Loftus and Rauser Debates*

Loftus turned from the Christian faith as he conceived it. Those with a broader conception, even if merely hypothetical, or speculative, choose to remain. The mind-change is bidirectional. Some shift away from God. Some shift to God. One recent set of debates between Loftus and Rauser (2013) does serve to provide a contrast between the Atheist’s drivers and the theist’s drivers. In the debates Rauser does make the case repeatedly that is consistent with Christianity, and encouraging for the Christian. The tilt to God is strong as I read the relevant evidences from Loftus, in the context of evidential claims, and rebuttals, that Rauser offers in his debate here (Loftus & Rauser, 2013) and elsewhere (Rauser, 2011, 2012).

#### *Loftus’s Key Question*

Loftus does ask a key question, however: “What makes someone change his or her mind? Although I have passed through a conversion, not even I can tell you how it happens, exactly. Perhaps it happens as a result of a crisis, plus information, minus a sense of Christian community? I’m not sure how my crisis prepared me, but I do know I was puzzled with why God allowed it, and why his people didn’t seem to care (Loftus, 2007, p. 36).” So, what makes someone change his mind?

What makes someone adopt a mind-change, a new orientation. My answer expressed in another venue—a venue related to appetites—would be as follows: When asked now what the cause might be of an orientation, say a bad orientation, is simply to say:

*“excessive appetites, simple and complex reward-systems (operant learning theory, opponent-process-theory), curiosity, bad thinking (via action-identification theory, dissonant thinking theory, self deception, addictive thinking, illusory thinking), self-corrective backfires (ironic effects theory), bad beliefs, developmental lags in resources (cognitive immaturity, and self-regulation weaknesses), bad constraint systems (parents, politics, media, culture, laws), cost/benefit analyses where benefits outweigh costs, bad choices, chance, and time, all in the context of a smattering of biological influences. The cause is a complex constellation of variables, all of them centered on thinking, learning, and choosing.”*

When asked what the cause might be of a “good” orientation, the answer might look like the following:

*“appetites, simple and complex reward-systems (operant learning theory, opponent-process-theory), curiosity, better thinking (with respect to action-identification theory, dissonant thinking theory, self deception, addictive thinking, illusory thinking), better self-correction(ironic effects theory), better beliefs, developmental maturity in resources (cognitive and self-regulation strategies and strengths), good constraint systems (parents, politics, media, culture, laws), cost/benefit analyses where benefits outweigh costs, good choices, chance, and time, all in the context of a smattering of biological influences. The cause is a complex constellation of variables, all of them centered on thinking, learning, and choosing.”*

Of course one could flip the paradigms in terms of which paradigm was the “good” orientation and which paradigm was the “bad” orientation. But then the question becomes: which is the better orientation. As I have argued in this text, the evidence and argument tilts towards theism, Christianity, and Jesus. That tilt continually makes the case for the better orientation.

When one’s mind-change, one’s acceptance, is towards naturalism the cause is complex. When one’s mind-change, one’s acceptance, is towards Jesus the cause is complex. The choice is simple!

The blindness (Psychological and Theological) that pervades academia, or epistemology, strikes me as striking. It alerts me to problems, and pushes me to guard against dyspistis, faulty belief. In exploring varieties of blindness, ironically, vision is enhanced.

Naturalism, and its nature, pushes me in the direction of belief. The case for naturalism seems seriously flawed. It is an inadequate foundation. And, as it is a source of blindness for many, it helps me understand warranted belief better.

## Everett

Daniel Everett, even more so than Loftus, Templeton, and Shermer, had substantial exposure to Christian thinking. His degree of commitment was dramatic; he, along with his wife and children, worked for years on language transcription and Bible translation (through SIL) with native groups (e.g., the Pirahãs) in the Amazon. Yet, he eventually opted out of the Christian worldview. Why? In his own account (2008) he indicates several initial causes, or big causes, that he links to experience, worldview, culture, language, and so on.

### *Existentialism (the Philosophical Problem)*

Everett (2008) doesn't formulate the problem as an existential philosophy problem. But that seems to be a safe inference. He indicates that he was shocked that the Pirahãs did not want what he offered. They said they didn't want Jesus. "I had gone to the Pirahãs to tell them about Jesus and, in my opinion at the time, to give them the opportunity to choose purpose over pointlessness, to choose life over death, to choose joy and faith over despair and fear, to choose heaven over hell (Everett, 2008, p. 264)." They preferred to drink. They preferred more than one woman.

The nature of an existential link is evident in Everett (2012) with his discussion of Camus and "The Myth of Sisyphus." Sisyphus was condemned to roll a boulder up a hill each day only to have it roll back down each night. That's a boring life. What Camus, the Pirahãs, and eventually Everett come to see is that such a life can be happy. "The Pirahãs have grasped this. Like angst-free, realized existentialists, they embrace the accomplishments of each day and find meaning in their lives without worrying about their children's future or what posterity will think of them. They stare into the eyes of death without blinking and live their physically demanding lives almost constantly laughing and smiling (p. 323-324)." Their language is strikingly limited, avoiding numbers and complex sentences, limited by a few consonants (N=8) and vowels (N=3). Their language is immediacy-focused avoiding past and future. Though a limited language, their happiness, is imbued within their language, and it leads Everett to posit "a grammar of happiness."

A big question here might be: Is happiness the best life goal? For the evolutionist: what if happiness was counterproductive to survival of the species? For the existentialist: Isn't happiness just one choice among many and all amounting to the same thing? For the theist: Is happiness a correlate of complacency rather than growth? For the developmental psychologist, is the happiness of the child the human cognitive highpoint? A problematized reflection on happiness at the very least raises questions about happiness (1) as a purpose, (2) as a trump card, (3) as an orientation.

## The Happiness Principle

This “happiness criterion” is a relatively common assumption. Basically, the claim reduces to *whatever makes people happy is good*. If it makes you happy then it is okay (sometimes stated with the caveat “so long as no one is harmed”). But is that the case? The argument might not be as sound, as it first seems. As an example of someone who resorts to the happiness criterion consider Bailey (2003). Bailey’s appeal to happiness as a criterion for acceptance certainly appeals to the heart. Happy parents, happy people, and a happy world, are desirable states. Who would argue with that objective? Parents want their children to be happy.

## Happiness as a Trump Card

Consider some happiness-conflicted cases in contemporary Western reflections on sexual issues like homosexuality, gender-identity, and sex reassignment. On page 12 of his 2003 book Bailey notes the wishes of a mother for her feminine son:

“She did not like the way the psychologist seemed to assume that homosexuality would be a bad outcome. In her own mind, the issue was more complicated—she wanted Danny to be happy, and if he could be both happy and gay, she would love and accept him all the same.”

Happiness here is paramount. And ends justifying means, it seems.

In a similar vein to Danny’s mother’s wish, Bailey refers to another gender-identity theorist (i.e., Zucker) who posits disagreement with the Right’s emphasis on preventing homosexuality for two reasons: “Zucker does not consider this an important clinical goal because he thinks that homosexual people can be as happy as heterosexual people, and regardless, he doubts that therapy to prevent homosexuality works (Bailey, 2003, p. 29).” Again, it is not unusual in the academic community or the parental community to advance *happiness* as a trump card.

More striking: in sex assignment surgery *happiness* is a key consideration. When taking into account the issue of sex assignment following cloacal exstrophy, Bailey comments on genetically male children who were raised as females, but then reverted back to males upon the subsequent revelation of their true genetic sex. “Reiner’s results all point to the superiority of male assignment for cloacal exstrophy cases born male. This is obvious for those who changed back to boys. I spoke to parents of three of these children, and all said their children were much happier as boys than they had been as girls. Interestingly, only one of these parents said her child had seemed unhappy as a girl. The other two characterized their children as basically happy before and yet much happier after becoming boys (Bailey, 2003, p. 51).” Happiness is at the forefront here, but it is a happiness premised on, or consistent with, natural biological underpinnings; the happiness was likely contingent upon a broader psychological harmony. Possibly, these children who switched would have opted to switch to their biological male pattern even if there was not increased happiness.

In a different context Bailey’s bias comes across with a comment like: “By the kind of utilitarian analysis I am partial to, let us ask, which ending would leave the world a happier place... (2003, p. 191).” This happiness criterion, or touchstone, might benefit from additional

reflection, however. If smokers claim to be happy when smoking, should we leave them alone? Should we support their smoking objectives? “Yes” is a viable conclusion if simple happiness is the criterion from which one reasons. More complex: if smokers help make tobacco executives, and employees, happy, leading to a great increase of happiness, should we leave both groups alone? Yes, the happiness case could be made.

And if the above caveats relating to happiness as a credible trump card are not sufficiently alarming what about these two? (1) If those practicing zoosexuality claim it is an orientation which brings them happiness, and it does not harm another human being, should we leave them alone? (2) If a person has an amputation fetish (See Bailey, 2003, p. 201 and 206), which could make them happy, should we leave them alone to pursue their happiness? Or, is there something more than happiness that warrants consideration, especially with some of these potentially controversial areas?

### Happiness as an Orientation

One might be surprised that Bailey does not argue for, or against, a happiness orientation. Yet such an orientation could be resident in one’s biology (see Haidt, 2006). Bailey is a fundamental, biological determinist claiming “...all behaviours are ‘biologically determined’ in the sense that all events are caused, and behavioural events are caused by brain states which are ‘biological’ (Bailey, 1995, p. 104).” True, happiness is not necessarily a behavioural event, but in *The Happiness Hypothesis*, Haidt (2006) also flags the importance of biology: “In the 1990s, the two big findings of happiness research (strong relation to genes, weak relation to environment) hit the psychological community hard... (p. 90).” As he comments on page 86: “In the long run, it doesn’t much matter what happens to you. Good fortune or bad, you will always return to your happiness set point—your brain’s default level of happiness—which was determined largely by your genes.”

So the question to ask here is: could there be something more important than happiness when considering a mix of our ontological and motivational drivers? Yes, several considerations. For one thing, ethical thinking, or an ethical framework, seems to get by-passed in a process that focuses on happiness alone. As Everett (2008) noted of the Pirahã they liked to drink, and have sex with many partners, not just their wives. Homosexual play (p. 104) and intergenerational sex (p. 103) are in play as well. If people are happy via such practices are such practices then ethical?

In ethical thinking one is focused on intentions, consequences, and/or deontology. The consequences Everett (2008) seems to note are happiness-related. As a pragmatist I suspect his ethical analysis here is limited to consequences; he’s a consequentialist.

Consider the self-identified homosexual child noted earlier. The parent wants the child to be happy, and if the homosexual relationship is claimed to lead to a particular *consequence*—happiness—the parent is supportive, as Bailey noted. The parent and child (and Bailey) are functioning like the consequentialist, the pragmatist. There is more, however. This can be noted also with respect to suspect consequences. Consider smoking: the child claims he is happy smoking and expects the parent to be supportive. Many parents are supportive, albeit, often reluctantly. It is easy to see here, though, that happiness is not the only consequence in the mix. There are addictive consequences, health consequences, social consequences, religious

consequences, financial consequences, and so on. Happiness as the pre-eminent consequence is eminently shallow.

The second factor in ethical consideration is intent. If the child's *intention* is to be happy, the parent and the child are functioning to give weight to one's good intention. The person's motive is good, there is no intended malevolence. The person's motive might be idealized in the form of love, relationship, stability, satisfaction, pleasure, self-esteem, and so on. The intentions are good. The problems arise when the intention, upon deeper examination, is seen to be limited, perhaps a rationalization, steeped in denial, premature, narrow, lacking foresight, and so on. Again, happiness as a pre-eminent intention is intentionally shallow.

The deontologist, at the third level, sees that some things are wrong in principle. Zoosexuality, incest, intergenerational sex, adultery, and so on, are listed as wrong regardless of intentions and consequences. Smoking is seen as wrong regardless of intention and consequence. The deontological approach looks to rules, social laws, psychological laws, natural laws, codes, and principled, reasonable arguments for guidance. Happiness as the pre-eminent rule is suspect. Would not the wise one consider all three components of ethical thinking when considering happiness as one's goal?

### The Lack of Happiness

Then there is the reflective framing that draws upon a wider literature base. Happiness is not the ideal we might initially think it is in our knee-jerk analysis. In broader analyses, and reflections, as in *The Happiness Hypothesis*, we see someone like Haidt (2006) making compelling arguments for an expanded perspective of happiness. He points to the value of suffering, the value of adversity (even the need for adversity), the value of stress (like eustress), and the intriguing literature on "posttraumatic growth." He draws upon the wisdom of the sages of the ages who point to the value in suffering (quoting the Apostle Paul, the Dali Lama, Nietzsche, Meng Tzu, Shakespeare, and so on). His review serves to dim the high view of "happiness."

Haidt also develops reasonable psychological framing from conceptual and empirical research (see Haidt's chapter 7 on "The Uses of Adversity," and chapter 5 "The Pursuit of Happiness"). The ethical considerations, the broad literature on suffering (philosophical, psychological and religious), the psychological framing offered by Haidt (2006) present a significant challenge to a simplistic approach arguing for happiness as the important, and reasonable, ontological and existential motivator.

### The Dark Side of Happiness

One further caveat regarding the aspiration to happiness as an existential, or ontological, determinant can be drawn from parallels between Baumeister's (1997) four causes of evil, and the pursuit of happiness. Baumeister sees the four causes of evil as: (1) what could be called "Acquisition" (greed, lust, ambition, where ends are more important than means), (2) what could be called "Pride" (although Baumeister labels it "egotism and revenge" and ties it to self-concept and inflated self esteem), (3) what could be called "Good Intentions" (Baumeister flags it as Idealism) as in Nazi philosophy, the Marxist agenda in the Soviet Union, or the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, where such acts are rooted in idealism, and (4) "Play" (there is a

dark side to fun, as can be seen in torture, bullying, sadism, rape, abuse of animals, and so on (Kashdan, 2009). All of these causes of evil can be tied to happiness—acquisition, pride, idealism, and fun. Clearly something more than simple happiness ought to drive one’s analysis of happiness as motive, happiness as criterion, or happiness as justification.

So Everett’s focus on happiness in the Pirahã is understandable at one level of analysis, a surface level of analysis. However, deeper reflection advises caution. Happiness cast in the form of a “happiness-principle” is a simplistic construct that can be deceptive.

### *Evidentialism (the Epistemological Problem)*

Everett notes that the Pirahã base their beliefs on their sensory experience. The fact that Dan had never seen Jesus was a defeater for the Pirahã. They believe only what they see, or, at times, what others they know claim they have seen. In addition, Everett argues for this as an “immediacy of experience principle.” And he finds it aligns with his growing scientific methodology and the penchant for absolute evidentialism. With respect to his faith, his Christian beliefs, he writes: “I only had subjective support for what I was saying, my own feelings (p. 270).” He was identifying with the Pirahã epistemologically.

As with the “happiness-principle” an acceptance of an “immediacy-of-experience principle” can be limiting. When immediacy-of-experience is configured along the lines of absolute evidentialism a great deal of epistemological thought is overlooked, or dismissed prematurely ([see below](#)). There are varieties of evidentialism, passionate epistemologies, prudential epistemologies, existential epistemologies, virtue epistemologies, and more, that serve to deepen understanding and mitigate a simple “immediacy-of-experience principle.”

### *Noeticism (the Sin Problem)*

Does one’s noetic structure contain the belief in sin? Do people know they do the wrong thing at times, violate a law of the heart, violate a right of another, or offend their creator? Everett (2008) reflects: “On our furlough, I thought again of the challenge of the missionary: to convince a happy, satisfied people that they are lost and need Jesus as their personal savior.... If people don’t perceive a serious lack of some sort in their lives, they are less likely to embrace new beliefs, especially about God and salvation (p. 266).”

Everett’s message didn’t fit with the Pirahã’s culture. He acknowledges a loss of the sense of the universal appeal of the Christian message. The Pirahã didn’t feel lost or a need to be saved. He contends they had no sense of sin or brokenness. Likely, a more fine-grained look at the behaviour of some of the Pirahã would present a challenge to such a belief. There is the story of the wife sitting on the husband as some form of restraint or punishment for his tryst with



another woman the previous night. Perhaps the women of the tribe have a different sense of morality—happiness.

Lying seems to be standard practice with respect to some activities—who is who and who is doing a particular act. The Kaoáíbógís are seen regularly by the Pirahãs. They speak in a falsetto voice. They are viewed as humanoid figures. Many unexplained phenomena are attributed to their agency. They are mischievous, and look for sex “at the first opportunity.” The alarm bell sounds with Everett’s following comment: “But the principle manifestation of Kaoáíbógís to the Pirahãs are their fellow villagers, who will speak in a falsetto voice and come into the village naked at night claiming to be a Kaoáíbógí (Everett, 2012, p. 312-313).” Is this a mischievous route to fun and sex? Self deception? Hypnotism? Trance? Or Lying?

What about the big sins like murder? Everett himself describes his fear of being murdered after hearing chatter when a few Pirahãs have a few drinks and seem to be baited by an outsider to kill the missionaries. When Everett later asks one of the Pirahãs why they want to kill him the answer he receives is: “Because the Brazilian says that you do not pay us enough and he says that you told him he could not pay us if we worked for him (Everett, 2008, p. 64).” There is a sense of justice, fairness, lying, mistrust, vengeance, theft, and more, that would factor into a noetic structure.

Furthermore, the Pirahãs have a view of others (all outsiders) as “crooked people,” “...that is, bent and not working properly (Everett, 2012, p. 304).” Such a perspective speaks to a psychology of defect—a door ajar to brokenness, sin, and a theology-of-repair.

### *Superstition (the Learning Problem)*

Everett (2008) compares his learning process with the Pirahãs’ process. “All the doctrines and faith I had held dear were a glaring irrelevancy in this culture. They were superstition to the Pirahãs. And they began to seem more and more like superstition to me. I began to seriously question the nature of faith, the act of believing in something unseen. Religious books like the Bible and the Koran glorified this kind of faith in the nonobjective and counterintuitive—life after death, virgin birth, angels, miracles, and so on. The Pirahãs’ values of immediacy of experience and demand for evidence made all this seem deeply dubious (p. 270-271).”

Everett admits he questioned his faith for some time as a function of “Brazilian intellectuals,” (probably related to his PhD program) a hippie background, and much reading. It would be interesting to know who he was referring to here, as this likely was the major impact on his loss of faith. There are hints from his 2012 text with references to the pragmatists (e.g., James and Rorty), the existentialist (Camus), and the more current intelligentsia (e.g., Chomsky, Fodor, Pinker, Pierce, and a host of others). He himself admits that the Pirahãs were just “the last

straw (p. 271).” His learning had led him to the label “closet atheist” by the late 1980s. His learning led him to give a preeminent place to one’s “reason” rather than outside authorities. His learning seems to have led him to abandon truth as a transcendent reality, and absolutes like righteousness. His learning led him to pragmatism. One wonders however which would win in a conflict between “reason” and “pragmatism?”

### *Naturalism (the Worldview Problem)*

It seems that Everett has opted for the particular worldview we call naturalism. As noted above: naturalism is a major problem for belief. It is perhaps the most serious constraint on belief that theists face. Yet naturalism is rarely considered as critically as it deserves. As noted [above](#) naturalism is vulnerable on several fronts. It is challenged cogently by the theist camp (e.g., Plantinga, Rea, C. S. Lewis, Smith, and others) and inadvertently by the atheist camp (e.g., Nagel, Rosenberg, and others). Those who place all their hope, faith, trust, and service in the naturalist camp are likely committing themselves to a paradigm with significant limitations, flaws, and future.

Of the prodigals, I empathize most strongly with Everett. We have many similarities—language interests, career paths, marital breakdown, academic studies, reading sources, and so on. In 1976 when he was off to the wilds of Mexico in preparation for working with Wycliffe Bible translators I was exploring an application to University of Oklahoma for the Summer Institute of Linguistics. He turned to work with the languages of those at a distance, in missionary work; I turned to work with the languages of those nearby, in education. He left his faith; I decided to hold on and continue to walk in the Jesus camp regardless of the problems (personal, theological, cognitive, sinful, and intractable)—an obstinacy epistemology. I suspect Everett adopted the prodigal role on the bases of surface level analyses. For me, more moderate levels of analysis were sufficient to get me through the tough times; and the deeper levels of analysis now unfold like flowers in bloom.

### Dennett & LaScola Interviews

Dennett and LaScola (2010) have interviewed five Christian ministers (Protestants) who are still active in their churches but have left the faith at a cognitive level. There are two major questions here. Why have they left their faith? Why are they still active in Christian churches? With respect to continued pastoral activity, one can sympathize, even empathize, with such ministers who are trapped by system factors like their familial needs for income, their cognitive changes over time in the face of requirements for doctrinal allegiance, cognitive dissonance, social pressures, and so on. Their sense of entrapment is somewhat understandable.

Of interest for this essay, however, is what the “blindnesses” might be. One blindness seems to be tied to the definition of God, or the God construct. As Dennett and LaScola note

there is a range for defining God, a range diminishing from anthropomorphism (physical at a low level, and spiritual at a higher level), to deism, to the abstract “ground of all being,” and on to atheism. A change in one’s view of God could obviously be a form of blindness, if the correct view is abandoned. If the Christian view of God (omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, omnibenevolent, and Trinitarian) shifted to deism one could argue it would be a form of blindness, though one could also easily argue for sightedness if the Christian view was wrong. The question then becomes who has the better argument? Or better: whose argument maps onto reality?

The arguments offered by the prodigals in Dennett and LaScola to justify abandoning the Christian theistic view are not particularly strong, compelling, thorough, or well articulated. Often there is a failure to address alternate explanations, broader contexts, or counterarguments.

### **Wes**

Wes has troubles with the Bible: Adam and Eve are seen as story only, for example. Fair enough, but he doesn’t offer rebuttals to Christians who agree with him (e.g., Lamoureux, 2009) or Christians who would challenge him by addressing genre (e.g., Swinburne, 2007; Wright, 2003), or Christians who address the Adam question (e.g., Rana & Ross, 2005; Collins, 2011; Dembski, 2009).

He denies doctrines like the resurrection and the virgin birth. But he doesn’t address the arguments for the resurrection (Craig, 2008; Habermas, 2006; Habermas & Licona, 2004; Wright, 2003) and why they are wrong. There seems to be an absence of a virtue epistemology on Wes’s part.

Wes seems to have channeled himself into the Christian ministry; he went on to seminary because of the credits he would receive there.

Wes sees Christianity as a tool (“means to an end”) to facilitate liberal democratic values. He doesn’t see God as personal: “So I think the word God can be used very expressively in some of my more meditative modes. I’ve thought of God as a kind of poetry that’s written by human beings. As a way of dealing with the fact that we’re finite; we’re vulnerable (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 127).” His goal is to help people, to provide community, to help damaged Christians.

Wes has colleagues who seem to support his liberal stance.

### **Rick**

Rick would not be the traditional conservative Christian. “...he has worked in civil rights, gay rights and women’s rights, including assisting women who were seeking abortions before they were legalized nationally. He specifically chose the UCC denomination because it had ‘no forced doctrine,’ offered ‘a lot of freedom to believe what you want to believe,’ and had a large and active social justice mission (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 128).”

Tillich and Bultmann seem to be the formative theological forces for Rick’s theological development.

Rick was an agnostic from his student days and opted for the seminary to avoid the draft. He stays in the ministry and sees his role along the lines of liberating people from bad ideas; that is bad ideas about Christianity. Ideas like “creedal stuff” and Hell. His focus is social justice. It

would seem to be a stretch to claim Rick has abandoned his faith, or lost his faith. Rather, Rick seems to be a non-believer right from the start.

### **Darryl**

Darryl would not be a believer in the traditional Christian God. He sees himself more along the lines of a pantheist.

I reject the virgin birth. I reject substitutionary atonement. I reject the divinity of Jesus. I reject heaven and hell in the traditional sense, and I am not alone. I am a “Jesus Follower” for sure. It is arguable whether I am also a “Christian.” I can't imagine continuing in this work if I did not have a strong personal faith of some kind. My cognitive dissonance revolves around the urge to rescue others who find themselves in the same boat – and who still strongly believe in God in some sense, and find Jesus a compelling religious figure (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 131).”

Darryl seems to have “felt” a call of some sort. He does experience cognitive dissonance. However, Darryl would not be a believer in the traditional Christian sense

### **Adam**

Adam was the type of believer who immersed himself in the controversies, cognitively. He watched the debates. He read the arguments on both sides of the issues. He admits to being stressed by the suffering in the world, and that seems to have been a key factor that led to his tilt away from theism. A second key factor was the textual criticism issues (i.e., variants, etc.). The arguments he once valued are no longer strong enough to counteract the criticisms. It seems he lacks the defeater deflectors with respect to (1) the argument from evil and suffering, and (2) the arguments related to the nature of biblical revelation.

### **Jack**

Jack was someone who had trouble finding sense in Christian doctrine over time. He was drawn to Christianity initially because of the love, but his study of Christianity left him lacking. Of the individuals presented by Dennett and LaScola (2010), it was Jack who seemed amenable to offering reasons, at least in the text.

“I didn't plan to become an atheist. I didn't even want to become an atheist. It's just that I had no choice. If I'm being honest with myself. I've just this autumn, started saying to myself, out loud, 'I don't believe in God anymore.' It's not like, I don't want to believe in God. I *don't* believe in God. And it's because of all my pursuits of Christianity. I want to understand Christianity, and that's what I've tried to do. And I've wanted to be a Christian. I've tried to be a Christian, and all the ways they say to do it. It just didn't add up. The love stuff is good. And you can still believe in that, and live a life like that. But the whole grand scheme of Christianity, for me, is just a bunch of bunk. ... I wanted it to be true. And I kept telling myself, 'I don't understand.' And, you know, I devoted my whole life trying to understand. And finally I got to the point where --- I've got to admit to myself this is how I feel. I can't pretend any longer (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 139).”

Specifics that Jack found troubling were:

The plan of salvation. “OK, this God created me. It’s a perfect God that knows everything; can do anything. And somehow it got messed up, and it’s my fault. So he had to send his son to die for me to fix it. And he does. And now I’m supposed to beat myself to death the rest of my life over it. It makes no sense to me. Don’t you think a God could come up with a better plan than that? (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 139)”

The portrayal of God. “What kind of personality; what kind of being is this that had to create these other beings to worship and tell him how wonderful he is? That makes no sense, if this God is all-knowing and all-wise and all-wonderful. I can’t comprehend that that’s what kind of person God is (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 139).”

Problematic Stories. “Every church I’ve been in preached that the Jonah in the Whale story is literally true. And I’ve never believed that. You mean to tell me a human was in the belly of that whale? For three days? And then the whale spit him out on the shoreline? And, of course, their convenient logic is, ‘Well, God can do anything’ (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 139).”

Contradictions. “Well, I think most Christians have to be in a state of denial to read the Bible and believe it. Because there are so many contradicting stories. You’re encouraged to be violent on one page, and you’re encouraged to give sacrificial love on another page. You’re encouraged to bash a baby’s head on one page, and there’s other pages that say, you know, give your brother your fair share of everything you have if they ask for it (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 140).”

The Hiddenness of God. “But if God was going to reveal himself to us, don’t you think it would be in a way that we wouldn’t question?... I mean, if I was wanting to have ... people teach about the Bible ... I would probably make sure they knew I existed.... I mean, I wouldn’t send them mysterious notes, encrypted in a way that it took a linguist to figure out (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 140).”

Hell. “I do remember this a couple of years down the road after being a Christian – this concept and idea of hell. I was going, ‘Hell? What do you mean I was going to hell? Why? What’s hell, and where is it?’” And I’ve never believed in hell. I just never bought it. There’s a place where people go when they die, and they burn eternally? No (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 140).”

Heaven. “The whole heaven thing makes no sense either. Why would I want to walk on streets of gold? I know people think that’s literally how it’s going to be. If we have no value system in heaven, as far as monetary or value system like we have here on earth, why would I want to walk on streets of gold? And I have people who believe they’re going to have a physical body, and we’re going to be in the new Earth ... and we’re not going to die, and we’re not going to grow old, and we’re not going to have pain. Why? That all makes no sense to me (Dennett & LaScola, 2010, p. 140).”

### **The Disbeliefs**

Where did they fail? I'm not so sure that Wes, Rick and Darryl would be prodigals. Their Christianity seemed to be more situationally driven, or circumstantially driven, than a conversion experience to a Christian belief system.

Adam and Jack, however, do seem to be prodigals. What blindnesses might they be subject to? A *weak noetic structure* that is not adequate to deflect defeaters, or defeat defeaters would be one possibility. *Shallow processing* might be another possibility. Further, it seems fair to ask: Is there a lack of a *virtue epistemology*? Are they really attempting to deal with the issues with a mature, and fair, epistemological approach? Or is there a *cognitive immaturity* that impacts their processing?

### **Taunton Interviews—Adolescent Prodigals**

Larry Taunton (2013) reported on interviews with a number of young atheists who left Christianity in favour of atheism. They were drawn nationwide from a campaign targeting college student members of secular organizations (i.e., Secular Student Alliances or Freethought Societies). A number of the participants are identified (i.e., Phil, Stephanie, Ben, Michael, Meredith, and Rebecca) in the article but the gist of the article formulates a composite of sorts—a composite of the general reasons contributing to the move towards atheism. Those identified are apparently selected when illustrative points or quotes from them help flesh out the case. For these prodigals, there are a number of interesting reasons underpinning the move to the atheist side of the scale. So, why have they left their faith?

The arguments offered by the prodigals in Taunton's interviews to justify abandoning the Christian theistic view are not particularly strong, compelling, thorough, or well articulated. However, they are reasons that the Christian community needs to seriously consider as current roadblocks for adolescents. These roadblocks can be detrimental to continuing the Christian walk.

### **Church Reasons**

Many young prodigals had trouble with Church—the *messages*, the *models*, the *mode*. The *messages* were oriented towards being good, or addressed focal points like social justice issues, getting along, “holding hands” (e.g., Phil), etc. The point being, it seems that the substantive elements of Christianity were shelved. One gets the sense that many young prodigals were sensing the contrast between the “hardness” of the true Christian message (which was missing) and the “softness” of the massaged message designed to attract, and hold, attendees. The message was apparently indistinguishable from similar agendas offered by government, schools, social organizations, and other religions. Fair enough, it seems the secondary messages

can become primary, and this is something that mitigates the interests of the young, sensitive idealist.

In the church there were some leaders who truly seemed to *model* Christianity. They dealt with tough questions, tough texts, and tough psychological, sociological, theological, polemical and apologetic demands in lifestyle and effort. But were they too few? Were they circumvented for more emotionally appealing leaders? It seems so (e.g., Phil)! Church services were boring, shallow, innocuous, and generally irrelevant, for some. And one suspects they were oriented towards entertainment, music, fun, and convenience, with popular models, but again missing the hard Christian call. Without the authentic models the prodigals left.

Also related to church is *mode*. When church is viewed as a Sunday morning service, it is easy to envision young people being bored, conflicted, and subject to cost/benefit analyses that lead them away from the notion of church. For the Christian, church is a much broader construct than a building, or attendance from 11:00 until noon on Sundays. Church is a place and state one is always in. It involves continuous communion with God and others. One can be reading, writing, walking, jogging, swimming, photographing, listening to an orchestra, visiting a museum, watching a movie, listening to birds, discussing a sporting event, listening to a lecture, watching a debate, and so on, and still have the sense of being “in church,” in communion, in ecclesia. A course in history, anthropology, psychology, and so on, can be a church experience—communion and worship. Giving can be a church experience. A smile can be a church experience.

### **Rational plus Emotional Reasons**

It seems the initial reaction to Taunton’s question (i.e., “*What led you to become an atheist?*”) was an appeal to the rational. But were their motivations purely rational? Were emotions involved? Were there cognitive limitations influencing decisions? Were there factors impacting the purported claims of rationality that such prodigals might have missed?

While their espoused reasons were often considered rooted in the rational (e.g., science, failure to address the creation/evolution issues, the “problematic” issue of biblical textual reliability, sexuality issues, one-way vs various routes to God, the purported logical problems of religious belief, investigations of competing religious worldviews, lack of meaning and purpose, ethical problems, and so on), the emotions figured in as well (e.g., Meredith and the emotionally abusive parent, Rebecca and unanswered prayers). In effect, their espoused beliefs often masked these emotional factors which pointed to covert beliefs-in-use.

### **Age-Related Reasons (14 – 17 years)**

The majority of these prodigals shifted to atheism in these middle adolescent years. Only one individual in their sample was at the college level when making the shift. This is a

potentially important point; what age-related factors might be in play here? Several possibilities are addressed below under the section heading, “The Disbeliefs.”

One important age consideration here is the broad age range (i.e., 11 to 18 years of age) when people, young people, are perhaps quite vulnerable. It is during this time frame when seminal acts, attitudes, and beliefs, are forefronted. The initial consequences of these are largely innocuous; however, the consequences soon become common recurrences, then habits, and then entrenched learnings. At an entrenchment stage, change is very difficult, even when change is the reasonable course. By way of illustration: the first cigarette the adolescent smokes has innocuous consequences; the next ten are likewise innocuous; the 1000<sup>th</sup> cigarette smoked is gaining in habitual strength; the 100,000<sup>th</sup> cigarette smoked is consistent with entrenched learning. Change at this latter stage is exceedingly difficult regardless of the reasonableness of the change.

Another age consideration is the proportion of young Christians, aged 11 to 18 years of age, who might follow the prodigal route. Perhaps it is one percent; it would be interesting to know more accurate numbers. But if it is one percent we can recall the parable of the lost sheep, the one lost sheep from the fold of 100. This would be instructive for Christians. Indeed, the shepherd searches for this one lost sheep. And given the return to the fold for some of these lost sheep, prodigals, a little later in life (e.g., [C. S. Lewis](#), [Alistair McGrath](#), [Spufford](#), etc.) there is both hope and strategy in this phenomenon. What drew these lost sheep back? Reason: evidence, argument, authorities, and emotions!

### **The Internet Reasons**

The prodigals were asked about influential factors in their conversion to atheism. One suspects there would be references (1) to people (e.g., friends, acquaintances, new atheists), (2) to debates, books, or seminars, and so on. But no! “Instead, we heard vague references to videos they had watched on YouTube or website forums.” This attention to the Internet has several implications: (1) the shift in importance from text to image ([see Ellul](#)), (2) the shift to shallowing of thinking ([see Carr on Shallow Sight](#)), and (3) the need for critical thinking skills and dispositions.

### **The Disbeliefs**

One question that remains when these adolescent reasons are considered is the following: who has the better argument? Is it the prodigal who leaves? Is it the elder brother who stays? Or is it the father who deals with both sets of problems (see Keller, 2008)? Or perhaps another way to frame it is as follows: which of their opinions, or positions, adequately map onto reality?

What were the disbeliefs of these young prodigals? How did these young new atheists descend into disbelief? The argument advanced at this point is that these young prodigals shifted in the direction of atheism given classic belief constraints and liabilities, the very constraints and liabilities addressed in this essay with respect to theistic



misunderstandings. Some of the more notable possibilities are listed below. They are hyperlinked to the place in the text where they are elaborated on.

- Developmental
  - [Cognitive immaturity](#)
  - [Narrative immaturity](#)
- Damage
  - [To one's noetic structure](#). A *weak noetic structure* that is not adequate to [deflect defeaters](#), or [defeat defeaters](#) would be one possibility.
- Akrasia
  - [Will depletion](#)
  - [Will conservation](#)
  - [Will and wants](#)
- Beliefs
  - [Sternberg's Imbalance Model](#)
  - [An Illusory Thinking Model](#)
- Psychological Processes
  - [Action Identification Theory](#)
  - [A Darkened Mind Theory](#)
  - [Dissonant Thinking Theory](#)
- Academic Opposition
- [The Reigning Paradigm](#)
- [Shallow Sight](#)
- [Malevolent Scripts](#)
- [Religious Narratives](#)
- Epistemologies
  - [Virtue Epistemology](#)
  - [Obstinacy Epistemology](#)
  - [Prudential Epistemology](#)
- [Confirmation Bias](#)
- [Dichotomized Thinking](#)
- [System Level Thinking Biases and Processes](#)
- [Missed Signals](#)

As a general summary, there are internal constraints these young people face and external constraints to which they would be vulnerable. Internally, developmental immaturity would be paramount. It could show up in cognitive abilities, knowledge gaps, noetic deficits, will limitations, and so on. Further, their belief structures could be quite immature along the lines of Sternberg's (2002) imbalance theory, or Illusory Thinking Theory. Also internally, their thinking could be constrained via Action Identification Theory, Dissonant Thinking, Mind-Darkening, Shallow Sight, or cognitively-based biases (confirmation bias, dichotomized thinking, and system level thinking biases). Their epistemologies could be too limited, that is limited to simple absolute evidentialism. Externally, they could be influenced by malevolent scripts, the reigning

paradigms, religious narratives, missed signals of transcendence, peers, academic authorities, and so on.

The resolution of problems related to disbelief is not simple. It requires discipleship. Sunday school and a church service is likely inadequate. Somewhat better would be schools, colleges and university training but even at these levels both time and content could be lacking. Time-wise the goal is 24/7, or close to it. The disciples of Jesus were with him, it seems, constantly. Content-wise the goal is the focus on the authentic message—the person, work, life, death, resurrection, and message of Jesus of Nazareth—as well as the Christian armour, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### J.J.C. Smart

In the debate between Smart and Haldane (1996, 2003) Smart admits to being a former theist. Moreover, he seems genuinely open to possibilities. He writes: “I was once a theist and I would still like to be a theist if I could reconcile it with my philosophical and scientific views. So I shall not be too sorry if John Haldane wins the argument (p. 6).” Tracking through the debate it is relatively clear that Smart has a prior commitment to philosophical naturalism, which logically precludes the supernatural. As I see it, his primary constraint—as with so many atheists—is relatively easily to label; it is the prior commitment to philosophical naturalism.

Some think that atheism is an acquired position. Some think atheism is the state characterized by: “I just found-myself-disbelieving.” Some think it is a stance: “Here I stand.” Some think it is a rational position and therefore should be adopted; others think it is the rational position and is the only position that should be adopted. Some consider all options and keep all options on the table. Positions that keep choice on the table are wisest.

As noted in Part A there are liabilities and constraints that push one in the direction of atheism. At the same time there are internal and external factors that function as signals and facilitators that tilt one towards theism. Many find these signals credible, influential, and even compelling. Others find they still prefer to go with the tilt towards atheism or agnosticism. There is a choice in one’s move towards theism, and in one’s move towards atheism.

A discussion of prodigals who leave Christianity for atheism helps one understand constraints, liabilities, and choices. As a pivot point it is equally informative to consider another type of prodigal: those who leave atheism for theism. Such a consideration provides a further context for considering the evidences for theism and the place of responsibility and choice.

## On The Prodigals Leaving Christianity

### Where Are They Going?

What draws the prodigal? What does the prodigal turn to? Historically, prodigals in New Testament times turned back to traditional Judaism or zealot-type cultic expressions. Or, they turned to Greek and Roman mystery religions. Or, they turned to philosophy or Gnosticism. This pattern likely existed up through the first few Christian centuries. Later prodigals might have turned to Islam (as a cognitive intention, as an expedient, or as a folly). Or, they might have simply turned to the mundane pressures of life. After the first millennium the turn was likely dominated by the draw of Islam, although there would be turns back to the classical scholars as well.

Turns within Christianity to reformation movements, were not really examples of prodigalship. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century some would have seen that the prodigals were turning to the secular-humanistic focal points—reason, rationality, and the sciences. But such a focus on humanism would include many Christians as well, so these turns were not necessarily from Christianity.

A study of the full turn from Christianity is an interesting topic. In late 18<sup>th</sup> century France some prodigals made the full shift to the humanistic worldview with the French revolution. Added later to this draw in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was naturalism. Humanism and naturalism together have formed the drawing power for prodigals through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and now the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Humanism, naturalism, socialism, Marxism, revolution, pragmatism, liberalism, scientism, postmodernism, have been the strong drawing forces for such prodigals over the past 200 years. Interestingly, the construct of naturalism does seem to be the substrate of this range of attractors.

### Preferential Motivation For Going?

In addition to motivators as described above (e.g., problem of evil, a philosophy like naturalism, failures of Christians, failures of healing, failures of prayer, silliness, and the like) there are motivators like “liking” and “disliking” which are key constructs when it comes to grasping the turn to, or from, God. To consider these key constructs, several framings are available: the psychology of liking, the dark side of liking, and the dislike of God, for starters. These link to the notion of the prodigal; the prodigal leaves because he likes something outside, he dislikes something inside, or both.

#### *The Psychology of Liking*

Psychologically, one asks, what is it that underpins liking? Physically, we like what gives us pleasure—food, sex, drugs, alcohol, biochemical rushes. Psychologically, we like possessions; we like friends who affirm us; we like those who worship us, even love us. We like success—achievements, winning, getting, creating. We like peace. We like pursuing interests; we like

creating. Philosophically, we like what is logical, coherent, consistent, and reasonable. Of course one might be willing to forego some things (e.g., the logical and reasonable) if other things were in the mix—say psychological success, or worship or admiration from one’s peers, or access to the darker side, or promotion, tenure, and the starring role—praise. Faust-like!

### *The Dark Side of Liking*

People like, or have liked, or have simultaneous attraction-repulsion feelings towards, that which seems dark. Pornography, power over others, schadenfreude, the coliseum, sadism, gossip, watching calamities from a distance, horror movies, and more, have an element of attraction. Some people seem to have liked attending public executions, watching the French Revolution unfold, seeing vigilante justice implemented, witnessing public humiliations, and more. Watching the Gulf War on TV was liked, much like watching a video game with some destructive component. People seem to like practical jokes that humiliate. Some like bullying, and witnessing bullying. Some like setting viruses loose on the internet, in hospitals, in a society. Some like tripping people. Some like setting fires they know will destroy acres of forest, animals, homes, and firefighters. The fox and the hounds, the bear-baiting, cock-fighting, and dog fights offend the modern empathic sensitivities, but such were liked at various historical points. Horse racing, scientific research with animals, and eating meat, offends many. What is this dark side of liking?

Do prodigals have an interest in the dark side of liking, an interest that they act upon? The questions to ask—from a Baumeister (1997) perspective—might be as follows: (1) What does the prodigal gain materially? (2) What does the prodigal gain in terms of ego, or identity? (3) What does the prodigal gain in terms of a personal ideology? (4) What does the prodigal gain with respect to justice, vengeance, or schadenfreude? For a discussion of cognitive gains related to the dark side of liking [see below](#).

### *The Dislike of God*

The quote from Dawkins about God is a good starting point. Dawkins writes:

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully (Dawkins, 2006, p. 31).”

Whether Dawkins can be faulted for his lack of a scientific approach here, an ignoring of a hermeneutically full analysis, a failure to consider explanations and counter-arguments, the point remains: he does not like God, or at least a particular god of his imagination.

I wrote a little poem as I reflected on Dawkins' diatribe.

*On Dawkins and the Ugly.*

*An anus is ugly,  
Intestines not snuggly.*

*Farts turn heads  
away to a rose.  
Green slim runs  
a ways from a nose.*

*Shit messes  
things up ...rumps.  
Only guesses  
those bugerous lumps.*

*Eyes ooze.  
Breath smells!  
Bumps bruise.  
The engorged,  
... swells!*

*Yet, the most beautiful woman that ever has been  
With all the above... can be lovely seen.*

Pretty gruesome through one lens! Mere description through another! Prisons for some! Prisms for another!

What do people dislike about God, beyond Dawkins' list?

- Hiddenness (He doesn't give enough evidence to compel; He doesn't communicate like one communicates with peers);
- Hell (He has condemned people to Hell; He made Hell); ...
- He destroys his creations (As the story of Noah goes God destroyed most of humanity in the flood; He orders destruction of cities and peoples; He designs, or permits, the destruction of lower life forms as part of a life cycle; He permits natural disasters; ...)

- He stands by (He doesn't protect his own, when he could intervene; He watches His creation, rampant with redness "in tooth and claw." We are saddened when the penguin fails finally trying to keep the egg off the ice, or when the humpback mother, in flight for hours, fails to finally protect her calf from the killer whales, or the African mother holds her dead child in the parched, sun-drenched sands of no hope. Our empathy becomes a base-line for judging God's empathy).
- X = Some other Unknown.

As a further thought, I was intrigued by a comment from Ross (2011). Ross had been debating Victor Stenger with respect to the scientific evidence for God. Some minds were pried open a little. In the post debate setting, many were looking for the single most potent or strongest piece of evidence for God. Ross doesn't answer this question; instead he points to (1) the breadth of evidences (scientific, historical, philosophical and theological), and (2) a new piece of evidence acquired "that very day." What was this newer evidence?

"Throughout the entire conference, I told them, both the speakers and audience vigorously expressed their mocking disdain toward belief in a Creator God, but not just any god. Intense emotion had been directed entirely toward the God of the Bible. The gods of the other religions received a free pass from this scathing scorn. Why? If the people here confidently believed the God of the Bible does not exist, I asked myself, why don't their emotions toward him resemble their feelings toward the tooth fairy, the Easter bunny, and Santa Claus? Their degree of passion and nearly constant focus on the issue of God's nonexistence suggested something different. It suggested to me not that they disbelieved in God but rather that they despised God. They strongly disliked him. When I mentioned this thought, the group's response was telling: 'It's not so much we hate God as that we hate his followers!' (Ross, 2011, p. 111)."

Ross indicates that he shared this story of his post debate encounter to flag the notion that at times a person's atheism or agnosticism can be a response to bad experiences related to disappointment, hurt, anger, pride, and so on. Whether this possibility rises to the level of a piece of evidence is questionable. But it does rise to the level of a constraint on belief and hence a source of theistic misunderstanding.

### *The Dislikes of the Prodigals*

A few of these "dislikes" stand out for the prodigals presented above. They disliked the fact that God didn't communicate with them in a particular fashion—a direct fashion. They disliked that God didn't intervene: (1) to protect them more fully (according to their plans), (2) to deliver (according to their desires), (3) to heal on their behalf (according to their timelines), and (4) to sanctify them and fellow Christians (according to their theology of the immediate, and the

intermediate). They disliked the divine culpability they inferred for evil, and the amount of evil in the world. They disliked the charlatans that wore the Christian garb but treated sheep like rubbish. They disliked the suffering of children. They disliked the suffering of animals. They disliked the absence of “compelling” evidence—the evidence they called for. They disliked the silence of God.

### *The Mechanics of Going -- Cognitive Capital*

What distinguishes the prodigals leaving Christianity from the prodigals leaving atheism? A few things strike me as informative: (1) cognitive sequencing, (2) cognitive quality, and (3) Baumeister’s four cognitive roots of evil.

#### Cognitive Sequencing.

There is a different order-of-approach that distinguishes the new atheists from the new theists. At least, I put that forth as a suggestion for consideration. Prodigals leaving Christianity focus first on the *negative details* of Christianity; then they reformulate their worldview, adopting a new worldview. As the final step they address the positive details in their new competing worldview, typically a worldview like naturalism. Prodigals leaving atheism focus first on the *positive details* of Christianity; then they reformulate their worldview (i.e., fall in love), adopting the new Christian worldview. As the final step, they then address the negative details in both competing worldviews—naturalism and Christianity. For one group (the new atheists) the weight is on the *negatives first* (this seems to hold for Lobdell, Shermer, Erhman, Templeton, Loftus, and Everett); for the other group (the new theists) the weight is on the *positives first* (this seems to hold for Lewis, Collins, McGrath and Flew).

This ordered approach is much like falling in love or forming a friendship. One falling into a friendship sees the positives first. One attends to the positives. One learns to value the positives. The personalized concept of love or friendship is then formed. Later some negatives are addressed, but the obstinacy of belief (Lewis, 1960) supports one in mitigating the negatives. Of course there is a dangerous side to this cognitive strategy or style—a confirmation bias. If one is encountering folly (say the positives in Islam, or the positives in Mormonism, or the positives in Nazism, or the positives in the gold-digger-woman) one is in danger. The better need is for a fair evaluation of all sides of the situation.

#### Cognitive Quality.

When considering the prodigals leaving atheism (that is, considering their arguments, their developmental trajectories, their facing of evidence), and comparing them with the prodigals leaving Christianity, there seems to be a difference. Striking is the difference in calibre on the two sides with respect to academic rigour. Prodigals leaving Christianity seem to be the weaker group. Not in every case is this true; for example Smart is a “high calibre” atheist, as is Paul Draper, I suspect. But generally, the

prodigals leaving atheism seem cogent and more compelling regarding their shift from atheism to theism. Admittedly, my judgment (and perception) might be tainted, but I am struck by the calibre of the arguments of Lewis, McGrath, Flew, Collins, and others.

### Cognitive Roots of Evil.

When a former Christian opts for atheism, it is possible that they are impelled by a mechanism embedded in evil, yet with the ironic appearance of good. Using Baumeister's four roots of evil (I'll call them: *gain*, *ego*, *idealism*, and *sadistic pleasure*) (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) as a lens, can be informative here. First, the prodigal's move to atheism can be a *gain* materially (i.e., no tithing, no charity, no worries about hell, no serving others, no forbidden pleasures like literature, food, alcohol, no subservience to a higher authority like so-called apostles or even God; or on the other hand, gain of "truth," freedom, peer-approval, and social respectability). A *gain* can be readily configured as good.

With respect to the second root, when a former Christian opts for atheism, it is possible that they are impelled by *ego* (i.e., no more self-deprecation, or guilt, or shame, or failure, on the other hand, growth of ego via status, prestige, acceptance, in-group standing can be motivational and pride-generating). Attention to *ego* development along such lines can be readily configured as good. Egoistically, the Christian prodigal gains in that he is now open to self aggrandizement, a fuller range of identities, orientations, behaviours, and pleasures.

With respect to the third root, when a former Christian opts for atheism, it is possible that they are impelled by *idealism* (i.e., admirable values like social justice, human flourishing, environmentalism, saving the planet, anti-slavery, an ethic of care, and decolonialism). Ideologically, the Christian prodigal gains in that he is free to adopt the ideologies of the intelligentsia, the prestigious, the do-gooders, the rulers, and the admirable. Admirable ends can colour means.

With respect to the fourth root, when a former Christian opts for atheism, it is possible that they are impelled by *sadistic pleasure* (i.e., revenge upon those who caused them problems, embarrassing the religious powers-that-be, making fun of the believers, unseating parents, or even lashing out at God). Justice, even vigilante justice, can be seen as a good—a viscerally, pleasurable good. Emotionally, the Christian prodigal gains in that he finds gain in the sense of justice, revenge, hostility, and schadenfreude falling upon those disagreeable gadflies pestering the complacent.

Of course, there are parallels when the shift is from atheism to theism. When a former atheist opts for theism, it is possible that they are impelled by *gain*, some good things (i.e., eternal life, forgiveness, no worries about hell, meaning in serving others and God; or on the



other hand, gifts from God, power from God, favours from God). Yes, admittedly, some of these good things are not “good” things, all-things-considered!

When a former atheist opts for theism, it is possible that they are impelled by *ego*, some good and some bad items (i.e., status as in sonship, praise from the sheep, honour from parishioners, first-place in the kingdom). Wrong motives!

When a former atheist opts for theism, it is possible that they are impelled by *idealism*, some good ideals and some bad ideals (i.e., admirable values like true justice, human fulfillment, purpose, transcendence, relationship with God, or suspect values like Christian triumphalism, just vengeance, and vindication).

When a former atheist opts for theism, it is possible that they are impelled by *sadistic pleasure* (i.e., revenge upon those who caused them problems, embarrassing the political powers-that-be). There is something pleasurable in the fall of the proud.

Who has the better case? As I see it, the atheist prodigals, those leaving atheism for theism, have the better case. Their arguments seem stronger, at least those listed above (e.g., Lewis, McGrath, Collins, and Flew) when compared to those prodigals leaving Christianity (e.g., Templeton, Lodbell, Shermer, Loftus, and Everett). The cognitive capital seems to fall to the theists leaving atheism.

### ***The Mechanics of Going -- Moral Capital***

#### **Moral Reasoning And Prodigalship**

In the Biblical story of the prodigal son, the younger son wants his inheritance, his monetary capital; he wants to explore the world, have an adventure, take risks, and, perhaps, “find himself”—ego enhancement. His father complies. When that material capital runs out and he “finds himself” quite impoverished he decides to return home. In fact, he chooses to return home. In the story the players are the prodigal son, the elder brother and the father. Can such a story inform the issue of prodigals like those opting for atheism?

There is a parallel when one substitutes moral capital for material capital. Haidt (2012) has advanced six bases for moral reasoning: (1) Care/Harm, (2) Liberty/Oppression, (3) Fairness (4) Loyalty, (5) Authority, and (6) Sanctity. These bases in use can be considered as moral capital providing underpinnings for decisions. In his research Haidt finds that American Liberals are strongest on Care/Harm in this moral matrix. They also are concerned with Liberty and Fairness, but less so. Loyalty, Authority, and Sanctity carry virtually little weight. Haidt finds that the Libertarians are strongest on Liberty; but they also are concerned with Fairness; the remaining four bases carry little weight. The American social conservative, on the other hand,

seems to be substantially weighting all six values in the moral matrix. And worth noting is the fact that Haidt advances this distribution as a card-carrying Liberal.

In a sense the Liberals are prodigals. They have taken their moral capital (particularly Care/Harm, but also Liberty and Fairness) and left the fold, the six-fold moral capital characteristic of the conservatives. This narrowed focus, and the leaving-of-the-fold, is consistent with the biological drivers of the liberal personality type—novelty seeking, curiosity, risk-taking and so on. Liberals are in a sense somewhat like the prodigal son in the Biblical story, and perhaps the atheist in the present narrative.

Do the Liberals come back home like the prodigal son did when his capital atrophied? Perhaps they do. Some do! There is the commonplace notion that people move from one political position in youth to a more conservative position with age<sup>1</sup>. Actually, though, they do not abandon the left's moral thrust; rather they broadened the moral bases to include all six matrices that Haidt identifies. Is it the case, then, that many move to the right as they mature, cognitively? Do they go back home? Are the leftists, the liberals, the prodigals?

Back to the story of the prodigal son: when the prodigal son gets back home, the elder brother shows his own moral matrix—he is quite concerned, or only concerned, with the Fairness base. Again, youth is a limitation, it seems. He too is a prodigal from the six-fold moral matrix. It is the elderly father who draws upon all six moral bases. In the father one sees a concern about Sanctity (of sonship), a concern about Authority (parenting), a sense of Loyalty (to both sons, but with wisdom and caring compassion), an attention to granting Liberty or even encouraging Liberty (in the case of the younger son), an addressing of Fairness (in a broader framework), and a concern about the Harm suffered (by both sons). The moral capital is with the father.

Perhaps atheists in their Liberal cloaks are moral prodigals, taking their moral capital and squandering it, unwittingly. How? They focus on the Harm base, only. Or, they might also address a Liberty base, or even a Fairness base. At home, the Father's home, there is a six-fold moral base. Aging might send them home. Insight might send them home. Reflection might send them home.

What is it that opens the eyes for some prodigals? What is it that allows some to see the transcendent? What is it that facilitates one choosing the transcendent? What is it that tilts one in the direction of God? Examination of the claims, the arguments, the evidence, can facilitate a tilt in a particular positive direction, the theistic direction. A number of these prods are presented in Part B of this essay. Such prods can lead to a tilting, and choice is instrumental at every step of the way. Including the mind-change step! One can choose to go left; another can choose to go right.

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<sup>1</sup> Myself, I was more on the left (Socialist, even Marxist) when I was around 20 years of age. I voted NDP. By mid-twenties I moved further to the right, though still left; I voted Liberal. By my thirties I was conservative. By my sixties I would offer financial support to conservative causes. I left the left with age and maturity.

Arguably, it is a reasonable contention that choice is an instrumental key at many levels of belief formation and acceptance, and disbelief formation and rejection. Maybe one cannot choose to believe synchronically, but one's choices underpin the formation of one's beliefs diachronically. The foundational issue of choice, and the freedom to choose, are basic for human cognitive processing. People choose to believe (at least for some types of belief, or some belief precursors, or for some philosophical position, or at some important seminal points-in-time) and choose to disbelieve, for other types of belief, even when those beliefs are believable. There is both a philosophical side to freedom to choose, and a theological side to freedom to choose. While arguing the case for freedom of choice is convoluted, and potentially distracting from the issue of belief and disbelief, there are such arguments.

## Choice Constrains Belief.

### *Choice*

Both belief, and disbelief, can involve elements of choice; or at least some beliefs can involve choices. In many ways one chooses to believe (*pistis*), and more broadly, one experiences (contingent on nature, luck, environmental influences, and choices) faulty beliefs, broken beliefs, or dysfunctional beliefs (*dyspistis*). These beliefs and disbeliefs are functionally related to liabilities, constraints, facilitators, preferences, and dispositions; but also such beliefs and disbeliefs are: (1) contingent upon choices (synchronic and diachronic), at least in part, and (2) determinants of subsequent choices (and subsequent beliefs), at least in part.

### *Choice Over Time*

Choice can be viewed synchronically and diachronically. Synchronic choice occurs at a particular point in time. For example, Fred chooses to buy a lottery ticket today. Diachronic choice reflects a choice-history, a series of choices across time, and thus a developmental pattern for a choices-trajectory. For example, Fred chooses to buy a lottery ticket today (synchronic choice), but Fred has been buying perhaps twenty lottery tickets on average every week for the past year. The year previous, Fred was buying about ten tickets per week. Five years ago, Fred was buying one lottery ticket every week. Seven years ago, Fred would buy one ticket periodically. Ten years ago, Fred bought none; he saw them as a foolish waste of money in the earlier decade. Over time Fred's diachronic choice pattern changed the calibre of his particular synchronic choices, in nature, in force, and in meaning. Synchronic choice and diachronic choice differs as a function of time, history, learning and context.

As discussed earlier at various points, with respect to beliefs and choices, smoking also offers a good illustration. The caliber of choice for the person who chooses to smoke at Time 1 (i.e., the rebellious teen or pre-teen exploring the exotic side of life) is different from the caliber of choice for the same person who chooses to smoke at Time 2 (after one year of smoking a

pack-a-day), at Time 3 (after five years of addiction), and at Time 4 (e.g., after 10 years of the addiction). This is the case even if the caliber of the belief (e.g., smoking is exploration, smoking is bad for one's health, smoking is relaxing, smoking is image enhancing with peers, smoking is a weight control tool) is the same at all choice-points. The caliber of choice changes over time.

### *Choosing Disbelief*

One experiences an absence of belief where one is without a particular belief (either as a result of nature, experience, luck, choice, inattention, or blindness); this could be termed "apistis." As a first impression, it seems to be a stretch to link this to choice. However, is it conceivable that one could choose to not-believe? It turns out that the answer is: "Yes." For some beliefs when can choose to espouse disbelief ([see the reference to Wald](#) or even [Nagel](#)). Firstly, then, linking belief to choice, one could make the simple irrational choice like Wald, or preferential choice like Nagel, and others. Of course, the espoused belief might not be the actual belief, the belief-in-use. But some choice function is operative.

Secondly, and more reasonably, one could be implementing what appears to be a synchronic choice but is actually a diachronic choice with earlier choice-points, and choices, influencing later choices (i.e., influencing current choice calibers, propensities, and responsibilities). Think back to the compulsive lottery-ticket buyer and both his current choices and his earlier choices, years earlier. The choices, over time, differed in calibre. The personal responsibility and choice-potency was sturdy eight years ago; now the lottery-ticket buyer functions from habit, addiction, and perhaps a hope to recoup losses. The power to invest in his current choice is weak. Moreover, the current responsibility for his choice seems mitigated considerably by his historical and developmental circumstance. Choice calibre changes over time which then impacts both behaviours and beliefs. With smoking, the atrophy of choice diachronically is even more striking.

Thirdly, one could agree that there are choices with respect to certain types of beliefs. Barrett's (2004, 2009, 2011) "reflective beliefs" would clearly involve elements of choice. The very notion of reflection aligns with decisions, intentions, and thus choice. The stretch emerges in that it is more difficult to conceive of a choice in the area of "non-reflective beliefs," like the beliefs Barrett lists in his 2009 chapter:

- The belief that: People act in ways to satisfy desires
- The belief that: Rainbows exhibit six bands of color
- The belief that: Raccoons and Opossums are very similar animals
- The belief that: People from outside my group are more similar to each other than people inside my group

- The belief that: Animals have parents of the same species as themselves
- The belief that: Unsupported objects fall (p. 78)

Choosing to disbelieve such “non-reflective beliefs” is unreasonable. However, such non-reflective beliefs can move to the reflective system, as one reflects. To illustrate: some postmoderns, paranormals, Humeans, skeptics, and so on, do espouse dyspitis, and apistis, even with some of these non-reflective beliefs. By way of illustration consider the following non-reflective belief: effects have causes. The Humean notion that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect is a reflective belief, not a non-reflective belief. As a reflective belief one must choose it, at least in part. Similarly, when one sees design and teleology in nature (non-reflective beliefs) one must choose, or may choose, to override such beliefs (as Dawkins and Crick advise). In effect, here disbelief is chosen; ironically, it may be chosen as an espoused belief, but be denied in practice as one’s beliefs-in-use can betray what one truly believes or believes at a more fundamental level (see Kelemen & Rosset, 2009; Kelemen, Rottman & Seston, 2012).

The underpinnings of belief are many and choices are influenced by such underpinnings. Critical then is the issue of choice. The authenticity of choice, free will, and real beliefs driven by choice, are assumed. At this point it is enough to say there are: (1) beliefs that are innate, essentialist, endogenous, and of the caliber of what “we can’t not know” (see Budziszewski, 1997), basic beliefs, properly basic beliefs, and (2) beliefs that are essentialist in that they are automatic, intuitive, and non-reflective (as in System 1 thinking in Kahneman, 2003, 2011), and (3) beliefs that are constructed, chosen, and ignored, via a constellation of factors which include free will (as in System 2 thinking in Kahneman, 2003, 2011). The danger is in choosing a particular disbelief when belief is the better choice, that is, the choice that correctly maps onto reality.

### ***The Confirmation Bias and Choices***

Cognitively, there are human tendencies: (1) to *look for information* in support of our current beliefs, our favoured beliefs, and our chosen beliefs, (2) to *interpret information* as supportive of our current beliefs, our favoured beliefs, and our chosen beliefs, and (3) to *avoid information* (i.e., facts, models, hypotheses, and theories) not supportive of our current beliefs, our favoured beliefs, and our chosen beliefs. These tendencies fold into a bias favouring our *active position*. The *active position* we hold can be our preferred position, or just our current position. It can even be our imagined position, our initial position when considering pros and cons, our selected position for a debate or position paper, or even our peers’ position. The *active position* leads to a bias—a “confirmation bias.” For the most part the confirmation bias propensity is viewed in a negative light and as a major problem for thinking clearly, although there can be some positive benefits as well (Nickerson, 1998).

*Mechanics.* Nickerson (1998) notes a number of specific mechanics which can be operative in the confirmation bias, actions which restrict understanding, actions such as:

- Restriction: “...restriction of attention to a favored hypothesis (p. 177)”
- Restriction: “...restricting attention to a single hypothesis (p. 177)”
- Restriction: “...preferential treatment of evidence supporting existing beliefs (p. 178)”
- Restriction: “...looking only or primarily for positive cases (p. 178)”
- Restriction: “...overweighting positive confirmatory instances (p. 180)”
- Restriction: “...seeing what one is looking for .... regardless of whether the patterns are really there (p. 181)”
- Restriction: by seeing “illusory correlation (p. 183)”
- Restriction: by being subject to a “primacy effect... information acquired early in the process is likely to carry more weight than that acquired later (p. 187)”
- Restriction: by being vulnerable to our “Own-judgment evaluation.... studies have typically shown overconfidence to be more common than underconfidence (p. 188)”
- Restriction: by being subject to “the illusion of validity.... experts are not immune (p. 189)” Attorneys, physicians, psychologists, engineers, and clinicians have been found to be overconfident with respect to their judgments and beliefs (a form of [professional blindness as discussed earlier](#)).

*Societal Implications.* Confirmation bias has societal implications noted by Nickerson (1998) with respect to understanding in various areas. It has been implicated in number mysticism; Nickerson (1998) links the confirmation bias to the preoccupation with numerology over millennia. One example he discusses is the numerology associated with the Great Pyramid and the mathematical relations “hidden” therein—a form of mysticism.

The confirmation bias was also seen in the judgments of apparently “decent people,” people who were nevertheless involved in indecent witch hunts. Confirmations of witchcraft were found easier than exonerations, it seems.

Confirmation bias is seen in the rationalizations for various political policies. For example, “Obamacare” for the Obama administration, is prone to confirmation influences via supportive evidences and arguments. On the other side of the political coin, seeing “Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq” was prone to confirmation via supportive evidences and arguments for the Bush administration. The downside is not seen.

The confirmation bias has a long history in various medical treatments (e.g., bleeding, purging, homeopathy, ...). Rigorous drug testing protocols, and medical treatment studies, are the

standards now in order to deal with the confirmation bias. Still, it is likely that some procedures do slip through because the author has a confirmation bias.

The confirmation bias is potentially quite damaging in judicial reasoning by jurors tainted by primacy effects. This is a difficult bias to address. Judges give jury instructions and guidelines but the bias likely still exists. Hopefully the jury experience counteracts a number of these biases.

In science the confirmation bias can be counterproductive leading to theory persistence and change resistance (cf Kuhn, 1970; Lakatos, 1970). This is a problem when such theories are wrong and misleading.

*Causes of the Confirmation Bias.* What are the causes of such a bias? Nickerson (1998) offers a few reasons to help elucidate the possible drivers of confirmation bias.

- *Wanting to Believe:* “The Desire to Believe ... dubbed the Pollyanna principle (Nickerson (1998, p. 197)” .... The desire might be rooted in rewards; one envisions substantial rewards (material rewards, ego rewards, ideological rewards in the form of triumphalism, or the manifestation of ultimate justice) associated with being right.
- A variant of the “desire to believe” is the propensity to believe; it is called “*a principle of credulity*” by both Reid (1818/2011), and more recently Swinburne (2013). Belief is basic.
- *Cognitive Restrictions:* “Information-Processing Bases for Confirmation Bias.... tendency of people to gather information about only one hypothesis at a time.... people are fundamentally limited to think of only one thing at a time (Nickerson, 1998, p. 198).” Also in play here should be arguably *virtue epistemology*. Nickerson (1998) notes: “Another explanation of why people fail to consider alternatives to a hypothesis in hand is that they simply do not think to do so. Plausible alternatives do not come to mind. This is seen by some investigators to be, at least in part, a matter of inadequate effort, a failure to do a sufficiently extensive search for possibilities ... (p. 200).” This is a classic failure related to *virtue epistemology*!
- *Reference Frames:* “Conditional Reference Frames.... when people are asked to explain or imagine why a hypothesis might be true or why a possible event might occur, they tend to become more convinced that the hypothesis is true or that the event will occur, especially if they have not given much thought to the hypothesis or event before being asked to do so (Nickerson, 1998, p. 203).” This fascinating phenomenon seems to parallel somewhat “[ideomotor action theory](#)” where simply thinking about an act sets the human being into motoric action. As a parallel here, we have what might be termed *ideo-ideological action theory*—thinking about a hypothesis as true sets a cognitive

confirmation bias in cognitive motion. Also in play would be the order of considering pros and cons; to consider the pro reasons first is conducive to a bias to the pro side of the argument.

- *Error Avoidance*: “Pragmatism and Error Avoidance.... some ways of being wrong are more likely to be regrettable than others (Nickerson, 1998, pp. 203-204).” Type 1 Errors (i.e., rejecting the null hypothesis inappropriately) and Type 2 Errors (i.e., accepting the null hypothesis inappropriately) are considerations for the pragmatic decision makers. “In general, the objective of avoiding disastrous errors may be more conducive to survival than is that of truth determination (p. 204).” Is one side of Pascal’s Wager the classic example of “avoiding disastrous errors?” That is: One ought to believe in God because if there is a God, and one bets against this possibility, the loss is infinite. If there is no God, and one bets that there is a God, the loss is finite and minimal. The errors, and the route to “avoiding disastrous errors,” are clear for Pascal.

*Problems of the Confirmation Bias*. The problems can be cast as *methodological* or *moral*. The confirmation bias is a *methodological* problem addressed by those who see attempts at refutation as the hallmark of scientific progress (e.g., Popper, 1965). Popper’s solution is to work intentionally to refute hypotheses rather than seek to confirm them. The objective is verisimilitude which is viewed as more reasonable than truth-finding.

The confirmation bias is a *philosophical/methodological* problem for those epistemologists oriented towards truth-seeking. [Virtue epistemologists](#) argue for understanding the bias and guarding against the bias methodologically. They broaden perspective; they set up safeguards; they experiment; they weigh alternatives; they apply rigour; and they remain open-minded to various hypotheses and theories. The characteristics of the virtue epistemologists are in a broad sense scientific.

The confirmation bias is a *moral* problem for the evidentialist epistemologists like Clifford—those who call for more evidence before belief. In one’s cognitive processing when facing the threat of confirmation biases, rigour, perspective, and effort, are possible, but such safeguards that are needed require work.

*The Problem for the Believer—Theist or Atheist*. Here the issue is the clear and present danger for the atheist who finds herself unwittingly distracted by a propensity to the confirmation bias. Of course, the same problem exists for the theist. At this point however, the confirmation bias is placed on the table as a constraint that the atheist faces, a constraint that can help with respect to understanding theistic misunderstanding. The atheist, whether committed to atheism, considering the pro side of atheism, exposed to atheism, or imagining atheism, is vulnerable to a confirmation bias. The confirmation bias acts as a constraint against theism.



That the theist is vulnerable to the same mechanisms is a fair observation. If we don't know which side is right, however, it is fitting that we consider: (1) which side has the better arguments, (2) which side has the better defense mechanisms in place, (3) which side can withstand better the proposed defeaters, (4) which side has abduction and the cumulative case effect working for it, and (4) which side has the more prudential outcomes.

*Confirmation Bias—A Good Thing?* Is the confirmation bias in any way a good thing? The simple answer is yes, if one's belief is true. That the confirmation bias can be a good thing, pushing one to stick with a scientific theory in spite of troubling facts (Lakatos, 1970), would be part and parcel of the scientific process. That the confirmation bias can be a good thing pushing one to stick with the legal principle "innocent until proven guilty," can serve justice well. That the confirmation bias can be a good thing pushing one to stick with a friend or spouse surrounded by the likes of Iago, is a good thing (see Lewis, 1960b on the obstinacy of belief). The confirmation bias can be a good thing when survival is the goal; it is a better thing when truth is at the end.

*Confirmation Bias And Choice.* Is there a role for choice in the confirmation bias? Yes, there is a role for choice at least at two levels. At a *seminal level* one's choices can set the confirmation bias in motion. Choosing to entertain an idea can set the confirmation bias in motion. Choosing to explore the pro side of an issue can set the confirmation bias in motion. Choosing a peer group espousing an idea can set the confirmation bias in motion. Many of our initial choices have confirmation bias effects. The effects are inadvertent, but they are contingent on choices.

At a *critical level*, certainly when one understands the nature of the confirmation bias one is in a position to implement strategies to help circumvent the bias. Choosing to practice a virtue epistemology, to implement multiple-perspective-taking, and to consider the motivational rewards of confirmation, does indicate an important role for choice. This important role for choice can be post hoc, but it is still critical.

### ***Dichotomized Thinking And Choices***

The best presentations of dichotomized thinking have been offered by Gould in two books. The meritorious side of dichotomized thinking seems evident with his *Non Overlapping Magisterial Authorities (NOMA)* (Gould, 1999). Here there are two categorically distinct authorities.

The problematic side of dichotomized thinking is evident with the history of the problem traced back to the various roots of science: roots in the Greek and Roman classics, the Renaissance with its return to the classics, Humanism, and then the nascent sciences of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century with a focus on observation and experimentation (Gould, 2003). For the careful observer developmental accretions are seen; both knowledge and methodology ideally broaden rather than

collapse onto a “favoured child.” A collapse onto a categorical, dichotomizing form of thinking is a major problem.

Gould suspects our predisposition to fall into dichotomized thinking is “baggage,” a result of our evolutionary past. That said, it is undesirable baggage leading to fallacies of dichotomization. It pits ancients against moderns, science against religion, science against the humanities, postmoderns against moderns, as combatants in academic warfare. Such dichotomization is simplistic, wrong, counterproductive, and even destructive.

An extended quote from Gould (2003) seems warranted here: “I freely confess my negative, and somewhat cynical, feelings about the fallacies (and sometimes even the viciousness) of dichotomization as our usual framework for characterizing the never-ending struggles of academic life—often so silly in their pretentious and vainglorious rancor, especially when honest moments force our admission that degree of public recognition, and differential access to parking spaces, rather than serious issues of intellectual content, usually underlie the intensity of expressed feelings. Viewing the question in its historical amplitude, the most persuasive argument against a concept of ‘natural’ and inherent conflict between science and the humanities may well rest upon the peculiar circumstance that not a single episode in the four successive rounds of this supposed struggle provides any decent evidence for genuine dichotomous opposition, but rather illustrates the far greater complexity, artificiality, contingency, and shifting allegiances of our taxonomies for academic disciplines. So if ‘science’ and the ‘humanities’ cannot be construed as sufficiently stable entities locked in tolerably continuous struggle over genuine and persisting differences of intellectual note, then I suspect that our strong impression of lasting conflict only records our simplistic imposition of phony dichotomous models upon a much different, and far more subtle, story of substantial and fruitful interaction amid instances (or even periods) of misunderstanding and occasional strife (p. 83-84).” Gould stands as the true academic, the real scholar, the balanced scientist, and the wise sage.

From the dichotomous wars, the fallacies, and the dead-ends, there are lessons to be learned. There is a pressing need to transcend such dichotomized thinking. Such a move supposes choice as the necessary route. Choice that sees continuity, growth, and debts to our forefathers! “On the shoulders of giants” contains a truth independent of the controversial origin of the metaphor (Gould 2003). Yes, the shoulders of “giants,” but more than the shoulders of giants, the stories of “ants,” or the strains of “gnats,” are a “sign” for a past.

The small, big-bangs of knowledge (e.g., the Renaissance, Humanism, Reformation, Counter Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and the Technology Revolution) are related. There is an unfolding! A blueprint, materials, workers, tools, an infra-structure and a super-structure!

*Dichotomized Thinking And Choice.* Is there a role for choice in the practice of dichotomized thinking? Yes, for example, consider that there is a role for choice at least at two levels—*ease* and *evil*. With respect to *ease*, we choose dichotomized thinking because it is easy, it aligns with our scientific propensity to categorize and form taxonomies, it is natural, and it is front-line thinking, [System I level thinking \(Kahneman, 2003, 2011\)](#). We choose such roots.

With respect to *evil*, evil as framed in the four roots offered by Baumeister (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004), we could choose dichotomized thinking to advance a state that is actually a type of evil. For example, one can delight in the suffering of others (schadenfreude, gloating, sadism, etc.), a suffering achieved by insuring one loses an argument. Dichotomized thinking pushes opponents into the position of such suffering. One can strive to ensure one's ideology trumps the other's ideology. Dichotomized thinking pushes opponents into the position of apparently holding an unsound ideology. One can strive to advance the sense of self, and self-esteem; dichotomized thinking pushes others into the position of contrast—one's self esteem is enhanced as a function of the diminished self-esteem of the other. Choices seem to be operative here!

### **Dealing with the Confirmation Bias and Dichotomized Thinking.**

What are the better strategies to assist one when dealing with confirmation bias and the limitations of dichotomized thinking? In this essay three strategic approaches are suggested. First, a [virtue epistemology](#) would be at the forefront of the list. Virtue epistemology involves adopting positive virtues: "...carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, inquisitiveness, attentiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and intellectual integrity (Baehr, 2011, p. 98)," and guarding against negative vices: "... intellectual laziness, inattentiveness, lack of intellectual discrimination, gullibility, carelessness, disregard for truth, ignoring and distorting counterevidence, self-deception, and the like (Baehr, 2011, p. 98)." Secondly, a [belief allocation protocol](#) is important as a strategy. Such a protocol is designed to ensure: (1) multiple competing hypotheses are placed on the table for consideration, (2) the hypotheses are weighted in terms of belief/doubt (i.e., subjective probabilities or Bayesian probabilities), and (3) the probabilities and hypotheses are continuously revisited and recalibrated in response to additional evidence and argument. Thirdly, a [triangulation approach](#) is designed to draw upon multiple sources of knowledge from three venues: (1) *revelation* (special, natural, personal, interpersonal), (2) *reason* (cognition, systems of thinking, logic, fallacy-detection, bias-detection, analogy, induction, deduction, abduction, etc.) and (3) *reflections* (i.e., the systematized thoughts of various authorities in diverse specialties like anthropology, physics, psychology, history, biography, biology, neurology, theology, philosophy, etc.). The triangulation approach involves considering all three sources, equally weighting these three sources of knowledge, and reiterating their contributions. Such steps offer

some protection against: (1) a confirmation bias being misapplied, (2) dichotomized thinking, (3) epistemological imbalance, (4) human frailties, and (5) pride and arrogance.

## **Part B: Choosing Belief**

### Choice

Since belief can involve elements of choice the determinants of such choices—the underpinnings—are important. Choices are influenced by such underpinnings. That which follows in this second half of the essay are various underpinnings for theistic belief; the order, aligns with the remaining four of the six stances introduced in the Introduction: the Common-Sense Stance, the Inclusivist-Epistemological Stance, the Evidential-Charisms Stance, the Cumulative-Case Stance, and the Science-Based Stance.

Foundational is the issue of choice. The authenticity of choice, free will, and real beliefs driven by choice, are assumed. To reiterate an earlier claim, there are: (1) beliefs that are innate, essentialist, endogenous, and of the caliber of what “we can’t not know” (see Budziszewski, 1997), basic beliefs, properly basic beliefs, (2) beliefs that are essentialist in that they are automatic, intuitive, and non-reflective (as in System 1 thinking in Kahneman, 2003, 2011), and (3) beliefs that are constructed, chosen, and ignored, via a constellation of factors which include free will (as in System 2 thinking in Kahneman, 2003, 2011).

First on the Common-Sense Stance list is *biography*. One looks to those who choose to believe as examples, and as evidential sources. These prodigals from atheism when balanced against the prodigals from theism may reflect a perfect balance; or there may be a tilt—a tilt in the direct of theism. In fact, the tilt strikes me as rooted in common sense, and reason. Second on the list is *basicity*: Belief in God is viewed as a basic belief, a properly basic belief. Plantinga’s (1983, 2000) case for “Warranted Christian Belief” is enlightening and compelling. As a basic belief it aligns with McCauley’s (2011) exploration of religion as natural. In fact, it is reasonable to start and end with the notion that belief in God is a properly basic belief; it is a basic belief that is justified. Third on the list is “*The Gaps*,” particularly the Big Three gaps. They are placed in this important position as a result of reflecting on Shook’s claim (in his debate with Craig) that there are no adequate bridges to the supernatural from the natural. Perhaps there are no adequate bridges from the natural to the supernatural but reflection on these gaps leaves one—and I suspect many—on the supernatural side of the gulf, as the starting point. One *chooses* to abandon this logical starting point (the ontological starting point, the historical starting point, the epistemological starting point) when one adopts naturalism as a worldview, or as a research program (Rea, 2002).

Next, there is the field of *epistemology* with the Inclusivist-Epistemological Stance. The place for choice in systems of knowing is palpable. Choice shows up in: (1) an epistemology that is “volitional” and attentive to authoritative purposeful revelation (Moser, 2008, 2010), (2) an epistemology that incorporates character and virtue, “virtue epistemology,” (Baehr, 2008, 2011, Greco, 2011), (3) Pascal’s Wager and prudential epistemologies (Jordan, 2006), (4) acts of deduction, induction and abduction, (5) various aspects of evidentialism, (6) an obstinacy-epistemology, but most clearly in (7) the prudential and existential epistemologies discussed below. Also under the *epistemology* umbrella there are the evidences that follow belief—the evidential-charisms and the Evidential-Charisms Stance. Finally, there is the *aggregate effect* in line with the Cumulative-Case Stance, and the Science-Based Stance. The probabilities and prudential motivations accumulate to such a degree that the wise step is clear, the wise choice is clear. The wise choice is prudential, rational, virtuous, evidential, existential, and science-based.

### Models Leaving Atheism (The Belief-Choice Has Precedents)

A number of individuals (e.g., Templeton, Lobdell, Loftus, Shermer, etc.) have moved from theism to atheism as seen in the former section. They found that the evidence either compels atheism, or tilts one toward atheism. They believe they moved from misunderstanding to understanding. By the same token a number of individuals have moved from atheism to theism (see the four examples listed in the following). They too believe they have moved from misunderstanding to understanding. Both groups are making choices about which way the scale tilts all-things-considered, although they might not be fully cognizant of the “all-things considered.” Who is making the better choices? As I read the scales, those moving from atheism to theism are making the better choices, the rational choices, the wiser choices, the prudential choices—the common-sense choices.

#### *C. S. Lewis*

Lewis was a former atheist who reports his opting for Christianity in “Surprised by Joy.” Lewis may be the most influential Christian apologist in the previous century. His writings, his arguments, his character, his compassion, and his choices, are compelling. His book “Mere Christianity” has turned many minds to God. His other works (God in the Dock, Men Without Chests, Miracles, The Problem of Pain, The Obstinacy of Belief, The Four Loves, The Screwtape Letters, and more) have helped edify many in the Christian camp, and keep many in the Christian camp. His character, courage, grieving, humility, children’s literature, and scholarly literature independent of apologetics, have served the broad Christian community well.

#### *Alistair McGrath*

McGrath is former atheist who reports the story of his finally opting for Christianity in his book (2007) “Dawkins’ God.” He was enchanted by science as a child and teen, and committed to science as a life goal. He writes: “I threw myself into the study of the sciences and mathematics, specializing particularly in chemistry and physics

(2007, p. 2).” Of God, “...the sciences had displaced God, making religious belief a rather pointless relic of a bygone age.... A surge of anti-religious feeling was sweeping across the face of Western culture.... Religion would be swept aside as the moral detritus of humanity, at best an irrelevance to real life, and at worst an evil, perverse force which enslaved humanity through its lies and delusions.... Religion was just an idiotic ‘medieval superstition’ which no lover of the truth or morally serious person could tolerate.... Atheism was the only option for someone confronted with the facts.... (p. 2-3).”

McGrath admits to Marxism as his apparent worldview. He admits he tried to establish an Atheist Society at his school. He admits to deciding to study German and Russian to read the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in the original languages.

The mind-change seems to have been set in motion by two things. The first trigger was a decision to read a book encountered in the library that addressed the history and philosophy of science. New questions then arose: “...the right questions about the reliability and limits of scientific knowledge.... Issues such as the underdetermination of theory by data, radical theory change in the history of science, the difficulties of devising a ‘crucial experiment,’ and the enormously complex issues associated with determining what was the ‘best explanation’ of a given set of observations crowded in on me, muddying what I had taken to be the clear, still water of scientific truth (2007, p 4-5).”

The second trigger was a closer look at Christianity. “...I began to discover Christianity was rather more interesting and considerably more exciting than I had realized. While I had been severely critical of Christianity as a young man, I had never extended that same critical evaluation to atheism, tending to assume that it was self-evidently correct, and was hence exempt from being assessed in this way.... Far from being self-evidently true, it seemed to rest on rather shaky foundations. Christianity, on the other hand, turned out to be far more robust intellectually than I had supposed (2007, p. 5).”

At the same time that he received his doctorate in biophysics (1978) he also had broadened his studies and received an undergraduate degree in theology. Nicely positioned to critique science, theology and religion, his cogent critique (2007) of Dawkins was reasonable, his well-argued critique of atheism (2006) was luminescent, and his venture into apologetics (2012) was a welcomed addition to apologetics. Like Lewis, this prodigal from atheism offered something substantive. McGrath, his path, his arguments, and his choices, all were compelling.

### *Francis Collins*

Another former atheist who opted for Christianity is Francis Collins. His two books (2006, 2010) are encouraging for Christians. True, one is not too sure how secure Collins’ beliefs actually might be. One sees his choices, though, quite clearly. In his book, “The Language of God,” he describes his move from atheism to theism following his initial project of setting out to confirm his atheism. Clearly influenced by the evidences and arguments tabled by C. S. Lewis (e.g., *Mere Christianity*, and *The Four Loves*) Collins wrestled, not as a child but as a twenty-six-year-old scientist.

His path unwinds as follows:

“To quote Lewis, ‘If there was a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe—no more than the architect of a house could actually be a wall or staircase or fireplace in that house. The only way we could expect it to show itself would be inside ourselves as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way. And this is just what we do find inside ourselves. Surely this ought to arouse our suspicions.’ (p. 29).”

“Encountering this argument at age twenty-six, I was stunned by its logic. Here, hiding in my own heart as familiar as anything in daily experience, but now emerging for the first time as a clarifying principle, this Moral Law shone its bright white light into the recesses of my childish atheism, and demanded a serious consideration of its origin. Was this God looking back at me?”

“And if that were so, what kind of God would this be?” Deist? No! He “...must be a theist God, who desires some kind of relationship with those creatures called human beings, and has therefore instilled this special glimpse of himself into each one of us. This might be the God of Abraham, but it was certainly not the God of Einstein (p. 29).”

For Collins the moral sense of evil, holiness and righteousness surfaced along with his own failure given the incredibly high standards he faced. “And there was no reason to suspect that this God would be kindly or indulgent (p. 30).”

“I had started this journey of intellectual exploration to confirm my atheism. That now lay in ruins as the argument from the Moral Law (and many other issues) forced me to admit the plausibility of the God hypothesis. Agnosticism, which had seemed like a safe second-place haven, now loomed like a great cop-out it often is. Faith in God now seemed more rational than disbelief (p. 30).”

Like Lewis, and McGrath, this prodigal from atheism offered something substantive. He was not ignorant of history, of science, of argument, of evidence, of philosophy, nor eventually of God.

### *Anthony Flew*

Flew was a former atheist, perhaps the world’s premier atheist, who opted for a prodigal path. He left atheism. His switch, albeit primarily to deism was based on the evidence and arguments he encountered. He chose to switch. Flew’s mind-change may be the most interesting deconversion-conversion story since the apostle Paul’s Damascus Road experience.

Reading his account (Flew, 2007) of his leaving atheism gives one the narrative of his move from theism (nominal Christianity), as he was raised in a Christian home and his father was a Methodist minister, to atheism. Then there was the striking move away from atheism, to God (which some see as deism). He made the mind-change to atheism about aged fifteen. Sixty-plus years later he made the mind-change away from atheism to the idea that there is a God—apparently the move was to deism, but possibly to theism.

What was the evidence and argument that drove Flew's mind-change? Basically it was the evidence of design. "Although I was once sharply critical of the argument to design, I have since come to see that, when correctly formulated, this argument constitutes a persuasive case for the existence of God (Flew, 2007, p. 95)." Design is evident most forcefully in the laws of nature, the anthropic principle, and the origin of life.

- First. "Who Wrote The Laws of Nature?" is the question asked by Flew. He writes: "The important point is not merely that there are regularities in nature, but that these regularities are mathematically precise, universal, and 'tied together.' Einstein spoke of them as 'reason incarnate' (Flew, 2007, p. 96)." How come? The answer scientists (Newton, Einstein, Heisenberg) have given was "The Mind of God." Flew expands the list of those seeing the Mind of God to include also earlier scientists like Planck, Schrodinger and Dirac, and current scientists like Davies, Barrow, Polkinghorne, Dyson, Collins, Gingerich, and Penrose.

"Those scientists who point to the Mind of God do not merely advance a series of arguments or a process of syllogistic reasoning. Rather, they propound a vision of reality that emerges from the conceptual heart of modern science and imposes itself on the rational mind. It is a vision that I personally find compelling and irrefutable (Flew, 2007, p. 112)."

- Second. Fine-tuning. The anthropic principle as popularized by the likes of John Leslie. ([see the discussion below](#)). This is a strong argument which stands relatively firm regardless of the rebuttals offered.
- Third. The Origin of Life! "The only satisfactory explanation for the origin of such 'end-directed, self-replicating life as we see on earth is an infinitely intelligent Mind (Flew, 2007, p. 132)." Flew is not alone in making such a mind-change. In fact, he points to the Nobel-prize winner, George Wald, who argued for the idea 'we choose to believe the impossible: that life arose spontaneously by chance...' and then later concluded he was wrong and there is a pre-existing mind—Mind first, then matter. Teleology, intelligent design, codes, agency, big-bang cosmology, are more than signals of transcendence, they are switches to reroute one from the train-wreck coming. ([See the discussion below on the Big gaps](#)).

The general opinion is that Flew ended up as a deist. I'm not so sure about this conclusion. His interaction with N. T. Wright opens a door to speculation. After digesting Wright's case for Christianity, Flew acknowledges it is "absolutely fresh." Further praise: "It is absolutely wonderful, absolutely radical, and very powerful (Flew, 2007, p. 213)." He is open to the possibility of Christian theism. He writes: "As I have said more than once, no other religion enjoys anything like the combination of a charismatic figure like Jesus, and a first-class intellectual like St. Paul. If you're wanting omnipotence to set up a religion, it seems to me that this is the one to beat (Flew, 2007, p. 157)!" This is very close to the prudent acceptance which functions as a possible proxy for belief, or first



step in belief ([see the discussion of Jordan below](#)). Quite possibly Flew's words indicate the step of prudent acceptance.

The essay has been divided logically into two major sections: Part A addressed the question regarding the constraints against belief—the “why” some people are channeled towards disbelief. In Part B the focus has shifted to disbeliefs, and beliefs, in the presence of favourable signals for belief. In particular, in Part B the focus is on the rationally preferential tilt—a tilt for some to theistic belief, and a tilt for others away from theistic belief. Choice!

### *George Price*

Price was a radical atheist for much of his early life. His biographer, Harman (2010), tracks his life brilliantly contextualized through a tapestry of Darwinism, the neo-Darwinian synthesis, and the subsequent Darwinian aspirations. A problem in Darwinism is the source of altruism. Where does altruism come from given such rudimentary principles of “survival of the fittest” and “the selfish gene?” How could altruism emerge from natural selection processes? The question is a dominant theme, and pursuit, in Price's life; and the pieces of evidence, mechanics, trajectories, trials, and story lines that Price places on the table are fascinating.

Most fascinating with respect to the current essay were the conversions to Christianity that Price experienced. They are fascinating because of: the diversity of the conversions, the underpinning abnormalities that Price exhibited, the lived-experience of the conversions, and the overall tragedy of his life up to, and including, his suicide. Harman (2010) sees two conversions; yet maybe there were three, or more. In Harman's view, the first conversion was under the influence of Price's focus on coincidences and patterns in his daily life<sup>1</sup>. Such a focus is in line with the Jungian notion of synchronicity—an acausal connecting principle. In effect, a number of circumstances, and events, come together as *coincidences* wherein patterns of meaning are assumed, seen, or imposed, such that inferences of a religious communiqué pushed Price to convert to Christianity. Price himself came to discount this conversion as sufficient. The second conversion was deeper, a “love” conversion; it involved sacrifice, love of Jesus, obedience to the lifestyle pattern of Jesus, and the practice of humility and mercy. Price saw this conversion as his real conversion; others might see it as a deeper conversion or commitment. Now his lifestyle was characterized by giving all. He opened his meager living arrangements to a motley assortment of those in need. He gave his possessions, apparently all of them, to those in need. He gave his sparse monetary resources to those in need. He later came to see that all his self sacrifices seemed to benefit no one. Perhaps a third conversion experience was in formulation here; a deeper understanding of the human plight.

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<sup>1</sup> This patternicity would be typically attributed to a “Hyperactive Agency Detection Device” (HADD) in some psychological approaches. See the discussion [below](#).

Equally fascinating was the tragedy in Price's life, tragedy ending in suicide. There were the peculiarities in his character (i.e., Harman wonders if he fell along the Autism spectrum disorder), the commitment problems (e.g., with family, employers, career paths, research foci, and academic pursuits), the medical problems (e.g., thyroid), the psychological problems (depression, delusions? cognitive fog), and the suicidal ideation (at various points in time), which coloured his subsequent conversions in dark tones. Perhaps most troubling was the suicidal ideation set in motion at earlier life points.

With respect to the suicidal ideation, Harman noted that Price at several points had entertained suicide. Harman writes: "The UCL appointment was flattering but wouldn't pay the bills. Unless something extraordinary happened he planned to kill himself, he wrote to Annamarie, 'since it isn't worth the bother of working just to stay alive' (2010, p. 211)." At another point in the midst of interesting research issues, support from authorities in his field, and a passion to understand the mystery of family, one finds suicide is on the table. "For George, meanwhile, little had changed. 'I continue to have the plan of limiting my life span to about 50 years,' he wrote to Tatiana (Harman, 2010, p. 218)." In Harman's attempts to understand the actual suicide he looks to multiple causal influences: Price's constitution, his thyroid problems when not medicated, his depression, his detachment from reality, an unrequited love, a broken heart, and even a sense of failure given his altruistic preoccupation and efforts. That suicidal ideation sets in motion a potentially deadly course of action is understandable.

So Price is a strange convert. Bizarre behaviours are not unheard of amongst Christian converts. One need only think of Origen, St. Francis, Luther, John the Baptist, the third and fourth century monk Anthony and the subsequent monastics, Anabaptists, Quakers, and so on. Bruised reeds and smoking flax are not outside the attention and reach of God. Price's conversion is enigmatic and problematic; yet his conversion can be encouraging for Christians of varying psychological and scientific stripes.

These prodigals leaving atheism can follow a variety of channels—guided by emotional, existential, circumstantial, intuitional, reasonable, prudential, and passion river banks. They flow to the sea! Such guidance systems and motivators are eye-opening. The range of converts is typical of a diverse group, a motley assortment, the Jedermann.

## Basicity As Evidential (The Belief-Choice is Natural)

### Plantinga –On Christian Warrant (2000/2011)

Plantinga (2000) argues that belief in God is a basic belief, much like beliefs that emerge from perception, memory, and perhaps even logic. In fact, it is a properly basic belief in that it does not require an argument for its justification (see Clark's, 1990, discussion in Chapter four of his book where he draws upon Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and Calvin in making the case). The

*sensus divinitatis* is a form of perception, or faculty of perception. When we have properly functioning architecture—cognitive architecture—the beliefs are generally reliable, and valid, much like memories or perceptions are generally reliable and valid. Sometimes there are glitches, but these do not dissuade sensible people from holding to knowledge-points emerging from perception and memory. Sometimes there is dysfunction of the basic architecture, whether from brain damage, sin, or abuse. Sometimes there is dysfunction of the architecture due to culture, learning, constraints, desires, or will.

Reading Plantinga (1983, 2000, 2011) can be an edifying experience, for committed Christians, for doubters, for those curious about Christian faith, and for those with a mere philosophical bent. His book on “Warranted Christian Belief” is a book easily read reflectively cover to cover. It is a book easily reread at various points of interest. It is a book easily read again in the context of problems raised by the intelligentsia. His most recent book (2011) continues the course of edifying the Christian reader.

#### Plantinga –On Philosophical Warrant (1993)

Why do we at times fail to self-regulate our thinking, and behaviours, in a manner that leads to good ends? Two answers offered at this point are: (1) bad beliefs (i.e., beliefs that lack adequate warrant) which then would logically lead to “loose ends,” and (2) bad architecture (i.e., a defective neuro/cognitive infrastructure generating brains/minds that are not functioning properly), which in turn leads to faulty beliefs. This philosophical position rooted in Plantinga (1993a, 1993b) serves as a foundation for addressing the “beliefs” question here.

Plantinga’s philosophical position addresses, on the one hand, the notion of “warrant” (the support for a particular belief, and one might add “the consequent act”). On the other hand, it also addresses the notion of “proper function” (assuming the underlying architecture which supports warrant—brain, and perhaps, mind and cognition—is working according to a design that accords with access to knowledge and truth). Plantinga (1993b) presents his basic claim: “As I see it, a belief has warrant if it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no malfunctioning) in a cognitive environment congenial for those faculties, according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth (p. ix).” In addition to a “presupposition of reliability” (Plantinga, 1993a, p. 214), there are qualifiers, or caveats, such that there is a need to acknowledge (1) co-existing plans (what he terms the design plan versus the max plan), (2) by-products, (3) functional multiplicity (4) purpose versus design, and (5) “trade-offs and compromises” (See Plantinga, 1993b, p. 21-40) as relevant factors impacting belief.

*Co-existing Plans.* Regarding co-existing plans (i.e., the design plan versus the max plan), essentially the design plan shows teleological functionality (like health-generating and restorative responses under “some conditions,” or simply the construction of an identity.). As I understand it, a design plan can show short-term and long term functions, as well as allowance for developmental progression over time. These have the functional appearance of design (whether by God, evolution, or both) and a teleological sophistication, or clearly apparent purpose. With respect to beliefs it is beneficial to believe there is a two-ton vehicle approaching you at quite a speed when you plan to cross the street. It is beneficial to believe in the laws of logic. It is beneficial to believe that some authorities are trustworthy, and some are not. It is beneficial to believe that reasoning, argument, evidence and experimentation are likely more

reliable sources of good information than reading the entrails of elephants. It is beneficial to construct an identity of athlete, scholar, friend, and even criminal. Such teleological purpose could be limited to survival values only, but others likely see knowledge, wisdom, truth, communion, change, and growth, as purposively tied to such valuable design plans.

The max plan is characterized more by the unforeseen—things like a 300-foot fall, or being run over by a steamroller, as Plantinga points out. The design plan should lead to appropriate self-regulation for the purpose of health, growth, and truth. The max plan seems to be tied to knowledge, in a sense, in that understanding the intricacies and workings of nature and natural laws, independent of teleology, seems to be the focus.

When the architecture functions improperly, perhaps due to a damaged brain, or the architecture functions properly but with design limitations or glitches, it is reasonable to expect misperceptions and/or faulty cognitive constructs. The warrant to believe those faulty perceptions and cognitive constructs is suspect since the source (the dysfunctional architecture) is unreliable; thus the belief is suspect or faulty. The architecture is not competent for supporting warrant given the damage or limitations. Faulty perceptions and cognitions—generating faulty beliefs—easily lead to faulty self-regulation.

*By-products.* Limitations in thinking can limit subsequent beliefs. Limitations in beliefs can limit self-regulatory behaviour. In addition to limitations related to faults (thinking, beliefs, or architecture) there may be unintended consequences and by-products of a properly functioning system. Plantinga refers to the sound of the beating heart being an unintended by-product of the beating heart, and the design plan of the beating heart. It is more accidental than intentional. The sound is not considered to be functional. However, the sound would acquire functional significance when the medical profession learns to listen closely, and wisely. This is a positive by-product! We close our eyes when resting and while distracted by the sound of the beating heart we miss the lion approaching. A negative by-product!

In the cognitive domain, a design plan for paired-associate learning can be generally positive, but superstitious learning can creep in as an unintended, and unwanted, by-product. Other factors which could lead to unintended by-products might be fatigue, stress, hormonal rhythms, illness, emergent activity-switching, and so on. These may be correlates of proper function, but it is not the function one intends with respect to attaining truth, or proper ends.

Applied to failures to stop smoking, for example, such sources of failure can be viewed as a by-product of a failure to self-correct early in the learning sequence, when self-correction is pitted against weak alternative pressures. This is a negative consequence of a positive learning sequence. A by-product in believing one can choose to smoke is belief one can choose to not smoke. But the smoker has missed the importance of the changing caliber of choice over time.

*Functional Multiplicity.* The third scenario, functional multiplicity, exists when the source may be capable of functioning properly, but does not function in a particular way, due to multiple-functionality in the design plan. The ear, for example, has a function of serving as a mechanism for mediating sensory information. But it also has a function for orientation, and another function related to balance.

With respect to failures to stop smoking, functional multiplicity would be operative in lung functions (intake of air, and filtration of ambient air particles like nicotine). The intake of nicotine was not part of the design plan but acquires “value.” This functional diversity facilitates

addiction. This functional diversity is conducive to supporting a belief in some regarding the merits of smoking. Though for others, perhaps most, this belief would be viewed as a faulty belief.

*Quasi-purposed Designs.* The fourth scenario is purpose versus design. One example Plantinga uses is the refrigerator operating with a design that cools to 70° Fahrenheit. It functions according to its design, but the purpose was to get this storage container operating at a much lower temperature. Thus a design can be lacking in terms of its higher purpose, but still be adequate in terms of its design elements. Design can be considered bad design when purpose is factored in. With respect to smoking, the design intent of creating a “smoking rebel” might be adequate in terms of design, but we seem to be dealing with bad design when a healthy purpose is factored into the equation. Again, a negative consequence of a positive attribute is seen. Moreover, the bad design seems to equate to bad belief.

*Glitches.* The fifth scenario involves glitches, trade-offs and compromises. The term “glitch” is used here, for the sake of simplicity, though Plantinga uses a more sophisticated approach to the problem addressing philosophical Gettier problems (Plantinga, 1993b, p. 31-37). The “glitches” involve things that are not accessible to the thinker (as a result of something in the environment, or “cognitive equipment”) and, thus, preclude warrant.

Then there are the second-level belief forming mechanisms like inference and credulity. With respect to credulity Plantinga writes: “...you will have warrant for a belief that you acquire by way of testimony only if the person from whom you acquire the belief himself has warrant for it” (1993b, p. 37).

Regarding trade-offs and compromises consider, as Plantinga does, the design of a car. A design can be lacking in terms of optimal performance, but in the context of multi-dimensional thinking, the lack is understandable. For example, one could design a car to go much faster, and accelerate much more quickly, but this competes with design variables aiming for fuel economy, or for safety, or for durability.

With respect to failures to stop smoking, such failure mechanisms can be viewed much like an engineering tradeoff. In order to ensure that good learning is firmly entrenched there may be times when one must allow for bad learning to be firmly entrenched as well—a tradeoff. In order to gain in important epistemic areas (e.g., knowledge, creativity, agency, freedom, truth), failures are permissible in other areas (health, economics, social circles)—tradeoffs much like in the auto engineering perspective.

While there are minor cognitive failings that are common knowledge (e.g., a stick looks bent in the water, or there seems to be an oasis in the dry, desert distance, or a dry road ahead looks wet, or the fake fruit looks real, as does the hologram, and so on) these are minor tradeoffs. A broad multi-dimensional perspective comes into play where trade-offs make sense to optimize multiple dimensions rather than maximize one dimension. Cognitively, a designer “...would want to design a system that worked well (that is, produced true beliefs) over as large a proportion as possible of the situations in which owners will find themselves, consistent with satisfying those other constraints.... In this way you end up with a system that works well in the vast majority of circumstances; but, in a few circumstances it produces a false belief. (Of course, you add the important feature of learning from experience in order to mitigate the doleful effects

of the compromises: after a couple of trials you no longer believe the road is wet, that there is an oasis just a mile away, that the stick is bent, or what Paul, that habitual deceiver, says; you learn to be on the lookout for fake fruit and holograms (Plantinga, 1993b, p.39).” In essence, there is an optimal design, with the learning option to mitigate the limitations due to tradeoffs and compromises. One can learn to attain better self-regulation.

If one has learned to smoke, or learned to adopt a smoking orientation, is this an example of faulty beliefs or improper function? Yes. To believe that smoking is health-supportive (calming, a weight control mechanism, etc.), is psychologically image-enhancing (artist, rebel, etc.), or is socially accommodating (peer support, social lubricant, etc.) could be considered as beliefs without adequate warrant or full warrant. Such beliefs are like the “bent stick in the water illusion,” or the “fake fruit looks real.” These beliefs are like illusory beliefs, rationalized beliefs, rather than warranted beliefs. Such beliefs could be driven by “glitches,” “functional multiplicity,” “unintended by-products,” “co-existing design plans,” “quasi-purposed designs,” “glitches,” or “minor cognitive failings.” Such beliefs could also be driven by a deficient architecture lacking proper function, or mature function. Hormones, circadian rhythms, allergens, toxins, diet, could affect proper function. Developmental immaturity, faulty cognitive constructions, superstitions, habits, learning styles, personality, gullibility, also could affect proper function. Something is wrong with the beliefs.

This philosophical foundation for belief, and the warrant for holding a particular belief to be true, serves as a reference point for consideration of psychological models of stupidity, foolishness, failure, and so on. This is particularly the case with respect to regulating thinking and behaviour. As a checklist for considering explanations of faulty beliefs, behaviour and self-management the following questions can be asked related to (1) proper function and (2) aberrations:

- Are cognitive faculties functioning properly?
  - Intrinsically (neurologically, physiologically, ...)?
  - In their proper optimal environment (in view of constraints like circadian rhythms, hormones, emotional stability, ...)?
  - In line with their design plan?
  - At a mature developmental level?
  - At an optimal level?
  - Critically (with mechanisms in place for protection from propensities to deception)?
  - Reasonably (using rules of logic, empirical data, experimentation, testing, reflection, sensitive to logical fallacies ...)?
  - Given second-level belief forming limitations (e.g., inference, credulity, authorities, and so on)?
- Are there by-product problems
  - Is functional multiplicity a diversion?
  - Are there unintended consequences (tangential to the design plan) that lead to problems?
  - Are there glitches (missing information, or cognitive misfires)?
  - Are there tradeoffs and compromises involved (e.g., bent-stick-blindness)?

This checklist provides direction for considering problems related to faulty beliefs. Clearly there are many sources (philosophically) of problematic beliefs, problematic thinking, and, thus, problem behaviour. Some sources, though, require psychological consideration as opposed to philosophical consideration.

Even a prominent atheist like Nagel can see merit in Plantinga's case<sup>1</sup>. Nagel writes as follows:

*Most people are believers or nonbelievers in the existence of God not as a result of argument, but in a much more basic way. They either see or experience God's presence in the world and in their lives or they don't. If God exists, then the capacity to see God's will expressed in the world is one of the forms of perception he has given us, the sensus divinitatis. If God does not exist, then it is a form of illusion. As Alvin Plantinga has argued – persuasively, in my view -- the justification for such religious belief is inseparable from its truth, just as is the case with sensory perception. We can't construct a justification by starting from purely subjective data and inferring that God provides the only possible explanation of those data, any more than we can prove the existence of the physical world that way. But that doesn't show that either perceptual or religious beliefs are unwarranted. Whether they are depends on whether they are delivered by reliable human faculties.*

*If one believes in God already, that belief will naturally form a part of the way one understands other things one knows about the world. If on the other hand one doesn't regard the existence of God as a serious possibility, it will not be included among the resources that could conceivably be used to make sense of anything else. To someone for whom the possibility of an interventionist god is simply ruled out in advance, and problems in working out a purely mechanistic account of the evolution of life are nothing but intellectual challenges to evolutionary theorists to develop the theory further. There is no available alternative to an explanation in terms of chemistry and physics. To a believing Christian, on the other hand, the question is naturally open. After all, if God is responsible for the character of the world, including our existence, this responsibility might have been exercised only by establishing the eternal laws of physics, or it might have been exercised more specifically, by ordaining further principles, processes, or events not determined by the laws of physics.*

--Thomas Nagel (2005) "Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament" (pages 23-24) downloaded from: <http://records.viu.ca/www/ipp/pdf/2.pdf>

Plantinga –Class Notes “Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments”

Class Notes can be found here: <http://philofreligion.homestead.com/files/theisticarguments.html>

The arguments can also be found as an appendix in Baker (2007). The preamble in the Appendix also contains a discussion on what constitutes a good argument, and addresses the

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<sup>1</sup> Although see Nagel's reworking and revision in 2010 [addressed below](#) where he omits reference to Plantinga.

question “what are these arguments good for?” Plantinga, himself, does not hold that such theistic arguments are needed for justification or rationality. So what are they good for? Four things:

- “First, they can move someone closer to theism – by showing, for example, that theism is a legitimate intellectual option.”
- “Second, they reveal interesting and important connections between various elements of a theist’s set of beliefs.”
- “Third, the arguments can strengthen and confirm theistic belief.”
- “Finally, and connected with the last, these arguments can increase the warrant of theistic belief (Plantinga, 2007, p. 209).”

It is interesting that Plantinga can place a list of additional points on the table for consideration, points that are rough, uncrafted, and potentially flawed. Plantinga, himself, says: “I hasten to add that the arguments as stated in the notes aren’t really good arguments; they are merely argument sketches, or maybe only pointers to good arguments. They await that loving development to become good arguments (Plantinga, 2007, p. 203).” Many will find them interesting and valuable. Like Pascal’s *Pensees*, even though rough, and fragmented, the thoughts are worth consideration. Such efforts might encourage others to get some points out there as well.

For now, just listing the arguments offers a bit of a tilt towards theism. Reading Plantinga’s brief elaboration of the topic leads to a further tilt. Exploring the arguments in depth holds promise for tipping over, right over. The list follows:

#### Ontological/Metaphysical Arguments

- “The Argument from Intentionality (or Aboutness)”
- “The Argument from Collections”
- “The Argument from (Natural) Numbers”
- “The Argument from Counterfactuals”
- “The Argument from Physical Constants”
- “The Naive Teleological Argument”
- “Tony Kenny’s Style of Teleological Argument”
- “The Ontological Argument”
- “Another Argument ...Why is there anything at all?”

#### Epistemological Arguments

- “The Argument from Positive Epistemic Status”
- “The Argument from the Confluence of Proper Function and Reliability”
- “The Argument from Simplicity”
- “The Argument from Induction”
- “The Putnamian Argument (the Argument from the Rejection of Global Skepticism)”
- “The Argument from Reference”
- “The Kripke-Wittgenstein Argument from Plus and Quus”
- “The General Argument from Intuition

#### Moral Arguments

- “Bob Adams’s favoured version”



- “George Mavrodes argument...”
- A.E. Taylor’s arguments...”
- “Clem Dore’s (and Sidgwick’s) Kantian Argument...”
- “Hastings Rashdall...”
- “The Argument from Evil”

#### Other Arguments

- “The Argument from Colors and Flavors”
- “The Argument from Love”
- “The Mozart Argument”
- “The Argument from Play and Enjoyment”
- “Arguments from Providence and Miracles”
- “C.S. Lewis’s Argument from Nostalgia”
- “The Argument from the Meaning of Life”
- “The Argument from (A) to (Y)”

#### Properly Basic Belief in God is Not A Limitation

Plantinga (1983) has argued that properly basic belief in God is not to be dismissed because of the following criticisms: (1) it opens the door to all kinds of weird beliefs, (2) it has no grounding, (3) it is not open to argument, or (4) it is simply fideism. He addresses all of these objections. Properly basic belief in God is contextual, is grounded, is open to arguments, and is not fideism. His summary statement reads as follows:

“I have argued that the evidentialist objection to theistic belief is rooted in classical foundationalism; the same can be said for the Thomistic conception of faith and reason. Classical foundationalism is attractive and seductive; in the final analysis, however, it turns out to be both false and self-referentially incoherent. Furthermore, the Reformed objection to natural theology, unformed and inchoate as it is, may best be seen as a rejection of classical foundationalism. As the Reformed thinker sees things, being self-evident, or incorrigible, or evident to the senses is not a necessary condition of proper basicity. He goes on to add that belief in God is properly basic. He is not thereby committed to the idea that just any or nearly any belief is properly basic, even if he lacks a criterion for proper basicity. Nor is he committed to the view that argument is irrelevant to belief in God if such belief is properly basic. Furthermore, belief in God, like other properly basic beliefs, is not groundless or arbitrary; it is grounded in justification-conferring conditions. Finally, the Reformed view that belief in God is properly basic is not felicitously thought of as a version of fideism (1983, p. 90-91).”

#### Reid—On Common Sense

Common sense is properly basic. It is in the category of first principles. Reid (1818/2011) makes such a case in his critique of Descartes, Locke, and Hume. So what are some of the properly basic beliefs that characterize basicity, and underpin our constructed beliefs, our knowledge, our hopes, and our faith?

*That we believe we exist is properly basic.*

One doesn't need the arguments of Descartes to get to this belief. Both the "I think" and the "I am" are properly basic beliefs.

*Consciousness is properly basic.*

As a challenge to Descartes, Reid asks: "...why did he not prove the existence of his thought? (p.19)." Why, indeed? Well, "Consciousness vouches that. But who is voucher for consciousness? Can any man prove that his consciousness may not deceive him? No man can: nor can we give a better reason for trusting to it, than that every man, while his mind is sound, is determined, by the constitution of his nature, to give implicit belief to it, and to laugh at, or pity, the man who doubts its testimony. And is not every man, in his wits, as much determined to take his existence upon trust as his consciousness (p. 19)?"

*Sensation, memory and imagination are properly basic functions or faculties.*

"Why sensation should compel our belief of the present existence of the thing, memory a belief of its past existence, and imagination no belief at all, I believe no philosopher can give a shadow of reason, but that such is the nature of these operations: They are all simple and original, and therefore inexplicable acts of the mind (p. 30)."

As these are properly basic, they provide valid and reliable information when functioning properly. Yes, there are caveats that come into play as Plantinga has noted. There is a need for analysis, critique, awareness of glitches, design plans, and so on.

*Principles of common sense are properly basic*

"If there are certain principles, as I think there are, which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe, and which we are under a necessity to take for granted in the common concerns of life, without being able to give a reason for them; these are what we call the principles of common sense; and what is manifestly contrary to them, is what we call absurd (Reid, 1818/2011, p.35)."

"What shall we say then? Either those inferences which we draw from our sensations, namely, the existence of a mind, and of powers or faculties belonging to it, are prejudices of philosophy or education, mere fictions of the mind, which a wise man should throw off as he does the belief in fairies; or they are judgments of nature, judgments not got by comparing ideas, and perceiving agreements and disagreements, but immediately inspired by our constitution (Reid, 1818/2011, p.39)."

*Common language is properly basic.*

That aspect of language which is basic to humans Reid calls "natural language." What he terms "artificial language" is more like the superstructure that a culture builds on top of the natural language. Reid seems to foreshadow Chomsky's distinction between deep structure which is common to all languages, and surface structure, which are reflected in the culturally diverse languages built by a culture over an extended time period.

*Holding to the regularity of nature is properly basic.*

Belief in the regularity of nature is basic, and a challenge to Hume's contention that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect. One is quite convinced there is a connection between cause and effect because it is a properly basic belief. As Reid phrases it: "The wise Author of our nature intended, that a great and necessary part of our knowledge should be derived from experience, before we are capable of reasoning, and he provided means perfectly adequate to this intention. For, first, He governs nature by fixed laws, so that we find innumerable connections of things which continue from age to age. Without this stability of the course of nature, there could be no experience; or, it would be a false guide, and lead us into error and mischief. ...Secondly, He hath implanted in human minds an original principle by which we believe and expect the continuance of those connections which we have observed in time past (p.199-200)."

*It is properly basic that we live by faith.*

Yes, the just shall live by faith. What Reid adds is equally interesting: "the unjust live by faith as well" (Reid, 1818/2011, p. v). Beliefs are foundational. And the foundations of many beliefs are found in common sense, and basicity.

*It is properly basic to hold that our sense data corresponds to reality, generally.*

This may not be the espoused belief of many, particularly those who limit access to that which is internal (in the mind); but it is the belief-in-use for just about everyone in the realm of sanity, or bordering on sanity. Why? It is because such a belief is properly basic.

*The basicity of acquiring information from fellow-creatures is principled.*

The first principle is that our fellow-creatures (and we, ourselves) have a *propensity to truth-telling*. For Reid: "This principle has a powerful operation, even in the greatest liars; for, where they lie once, they speak truth a hundred times. Truth is always uppermost, and is the natural issue of the mind. It requires no art or training, no inducement or temptation, but only that we yield to a natural impulse (p.196)." It is basic. It is an original principle. Lying is not natural. It does violence to our nature.

The second principle is that our fellow-creatures (and we, ourselves) have a *propensity towards believing others*, an acceptance of authorities—the *principle of credulity*. Reid (1818/2011) notes: "It is unlimited in children, until they meet with instances of deceit and falsehood: and it retains a very considerable degree of strength through life (p.197)."

An extended quote from Reid elaborating on these two principles is profitable here:

"If nature had left the mind of the speaker *in equilibrio*, without any inclination to the side of truth more than to that of falsehood; children would lie as often as they speak the truth, until reason was so far ripened, as to suggest the imprudence of lying or conscience, as to suggest its immorality. And, if nature had left the mind of the hearer *in equilibrio*, without any inclination to the side of belief more than to that of disbelief, we should take no man's word until we had positive evidence that he spoke the truth. His testimony would, in this case, have no more authority than his dreams; which may

be true or false, but no man is disposed to believe them, on this account, that they were dreamed. It is evident that, in the matter of testimony, the balance of human judgment is by nature inclined to the side of belief; and turns to that side of itself, when there is nothing put into the opposite scale. If it was not so, no proposition that is uttered in discourse would be believed, until it was examined and tried by reason; and most men would be unable to find reasons for believing the thousandth part of what is told them. Such distrust and incredulity would deprive us of the greatest benefits of society, and place us in a worse condition than that of savages (Reid, 1818/2011, p. 197).”

Basicity—properly basic beliefs, and properly basic faculties—tilts one towards belief. And given the basicity of belief in God in secular thought (McCauley, 2011) and Christian thought (Clark, 1990; Plantinga, 2000), the tilt towards theism would have a relatively firm ontological footing.

## On Problematic Evidentiary Gaps (The Belief-Choice is Preeminent)

Opting for consideration of “the gaps” as a force towards theistic understanding, as a force second only to basicity was a first-rate choice. Why? Clearly, some gaps are “of God.” This notion was triggered by watching the Craig/Shook debate where Shook makes the claim that there are no adequate bridges from the natural to the supernatural. Thinking of the issue in terms of “bridges” is an interesting way to frame the problem of arguing a case for the supernatural aspect. Shook worked from the base-point of naturalism and was exploring the hypothesized bridges to the supernatural. One can appreciate the difficulty of forming a bridge from the natural to the supernatural. This is especially so if the supernatural is precluded on principle—the scientific, methodological principle.

But Shook has the problem backwards. Reframing this bridging issue—that is, considering the possibility of working from the supernatural to the natural, rather than from the natural to the supernatural—strikes one as conceivable, reasonable, workable, commendable, more informative, and correct. For some gaps the natural is not the reasonable starting point. In effect, there are three major gaps that place one at the level of the supernatural as the starting point: (1) the something from nothing gap, (2) the life from nonlife gap, and (3) the complex life from simple life gap. These gaps point to a positive case to be made from the “gaps.” Hence, this series of gaps, thus reframed, contributes to understanding theistic misunderstanding as disordered learning.

### The Three Major Gaps

On bridges to the supernatural! Shook contended that the bridges from the natural to the supernatural do not appear adequate. However, considering an alternative explanation or alternative framing we see we don’t need these bridges. We are already there—there at the supernatural as the starting point. Shook has it backwards. Upon reflection on the gaps one sees the three big gaps are consistent with this reframing.

Gap #1—*The something from nothing gap*. The fact that we are at a point (or place) in the universe where something exists, that is, that something has come from nothing is, in fact, placing us in a privileged location, a supernatural location as the starting point.

Although Shook may bemoan the difficulty of building a bridge from the natural to the supernatural, his real problem is the opposite. People like Shook actually may be trying to covertly build bridges from this location—from the supernatural to the natural. They attempt this via hypotheses like the universe comes from nothing (Krauss, 2012), or the universe comes about via laws like gravity (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010). Others see the only viable alternative to the supernatural in the multiverse hypotheses. These hypotheticals are advanced now since earlier bridges of an eternal universe, or steady-state theory, failed.

In effect, Gap#1 assumes that the supernatural precedes the natural—there is a move from nothing to something (i.e., the natural). Yes, there are some who try to argue this can be cast as something natural itself via laws like gravity (cf. Hawking and Mlodinow, as in “The Grand Design”) or a multiverse<sup>1</sup>. However, it just seems clear—logical, reasonable and rational—that something precedes the natural, and that would be the supernatural. The supernatural is the starting point. The bridge is to the natural.

Gap #2-- *The life from nonlife gap*. The fact that a conglomeration of molecules bouncing around randomly, have transformed, “miraculously,” into life indicates we are already starting at the supernatural stage. There is no natural mechanism to explain this bridging from bouncing bits (atom and molecules) to bits that bite; that is, simple life forms.

One might find naturalists like Hoyle and Crick (or even Dawkins) looking to seeding-of-life from outer space to explain it. That’s a stretch, and solves nothing. Is it not arguable that they are trying to bridge to the natural from the supernatural. There is surely a case for this thesis. The bridging is backwards. The gap between the particles and life leaves one at the doorstep of the supernatural as the starting point<sup>2</sup>.

Gap #3-- *The complex life from simple life gap*. The fact that primitive unicellular life forms have transformed into about 30 different body plans (and millions of subsequent species) without a credible natural mechanism indicates we are already at the supernatural. The focus on evolution, particularly natural selection of random mutations, as the mechanism is scientifically questionable. Behe (2007) makes the case that natural selection can only get one a few steps

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<sup>1</sup> John Lennox does an good job of deconstructing both claims—see (1) Lennox (2009), *God’s Undertaker*. Oxford: Lion, and (2) Lennox (2011), *God and Stephen Hawking*. Oxford: Lion.

<sup>2</sup> See Stephen Meyer, 2009, *Signature in the Cell*. New York: HarperOne.

along the path. Later he notes most evolutionary changes are loss of function mutations (Behe, 2010). And even these steps can be suspect.

Wallace, the co-discoverer of natural selection, holds to intelligent evolution (see Flannery, M. H. (2008). *Alfred Russell Wallace's Theory of Intelligent Evolution*. Riesel, TX: Erasmus Press.) Furthermore, natural selection, as the evolutionary mechanism, seems disaster-prone even for those inside the field. Lennox (2011b) notes criticisms by Fodor, Provine, Reid, and others. Consider his comment and quote regarding William Provine: "Biologist William Provine, in a remarkable afterword published in a new edition of a classic work, explains that his views have 'changed dramatically': 'Natural selection does not act on anything, nor does it select (for, or against) force, maximize, create, modify, shape, operate, drive, favour, maintain, push, or adjust. Natural selection does nothing. Natural selection as a force belongs in the insubstantial category already populated by the Necker/Stahl phlogiston or Newton's ether ... Having natural selection select is nifty because it excuses the necessity of talking about the actual causation of natural selection. Such talk was excusable for Darwin, but inexcusable for Darwinists now. Creationists have discovered our empty natural selection language, and the actions of natural selection make huge vulnerable targets (p. 180-181).'"

The entire notion of natural selection, as a mechanism, is a current issue in the philosophy of science (Havstad, 2012). "The argument is that, if the description of a mechanism purporting to explain a particular phenomenon covers a host of other processes, then the account is insufficient as an explanation of the particular phenomenon of interest. Barros's [2008] mechanistic account of natural selection in general does not pick natural selection out from among other selection-type processes, and thus it is insufficient as an explanation of the particular phenomenon of adaptation by natural selection....This is not a temporary but instead a persistent problem for natural selection (p. 519-520)." While a subtle problem, and perhaps philosophically esoteric, it adds to challenges that arise with respect to natural selection as something that does something (see Provine in the previous paragraph; Behe, 2007, 2010; and Mazur, 2009).

The gap between simple life and the complexity of the human being, with reason, mind, consciousness, morality, ... is monumentally striking. Again, the bridge is from the supernatural as the starting point.

The Intelligent Design group ought to have a place at the table arguing that this bridging from the supernatural position to the natural position (i.e., the naturalist's position as a stand-alone) doesn't work.

There are some atheists who argue for a place for ID. See the philosopher Bradley Monton (2009) "Seeking God in Science, An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design," Broadview Press. Also, atheist Thomas Nagel has (1) given a pitch for Stephen Myer's (2009) very, very, compelling book "Signature in the Cell" HarperOne, ... a nice nod as book of the year, and (2) acknowledged Plantinga's case for basicity (see comments above from Nagel). Moreover, Nagel's (2012) recent reflections are moving to a prior place for mind, a position very close to assigning a starting point at the supernatural.

So again, it is arguable that Shook has it totally backwards. The real problem is not that it is difficult to make a bridge from the natural to the supernatural; rather, the real problem is that the bridges from the supernatural to naturalism are ignored or denied. Yet, the bridges from the supernatural to the natural do bear the load. It is just that the naturalists deny the bridges exist once traversed. In fact, one can argue that abandoning these bridges, as two-way streets, is a move to the irrational, when severed from their supernatural base. Along such lines, Plantinga has argued quite forcefully that naturalism is irrational. See his *Warrant and Proper Function* (1993) Oxford University Press, particularly chapter 12.

### The Minor Gaps

When the charge “god of the gaps” is espoused, it is used as: (1) a pejorative, to silence an adversary, (2) a charge, to reveal an advocate as a science stopper, or (3) a revelation, that the one making the charge is quite shallow. In fact, the god-of-the-gaps shibboleth is a communication stopper more so than a science stopper. Putting someone into the god-of-the-gaps crowd is a little like raising the spectre of fairies, spaghetti monsters, and Santa Claus. It’s a type of blindness—assumed for one side, actual for the other side. More often than not the charge “god of the gaps” is put forth as a red herring, a distracter.

So what are some of the minor gaps? There are *overt* and *covert* gaps. At an *overt* level, one way to categorize the minor gaps is by reference to earlier theological blunders such as primitives attributing to a deity the cause of thunder, or the cause of hail, or the cause of the volcano spewing lava. Such minor overt gaps, progressively shifted to indirect causation, which purportedly attributes to God’s agency anything unknown, or not-yet known. However, the final step is to assume that all gaps (where the purported causal attribution is to God) will eventually be explained as due to natural causes just as the earlier blunders were eventually understood. This seems to be in the mind of some who use the charge “god-of-the-gaps” to diffuse a theist’s claims for a God who intervenes. Yet all things considered, such a charge has many of the adornments of a straw man.

At a *covert level* the analysis is more nuanced. A source of misunderstanding here is possibly due to conflation of efficient cause and formal cause. While a primitive analysis might default to god-as-efficient-cause (for thunder or hail or volcanoes) the more appropriate analysis would be to see God as formal cause, and more broadly as final cause. He is not the efficient cause slinging hail or lava, but He is the formal cause—this is His creation, following His laws, unfolding according to His plans. Such gaps then, at the deeper *covert level*, would function to start conversations, induce research, formulate theories, and develop understanding and wisdom. Such gaps do not stop understanding.

For the Christian, God is the God of the gaps ...and the non-gaps. Scholars like Lennox (2011b), for example, see this quite clearly.

*Kaita—On “God-of-the gaps” Arguments*

Kaita (2007) has written on the gaps issue from a Christian scholarship position. He addresses the minor gaps in a reasonable fashion. He, himself, approaches the issue as a scientist. He is the Principal Research Physicist in the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory at Princeton University. He has hundreds of publications in nuclear and plasma physics. His take on “god of the gaps” thinking is insightful and informative.

As an example of the god-of-the-gaps claim consider the following: “...In times past, many people thought that angels moved the planets along their orbits. Now we know that gravity is responsible, so the realm of influence for such beings is diminished. Eventually, their need disappears altogether, and so would our belief in them (p. 138).”

“The position so described is actually one of faith, and it commonly goes by the name of ‘naturalism’. Its tenet is that the supernatural does not exist, so scientific evidence for it is simply not possible (p.138).”

“Christians should not be so quick to deny the possibility that other ‘gaps’ are not voids in our knowledge. I am clearly not advocating, especially as a scientist, the idea of ascribing anything we do not easily understand to a supernatural agent. However, the gaps we perceive could be indicators of profound truths about God, as manifest in the physical world that he created. While methodological naturalism is a good starting assumption for scientific research, adhering to it at all costs may very well blind us to those truths (p.143).”

Consider the following: Many Christians “...fear being labeled as believers in a ‘God of the gaps’ (p.138).” This is true when the charge is a pejorative term. But the gaps are not to be feared. For those willing to peer more deeply there can be great rewards, even rewards revealing God. If the gaps are not to be feared, neither are those who make the charge.

#### *Lennox—On “God-of-the gaps” Arguments*

Lennox (2009) is a mathematician and one who does not fear the gaps. He notes that there are “...relatively few ‘good gaps’ that do not yield, and indeed become increasingly opaque, to any purely naturalistic methodology. But they are of great importance as we can see by listing what they are: the origin of the universe, its rational intelligibility, its fine-tuning, the origin of life, the origin of consciousness, the origin of rationality, and the concept of truth, the origins of morality and spirituality (p.190).” Indeed! Here Lennox goes beyond the Three Big Gaps (i.e., something from nothing, life from nonlife, and complex life from simple life) listed earlier.

Further Lennox (2011b) writes: “As a scientist I am sensitive to the danger of falling into a ‘God of the gaps’ mentality and running the risk of intellectual laziness. For that reason I hasten to say that I do not find the main evidence for God’s activity in the current gaps in the scientific picture. I see evidence of God everywhere in the science we do know—indeed, I see it in the very fact that we can do science. ...God is the God of the whole show (p. 165).” So, God is in the gaps and the non-gaps; He is behind the natural processes and the special acts; He underpins mathematical intelligibility, boundary conditions, fine-tuning, natural laws, constants, and more.

Lennox (2011b) devotes an Appendix to the issue of the God of the Gaps. He turns the tables. “Evolution is a notorious gap filler. ...I suspect that belief in an evolution of the gaps is



probably more widespread than belief in a God of the gaps, since concentration on the latter allows the former to thrive undetected (p. 183).”

There is the notion that “gaps” are really a function of one’s underlying worldview. Gaps presuppose a worldview. One could attribute the apparent design of Stonehenge, or Mount Rushmore, or the spear tip, to natural forces (wind, rain, water, erosion, etc.) or to intelligent agents. If one holds to a purely naturalistic paradigm any failure to explain how it happened by natural forces is a “gap,” a naturalistic gap, by definition.

*Larmer—On “God-of-the gaps” Arguments*

Larmer (2002) has looked more formally at the “God of the gaps” reasoning, and the supposed fallacy. He writes: “Exactly wherein the fallacy lies and whether those who defend the claim of divine intervention in the course of nature are really guilty of such reasoning gets little discussion. Equally, it seems to be assumed, rather than argued, that theologians in the past have typically been guilty of this fallacy and that the progress of scientific understanding has steadily undermined any prospect of justifying claims of divine intervention within the course of nature. My intention in what follows is to expose these assumptions to critical analysis in order to judge how seriously the ‘God of the gaps’ objection should be taken (p. 129).” Larmer looks quite closely at the structure of the argument used by those raising the god-of-the-gaps issue. But he makes the main point that it is the premises of the argument that are critical.

Focus on the Structure. Larmer looks critically, and more fully, at the *argumentum ad ignorantium* fallacy. The typical use of the argument is simplified and often uses caricature. That’s a problem! What it boils down to though is the following: “It is clearly fallacious to argue that a statement must be false solely on the basis that it has not been proven true, or that a statement must be true solely on the basis that it has not been proven false (p. 130).” Larmer contends that more should be said on the subject. There is a much more nuanced view of evidence in the knowledge fields. For example, he notes that arguments from silence are used in historical research. He notes that experimental psychology attends to “lack-of-knowledge inferences” in subjects as interesting and important research focal points. And, he points to the concept of “negative evidence” in the natural sciences. Essentially, and practically, the *argumentum ad ignorantium* fallacy is not the way people argue. The more appropriate focus is on the premises.

Focus on the Premises. How do people argue when drawing upon *argumentum ad ignorantium*? “Usually, we find them utilizing a premise, whether it be implicit or explicit, that if a proposition P were true (or not true) then we should reasonably expect to find evidence for it being true (or not true). When we do not find such evidence we can take this as a kind of evidence that P is false (or true) (p.130-131).” So the question becomes: are the premises sound, or legitimate?

“What is really at issue is not the logical structure of ‘God of the gaps’ arguments, but rather the legitimacy of the premise that enough can be known about the operation of natural causes to make it reasonable to conclude that at least some gaps in purely naturalistic

explanations are evidence of supernatural intervention. If this premise can be undermined then there will be little reason to take such arguments seriously (p. 130).”

Focus on Undermining the Premise. Larmer notes several focal points for those attempting to undermine the premises.

- (1) *A Conceptual Problem:* Claim that God of the gaps thinking uses a theologically inadequate view of God (p. 132).
- (2) *A Methodological Problem:* Claim that a foundational principle is violated in that “it is in principle illegitimate ever to infer an immaterial cause as an explanation of a physical event (p. 134).”
- (3) *An Empirical Problem:* Claim that “...even if gap arguments cannot in principle be ruled out as unscientific, they have been shown to be unsuccessful on empirical grounds (p. 136).”
- (4) *A Rhetorical Problem:* Assume that those who use such arguments are “like children trying to defend sandcastles against the incoming tide (p. 136).”

Focus on Supporting the Premise. Larmer’s response to these lines of argument is rooted in history, reason, and evidence.

- (1) *Regarding History:* He points to theologians like Augustine and Aquinas to demonstrate that it is historically naive to hold that prior to the rise of science theologians held that God was the “immediate cause of anything they did not understand (p. 136).” “Both held that supernatural interventions in nature take place, but neither argued for such interventions on the basis of ignorance of how secondary causes operate (p. 136).”
- (2) *Regarding Reason:* He noted a double-edged sword faces the combatants. Both sides of the argument are at risk. “The claim of those defending gaps arguments is that we can know enough about the operation of natural causes to conclude that the explanation of certain phenomena in purely naturalistic terms is either unlikely or impossible. This claim can be undermined if, as science progresses, it becomes clear that a complete explanation of such phenomena purely in terms of natural causes can be given. Equally, however, it must be acknowledged that this claim is strengthened if, as science progresses, the prospects of providing completely naturalistic explanations become increasingly remote. Put a little differently, this line of argument must grant the possibility that the progress of science has strengthened, rather than weakened, ‘God of the gaps’ arguments (Larmer, 2002, p. 136).”
- (3) *Regarding Evidence:* He noted that evidence (or the lack of evidence) is crucial. “The real issue is not whether ‘God of the gaps’ arguments are in principle inadmissible, but whether there is good evidence for the claim that natural causes are inadequate to explain certain phenomena. A key question in addressing this issue is the question of under what conditions is the failure to find evidence of something good reason to conclude that it is not present. The failure to find something can only be considered good evidence that it is not present if it is reasonable to suppose that one’s search procedure was adequate to detect it (p. 136).” An adequate search implies a broad epistemological focus. There is a place for (1) virtue epistemology, (2) a purposely-available-evidence epistemology (Moser, 2008), (3) an existential epistemology, and (4) a full-spectrum evidentialism.

With respect to the big gaps (origins and development of life), at least, Larmer notes that “the advance of science has made the problem more, rather than less, intractable (2002, p. 137).” The claim of Lennox (2011b), that God is the God of the whole show—gaps and non-gaps—, looks bright, considerably brighter than the facile communication stopper, the flippant charge of “god-of-the gaps” so often encountered.

The gaps, large and small, are such that one is placed in a position of choice. With respect to the Big Three Gaps, choose to see the priority and pre-eminence of the supernatural when bridging to the natural. Or choose to see the natural only. With respect to the small gaps choose to see that “God is the God of the whole show,” or choose to see the pejorative: the “god-of-the-gaps” rant.

### Epistemological Reasoning And Evidence (The Belief-Choice is Reasonable)

Believing is traced to two different belief systems—System 1 and System 2—as designated by Kahneman (2011). For a description of the two systems see the discussion on Kahneman [below](#). The point to be made here is that one belief system (System 2), which involves reflective belief formation, is contingent, in part, on choosing. We make choices. We exercise free will. We construct knowledge. We are responsible. Choices are part of our belief formation, and thus instrumental in knowledge construction, and subsequently wisdom.

### Evidentialism and Choice (Locke, et al.)

We make choices for reasons. We make deductions, inductions, and abductions for reasons. We form beliefs for reasons. We accept hypotheses, opinions, models, and theories for reasons. Underpinning reasons are: basic beliefs, arguments, and evidence. Clifford’s dramatic appeal to evidence, solid evidence, as the underpinning of belief, resonates. Clifford held that it was wrong “always, everywhere, and for anyone” to believe something without adequate evidence. But, if it is wrong to believe anything upon insufficient evidence, one needs to ask: what is sufficient evidence? And what about probabilities (subjective judgments, opinions, and statistical probabilities), what is a sufficient probability? Inducements to accept a proposition as credible are varied—for example, sensations, intuitions, authorities, memories, logic, common sense, even hope and love can be inducements. Inducements are sometimes unconscious or automatic, and sometimes inducements are practical. Such factors do serve to broaden the scope of evidence, and thus, evidentialism.

As one who has pursued and published research in the areas of science, psychology and education, evidentialism is a methodological-given. It is a given as methodologically important. Yet, upon subsequent reading and reflection one sees an automatic response regarding evidence is cognitively narrowing, to a dangerous point, given the alternate various epistemologies on the scene, and the critiques of evidentialism on the scene (e.g., Dougherty, 2011; Jordan, 2005; Wainwright, 1995).

Drawing upon Locke, Dougherty, Jordan, and Wainwright, a workable approach to evidentialism can be constructed—an approach that improves on Clifford’s narrow view by broadening the basic view offered by Clifford. Such views, albeit often overlapping, can be offered as contributing to a broadened view. They are here labelled as: Basic, Core Broad Empiricism (CBE), Faculty Evidentialism, Ethical Evidentialism, Epistemic Evidentialism, Absolute Evidentialism, Defeasible Evidentialism, and Dutiful Evidentialism.

*Basic Evidentialism.* First, then, Locke gets the *Basic* label being historically first. He makes the case for the empirical and rational demands of evidentialism. In *Concerning Human Understanding* Locke addresses degrees of assent from high to low—ranging from certainty, through probability, to improbability, to impossibility. There are “...degrees of assent from full assurance and confidence, quite down to conjecture, doubt, and distrust... (Book IV, Ch. 15, Sec 2).” Where one is on this continuum depends upon two evidential grounds: personal experience or the reported experience of others. “Probability then, being to supply the defect of our knowledge and to guide us where that fails, is always conversant about propositions whereof we have no certainty, but only some inducements to receive them for true. The grounds of it are, in short, these two following: -- First, The conformity of anything with our own knowledge, observation, and experience. Secondly, The testimony of others vouching their observation and experience. In the testimony of others is to be considered: 1. The number. 2. The integrity. 3. The skill of the witnesses. 4. The design of the author, where it is a testimony out of a book cited. 5. The consistency of the parts, and circumstances of the relation. 6. Contrary testimonies. (Book IV, Ch. 15, Sec 4).” And Locke further stresses that before one comes to make a judgment, the pros and cons of all the arguments “ought to be examined (Book IV, Ch. 15, Sec 5).” Amen!

Such an examination leads to a weighted judgment proportional to the evidence: quality and quantity, and pros and cons. This would be *basic* evidentialism, but Locke does keep the evidential door open for context, history, charity, disagreements, time, analogy, and even divine revelation, albeit secondary to right understanding of such revelation.

In a more contemporary setting the *basic view* would be expressed as Jordan’s (2006) “first stab” where he frames it as:

“EV. For all persons  $S$  and propositions  $p$  at times  $t$ , it is permissible for  $S$  to believe that  $p$  at  $t$  if and only if believing  $p$  is supported by  $S$ ’s evidence at  $t$  (p. 42).”

With respect to this assertion Jordan adds: “The notion of support encapsulated in (EV) is that of a preponderance of evidence: a person may believe a proposition  $p$  just in case  $p$  is more likely than not on  $S$ ’s evidence. ....what we might call ‘the evidentialist imperative’ (Jordan, 2006, p. 42).”

*Core Broad Empiricism (CBE).* Adding a little to the basic view Dougherty (2011) broadens the evidential sources somewhat. He writes: “The only indications of how the world might be are ultimately derived from experiences of some kind (including memory impressions, apparent logical insights, introspection, and other traditional sources of evidence) (p. 6).” Obviously evidence is more than sense data in this formulation.

*Faculty Evidentialism.* Knowing, or true belief, occurs when one is appropriately responsive to the evidence. One's faculty for knowing (i.e., perception, *perceptual knowledge*; memory, *memory knowledge*; insight, *a priori knowledge*) aligns with one's appropriate evidences. Dougherty expresses it as: "The conceptual core is that when one forms a true belief because they were appropriately responsive to their evidence, then they know. Perceptual knowledge is true perceptual belief appropriately responsive to perceptual evidence, the 'testimony of the senses'. Memory knowledge is true belief appropriately responsive to memory impressions, what we might call 'the testimony of memory.' A priori knowledge is true belief about a priori matters appropriately responsive to apparent insights (2011, p. 12)." One quantifies across basic faculties like those identified. The process seems to have elements of a cumulative case weighing not just the evidence, but the evidence across faculties, and then the total case. "One then has knowledge that  $p$  when the balance of one's reasons is sufficiently heavily tipped in favour of the true belief that  $p$ , and the main reason one holds that belief is because of those reasons (Dougherty, 2011, p. 12)."

Why then do people differ with respect to their beliefs? The faculty evidentialist might answer: "total experience." As an illustration: "An expert's visual faculty could deliver the report 'That's an elm.' where the novice's could not. Though the expert and the novice might have the same *sensuous* experience, they would not have the same *total* experience, because something in the expert's past experiences causes him to have a different experience in the present observation. When the expert hosts the exact same sensuous qualia there is an additional experience. The expert sees the object as an elm. This difference in total experiential/evidential profile explains the difference in their justification regarding the thing they both see and have the same *visual* experience of (Dougherty, 2011, p. 12)." For Dougherty the theory aligns with common sense, "paradigm cases of knowledge," and explanations for problematic cases.

*Ethical Evidentialism.* Jordan (2006) uses this terminology and attributes it conceptually, at least, to Clifford. Since Clifford held that it was wrong "always, everywhere, and for anyone" to believe something without adequate evidence, his appeal was moral. There are detrimental effects of such inappropriate beliefs for both individuals and society; thus harm links to the moral aspect. Jordan (2006) elaborates on the ethical framing: "The most plausible construction of ethical evidentialism is an indirect consequentialist one (p. 43)." Such a construction grounds the normative import of the evidentialist assertion "... on the claim that one should obey any rule that is such that, if everyone were to follow it, collective utility would be maximized (p. 43)." In effect, there is an *ethical evidential imperative*.

*Epistemic Evidentialism.* Beyond the moral sense addressed above there is an intellectual sense, and justification. Essentially, "...it is unreasonable to believe something without adequate evidence (Jordan, 2006, p.43)." To pursue a course that is unreasonable is a violation of epistemic evidentialism. In effect, there is an *intellectual imperative*.

*Absolute Evidentialism.* "If the evidence is balanced, or one finds oneself in a state of radical uncertainty, then one should neither believe nor disbelieve. One should withhold belief (Jordan, 2006, p.45)." Withholding belief, or suspending belief, is viewed as the wise choice in the absence of evidence, in the presence of balanced evidence, and perhaps for the sceptic-in-

principle, the experimental researcher, and the personality type that demands absolute certainty. In effect, there is an *agnostic imperative*.

*Defeasible Evidentialism*. “Defeasible evidentialism allows exceptions. Not every proposition falls under its purview, since it assigns the evidentialist imperative a limited scope, allowing the possibility that some propositions reside outside its jurisdiction. ...it leaves open the possibility that one may have grounds other than the evidential from which to believe (Jordan, 2006, p. 45).” What would these other grounds look like? Duties!

Moral duty can push one to adopt a proposition that seems inadequately supported, or push one to reject a proposition that seems adequately supported. This is rationally permitted as no one is irrational pursuing moral duty.

Intellectual duty, particularly as a research protocol, a strategy to force consideration of alternatives, a planned scepticism, or a defensive rally (after Lakatos, 1970) can make sense, rationally, from an intellectual perspective. No one is irrational for pursuing intellectual duty, although the pursuit may have irrational aspects. Such irrational aspects require further rational considerations. What might be truly irrational is placing all of one’s eggs in the absolute evidentialist basket.

There are problems with evidentialism (Dougherty, 2011, Jordan, 2011, Wainwright, 1995). Jordan notes: “...if one wants to hold that evidentialism is obligatory, it is at most a defeasible obligation. If the evidentialist imperative is defeasible, it can be overridden if there are occasions in which it is morally or rationally obligatory to believe a proposition that lacks adequate evidence. So, it is possible that a use of pragmatic arguments is compatible with the evidentialist imperative, understood as a defeasible obligation (Jordan, 2006, p. 46).” The tilt here is towards a case for a broadened evidentialism, an evidentialism that permits the pragmatic, and thus the choice to include views beyond naturalism. There are permissible, rational, evidential tilts towards theism!

### Passional Epistemology (Wainwright)

Wainwright (1995) has offered an intriguing case for the important place of the heart in coming to the knowledge of God. He examines such advocates for the place of the heart in epistemology as Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and William James.

The push to include the factor of the heart, the passional and the emotive, alongside evidentialism, does seem reasonable in some sense. Wainwright notes: “Two interrelated facts have contributed to the current tendency to downplay the importance of evidence in the formation and retention of religious beliefs. The first is the obvious absence of evidence that would compel the assent of any fully informed, sufficiently intelligent, and adequately trained inquirer. The second is the fact that religious belief seems to depend more directly on the state of one’s heart or moral temperament than on evidence. How else explain why two equally intelligent and informed inquirers can arrive at such different assessments of the same evidence.

(Compare Richard Swinburne's and J. L. Mackie's evaluations of the evidence for design, for example) (Wainwright, 1995, p. 3)." It is actually quite striking how the evidence is compelling for theism for some, and for atheism, for others. In effect, the passional place for the heart does seem primary, or parallel, as opposed to picayune.

So what is the place for evidentialism in a passional epistemology? On the one hand, the evidential "compulsion" seems to be post hoc—it seems to align with an evidential-charism—gifts or graces that are subsequent to belief, and supportive of belief. On the other hand, evidential "compulsion" may still be a requirement for belief, but only those rightly disposed (i.e., holding proper moral and spiritual qualifications) can properly adjudicate the evidences using their cognitive processes. Wainwright favours the latter as worthy of investigation; yet, he aims to steer a middle ground between *objective reason* (the position that God can be known by objective reason alone, a reasoning process that systematically excludes the heart—passion, desire, and emotion—from the process) and *subjective reason* (a view that God can be known only by the heart, subjectively). "The tradition I will discuss steers between two extremes. It places a high value on proofs, arguments, and inferences yet also believes that a properly disposed heart is needed to see their force. This epistemic theory is deeply embedded in important strands of Christian tradition (Wainwright, 1995, pp. 3-4)." For examples, Wainwright points to Calvin, Aquinas, 17<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican divines, Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and even William James as thinkers with something substantive to add to such a position. He, himself, is particularly attentive to Edwards, Newman, and James.

*On Newman.* Wainwright sees Newman as relying on an evidentialist position, of sorts. Religious belief is based on sufficient evidence, thus the evidentialism. Those with properly functioning noetic structures will find the evidence fits; it is convincing. The caveat is seen in the following quote: "Newman is not an evidentialist if evidentialism requires state-able and publicly accessible evidence that compels assent regardless of a person's moral temper (Wainwright, 1995, p. 81)." So, something more than evidence and a properly functioning noetic structure is required. Newman's notions of abduction and the illative sense flesh out this "something more."

Deductive and inductive reasoning are key tools to form beliefs and knowledge. But many arguments are good arguments while neither deductively valid nor inductively sound. Such arguments are inferences to the best explanation, that is, examples of abductive reasoning. Here people will differ. Here reasoning is contingent upon experience, expertise, access to authorities, exposure to authorities, conscience, character, and psychology (cognitive architecture, emotions, longings, interests, wants, fears, intuitions, instincts, hopes, desires, likes, and loves). The case for plausibility can differ from person to person. Here, the passional can be seen to factor in with respect to belief formation and knowledge building.

The "illative sense" is the faculty of informal reasoning for Newman. As Wainwright explains: "The faculty is principally employed in three ways: (1) in conducting an argument, (2) in assessing prior probabilities, and (3) in evaluating an argument's overall force (Wainwright, 1995, p. 58)."

In *conducting an argument* the things that come into play are many and varied: facts, artefacts, records, language, narratives, doctrines, experiences, testimonies, premises, principles, models, theories, and more, all of which must be organized, weighed, selected, judged, analyzed, and synthesized. “The illative sense then decides which considerations are relevant, assigns weights to different kinds of considerations, marshals the evidence in some sort of order, applies appropriate principles, (those used in assessing testimony, for example), and balances the positive and negative considerations against each other (Wainwright, 1995, p. 59).” Clearly this is affected by the person (his attention, ability, persistence, virtue, interests, prejudices, and so on) and may result in admirable or poor effects.

*Assigning probabilities* is another function of the illative sense. Some hypotheses are discarded outright. Some hypotheses are assigned probabilities that are subjective, that is, contingent on the particular person’s protocol for making the judgment call. Some are clearly reflecting pre-existing biases. Quoting Newman, Wainwright flags this fact: “If he is indisposed to believe he will explain away very strong evidence; if he is disposed, he will accept very weak evidence (Wainwright, 1995, p. 59).” One’s disposition is a crucial factor.

The third function of the illative sense is to *assess the force of the argument*. This too is contingent upon the person—their background, their attention, their commitment to the process—essentially, their epistemological virtues. In effect, the judgment is contingent upon the state of the person’s heart. Thus, the passional is in play.

For Newman the human carries the weight in facing the evidence and processing the evidence. “There is one significant difference from Edwards. If I understand Newman correctly, supernatural principles are not needed to grasp (any) religious truths (Wainwright, 1995, p. 82).” For Newman, then, the passional side is captured by full cognitive processing which includes abduction and the illative sense.

*On Edwards*. For Edwards something supernatural is needed to unite the passional epistemology with the rational (empirical and evidential) epistemology. That supernatural component is the “new heart” received by the converted, as a grace. There are epistemic consequences of the new heart such as a proper appreciation of evidence. Wainwright holds that Edward’s position is plausible but only if his theistic metaphysics is correct.

We have knowledge, instruction, reason, community, traditions, Scripture—a multiplicity of evidences and evidential supports. We have the means, the material, and the capacity necessary to discover theological truth. What is lacking? A proper disposition is lacking! Grace repairs damaged dispositions. The converted have a new sense, a “spiritual sense,” which is a cognitive faculty “connected with a person’s will or inclination,” sensing spiritual beauty, understanding, and pleasure (Wainwright, 1995, pp. 25-26). It is a sense much like perception.

Where does this spiritual sense take the convert? “Although the spiritual sense’s direct object is true beauty or excellency, it also has an indirect object—spiritual facts or truths. ... the spiritual sense enables us to recognize the truth of propositions that are logically or epistemically related to the excellency of divine things. ... it also helps us grasp the truth of the gospel scheme



as a whole ...(Wainwright, 1995, pp. 30-31).” One doesn’t get to such truths by a long chain of arguments; rather they are now perhaps basic, or inferences from perceptions, or intuitions, or even properly basic beliefs.

Wainwright seems to favour an interpretation focusing on inference rather than properly basic beliefs. “Although God is not directly perceived, His reality is no more remote or uncertain than other minds or physical objects are in Locke’s view. If I am right, Edward’s position differs from a basic beliefs approach. One’s belief in God is not basic like our memory beliefs, or perceptual beliefs, or beliefs in simple necessary truths but is, instead, inferential (Wainwright, 1995, p. 33).” The spiritual sense permits the inference, facilitates the inference, or even draws the inference. The spiritual sense, an outcome of sanctifying grace, reorients desires, showing a passionate epistemology as critical for the informative function of an evidential epistemology.

*On James.* James too holds to the fundamental importance of passions (and interests) with respect to beliefs. Theories and metaphysical systems can conflict; subsets of facts are not the arbiter of decisions, or determinative of a position. Two equally impressive theories, hypotheses, or sets of facts can confront us. Interest and passion determines our choice (Wainwright, 1995, p. 85). Choice is a recurrent aspect for James.

Consider “The Will to Believe.” This notion “...describes a set of circumstances in which people are justified in embracing beliefs that are not self-evident or adequately supported by ‘objective’ evidence (Wainwright, 1995, p. 86).” There are two conditions for such a choice, this will to believe. “First, the choice between the belief and its alternatives is ‘living,’ ‘momentous,’ and ‘forced’ (Wainwright, 1995, p. 86).” The notion of “living” applies when both alternatives appeal as real possibilities. As an illustration, Wainwright suggests determinism and indeterminism, as vacillation between these two positions seems reasonable. The notion of “momentous” applies when the stakes are high or the decision irreversible. As an illustration, deciding to have a child is momentous. The notion of “forced” applies when there is no neutral ground. As an illustration, accept God, or not.

The second condition that would permit choosing beliefs that are not self evident, or adequately supported, is straightforward: if the belief by its nature cannot be decided on intellectual grounds, there is a reasonable justification to apply the will to believe in appropriate circumstances. “James thinks that the choice between the religious hypothesis and its denial meets these conditions (Wainwright, 1995, p. 87).” The choice is “living,” “momentous,” “forced,” and neither self-evident, nor decidable on intellectual grounds. Clearly, belief in such circumstances is an expression of will; the intellect is secondary.

But we can’t believe just anything. I can’t believe in leprechauns, for example. So then, fleshing this out a little, choice plays a role, not as an autocrat, but as colleague. “Belief in metaphysical hypotheses such as indeterminism or supernaturalism (or their opposites) is an expression of our ‘willing’ or ‘passional’ nature as well as our intellect; it reflects our temperament, needs, concerns, fears, hopes, passions, and emotions. Choice (conscious volition) can play a role in the formation of these beliefs. For example, we might deliberately decide to commit ourselves to the religious hypothesis or to nurture religious beliefs we already have. If

deliberate choice is to be effective, however, it must be supported by our passional nature (Wainwright, 1995, p. 88).” Our passional nature is in play.

The passional epistemology considerations are psychologically and philosophically reasonable. Moreover, they tilt one easily towards considerations of theism. They highlight the importance of choice, the importance of one’s noetic structures, and the importance of one’s background, context, and epistemological virtues. And further, they highlight those beliefs that are living, momentous and forced.

### Prudential Wagers and Choice (Pascal, Morris, Jordan...)

The simple version of Pascal’s Wager addresses both gain and loss. With respect to gain: One ought to believe in God because if there is a God, and one bets on this possibility, the gain is infinite. If there is no God, and one bets that there is no God, the gain is finite and minimal. With respect to loss: One ought to believe in God because if there is a God, and one bets against this possibility, the loss is infinite. If there is no God, and one bets that there is a God, the loss is finite and minimal. The gain versus loss accounting for Pascal informs him of the best bets—the prudential bets.

Morris (1992) in “Making Sense of It All” offers an influential presentation of the substance of Pascal’s Wager. In chapter 7 (Wagering a Life) he traces the essence, application, justification, and implications, of the Wager. The following list of points helps to frame the issue.

- Life is risk. (This would include beliefs.)
- We adopt strategies.
- There are good arguments for, and against, God.
- Arguments are less compelling than experience.
- Pascal’s Argument: “His argument attempts to show that, we ought to adopt a certain strategy for living, with the aim in view of coming to know, and attaining the proper relation to, the highest Truth (Morris, 1992, p.110).”
  - (This involves engagement in order to know, much like: (1) Moser’s (2008) call for a religious epistemology addressing purposively available authoritative evidence, and volitionalism—which is contrasted with pure rationalism and pure empiricism—, (2) Jordan’s (2006) reasoning regarding the difference between acceptance and belief ([see below](#)), and (3) Jesus’ call for engagement in order to come to knowledge, John 7:17)
- “Either God is or he is not.” ...“Reason cannot decide this question. ...”How will you wager?”
- Costs and payoffs factor in.
- “Pascal claims that the evidence that can be marshalled for an atheistic worldview is inadequate. He believes that the religious wager, by contrast, enjoys from the start an adequate evidential base and, moreover, promises to be able to extend that base (Morris,

1992, p.126).” Thus the initial flickering belief, when bet upon, grows, even to the point of knowledge.

- Choice is seen to be key—choosing to wager on God.

A richer elaboration on the Pascalian Wager (and the Jamesian Wager regarding material, social and psychological benefits of belief) is seen in Jordan’s book (2006) titled *Pascal’s Wager*, and in his dialogue/debate with Schellenberg in section 4 of the on-line debate “God or Blind Nature?” (Draper, 2007-2008). Jordan’s line of thinking is more convincing than that which Schellenberg offers, although an agnostic would likely choose to disagree. Jordan’s final paragraph in the debate reminds the reader of the limits of evidentialism, and the “overwhelming reason supporting theistic faith as compared to atheism,” etc. It leaves the reader, the one who is willing to consider the prudential arguments, on a high note, and tilting towards theism.

Jordan (2008) ends his contribution to the debate as follows: “Let me end by way of a point made earlier, a point worth repeating as it has been widely neglected: the divine hiddenness argument rests on the shaky foundation of absolute evidentialism. Absolute evidentialism, recall, implies that one should refrain from believing or accepting any proposition that is not rendered more likely than not by the evidence. Quite apart from quibbles about theistic faith and ultimistic faith, the vulnerability of absolute evidentialism to easily constructed counterexamples is the bane of the divine hiddenness argument. With the collapse of absolute evidentialism, the divine hiddenness argument topples into irrelevancy, as there is overwhelming reason supporting theistic faith as compared to atheism, naturalism, or ultimistic faith, even in the fog of religious uncertainty.” It strikes me that Jordan is right regarding the overwhelmingness, at least in the sense of the number of arguments, and the cumulative case accumulating probabilities (Swinburne, 2004).

### The Castaway Metaphor (and Choice)

In both the debate, and the book, Jordan uses the metaphor he calls “The Castaway’s Fire.” I quote here extensively from Jordan as his metaphor captures the challenge to pure evidentialism, and the wisdom of prudential practice, pragmatic arguments and common sense. Moreover, he gives value to Pascalian approaches.

“A castaway builds a fire hoping to catch the attention of any ship or plane that might be passing nearby. Even with no evidence that a plane or ship is nearby, he still gathers driftwood and lights a fire, enhancing the possibility of rescue. The castaway’s reasoning is pragmatic. The benefit associated with fire building exceeds that of not building, and, clearly, no one questions the wisdom of the action.

Of course, the castaway’s building of the fire does not require that the castaway believes the fire will be seen. It requires only a belief that it might be seen. Now consider the question of God. What if there is no strong evidence that God exists? May one believe, justifiably, that God exists? Or is belief in the absence of strong supporting evidence illegitimate and improper? Pragmatic arguments for theism are designed to motivate and support belief even in the absence of strong evidential support. These arguments show that theistic belief is permissible, even if one does not think that it is likely that God exists.... (Jordan, 2006, p.1).”

The castaway's fire may bring ultimate benefit (Pascalian prudence), but for the time being it brings practical benefits: warmth, opportunity for cooking, physical exercise, purpose, hope, protection from wildlife, and more (Jamesian prudence). It is an informative metaphor in support of prudence. It is a motivational metaphor!

Prudential, pragmatic arguments are not the only arguments beyond absolute evidentialism motivating one to embrace theism. There are other epistemic arguments that are also forceful and prominent. Moreover, such streams (evidential, pragmatic, and existential) can merge in a complementary fashion.

### Existential Epistemology (Motivation, Evidence, and Choice)

This belief driver integrates emotions as both motivator and evidence. Then, this motivational thrust is integrated with reason. When combined (reason, evidence, emotion and motivation) a complex view of faith emerges (Williams, 2011).

Cook (2012) also sees the relevance of the existential in moving into the faith camp. Emotions, passions, hopes, and ultimately choices are instrumental—even foundational—in opting for belief.

Cook is not alone. Spufford (2012) likewise looks to the emotions side of epistemology. After 20 years, or so, as an atheist he comes back to the Christian camp via the emotions door. He wonders whether there is a God. And answers: "There may well not be. I don't know whether there is. And neither do you, and neither does Richard bloody Dawkins, and neither does anyone. It not being, as mentioned before, a knowable item. What I do know is that, when I am lucky, when I have managed to pay attention, when for once I have hushed my noise for a little while, it can feel as if there is one. And so it makes emotional sense to proceed as if He's there; to dare the conditional. And not timid death-fearing emotional sense, or cowering craven master-seeking sense, or censorious holier-than-thou sense, either. Hopeful sense. Realistic sense. Battered-about-but-still-trying sense (p. 221)." It seems fair to place Spufford into the emotional/existential epistemological camp, but he could also fit within the prudential camp, as easily.

A big question at this point is the source of our emotions. Are we responsible for our passions/emotions? Solomon (2007) argues that we are responsible. If so, then the epistemological weight, and cognitive responsibility, falls dramatically upon the individual.

### Gethsemane Epistemology (and Choice)

Purposely available evidence (see Moser, 2008, 2010) as a belief driver has an element of the existential in its makeup. In existential ontology existence (and experience) precedes essence. Similarly, in existential epistemology there is a level where doing precedes knowing/believing. This makes sense with respect to gaining beliefs (and knowledge) from reading, from authorities, from research, from experimentation, from trial and error, from examination, from looking, and

from failures. Doing precedes knowing. This would also be the case for reflective beliefs (Barrett, 2009), and could be the case for non-reflective beliefs, or possibly the refinement of non-reflective beliefs.

In an existential epistemology, then, it can make sense that one must *do-to-believe*, or one must *do-to-know*. Doing involves intentionality, and thus choosing. One's choices, then, are foundational for one's beliefs.

Moser (2008, 2010, 2013) is one who emphasizes purposively available evidence and a volitional involvement. In Moser's (2008) book "The Elusive God," he stresses this variant on traditional epistemology. He distinguishes between two types of evidence: spectator evidence and purposively-available, perfectly- authoritative evidence. "Spectator evidence, as suggested, is volitionally casual in that it doesn't demand that we yield our wills to the source of such evidence. In this regard, it readily permits volitional looseness, and even volitional promiscuity (Moser, 2008, p. 56)." This type of evidence seems right at home with empirical evidential absolutists like Russell.

The alternate type of evidence is demanding. "The opposing view makes a category mistake about the relevant evidence of divine reality. Instead, taking a judicious approach, we should consider whether perfectly authoritative evidence regarding divine reality is actually available to us humans under certain circumstances. Such evidence would call people to trust, and thereby to be volitionally conformed to, a perfectly loving God, even in the face of temporary pain, suffering, frustration, tragedy, poverty, illness, deformity, or physical death (perhaps even all of these combined in one massively frustrating challenge). The evidence in question would call people to trust God with regard to God's perfectly authoritative and loving promises rather than our own (often confused and fleeting) desires (Moser, 2008, p. 72)."

"Skeptics suffer from a cognitive blind spot in neglecting that a perfectly loving God would offer purposively available authoritative evidence of divine reality that aims to transform our wills in the direction of God's perfectly loving will (Moser, 2008, p. 73)."

Basically, one must choose to do, in order to know. But one's volitional path in accord with conforming to a perfectly loving God is different from a volitional path of looseness or even promiscuity to sit as spectator. There is first-rate evidence for belief available for those willing to choose a particular path, the conforming path.

In a recent symposium Moser (2012) casts his approach as a Gethsemane Epistemology. One gets involved volitionally. One invests one's self. One denies one's self. One humbles one's self. One trusts God. One then finds the evidence unfolding. It is something like what McFall (2012) expresses: "The Christian conception of wisdom differs insofar as the highest kind of knowledge is only obtained after cultivating the virtues of faith and love—true knowledge is a reward, not a foundation, as Paul writes, 'that they may know the mystery of god, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2.2)... ultimate wisdom and knowledge are obtained directly through a relationship with Jesus, as humans must interact with Jesus to obtain it (p. 322)." Conformational willingness is critical.

At a lower prudential level, yet in a similar fashion, Jordan (2006) addresses the distinction between acceptance and belief. Acceptance, independent of actual belief, is chosen, prudentially, and might function as a sufficient proxy for belief, and precursor of belief (see [the discussion of Jordan below](#)). There are levels of volitional epistemological involvement across a spectrum from toe-dabbling in the waters to full immersion.

These existential and prudential approaches are linked quite closely with Jesus' call to do in order to know. ("If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."—John 7:17). The doing, however, is not categorical (Yes/No) but rather continuous—it shows growth, development, and improvement over time. The volitional commitment positions one in a place open to growth.

### The Radio Metaphor (and Choice)

Moser (2010) uses a metaphor to illustrate "tuning in," which can be applied to tuning into God in an epistemologically appropriate fashion.

"The *reality* of the frequencies activating the ham radio found in the miners' shack does not depend, of course, on our tuning in to those frequencies. The radio frequencies are real and actually available to people even if all of us are fast asleep at our radios. We, in fact, are bombarded with radio waves at all hours, even when we are altogether unaware of them. Similarly, the *available evidence* of the reality of the radio waves is independent of our tuning into them. In general, our not actually *having* (received) evidence does not entail that it is not *available* to us. Of course, our failure to turn on the ham radio can leave us with no received evidence of the reality of the radio transmissions in our area. Still, the distinctive available evidence of ham radio activity *can* be acquired by all who seek it in the right way, with the help of a radio. That evidence is definitely *available* to us, and it may be crucial to our being rescued from our wilderness predicament (p. 39)."

I would suggest amplifying the metaphor, a little. Consider five states and how they might parallel different epistemological approaches. One wants to get the reliable news from say CFRB—1010.

1. State 1. Here the radio is turned off, if not actually, then by definition, so that no signal can arrive for processing. (*Naturalism*)
2. State 2. The radio is on but multiple channels are feeding in such that the messages are mixed, garbled, in various languages, all of which make it difficult to tease apart the key news item from the competitors. (*Fideisms*)
3. State 3. The radio is on but one does channel surfing: first CHUM, then Q107, then CBC, then a few other channels. One is getting information relatively clearly, but there are fluctuating contexts, themes, topics, and so on that make it difficult to build a coherent and compelling news narrative. The information is good, and the narrative may be firm, but there are questions, even doubts. (*Natural Theology*)

4. State 4. One tunes into CFRB, at the right time, with the right volume, and attends cogently to the news. The narrative unfolds. (*Reoriented Epistemology: Volitional, purposely available, authoritative, personifying evidence*).
5. State 5. One tunes to CFRB to get the news narrative. Then turns to other stations as in State 3, to build a broad context, to elaborate on the State 4 news, to critique the State 4 news, to build an apologetic system and polemical seeds, triggers, and proclamations... (*the inductive, abductive, prudential, rational, volitional, empirical, epistemology*) (*Wisdom!*).

Choosing the best strategy, and in the best order, is not just important, it is profoundly important. A mind tuned to State 4, or better still State 5, is the mind-change needed to avoid the mire of despond—States 1 and 2.

Virtue Epistemology (and Choice)

Virtue epistemology refers to an approach to evidence-establishment that involves: (1) virtues like “...carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, inquisitiveness, attentiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and intellectual integrity (Baehr, 2011, p. 98),” and (2) attention to effects or vices such as “... intellectual laziness, inattentiveness, lack of intellectual discrimination, gullibility, carelessness, disregard for truth, ignoring and distorting counterevidence, self-deception, and the like (Baehr, 2011, p. 98).” At least for one formulation or framework, virtue epistemology focuses on persons, or agents, and their properties, rather than the properties of beliefs. There are cases of “defective inquiry” and cases of “defective ‘doxastic handling’ of evidence” that Baehr addresses.

Earlier, Baehr (2008) advanced four frameworks or approaches for character-based virtue epistemology. The frameworks can be viewed as conservative (strong or weak) or autonomous (moderate or radical) for purposes of clarification. The table below presents a graphic representation.

Table 9. Baehr’s Four Framings of Varieties of Virtue Epistemology (VE)			
Conservative		Autonomous	
Strong	Weak	Moderate	Radical
“Strong Conservative VE is the view that there are major, substantive connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, that the concept of intellectual virtue stands to “save the day” within or to transform traditional epistemology (Baehr, 2008, p. 475).”	“Weak Conservative VE is the view that the conceptual connections between intellectual virtue and traditional epistemology, while genuine, are more secondary or less central (Baehr, 2008, p. 475).”	“...defenders of Moderate Autonomous VE insist merely that epistemology proper is not <i>reducible to or exhausted by</i> traditional epistemology, and that the borders of traditional epistemology ought to be <i>expanded</i> to make room for a more immediate or independent concern with intellectual virtues. One representative sample of Moderate Autonomous VE is Lorraine Code’s <i>Epistemic Responsibility</i> (1987) (Baehr,	“Kvanvig argues that the notion of intellectual virtue should be the focus of epistemology, but that the belief-based, synchronic framework of traditional epistemology cannot accommodate such a focus (more on this argument below); consequently, he calls for a rejection of the traditional framework and the issues and questions central to it. Kvanvig’s preferred, more diachronic and socially oriented framework

		2008, p. 475).”	begins with a conception of “human beings in terms of potentialities in need of socialization in order to participate in communal efforts to incorporate bodies of knowledge into corporate plans, practices, rituals, and the like for those practical and theoretical purposes that ordinarily characterize human beings” (1992, 169) (Baehr, 2008, p. 474).”
Formidable challenge: “...on account of its commitment to the idea that something like an exercise of intellectual virtue is an essential feature of knowledge (Baehr, 2008, p. 493).”	Favourable rating.	Favourable rating: “...according to which an independent concern with intellectual virtues and their role in the intellectual life offers a suitable <i>complement</i> to traditional epistemology (Baehr, 2008, p. 493).”	Formidable challenge: “...on account of its contention that traditional epistemology should be <i>repudiated</i> in favor of an autonomous, virtue-based approach (Baehr, 2008, p. 493).”

“While the approaches of Weak Conservative VE and Moderate Autonomous VE are still largely undeveloped, they seem likely to represent the way of the future within character-based virtue epistemology (Baehr, 2008, p. 493).” While the Weak Conservative and Moderate Autonomous views are intellectually appealing, I would be reluctant to shelve the Strong Conservative view at this time. I find myself leaning to the Strong Conservative view.

Note that Baehr, while distinguishing between *character-based* qualities (e.g., openness, fair-mindedness, carefulness, and so on) and *faculty-based* approaches (e.g., memory, perception, and so on), limits his four-group analysis to character-based approaches. Reasonably, merit is assumed for both character-based and faculty-based approaches. Moreover, “proper function” is arguably critical for both character-based and faculty-based approaches. Essentially, then, Plantinga’s notion of a requirement of “proper function” could apply to a range of substrates—neurological and cognitive on the one hand, and moral, dispositional, and character-qualities on the other hand.

Love as a Virtue (and Choice)

In I Corinthians 13 Paul makes the statement that Love “...believeth all things.” Given the genre of the love list in I Cor 13, it might be fair to infer that Paul intends to communicate with his comment that the “all things” he has in mind are things like: “all good things,” or “all right things,” or “all theologically important things,” or “all true things.”

Yet, there are a couple of other possibilities of interest here, as well. First, there is a possibility related to actually believing all things as an act of intentionality. He who believes all things is open to consider all things—open-minded. There is an element of virtue epistemology here in such a stance. The real important question then becomes which things believed have the better case, the better evidence, the better coherence... This approach aligns with the notion of “belief allocation” discussed below. Methodologically, one places all ideas, hypotheses, and theories “on the table” as possibilities up for evaluation.



Secondly, there is the possibility that Paul's point aligns with the claim made by Reid (1818/2011) [above](#), regarding two relevant basic principles operative in believing. The first principle is that our fellow-creatures (and we, ourselves) have a *propensity to truth-telling*. The second principle is that our fellow-creatures (and we, ourselves) have a *propensity towards believing others*, an acceptance of authorities—the *principle of credulity*. Love and belief are kin at some deeper level.

Possibly, an attitude of belief (i.e., knowledge, assent, and trust, as the Reformers defined faith), is to our advantage. This could be the case whether belief was rooted in a scientific/cognitive approach, wiring, or nature, as Reid (1818/2011) might express it. It might even be rooted in childlikeness. Possibly, an attitude of belief really is a manifestation of love: again, knowledge, assent, and trust.

### Belief Allocation as a Virtue (and Choice)

Believing all things has a practical aspect: it keeps all hypotheses on the table. Furthermore, it has an ontological aspect: it signals basic proper function. Finally, it has an epistemological aspect: it advances knowledge at the level of “best belief” or best explanation given available evidences. To illustrate the value, and format, of such an approach—believing all things—consider two examples in the form of questions: (1) who killed Kennedy? (2) what explains Darwinian evolution?

#### Example Question 1: Who killed Kennedy?

The following figure illustrates how multiple competing hypotheses are placed on the table. The bars illustrate how much belief is allocated to each hypothesis. As the scale ranges from one to one hundred the most belief one could allocate is 100 percent, the least amount of belief would be one percent. The one percent minimum keeps all hypotheses on the table. Note that if a person allocates 10 percent belief (credibility, warrant, weight, etc.) to a particular belief he is, at the same time, allocating 90% doubt—a high degree of scepticism. As one acquires evidence, arguments, and defeaters, the bars change their weights. The allocated weights are assigned subjectively; so a weight like 60% could indicate a great deal of credibility, but so could a number like 40% or 80%. The weights are subjective and person-specific. They are informed starting points for conversations (interpersonal and intrapersonal), positioning (what do I believe? and how strongly do I believe it?), and research (what is the evidence pro and con? what are the defeaters? what are the alternate theories? what tests can I run? which authorities should I consult?...).

As may be seen in the figure Oswald gets the most weight re allocated belief. This is open to change as one reflects further given, say: (1) Oliver Stone's ruminations in his film JFK, (2) the new book by Oswald's girlfriend, (3) further criticisms, (4) vested interests like writing a term paper, and (5) general care and concern. The point being: while all hypotheses are on the table, one hypothesis is dominant (the Oswald hypothesis), but this is open to change, open to recalibration.

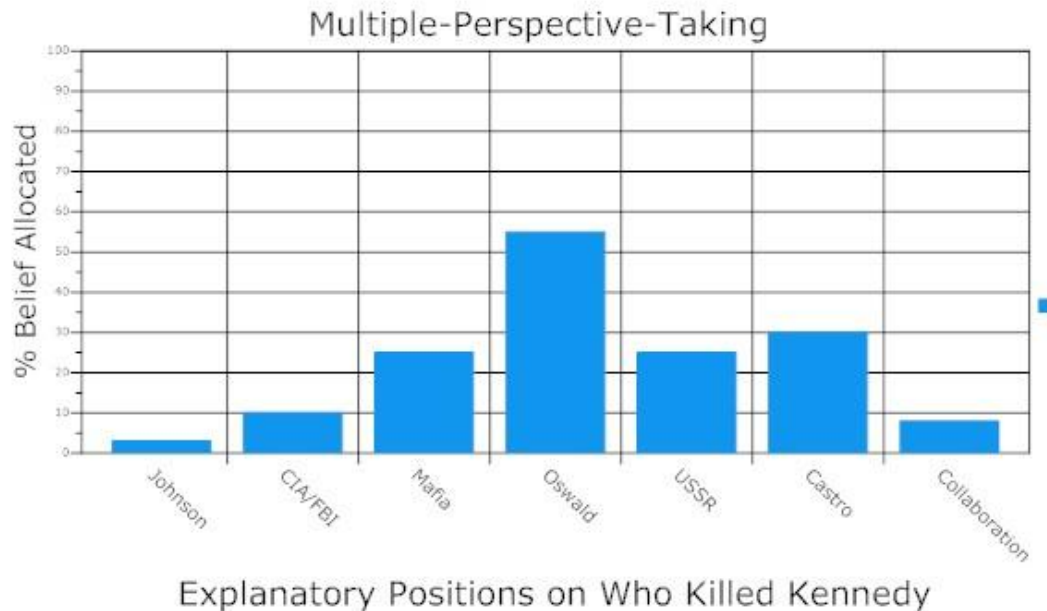


Figure 1. Belief allocation to various hypotheses on who killed Kennedy.

#### Example Question 2: Who/What Best Explains Darwinian Evolution?

The figure below is based on readings generating evidence, arguments, and critiques. The subjective weighting is currently in favour of the ID group. It could change. In the figure one sees that even the discredited Ussher, and the comic Bertrand Russell, are still on the table. Although Ussher and Russell are still on the table, the doubt is considerable—90% doubt for Ussher, and 97% doubt for Russell. The young-earth creationists were low (between 5 and 7% credibility) but this shifted up to about 10% after reading: (1) that R. C. Sproul has shifted to the young-earth creationist group, and (2) that Schroeder (1990, 1997, 2001), a Jewish applied physicist with a doctorate from MIT, has weighed in with intriguing discussions related to time and the six days of Genesis.

The set of books from a Jewish source (i.e., Gerald Schroeder who wrote "Genesis and the Big Bang," "The Science of God," and "The Hidden Face of God, How Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth") is intriguing. His take is more mystical. Regarding six days vs 14 billion years he asks: "Which understanding is correct? Both are. Literally. With no allegorical modifications of these two simultaneous, yet different time periods. It is unequivocal (Genesis and the Big Bang, p. 29)." Intriguing! A belief still on the table, albeit with more doubt allocated than belief. The "old earth" position still reigns, that is, warrants more belief allocated, on the chart. But the main point is they are all on the table. That's the virtue! Believe all things.

The case offered by Wallace has also increased in credibility for me as I read about Wallace, read Wallace himself, and considered some of his speculations. But then, this makes sense since Wallace is seen to align with the ID group (Flannery, 2008).

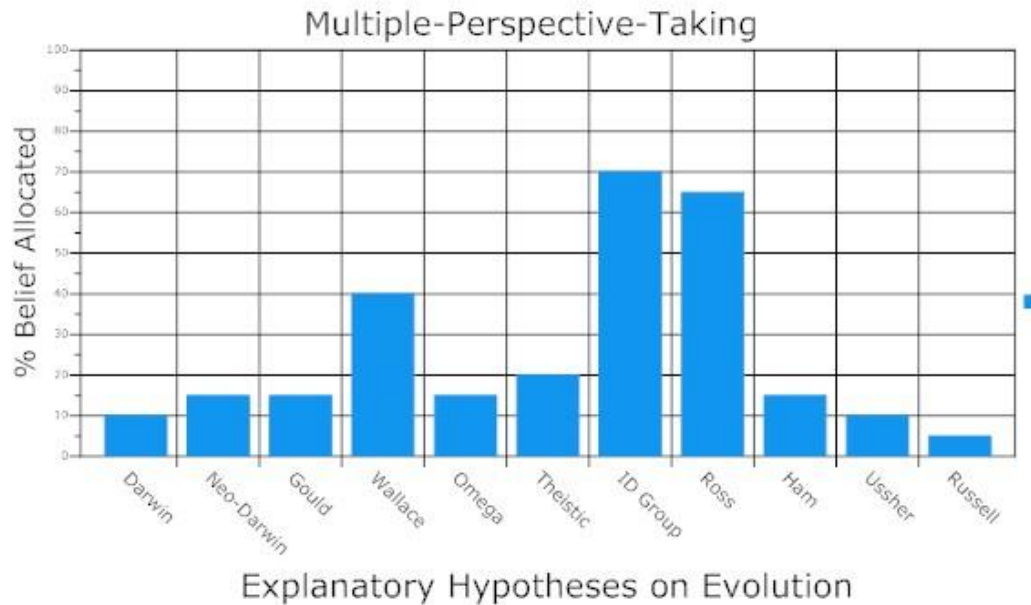


Figure 2. Belief allocation to various hypotheses for evolution.

This belief allocation protocol is both synchronic and diachronic. What happens at two later points in time? How do the belief allocations fare over time? Consider the following two updated figures.

From this first updated chart below a number of epistemological points are clear:

1. Still, no model on the table is at a 100% level of credibility. Thus there is doubt associated with each model. In effect, the “I don’t know” claim is a given.
2. After reading Francis Collins (2006) and Plantinga (2011) the strongest model for me, at the time of this formulation, is still the ID group, but the theistic evolution group that sees directed change (direct intervention, planned intervention, frontloading, or fully-gifted creation) is directly comparable. They both involve design. The conflict between the two is in part political, and in part, the fact that ID seems to be a broader or more inclusive camp. My weightings could change! Further evidence, arguments, and theories and models, are open doors.
3. Every position has belief attached to it. And the converse is: every position has doubt attached to it. To my way of thinking—which is at bottom scientific—this is the appropriate response for theology, all sciences, and philosophy.
4. In terms of time (the age of the cosmos) the models from Darwin through to Ross would be consistent with an age proposition of 13.7 billion years. Schroeder is nebulous, but for the sake of argument here I’ll put him on the young-earth end of continuum along with Ham, the polemical Russell, and the infamous Bishop Ussher. (Note that Schroeder gets a heavier weighting than Ham and Ussher. That’s because he is not a Christian (thereby eliminating one bias), he holds polar positions—six days and a long time—and he holds a PhD in Physics from MIT. His set of three books are written from a Jewish perspective,

and they are intriguing. The intrigue is evident in the titles: "Genesis and the Big Bang," "The Science of God," and "The Hidden Face of God, How Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth." His take has a mystical side. Listen to him here regarding six days vs 15 billion years: "Which understanding is correct? Both are. Literally. With no allegorical modifications of these two simultaneous, yet different time periods. It is unequivocal (Genesis and the Big Bang, p. 29)." This intrigues me!

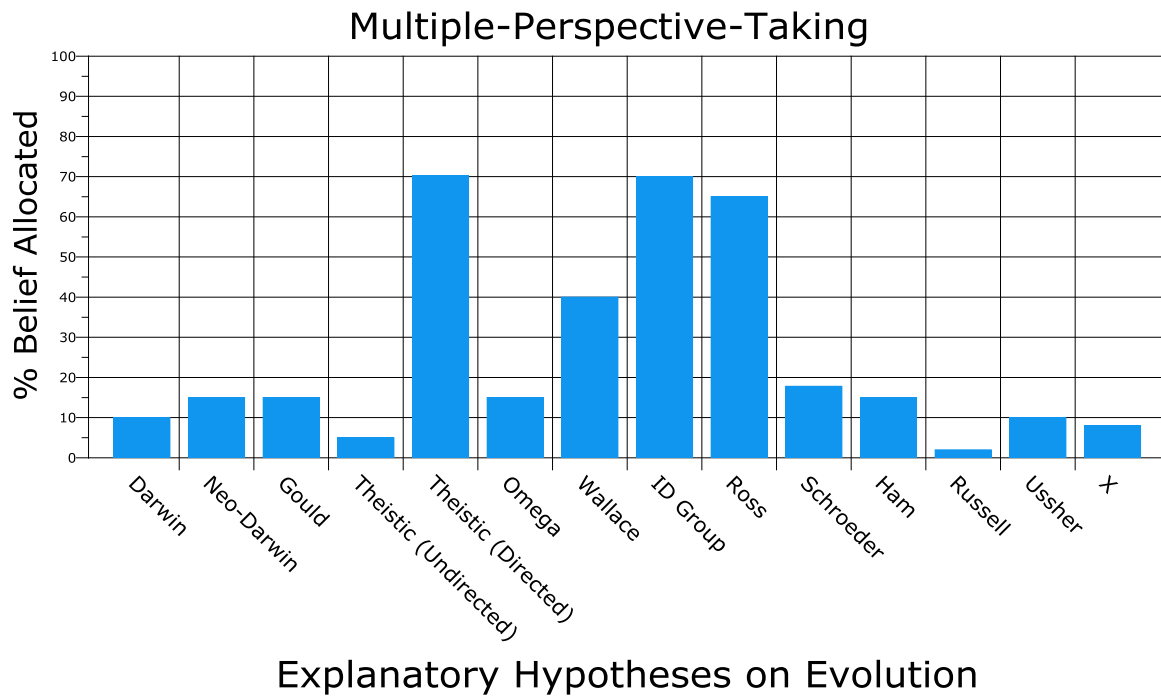


Figure 3. Belief allocation to various hypotheses for evolution at time 2.

Now for the next change, at Time 3!

In the following chart I have flagged the changes (increases) in my belief allocation (and conversely decreases in doubt) by the numbers for the young-earth group. It has been made more easily recognized by the colour shifts (orange and green). The epistemological question is why would I experience an increase in belief allocation over the past month, or two, in the direction of the young-earth group? I'll give three reasons here:

1. R. C. Sproul had changed his long-held position from 13.7 billion years to the young earth group position, I believe. I don't have that on good authority, nor have I read his argument for change, but if he has made the change it would bump my belief allocation

here a little. Why? Well, I think Sproul is a careful thinker and would not make such a shift lightly. You'll notice that the change in the chart is minimal, however, and I'm still in the 13.7 billion year category as the dominant view.

2. The second reason is more facetious, yet still of weight. It is tied to the anti-science arrogance of some, an arrogance characterized by the claim that one knows the age of the cosmos, while others do not. Harris, in his on-line dialogue with Sullivan, shows his insistence that he better knows the age of the earth/cosmos than the majority of Americans. It is not a very scientific attitude. The scientific attitude should always have the tag-phrase "until further notice" as advocated by the philosopher of science, Herbert Feigl. Yes, Harris is right to challenge the argumentum ad populum fallacy; he might be wrong to claim he knows better the age of the cosmos. Perhaps, the genetic fallacy?
  - a. To quote Harris: "...we don't do epistemology by plebiscite. The majority of people really can be wrong—as are the majority of American Christians about the age of the universe and about the evolution of life on this planet."
  - b. For me, with my belief allocation protocol (and its logical converse, a doubt allocation protocol) I would be more tentative than Harris whether wearing the theological hat, the scientific hat, or the philosophical hat. Surely, that's better science.
3. The third reason is the one that really pushes the shift—admittedly only a slight shift, though. It has to do with clocks (and perhaps Schroeder's more mystical Jewish bent). The age of the universe via a scientific protocol is based on a particular clock—the speed of light clock. There are other clocks!
  - a. After reading Hawking and Mlodinow's (2010) "The Grand Design" I have had to revise my belief/doubt chart a little. It affects the young-earth frameworks, and the unknown X variable ...which is always postulated, always on the table.
  - b. There is a "space expansion" clock. Space, it is hypothesized, drawing upon "considerations that go beyond Einstein's theory of general relativity, and take into account aspects of quantum theory (p. 129)" can move faster than light. Space has been postulated to expand faster than the speed of light. The conservative estimate for inflation was expansion by a factor of  $10^{30}$  in less than a second (actually quite a bit less,  $10^{-34}$  seconds). The analogy from Hawking and Mlodinow is expressed as: "It was as if a coin 1 centimeter in diameter suddenly blew up to ten million times the width of the Milky Way (p.129)." Whether these inflationary estimates are analogous ratios: (singularity is to X as 1 cm coin is to one trillion light years) speed of space expansion is mind boggling to some, brain boggling to others.
    - i. The diameter of the Milky Way is 100,000 light years. Ten million times the width of the Milky Way is:  $10^{11}$  I believe.
    - ii. Does this mean the universe—in terms of distance across, using a light years clock, or apparent-light-years-clock—is one trillion light years?

- iii. Note that Krauss (2012) has inflation at greater than  $10^{28}$  I believe.
- iv. The space inflation clock introduces interesting possibilities and more interesting clock problems.
- v. The clocks problem. There are multiple clocks:
  - 1. The speed-of-light clock.
  - 2. The speed-of-space-expansion clock?
  - 3. More interesting: if space inflates so dramatically and space-time is unified, it seems reasonable to wonder about time inflation, and contraction, as well.
  - 4. The speed of quantum communication between two distant electrons clock?
    - a. The apparent instantaneous communications between electrons at a great distance --Felder (1999) "Spooky Action at a Distance: An explanation of Bell's Theorem." ([www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Kenny/papers/bell.html](http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Kenny/papers/bell.html) )
    - b. Multiple levels of existents --Talbot (2005) "The Amazing Holographic Universe" ([www.rense.com/general69/holo.htm](http://www.rense.com/general69/holo.htm) )
  - 5. Multiple clocks a la Schroeder (1990, 1997, 2001)
  - 6. A Biblical para-poetical clock: the "thousand years as a day" clock
  - 7. A Pauline perspectival clock: time vs eternity (II Cor 4:17) "momentary, light affliction..." (whether for episodes in life, our entire 70 years, or 13.7 billion years) versus "an eternal weight of glory" (the key being eternity—a context wherein all time pales). It seems callous treating such horrendous human suffering, animal suffering, and the suffering of God as "a momentary, light affliction" but our narrow perspective is not the only perspective.
  - 8. God and Time. Craig has an interesting discussion of time with respect to God (see W. L. Craig, 2001, Time and eternity, Exploring God's relationship to time. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway).
  - 9. Space and time are linked as a dimension: space-time, implying a space-time clock.
  - 10. There is an absolute time, an instrumental time, an imaginary time, and perhaps even a negative time, to consider.
  - 11. Non-temporality. Fields and how they might impact space-time issues (e.g., Sheldrake, 2009, "A New Science of Life;" Sheldrake, 2002, "Seven Experiments That Could Change The World;" Radin, 2006, "Entangled Minds;" Radin, 1997, "The Conscious

Universe,”). In various field theories there is nonlocality, no distance in space or time between objects, advocacy of the fixed-arrow of time as an illusion, precognition and unconscious “presentiment,” and a host of empirical studies that keep the “clocks problem” on the table.

12. There are frames of reference to consider with respect to time.
13. Two major time-frames. There is a “Kairological Time” and a chronological time to consider (Dembski, 2009).
14. And quite likely there is more to unfold regarding time.

vi. My reaction:

1. As the intriguing information accumulates I realize it might be advisable to change my belief allocation chart a little.
2. I still give the greater weight to the conventional 13.7 billion year estimate. But there is a “but”!
3. Given possible time, space, and space-time issues I should draw in the unknown X variable more prominently, and admit there are things I don’t know. This unknown variable, X, gains weight! I’m intrigued by Dembski’s (2009) arguments for consideration of Kairological time and chronological time. It may be the next significant X variable! It may be the framing that helps clarify, at least in part, one of the clocks problems.

The first time I read Dembski’s (2009) argument I found it too esoteric to do more than shelve, or perhaps I should say, table. The second time I read it, it made more sense. The second time I had come to it having toyed with aspects of the “clocks problem” and the speed-of-light barrier.

#### Dembski’s View

This theodicy that Dembski offers now gets sufficient belief allocation weight to keep it on the table. I continue to explore the issue of time and clocks with the growing realization that time is a very complicated phenomenon and there is no satisfactory coherent understanding of time and clocks, at least for me, at this time.

I decided to revisit the Dembski (2009) book largely for two reasons: (1) Michael Keas did a book review of two books (including this book) in a journal I was currently drawing upon (Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith, 62(3)). I was drawing on this journal for various positions and articles on Adam. (2) I have long admired Dembski since first reading his 1998 book “The Design Inference,” and his subsequent writings on intelligent design. The Keas review was positive, so I reread Dembski (2009). The rereading left me animated this time because he does get at a number of the problematic issues for Christian theology (e.g., Adam, Eden, revelation, suffering, death, Fall, sin, and science) that are currently relevant. He seems to

get to a deep structure. Moreover, I now see the ideas are not the product of Dembski's fertile imagination, but they have a more honourable history and are largely rooted in pre-Darwinian geologists. So what are these intriguing ideas?

The big idea relates to time! I had been thinking about questions (regarding Adam, Eden, when ensoulment occurs, where ensoulment occurs, those hominids prior to Adam, and so on). And, I had been thinking of the Rana and Ross (2005) answers from the perspective of Progressive Creationism (i.e., accepting a literal Adam, and wrestling with the clock issues). Furthermore, I had been thinking about Lamoureux's (2009) answers via Evolutionary Creationism (i.e., claiming there was no Eden or Adam beyond the figurative level). When considering Lamoureux's position, whom I quite liked and valued when I read his book, I now saw Dembski had something different to offer: "One challenge to such a view is quite simple: Adam, human sin, and human ensoulment for all humans, entered prior to the big bang. It seems to be a logical problem that a consequence can precede a cause, but given things in play here (i.e., God, the creation, and the creation of time) there may be a case for such a consideration." This is what Dembski develops!

Dembski argues:

- There are two creations (sort of conceptual and actual), two logics of creation (causal-temporal logic and intentional-semantic logic), two creation accounts (Genesis 1 and Genesis 2), two time frames (chronos and kairos), two Falls (in kairos time, and in chronos time), two "books" (special revelation and natural revelation), and more.
- Dembski develops the claim that all evil in the world (personal and natural) is traced to human sin. Not possible, we say, in our knee-jerk fashion! Nonsense! How could that be? Here's how: At a surface level, the evil in the world (personal and natural) is back-dated to the conceptual Fall prior to creation not the Fall in our chronological time. Seems weird, I agree. But I find it, after rereading the book, to be a model with considerable explanatory power and scope, as well as philosophical and theological depth. Abduction leads me to weight it heavier than Evolutionary Creationism. I think it is fair to say that Dembski holds to a literal Adam and Eve, but he does write: "The theodicy developed in this book is certainly compatible with a literal Adam and Eve. But it does not require a literal Adam and Eve. What it does require is that a group of hominids, however many, had their loyalty to God fairly tested (fairness requiring a segregated area that gives no evidence of natural evil—the Garden); moreover, on taking the test, they all failed (2009, p. 146)."
- The Kairological Model acknowledges two time frames. "Genesis 1 is therefore not to be interpreted as ordinary chronological time (*chronos*) but rather as time from the vantage of God's purposes (*kairos*) (Dembski, 2009, p. 142)." The days of creation from this vantage point are not 24-hour days, not historical epochs, and not literary devices. "Rather, they are actual (literal!) episodes in the divine creative activity (p. 142)." They represent basic divisions, logical divisions, developmental divisions, and informative divisions. The Fall is seen by God in the Kairological model prior to our time (chronos). The Fall in *kairos* time, and kairos conceptual structuring, is prior to the big bang. The effects of the Fall are set in motion by God, and for His purposes (Dembski speculates on some of those purposes), from the beginning of *chronos* time and prior to the Fall that



occurred in created time and space, that is, the Chronological Model (the second creation account).

- “To understand how the Fall occurs chronologically and how God nonetheless allows natural evils to rage before it, we need to take seriously that the drama of the Fall unfolds in a segregated area. Genesis 2:8 refers to this area as a garden planted by God (i.e., the Garden of Eden). Now ask yourself why God would need to plant a garden in a perfect world untouched by natural evil. In a perfect world, wouldn’t the whole world be a garden? And why, once humans sin, must they be expelled from this garden and live outside it, where natural evil is present (p. 151)?” Dembski sees the two creation accounts in Genesis as “...just what’s needed for *kairos* and *chronos* to converge in the Fall... (p. 151).”
- “If we accept that God acts to anticipate the Fall, then, in the chronology leading up to the Fall, the world has already experienced the consequences of human sin in the form of natural evil. This seems to raise a difficulty, however, because humans who have yet to sin come into a world where natural evil is already raging. Starting their material existence in such a world puts them at a disadvantage, tempting and opposing them with evils for which they are not (yet) responsible. The Garden of Eden, as a segregated area in which the effects of natural evil are not evident (one might think of it as a tropical paradise), provides a way out of this difficulty (p. 151).”
- A pivotal point is entry to the Garden. “Any evils humans experience outside the garden before God breathes into them the breath of life would be experienced as natural evils in the same way that that other animals experience them. The pain would be real, but it would not be experienced as divine justice in response to willful rebellion.... Operating on a higher plane of consciousness once infused with the breath of life, they would transcend the lower plane of animal consciousness on which they had previously operated—though, after the Fall, they might be tempted to resort to that lower consciousness (p. 155).”
- Would God back-date the effects of Adam’s sin? Well, He back-dates the effects of Christ’s sacrifice according to traditional Christian teaching. That Adam’s sin has consequences visited on the natural order seems illogical on the surface level reading; but Dembski frames it as a covenant relationship—Adam is the covenant head of creation. “If God’s relationship with the covenant head goes awry, so does his relation with all that the covenant head represents (in this case, the world) (p. 147).” It fits biblically with both various texts attributing natural evil to Adam’s sin, and the biblical view of covenantal relationships.
- “Does evolution therefore undermine the theodicy I am proposing? Not at all. Although I personally think that the scientific evidence supports only limited forms of evolutionary change, evolution in the grand sense (‘monad to man’) would simply underscore natural evil in the world and thus constitute a further way that God makes the world reflect the corruption in the human heart as a consequence of the fall. On this view evolution is not so much a method of creation (though it can be that also) as a method of judgment by which God impresses on the world the radical consequences of human sin. In Genesis 1 and 2, God gives humanity a perfect world. In Genesis 3, God removes humanity to a less than perfect world. A world dominated by evolution is certainly less than perfect but may perfectly reflect the imperfection of human hearts as a consequence of the Fall (Dembski,

2009, p. 167).” This view seems to harmonize with a view flagged somewhat by C.S. Lewis, a view that points to devolution coterminous with evolution.

These ‘clocks’ issues are intriguing avenues to consider. They influence the various paradigms offered as explanatory evolutionary hypotheses. Intelligent design, directed theistic evolution, and progressive creationism are the prominent paradigms to consider in my analyses. Moreover it is Intelligent Design that seems to be the umbrella paradigm that dominates my belief allocation protocol at this point.

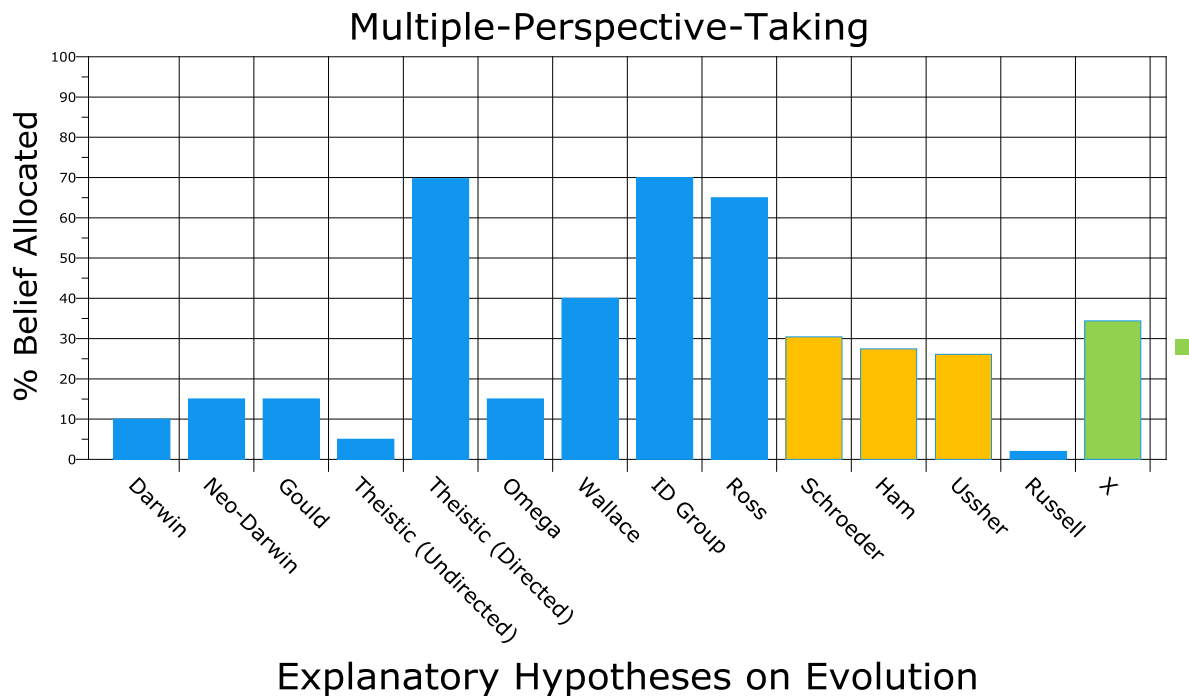


Figure 4. Belief allocation to various hypotheses for evolution at time 3.

A major “clocks” problem is linked to the notion that we can get something from nothing. Even if Krauss (2012) is right in all his meanderings regarding the origin of space from “nothing,” the origin of the cosmos from “nothing” and the origin of the laws from “nothing,” there is a refutation right under his nose. Well, perhaps near his nose would be better. As he sits there pondering, if he extended his pondering to the fact of his own mind being there to consider such things, and make such formulations, he might see a refutation, or at least a monkey wrench in the cogs of the machinations that he works with. I, for one, was struck by the number of times he used “If” or “seems” in his book.

Nothing vs God? It seems to me that God offers the more reasonable foundation. And Dembski offers a theodicy that seems more reasonable than the “nullodicy” alternative. Believe

all things. Be open to all things. Weigh all things. Doubt all things. Within this framework may your mind-change be mindful, and just, in time.

Now what happens with the next change, after Time 5?

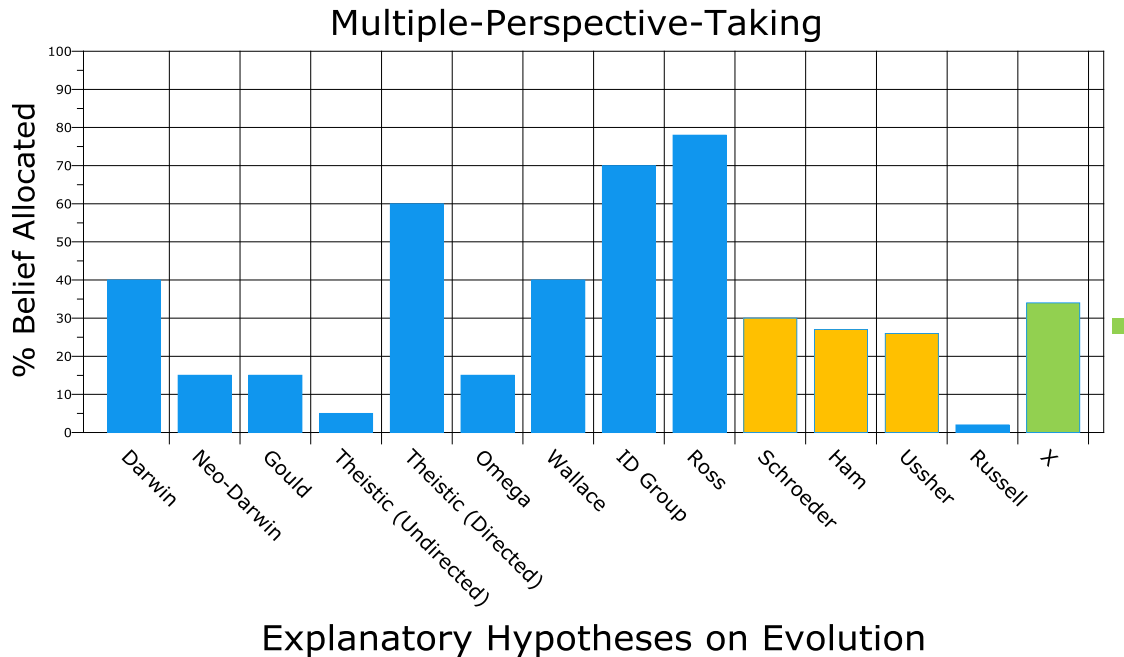


Figure 5. Belief allocation to various hypotheses for evolution at time 4.

The view in this figure (Figure 5) shows the increase in belief allocation for Progressive Creation—the view of Ross and Rana. After listening to some of their presentations and reading their recent works (Rana, 2008; Rana & Ross, 2005; Ross, 2008, 2009, 2011) their case gains in a level of credibility. That Ross’s view of Progressive Creation now occupies the primary place is reflected in the belief allocation adjustments. The increase seems warranted by the evidence and arguments reviewed. Moreover, the theistic evolution view now falls to third place, also in view of the arguments and evidence developed by Ross and Rana.

#### Triangulation as a Virtue (and Choice)

Triangulation is a prudent methodological approach to enhance understanding, even to achieve accurate understanding. What is triangulated is the knowing attained from three sources: *revelation*, *reason*, and *reflections* (systematic and thoughtful *reflections* of *authorities*). We triangulate information to build beliefs and knowledge. We triangulate information to check

beliefs and knowledge. This methodological approach functions at the human-to-human level, the human-to-animal level, and the human-to-divine level.

At the interpersonal level (human-to-human) we draw upon three sources: (1) *reason*, (i.e., our own thought processes, logic, heuristics, analyses, experiments, hypotheses, intuitions, perceptions, memories, analogies, theories, hermeneutical scope, epistemological frameworks, and intentional constructions), (2) *reflections* (i.e., authorities: as in the writings of others like historians, psychologists, philosophers, and even poets, artists, musicians, etc.), and (3) *revelation* (verbal and non-verbal communiqués from the other).

Similarly, at the interpersonal level (human-to-animal) we draw upon the same general three sources—*reason*, *reflections*, and *revelations*. True enough, the *revelations* from animals are mitigated and dramatically more inferential. But there are non-verbal communiqués from the other, the animal (eye contact, posture, tail-wagging, circling, etc.). And there can be quasi-verbal communications (growls, hissing, wound-simulations, etc.). The applications of *reason* and *reflections* are quite similar to the situation with humans mentioned in the previous paragraph. With this triangulation we build an understanding of the other, and their revelations to us, in this case animals.

Likewise, at the supernatural, interpersonal level (human-to-divine) we draw upon the same three sources: *reason*, *reflections* and *revelation*. With respect to *reason* (i.e., our own thought processes) it is logic, heuristics, analyses, experiments, hypotheses, intuitions, perceptions, memories, analogies, theories, hermeneutical scope, epistemological frameworks, and intentional constructions that impact our methodology and our understanding. With respect to *reflections* (i.e., the expressions of authorities), we are influenced by others. The types of authorities here would be quite broad: as in (1) the thoughtful writings of authorities like historians, psychologists, philosophers, and even poets, artists, and musicians, and (2) authorities like church fathers, councils, popes, creeds, theologians, prodigals, “heretics,” and comparative religions. With respect to *revelation* there are verbal and non-verbal communiqués from the other (in this case God), but also more broadly via natural theology or general revelation, special revelation, miracles, prophecies, charisms, the Holy Spirit, the *sensus divinitatis*, angels, and principalities.

We triangulate the information from the three sources. The three sources are flawed and limited, or at least assumed to be so. It is the triangulation that allows for mutual self-corrective mechanisms to operate. It is advanced as an appropriate strategy. It is clearly superior to a unique reliance on a singular authority. We build beliefs and knowledge more so from the triangulation of sources, rather than from any single source. Further, with such an approach there are no grounds to venerate any singular authority, or prioritize any singular authority. Christian groups in the past assigned priority often to a singular authority (e.g., Protestants to *revelation*, Catholics to the *reflections* of the teaching magisterium, or liberal Christians to *reason*). Problems followed! What would equal weighting for all three authorities look like?

On *reason*!

Those who give a pre-eminent place to *reason* might fail to face the problems with reason: (1) the cognitive limitations due to heuristics, (2) the psychological limitations of self deception, rationalization, denial, projection and so on, (3) the theoretical limitations of systems—belief system consequences, social system consequences, etc., (4) the epistemological limitations of epistemological biases, epistemological constriction, or specific epistemological avoidance, and (5) the philosophical limitations of the illusions of reason—for example: those noted by Piatelli-Palmarini (1994), those flagged by the likes of Kant and Hume (see <http://www.humesociety.org/hs/issues/v29n1/thielke/thielke-v29n1.pdf>), or those noted by Feyerabend (1975) . Reason enthroned is dangerous!

### On *reflection*!

Those who give a pre-eminent place to *reflections* need a guarded tentativeness as well. Proclaiming papal infallibility, for example, might be plagued by: (1) the weakness of the argument underpinning such a claim, and (2) the historical failures of such a claim. Similarly, proclaiming the pre-eminence for one's theory, or paradigm, or research study, or scientific roots, is problematic given the problems with scientific research (Ioannidis, 2012) and the history of scientific and conceptual revolutions over the past few millennia Feyerabend, 1975; Kuhn, 1970; van Fraassen, 2002). One is best positioned when one adopts a stance that is open to change (van Fraassen, 2002). Consider the issue: "So here is the problem for epistemology; we take ourselves to have knowledge and to know what it is to be rational. Yet we also look back and see that in our past our presumed knowledge went into crisis, and the crisis was resolved in ways that burst the very categories of our then-putative knowledge and reason. We could perhaps think of ourselves as so superior to our past that these reflections are now irrelevant—and maybe that is the natural epistemological attitude. But what if we acknowledge that we could be in that position again? ....There were times when epistemology itself needed to undergo radical changes and did so. Can we coherently acknowledge that we could be in that same position again? This problem is a touchstone for epistemology and a fortiori for empiricism, if an empiricist position is to include an epistemology in its stance (van Fraassen, 2002, p. 73-74)." *Reason* and *revelation* offer a balance, a policing, when triangulated with the *reflections* from authorities. Authorities (e.g., Paradigm, Pope, Council, Theory, Person, Position, University, Scientist, etc.) enthroned can be dangerous!

### On *revelation*!

Those who give a pre-eminent place to *revelation* as in scriptural inerrancy and infallibility would be plagued by: (1) the textual incongruities and apparent errors in special revelation, (2) the literary development of the texts, and (3) the various genre of historical writing, accuracy-expectation, narrative style and intent, authorial ascription, and so on. Revelation enthroned can be dangerous!

Arguably, the appropriate approaches to special *revelation* are tentativeness, multiple-perspective-taking, and ministerial. One must have a sound, humble, and nuanced view of *revelation* (e.g., Swinburne, 2007). This would parallel the same approach wisely adopted with respect to *reason* and *reflections*. A proposed approach to special revelation is stage-based.

### Triangulation and Belief Formation

What would the triangulation look like given the focal points addressed in this essay? Graphically the figure would look something like the following figure. While the figure does not capture all of the levels of analysis, nor all of the components in the analysis it does reveal the approach generally. The fact that Epistemologies is represented by a single term misses the complexity of the various epistemologies that are brought into the mix. For example, under *reasoning* the virtue epistemologies, the passionate and prudential epistemologies, the Gethsemane epistemology, and the obstinacy epistemology, are crucial. Also under reasoning there is a surface structure and a deep structure to be considered. Similarly, there is a surface structure and a deep structure in special revelation. Getting to the deep structure takes work on behalf of reasoning. Even more striking, getting to the deep structure takes work on behalf of the reflections; for example, those reflections on language offered by Swinburne (2007, 2011), C. S. Lewis (1947/1974) and Wolterstorff (2011) are crucial.

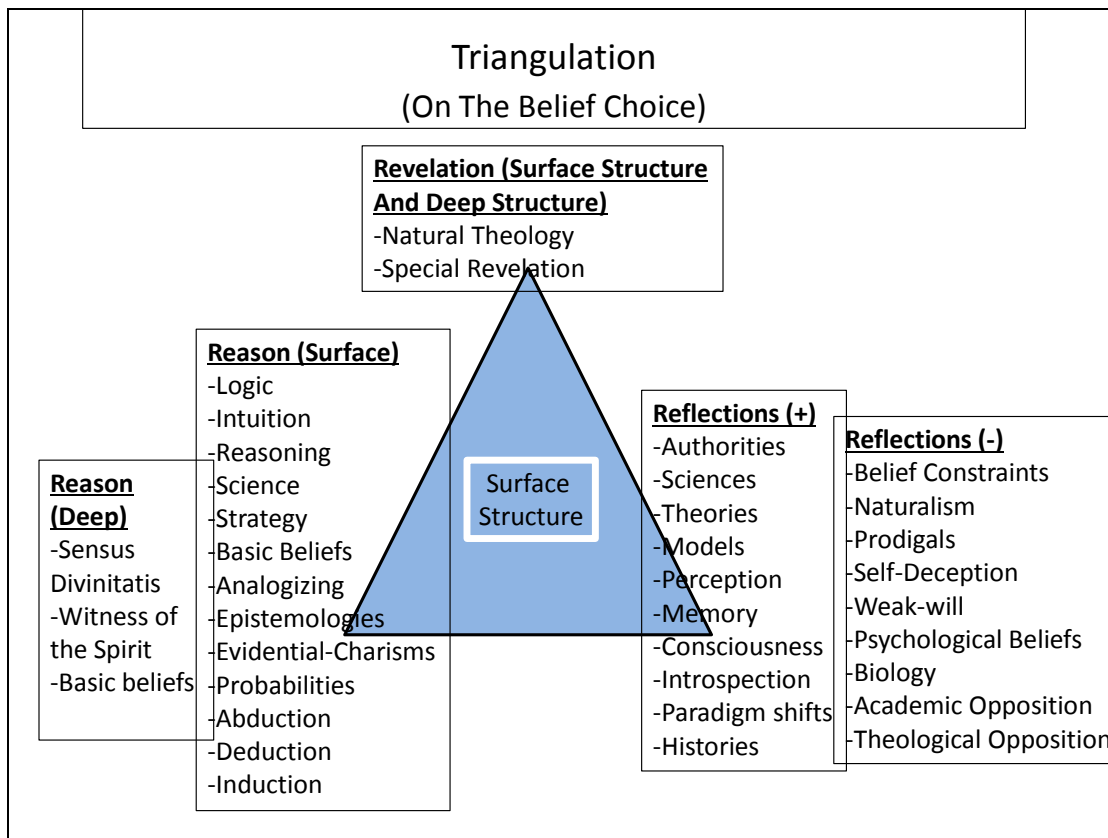


Figure 6. Illustrating some sample components that would be involved in triangulation of *reason*, *revelation* and *reflections*.

For an illustrative application to biblical events see the section on Miracles. For an illustrative application to Biblical text see Appendix 1.

### Natural-Signs Epistemology (and Choice)

Evans (2010) takes a fresh look at three prominent arguments for God: the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, and the moral argument. In effect, prior to these epistemological encounters being formulated as theistic arguments they seem to stand as signs pointing to God. As signs they offer *prima facie* evidence for God. They give awareness of God as a real being. This much is clear, although admittedly, not compelling. But Evans goes further: the signs give informational content about God at least at the level of suggestion. With respect to the cosmological: “Cosmic wonder suggests that whatever reality lies behind the natural universe exists in some deeper, more secure way than the contingent things that cry out for explanation (Evens, 2010, p. 185).” This is informational. With respect to the teleological: “Beneficial order suggests that what lies behind the universe is intelligent because purposive (p. 185). This is informational. With respect to the moral: “Moral obligation suggests that whatever lies behind the universe is personal and cares about moral goodness; the reality must be a being capable of creating an obligation (p. 185).” This is information!

One compelling piece of information that would emerge from the signs and be at play in the current essay is the unseating of naturalism. Naturalism, it has been argued above, is a major constraint against theistic belief, and a major liability in the broad academic field when wearing totalitarian garb. As Evans writes: “Even if we cannot know very much about God from the signs—even whether God is one or many—that does not mean we do not learn anything. We might still come to know that naturalism—the doctrine that the natural, physical world is the whole of reality—is false. Even if we do not know much about what lies beyond and behind nature, it might be very valuable to know that there is something beyond and behind nature (2010, p. 185-186).” This is information!

A second compelling piece of information would be the seating of revelation. As Evans notes: “...natural reasons to believe in God could make it much easier to defend the reasonableness of accepting a claim to special revelation (2010, p. 189).” Miracles, the resurrection, and revelatory history and claims, are much easier to entertain and defend if there is informational content from signs indicating there is a God.

A fuller case for the seating of revelation may be seen in Swinburne (2007).

### Death-Signs Epistemology (and Choice)

Does one choose belief, or disbelief, as a function of thoughts, experiences, and emotions associated with near-death, death, non-being, and judgment? Possibly! It makes some sense for those of an existentialist persuasion (e.g., Heidegger, Sartre, Tillich, etc.) to see death, or the

construct of one's own death, as instrumental in influencing one's thinking, one's prioritizing, and one's behaviours.

1. An Epistemologist's Examination. An existential variant that pushes toward belief, of some sort, is death. Moser, for one, advances death as a belief driver, a driver that pushes choice. Moser sees humans as "...responsible creatures intended by God to enter into volitional fellowship with God, who has the power needed to overcome death for willing humans. Human life itself readily becomes a harmful idol for humans, and thus an obstacle to our honoring God's supremacy over all created things, including ourselves and our lives (Moser, 2008, p. 258)." For Moser, God uses death to show the futility of life apart from him; and offers it as epistemologically evidential. "Attention to human death can thus reveal purposively available evidence of God's reality, particularly God's authoritative call to have us willingly surrender to God's perfectly loving will and power that can overcome death in lasting fellowship with God. As suggested, God is incognito in death, the place of our most serious threat. We do well, then, not to divert attention from our impending death (Moser, 2008, p. 258)."

2. A Commonsense Examination. Is the commonsense notion that there are "No atheists in foxholes" consistent with a philosophical truism? Is this the belief synonymous with hope? Is this the belief of desperation? Is this the true belief stripped of the shackles of various espoused beliefs? Is it the "Hail Mary pass" in the dying seconds of the game? Choice would be a factor here. Such a move is certainly consistent with the prudential epistemologies. One could opt for the prudential option, hope, and not be unreasonable. In fact, it seems quite reasonable, as discussed above regarding the [prudential epistemologies](#).

3. A Philosopher's Examination. Kreeft (2012) asks the question whether death is a friend. The three objections he leads with are:

- a. Death is an enemy in the Bible (I Cor 15:26).
- b. Death is a friend "...only if it helps us. It helps us only if we survive it and live after death. Therefore for those who doubt life after death, death cannot be a friend (p. 239)."
- c. If death is a friend, what should we do? For Kreeft there is the concern that such an opinion raises the response: "...we should cultivate it and invite it to come, for that is what we do to friends. But this would justify suicide (p. 239)."<sup>1</sup>

Kreeft's response to these objections serves to cast death as a friend for a variety of reasons: (1) it "elicits the greatest sincerity," (2) it is a "severe mercy" as noted by Sheldon Vanauken, (3) an enemy can also be a friend as in an opponent in chess, (4) it "is a friend in giving us a frame for our life," (5) it is a friend when timed rightly, "Some friends are friends only if they come at the right time, e.g. matchmakers, menstrual periods, rainstorms, and undertakers (p. 240)."

Considering Kreeft's responses one might cast death as valuable, evidential, and motivationally tilting towards God. It can influence perspective, clarity, reframing, focusing, and

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<sup>1</sup> This approach to death is common in contemporary Islamic martyrs. It was also evident in early Christian martyrs seeking death as something admirable and desirable.



jettisoning of the irrelevant. In effect, death can impact beliefs and then choices. One makes choices with death in mind. Such choices readily tilt towards theism. Yes, such tilts are easily resisted in a one-on-one basis. But the cumulative case is another story.

#### 4. A Psychological Examination.

Phenomena beyond the stages of death and dying (Kubler-Ross, 1969, 1974) found in the psychological literature that might be informative here are: (1) the death prime effect, (2) the Freudian drive known as thanatos, (3) action-identification theory, (4) the ideomotor action theory, (5) ironic effects theory, (6) Baumeister's framing of the "four roots of evil," and (7) personal reflections (e.g., self, Nagel, Hitchens, Ayer, etc.).

The basic guiding question here is: what does the facing of death push one to do? Does it push one to change beliefs, drop beliefs, adopt beliefs, explore beliefs, or solidify beliefs?

What might be learned from reflecting on the recent publication recounting dying and death from Christopher Hitchens (2012)? Are there choices he is seen to be making that tie directly to death?

My view of Hitchens is more positive than negative, even though he showed self-destructive behaviours (e.g., smoking and drinking to excess). While dying he wanted Chesterton which I would see as positive (albeit, perhaps he wanted Chesterton to review a few points to support an attack). But further, his debates with Craig and Lennox seemed more courteous than usual. He seemed on good terms in his travels and debates with Larry Taunton.

Also on the positive side, he showed a remarkable breadth in reading. Many of the questions he raised and the problems he flagged haunt most Christians at some time or other. He was a polemicist; and that's colourful, delightfully so. That said, his attitude to death and dying can be considered from a few perspectives that link to belief and disbelief.

First, action-identification theory leads to a narrowing of thinking when facing constraints. Death is a major constraint. Does Hitchens show a narrowing of thinking? Obviously he does. He chooses to focus on the disease, the death and dying of others, and the impact of his death on others. And somewhat ironically, he positions himself outside of death somehow looking in upon his death from a logical distance and a temporal distance, if not a real distance. Is this Freudian? Are we truly unable to imagine our own death—non-being?

Freud

"We cannot, indeed, imagine our own death; whenever we try to do so we find that we survive ourselves as spectators. The school of psychoanalysis could thus assert that at bottom no one believes in his own death, which amounts to saying: in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his immortality." <http://www.bartleby.com/282/2.html>

If true—that we see ourselves as immortal, transcending death—this places the dying in an interesting position. First, of interest, the dying may be self-deceived when claiming they are accepting the reality of death—not death per se, but their own death. If we truly cannot imagine our own death, this could be evidential—a fundamental conviction of immortality—a basic belief. It could be a sign that we do not die, an argument that we do not die, or a properly basic belief that we do not die. Yet, it is ignored or suppressed. Where a prominent psychological focus is on the denial of death (e.g., Becker, 1973) perhaps the more appropriate focus should be on the denial of life, after “life.”

Secondly, of interest, if true—that we see ourselves as immortal, transcending death—this places the dying in a precarious position, more precarious than they know. Self deception is dangerous, but self immolation is foolish. The death-believers may be entering a state that is not something a rational human being would desire, or should desire. Yet it is ignored or suppressed because of a faulty belief.

Thirdly, of interest, the dying may have chosen the path, and position, that death ends it all. They may be impelled at some level to die or move towards dying. Then they find out it does not end it all. Death may not be the escape they posited, or hoped for. It may not be the goal they thought they sought. There is a conflict between belief and desire.

#### On Thanatos (The death instinct)

Cherry (nd) writes: “Initially described in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud proposed that ‘the goal of all life is death’ (1920). He noted that after people experience a traumatic event (such as war), they often re-enact the experience. He concluded that people hold an unconscious desire to die, but that this wish is largely tempered by the life instincts.... In Freud’s view, self-destructive behavior is an expression of the energy created by the death instincts. When this energy is directed outward onto others, it is expressed as aggression and violence.” --Kendra Cherry at about.com

<http://psychology.about.com/od/sigmundfreud/a/instincts.htm>

#### Ideomotor action theory.

For a fuller discussion of this theory refer back to [Ideomotor Action Theory](#). For now, consider the basic claim: It is claimed that an idea, any idea, actually impels one to action associated with the idea. The idea triggers motor action. If so, what motor actions would the idea of dying or death trigger? Movement towards death and self destruction! Movement towards death might be evident in the feeling (or worry) when looking down from a great height—the worry or fear that one might impulsively throw oneself from the edge. Movement towards death might be evident in loss of appetite, depression, seclusion, withdrawal.... Movement towards death might be evident in risky behaviours (abuse of alcohol and tobacco). When reading through Hitchens’ last book one might ask: did he show these propensities? He didn’t seem to show all these patterns, but some were evident.

Ironic effects theory.

Things can backfire. See the discussion of [ironic effects theory](#). Good intentions can go awry. Attempts to circumvent a problem can actually drive the problem in a more profound manner. If trying to quit smoking actually induces more smoking, what happens when one tries to avoid dying? If trying to quit excessive eating actually induces more eating, what happens when one tries to avoid dying? Is the Freudian move towards dying the resulting effect?

The love of darkness and the four roots of evil.

This lens is intriguing. Recall the four roots of evil are configured as “good” from a general perspective. It is the links to bad effects that gain the term the label “evil.” The four roots of evil as drawn from Baumeister (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) may be identified as: (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure (like *schadenfreude* and gloating). Here’s the psychological irony: these roots of evil can be conceptualized as “doing good.”

Does Hitchens, in his death, gain something, enhance an ego, further an ideal, and delightfully disarm his opponents? It seems so. Does the suicidal jihadist have similar gains? It seems so. Does the Christian martyr? It seems so. The real pivotal question hinges on the ideal. Who has the best case, the best belief, the correct ideal?

5. An Empirical Examination A final aspect of death as a belief-driver is seen in the research on the near death experiences (NDEs). This is a growing body of research that does raise interesting issues. It seems many people who have NDEs may revise their beliefs, or firm up their beliefs, regarding a supernatural dimension. Choice would be a factor here, and it would be evidence based. The question about the quality of the evidence and the nature of the evidence remains. It is largely first person evidence; it convinces the person with the experience, but less so the one who hears about the experience. Nevertheless, there are attempts to approach the phenomena in a more rigorous scientific fashion and the quality of the evidence does seem to grow. There are some striking NDE phenomena.

Does the empirical evidence point to: (1) *brain-disorder*, a brain-based phenomenon which is a product of dysfunction, disarray, and deterioration? (2) a normal, valid, but *alternate level of consciousness, still brain-based*? (3) an *alternate level of reality* not readily amenable to perception given normal brain function? (4) a *post-mortem transitional state*, (purgatorial or “mansions”<sup>1</sup>) in Christian frameworks; bardo states in Tibetan Buddhism, or other transitional states like Hades, the river Styx, or the table-tappers in the *séance*), or (5) a *post-mortem final*

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<sup>1</sup> Consider the Biblical verse: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you...” What is interesting here is the meaning of “mansion.” It is like a tent that Roman soldiers would pitch as a temporary way station on their marches. Transitional! And the tent pitched for one group of soldiers could be unique to their colours, their mascot, their hometowns, their languages, etc. Their neighbours could have a different tent (and different decorating accoutrements) given the human competitive spirit. If there are “many mansions” and they are unique for various individuals, then differences in NDE would not be surprising. I someone like Alexander (2012) was visiting a “mansion” fashioned with him in mind (i.e., God’s mind). Not heaven; just a transitional tent (personal tents constructed with the unique individual in mind) that Jesus spoke about. Just a hypothesis! But one that intrigues me.

*state?* There is arguably evidence, or possible evidence, pointing to each of these possibilities. Interestingly, then, each of these five possibilities may offer some evidence of theism as a by-product to a challenge to naturalism, or conventional neuropsychology.

As a *brain-disorder* the mere fact of consideration of NDE phenomena can broaden one's knowledge base, and permit the assignment of subjective probabilities given the pros and cons of such traditional explanatory hypotheses. Sabom (1982) considers a number of front-line explanations for the NDE like: semiconscious states, conscious fabrication, subconscious fabrication, depersonalization mechanisms, hallucinations, dreams, prior expectations, drug-induced delusions or hallucinations, endorphin release, and temporal lobe epilepsy. There are arguments for and against these explanations, though some are more likely, or more reasonable, than others (e.g., hypercarbia carries some weight as does hypoxia, endorphin release, and temporal lobe seizures).

Even the deteriorating, dying, brain in disarray can alert one to the beauty of the healthy functioning brain, a brain which is a sign of theism. Disorder has much to teach us about order. As an illustration, it was, in large part, the disordered brain (e.g., brain-damaged, autistic-savants), or the different brain (e.g., prodigies) that informed the case for multiple intelligences as formulated by Gardner (1983). However, it is likely that hypotheses 2 through 5 are more prominent in raising questions about evidence for theism.

As an *alternate level of consciousness* (something internal) or as an *alternate level of reality* (something external) the NDE is somewhat enlightening, but perhaps also alarming. The evidence triggered by researchers like the early Raymond Moody (1975, 1977) in his research on "Life After Life" is intriguing, for the religious and the non-religious alike. It does raise the issue of an *alternate level of consciousness* which would be internal to the individual. This would be interesting in itself. It would surely be an area of study drawing various academics. And the quality of this alternate level of consciousness—clarity of thought, perception, sense of reality, perception of time, life-history memories, sense of the supernatural, and so on—do signal a possible pointer to the divine.

However, there is also the possibility of an *alternate level of reality*. The shift to explorations of an alternate level of reality, evident in the later Moody (e.g., Moody & Perry, 1993) with attention to more bizarre explorations (e.g., mirror gazing and the psychomanteum), is still intriguing, but is also, for the Christian, alarming, as it points to a level of reality that Christian thought treats with considerable suspicion. It can be evidential however in that it points to Christian theology.

The NDE research and reflections by Christians in the medical professions (Rawlings, 1978, 1993; and more critically: Sabom 1982, 1998) is potentially evidential for the Christian. The evidences marshalled by Habermas and Moreland (1998) in *Beyond Death*, can push one in the direction of belief, a tilt. While dramatic examples of NDEs are clearly questionable with respect to the claims of actual brain death (e.g., Alexander, 2012), other examples are striking (e.g., Sabom 1998). Sabom reported on the NDE of Pam Reynolds which is one of the more striking accounts given the details surrounding the mechanics and nature of her induced-death.

True, death may not have been reached in some ultimate sense given the fact that the one experiencing the NDE returns. Even if the experience is brain-based the experiences have characteristics that warrant the investigation of the cognitive experiences, processes, frameworks, and so on. They are remarkable experiences whether they are: (1) entirely materially-based, that is, brain-based phenomena, (2) indicative of non-material aspects of the human being with the soul or spirit in play, or (3) whether they are more sinister actual encounters with a dimension of reality under the influence of “principalities and powers.” All hypotheses should be on the table.

There are numerous good effects reported to follow from the NDE. They (i.e., NDE experiencers) often change their lives to reflect a break from pure naturalism, or shift their life-focus to reflect a heightened interest in care, love, relationships, compassion, religion, and even zealous sharing (Alexander, 2012; Neal, 2012). Not all of course clearly make this change. It seems the naturalist A.J. Ayer didn’t change much as a result of his NDE (see his chapter in Hitchens, 2007b). Yet, perhaps Ayer did change somewhat. This is a possible inference from some of his subsequent behaviours. See:

<http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/roundtable/an-atheist-meets-the-masters-of-the-universe.php>

Also, the fact that Ayers’ memory of NDE events may have been compromised is consistent with: (1) the neurophysiological effects of oxygen deprivation, and (2) Maurice Rawlings observation that there can be a revision of experiences after the NDE. Although, admittedly, the reports from Rawlings may be suspect given Sabom’s (1998) critique of some of Rawlings’ claims.

The NDE is sufficiently broad to justify a place at the table for consideration at the cognitive level, the psychophysical level, and the theological level. Moreover, the experiences can be cast in general evidential contexts (Cook, Greyson, & Stevenson, 1998; Potts, 2002), religious evidential contexts (Bonenfant, 200; Ellwood, 2000; Ring & Valarino, 2006), and with evidential evaluations and warnings to those who adhere to a Christian worldview (Sabom, 1998; 2000a; 2000b).

The bottom line is that death can have an epistemological impact. It can strengthen beliefs. It can direct beliefs. It can correct or ameliorate dyspistis. Alternatively, death might have a sedating effect; the cessation of life might look like a good thing, an appealing state. And if we can choose our beliefs, the cessation of death may be seen as a good choice. Of course true belief is not the driving concern in this scenario. Preference is the driving force and a type of blindness; think back to those like Nagel who admit such a preference and seem to orient life around such a preference.

#### Obstinacy Epistemology (and Choice)

Consider the state of being in love or having a firm friendship. One sees the positive qualities in the others. One attends to the positives. One learns to value the positives. The personalized concept of love or friendship grows over time and trials.

Later some negatives arise. But the obstinacy of belief (Lewis, 1960) supports one in mitigating the negatives. One has such rich positives in one's memory banks that the negatives that seem to surface are considered as anomalies, misperceptions, malevolent artefacts salted by some Iago. The first line of epistemological defense is to implement the obstinacy of belief. It will serve one well!

Of course there is a down side to this cognitive strategy or style. If one is encountering folly (say the positives in Islam, or the positives in Mormonism, or the positives in Nazism, or the positives in the gold-digger-woman) one is in danger. There is a point where the evidence ought to overcome the obstinacy of belief; but it is distant, not near. The knee-jerk response is no match for the jerk on the heart.

### Light Epistemology (and Choice)

This epistemological focus is based initially on John's claim that Jesus is the light (John 1:6-12). "There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him (Jn. 1:9-11)." He is a light, or the light, that enlightens.

In his essay "Is theology poetry?" C. S. Lewis distinguishes dreaming and waking states as something of a metaphor for science and theological states. "When I am awake I can, in some degree, account for and study my dream. The dragon that pursued me last night can be fitted into my waking world. I know that there are such things as dreams; I know that I had eaten an indigestible dinner; I know that a man of my reading might be expected to dream of dragons. But while in the nightmare I could not have fitted in my waking experience. The waking world is judged more real because it can thus contain the dreaming world; the dreaming world is judged less real because it cannot contain the waking one. For the same reason I am certain that in passing from the scientific points of view to the theological, I have passed from dream to waking. Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else (Lewis, 1949/1980, pp. 139-140)." Christianity offers light to see by. To see even the minor lights like science.

This idea of the light of Christianity explaining things is also explored by Lewis in his book "Miracles." He starts with the analogy where we possess part of a creative work—a novel or a symphony. Take the fragmentary novel; a new chapter shows up with the claim it is a missing chapter and central to the novel. The plot of the novel is housed in this chapter. Lewis writes: "Our business would be to see whether the new passage, if admitted to the central place which the discoverer claimed for it, did actually illuminate the parts we had already seen and 'pull them together.' Nor should we be likely to go very far wrong. The new passage, if spurious, however attractive it looked at first glance, would become harder and harder to reconcile with the rest of the work the longer we considered the matter. But if it were genuine than at every fresh hearing of the music or every fresh reading of the book, we should find it settling down, making

itself more at home and eliciting significance from all sorts of details in the whole work which we had hitherto neglected. Even though the new central chapter or main theme contained great difficulties in itself, we should still think it genuine provided that it continually removed difficulties elsewhere (Lewis, 1947/1974, pp. 399-400).” This resonates. Things get clearer and clearer with Jesus as the Christian core.

Lewis finds the Christian core in the Incarnation. It functions as the newly found chapter. “Here, instead of a symphony or a novel, we have the whole mass of our knowledge. The credibility will depend on the extent to which the doctrine, if accepted, can illuminate and integrate the whole mass. It is much less important that the doctrine itself should be fully comprehensible. We believe that the sun is in the sky at midday in summer not because we can clearly see the sun (in fact, we cannot) but because we see everything else (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 400).”

He applies this further to the contrast between science and Christianity. “In science we have been reading only the notes to a poem; in Christianity we find the poem itself (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 418).” And with respect to the caliber of the evidence one would consider: “Whether the thing really happened is a historical question. But when you turn to history you will not demand for it that kind and degree of evidence which you would rightly demand for something intrinsically improbable; only that kind and degree which you demand for something which, if accepted, illuminates and orders all other phenomena, explains both our laughter and our logic, our fear of the dead and our knowledge that it is somehow good to die, and which at one stroke covers what multitudes of separate theories will hardly cover for us if this is rejected (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 400).” The light incarnated is masterfully functional, masterfully illuminating, masterfully elegant, and masterfully intimate—at the level of knowing and known.

An interesting variant on “light” is offered by Rauser (2012) in what he calls LAMPs—**L**ittle **A**mazing **M**oments of **P**rovidence. These are synchronous events that suggest a pattern, a meaningful pattern. An initial response would be: “It’s just a coincidence!” On a categorical scale (Yes/No) one would likely be quite justified in favouring the coincidence label. However, on a continuous scale one becomes more suspicious; there are degrees of confidence now in play. Rauser (2012) refers to Dembski (see Dembski, 1998) in considering the question of an intelligence—a design—behind an event. The propensity to see design is increased as: (1) the *complexity* of the synchronous event increases, (2) the *specificity* of the synchronous event increases, and (3) the “suggestive pattern or *signature*” of the event increases. For Rauser, most important is “the strength of the signature (2012, p. 206).” Evidential LAMPs ought to be considered, and not dismissed on principles like: (1) a categorical approach to coincidence, (2) unavailability of experimental confirmation, (3) sola naturalism, or (4) preference, preference for darkness.

Light enlightens. Jesus is that light. He is the light that enlightens, somewhat ironically, even the Enlightenment! It is my experience, in line with Lewis, that things get clearer and clearer with Jesus as the light, the missing chapter found. But one must choose to receive him (Jn. 1:11-12). It is a bright epistemology!

### Confluence (and Choice)

Merging of epistemologies is one type of integration—a merging of methods. Another type of merging is confluence, a merging of agents. Confluence with respect to agents postulates the simultaneous action-of-God and action-of-human in knowing. For orthodox Christians there is the belief that the Scriptures are produced by the confluent action of a human being and God. The product is 100% the product of man, thus showing the style, language, background knowledge, and other features of the human author. At the same time, the product is considered to be 100% the product of God, in that God superintends the confluent action<sup>1</sup>. A similar view of agency, as in the production of Scripture, could extend to the production of a type of knowledge.

If a similar variant of confluency exists with respect to knowledge building, transcendental knowledge, what would the theological grounding look like? On the human side of the formula, we know human beings are heavily invested in the belief-producing, and knowledge-building, aspects of existence. In addition, on the divine side, Christians believe God is involved as well, confluent. The *sensus divinitatis* is a tool of God at work. There is the promise of the Holy Spirit contributing to belief-building. Deep reasoning! The Scriptures make one wise. The Church has the call to edify. The heavens declare the glory of God. The ant helps the sluggard! Perhaps by design! The law teaches. The history of the Jews is enlightening! The creation itself helps the human, perhaps by design (Gonzalez & Richards, 2004). The difference from Scripture-producing confluency, where God is superintending, is that the human being is superintending with respect to belief-producing confluency. Thus, the error rate is human. And, therefore, the human choices are important.

Is such confluency evidence of a push in the direction of acceptance and belief? Look and see, Dick and Jane!

### Traditional Epistemological Reasoning

#### Deduction (and Choice)

Craig (2008) in his book “Reasonable Faith,” frames the moral argument such that it is deductive and one must logically deduce God from the premises of the argument. If the premises are accepted the conclusion must follow. When such a deduction is denied, it must be by choice, must it not, if the premises are accepted?

In the moral argument the two premises (and the logical conclusion) are:

- (1) If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
- (2) Objective moral values and duties do exist.

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<sup>1</sup> Worth noting at this point is an observation offered by C. S. Lewis in his book *Miracles*. What happens when the miraculous enters the natural realm? “Miraculous wine will intoxicate, miraculous conception will lead to pregnancy, inspired books will suffer the ordinary processes of textual corruption, miraculous bread will be digested.... Its cause is the activity of God: its results follow according to Natural law (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 353-354).”



(3) Therefore, God exists (p.172).

Another framing of this argument might be:

- (1) If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
- (2) On naturalism, as in the animal kingdom, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
- (3) Therefore, God does not exist.

The key to the argument, and the conclusion, is which second premise one accepts. If one accepts that objective moral values and duties do exist for human beings, the conclusion follows—God exists. One chooses to accept that conclusion. I accept that there are objective moral values and duties. I am bound to accept that God exists. I am bound to choose that conclusion. Unless, of course, I can come up with a reason to reframe the second premise, say a naturalist-based reframing, and posit that values are subjective and cultural (as Hume’s claims are developed by Mackie, 2007). If so, then I can choose the different conclusion—God does not exist.

How does someone like Harris (2011) treat the premises?

What Kind of Blindness might Harris be experiencing?

1. Nagelism (I don’t want it to be true)
2. Lewontinism (No foot in the door allowed)
3. Hitchens/Dawkinism (I don’t like Him)
4. Naturalism (No room for God as a moral foundation, by definition)
5. Professional Blindness (See [Iatrogenic Blindness](#))
6. Abandonment (Romans 1)

### Induction (and Choice)

Induction, as in the sciences, is a choice, or at least has elements of a choice when rationalization, denial, and suppression are precluded. Moreover, induction always has the phrase “until further notice” (cf Feigl) tacked on to the end of claims, even scientific claims.

### Abduction (and Choice)

One considers all the information available, or all the information on one’s table, and then makes an inference to the best explanation. This seems to clearly involve a choice in the step of making the inference. Of course the inference is open to challenge based on criticisms offered, additional information, or the tabling of an alternate inference that is arguably better—better in terms of explanatory scope, explanatory power, internal coherence, or epistemological underpinnings.

A variant of abduction is the Pro/Con cumulative case test. In Christianity, for example, the cumulative case in favour of Christianity is quite strong; the cumulative case against Christianity is quite weak. In Islam, the cumulative case in favour of Islam is quite weak; the

cumulative case against Islam is quite strong. For Naturalism, the cumulative case in favour of Naturalism is quite weak; the cumulative case against Naturalism is quite strong.

This abductive method is operative in the current focus on dyspistemology. Given the evidence, arguments, and evaluations placed “on the table” for consideration here, the abductive inference that follows is: all the tilting evident is consistent with an inference that theism is a better position than atheism, or agnosticism.

### Analogical Reasoning (and Choice)

Such thinking can be viewed as: (1) a form of inductive thinking (Moore & Parker, 2001), (2) a “bridging” strategy to facilitate understanding of a complex concept by means of a simpler concept, or (3) a form of reasoning and problem solving requiring theoretical and empirical analysis (Gentner & Markman, 1997; Holyoak & Thagard, 1997) and/or neuropsychological considerations (Ashcraft, 2002). Each of these three views is amenable to thinking and understanding various target analogies from the analogical base. Inductively, as the analogical thinking unfolds, more and more facts, perceptions, elements and relations can be laid out which serve to facilitate induction, and abduction. Then, theoretical and empirical considerations add credit to the reasoning and problem solving.

In terms of theoretical underpinnings, the multiple-constraints theory (Holyoak & Thagard, 1997) and the structure-mapping theory (Gentner & Markam, 1997) offer two frameworks to draw upon when considering what can be learned from the use of analogical thinking, and what has been learned from particular analogies. Together, the two theories enrich the infrastructure for thinking, and give direction for a range of considerations.

Multiple-Constraints Theory. In the multiple-constraints theory, Holyoak and Thagard (1997) present three types of constraints: similarity, structure, and goals. With respect to similarity, the analogy is driven by, and dependent on, similarities in key *elements* and key *relations*. With respect to structure, *elements* and *relations* are mapped from the source to the target to identify consistent structural parallels. With respect to goals, the question of what the thinker’s intent might be is developed to guide the thinking.

On another axis, the authors address a “mapping step,” an “inference step,” and a “learning step.” Essentially, in the “mapping step” the logician (or the “analogician”) identifies similarities with respect to elements, relations, and coherent structural parallels. In the “inference step” new information is formulated, hypothesized, and considered. Likely, there is a tentative acceptance or rejection process active at this point as well. In the final step, the “learning step,” one acquires a broader perspective and perhaps a more-informed opinion or better understanding of the target analogy. In essence, then, knowledge grows in a manner that corresponds with reason and reality.

Structure-Mapping Theory. In structure-mapping theory (Gentner & Markam, 1997) the emphasis is on the knowledge which emerges from comparison processes (of similarities, metaphors, analogies, and anomalies) targeting commonalities (systematic, parallel, connected) and differences (alignable differences and non-alignable differences) in the source and target.

The alignment of the structures is the defining characteristic but there are three psychological constraints on this alignment that the authors argue for: (1) structural consistency, (2) a relational focus, and (3) systematicity. Generally the parallels with multiple-constraints theory are clear given the constraints related to structure and relations. The notion of systematicity, however, is less clear. In view of the notion that analogies “tend to match connected systems of relations” Gentner and Markam (1997) describe systematicity as follows: “A matching set of relations interconnected by higher order constraining relations makes a better analogical match than an equal number of matching relations that are unconnected to each other. The systematicity principle captures a tacit preference for coherence and causal predictive power in analogical processing (p. 47).”

Drawing on the two theoretical approaches to analogical thinking there would be a series of questions one could generate as a guide for evaluating the components in the analogies considered, and, subsequently, the merits of the investigation. Such questions could be addressed initially and subsequent to a consideration of the analogy.

1. What are the goals in formulating the analogy?
  - a. -Generally: knowledge, understanding, truth seeking, theory exploration, thinking, use of cognitive tools for assisting thinking, conceptual analysis,
  - b. -Specifically: To consider biological, physical, semantic, and logical parallels, for example, between evolutionary theory and gravitational theory.
2. What are the elemental similarities?
  - a. -Determinants (givens in sciences, function in time, temporal, eternity, )
  - b. -Labels (hypotheses, theories and laws, ...\_
3. What are the relational similarities?
  - a. -Remains to be seen if the elemental similarities can be moved to this category
  - b. -Both viewed by some as having creative power, agency,
4. What are the differences (non-alignable)?
  - a. -Biological vs Physical
  - b. -Social status-Evolution-Frowned upon by segments of society, not so for gravity
  - c. -Moral status – Evolution-judged by segments of society as suspect, not so for gravity
5. What are the differences (alignable)?
  - a. -Remains to be seen if the non-alignable can be moved to this alignable
6. Is the mapping coherent (showing systematicity and parallel connectedness)?
  - a. Perhaps? Perhaps not!
7. What is the “inference step?”
  - a. -Both are theories, but only one is at a law level, that is, gravity.
8. What is the “learning step?”

When considering analogies, as Gentner and Markam (1997) point out, inferences are drawn from the base case to the particular target scenario. Given this directionality it makes sense that the base is constructed from the more informationally-rich, coherent, and systematic formulation. This facilitates mapping a maximal amount of information to the target scenario.

### Figurative Thinking (and Choice)

A further variant of the analogical thinking is the figurative thinking addressed in forms like metaphor, allegory, parable, poetry, colloquialisms, idiom, and so on. Swinburne (2007, 2011) and Wolterstorff (2011) have presented cases for caution in treating certain biblical texts literally. When these texts are considered in the broad context of literary genre, language itself, understanding increases. Reason is enhanced.

### Agnosticism (and Choice)

I am holding that agnosticism is underpinned by choice, and a choice history. It is analogous to an orientation such as a smoking orientation, a sexual orientation, a disordered eating orientation, a suicidality orientation, and even positive orientations like creative writing, musicianship and athletic prowess. It is learned, preferentially.

It is linkable to a virtue-epistemological failure, like “laziness,” or shallow cognitive processing (Baehr, 2011; Carr, 2010). It is linked to failure to investigate. It is linked to a psychological failure like a reliance on biases and heuristics (Kahneman, 2003, 2011).

Baumeister flagged the four causes of evil as roughly: (1) gain, (2) ego, (3) idealism, and (4) sadism. Interestingly, these can be factors in the agnosticism-stance, as well. There is gain in agnosticism: freedom, pleasure, control, .... There is ego in agnosticism: I am in charge. I am the “I am.” There is idealism in agnosticism: let’s work for human flourishing, care, the environment, the brights, the sciences, the poor .... There is aggressive anger, if not sadism, in agnosticism, in that, one can take a few adolescent swipes at the unlikeable—one’s creator, one’s designer, one’s choreographer, one’s boss, one’s “parent.”

Interestingly, Swinburne (1998) flags agnosticism as an evil. See his chapter 11 “The Evils of Sin and Agnosticism.” Also, see the later discussion on Swinburne and agnosticism [here](#).

And from a different perspective an agnostic orientation may also be linked to problematic-belief generating mechanisms like ideomotor-action theory, ironic-effects theory, action-identification theory, learning theory, and so on.

When asked, in another context, what the cause might be of a homosexual orientation, or a smoking orientation, or disordered eating, or drug abuse, or compulsive shopping, my response was simply to say:

*“...simple and complex reward-systems (operant learning theory, opponent-process-theory), curiosity, bad thinking (via action-identification theory, dissonant thinking theory, self deception, addictive thinking, illusory thinking), self-corrective backfires (ironic effects theory), bad beliefs, developmental lags in resources (cognitive immaturity, and self-regulation weaknesses), bad constraint systems (parents, politics, media, culture, laws), bad choices, chance, and time, all in*

*the context of a smattering of biological influences. The cause is a complex constellation of variables, all of them centered on thinking, learning, and choosing.”*

How I reached such a claim was the substance of another book. How I see the same explanation for agnosticism is one thrust of this current text.

## Evidential-Charisms/Post-Hoc Evidences (The Belief-Choice Finds Affirmation)

What is the right term to express this post-hoc relationship with evidence? It is a commonplace that evidence precedes opinions, beliefs, and knowledge. Indeed! Yet, there is a place for evidential input that is post-hoc. While convinced that evidence is important in the traditional senses, it is not necessarily merely inceptional. Evidence continues to accumulate and influence decisions. When evidence follows belief it can be termed an evidential-grace, an evidential-charism, or an understanding—indeed, an understanding reminiscent of “faith in search of understanding.”

Plantinga’s case for properly basic belief in God, and Calvin’s case for the *sensus divinitatis*, both are rational and credible. These are faculty-based starting points! Like many, I find myself believing. In addition, there is a plethora of theistic evidences available; though, it seems to be, at times, these evidences are more of a graceful encounter post-hoc—encounters that firm-up belief, or firm-up the “I find myself believing” state. The entitlement to belief grows as the evidence grows—much like love for the beloved grows as knowing him or her grows, or much like the plant flowers over time, or much like life unfolds teleologically. Suspecting evidence, in some ways, to be more like grace than seminal data, I opt for the term evidential-charisms as a post-hoc evidential role distinct from the seminal conventional evidential role. This label does not preclude the value of facts, even brute facts; rather, it contextualizes the facts more broadly, temporally, and wonderfully.

Why this focus on evidence? One reason is based on a need to gain a better philosophical and psychological understanding of evidence and evidentialism. I had been operating with a somewhat traditional academic view that evidence is provided—as, or by, or through—senses, observation, memory, authorities, investigation, taxonomies, experimentation, arguments, logic, reason, theories, and finally narratives (biographies, histories, and “papers”) that show coherence, consistency, and resistance to defeaters. Evidence leads to theory-building, beliefs, and knowledge. In research communities this seems to be the common sense view. It fits the scientific philosophy, research program, and paradigm that underpinned my own academic pursuits. In science evidence can be acquired prior to a belief, and following a belief. The same holds with respect to theistic belief.

So, why do I have the need now to postulate this? First, it is now relatively clear to me that a clear distinction is warranted between two approaches to evidence: seminal (that which triggers a belief) and supportive (that which strengthens a belief). The latter I term evidential-charisms. Second, it is now relatively clear to me that some people treat theistic arguments and

evidences as seminal rather than as charisms. They look at an argument or piece of evidence offered and dismiss them as seminally inadequate—not sufficiently compelling. Others look and see evidence-charisms.

On the basis of absolute evidentialism of the seminal type, my nephew found himself to be a committed atheist, though he does switch to the term agnosticism in the interests of some honourable cognitive-cover, I suspect. I suspect it is a cover because I'm arguing at various points that agnosticism (and atheism) is a choice—or at least based on choices—and it is a choice that goes against the evidence when one considers the evidence virtuously and one has a healthy, informed, and suitably situated mind. My issue is: how do I present my case? But first, two preliminaries: (1) who has the burden of proof? and (2) what is my nephew's case?

### The Burden of Proof

It is generally argued that the burden of proof is on the theist. Not necessarily so! In Flew's (2007) discussion of his debates he proposed this claim in the "The Presumption of Atheism" that "the onus of proof must lie with the theists" as a "procedural principle." Following the challenges to the argument from the likes of Plantinga and McInerny, Flew's response was tempered. He considered the challenges. "So, while Plantinga argued that theists did not bear the burden of proof, McInerny went still further, holding that the burden of proof must fall on atheists (Flew, 2007, p. 55-56)!" Then: "Given adequate grounds for belief in God, theists commit no philosophical sin in so believing! The presumption of atheism is, at best, a methodological starting point, not an ontological conclusion (Flew, 2007, p. 56)."

Flew describes his 1985 debate in Texas (Anthony Flew, Wallace Matson, Kai Nielsen, and Paul Kurtz vs Alvin Plantinga, Wm. Alston, George Mavrodes, and Ralph McInerny) where each side clung to the "...position that the burden of proof was on the opposing side (Flew 2007, p. 69)." If Plantinga is right the burden of proof is on the atheist side. As Flew notes: "Plantinga, on the theist side, insisted that belief in God is properly basic, meaning that theists have no obligation to provide arguments for their belief, just as they cannot and do not have to produce arguments to support other fundamental beliefs like the existence of the world (Flew, 2007, p. 69-70)." One could add belief in other minds, belief in the reliability of perceptions, personal memory, and other properly basic beliefs. In effect, the issue of "who has the burden of proof" is not a settled question. Perhaps the real burden is the *burden of disproof* which would fall on the shoulders of the deniers, much like the burden of disproof falls upon the shoulders of those who deny the holocaust, or those who deny the real world, or those who deny the reliability of memory, or those who deny that the cosmos emerged from some agent.

Rausser (2012) also sees the burden of proof falling on the atheist. In his collection of discussions with an atheist one of the topics is the "burden of proof" issue. The following points help capture the essence of his claim with respect to leprechauns, or in parentheses (*God*):

- One does not have a burden of proof to disprove the existence of leprechauns (*God*), unless: (1) He meets someone who claims there are leprechauns and proceeds to offer evidence and arguments to support his claim for leprechauns (*God*). If the evidence and

arguments are rational there is an *epistemic obligation*, in line with a virtue epistemology, to explore the issue, develop hypotheses and theories, critique the issue, test the issue, and develop the issue. He meets someone who offers evidence and arguments but at an irrational level; then, there is a *therapeutic obligation*, in line with human compassion, to offer counseling, medication, education, and other helps. (3) He decides to explore the issue out of curiosity or existential interests; then there is a *virtue epistemology obligation* to treat the issue fully and fairly. Whatever route, it seems there is a burden of proof falling upon the leprechaun-deniers, if and only if, there are hypotheses on the table arguing for the existence of leprechauns.

- The demand for a “burden-of-proof-to-disprove” actually increases if there is an increase in the number of leprechaun believers (*theists*).
- The burden of proof is not only “to disprove” the existence of leprechauns, it is also to prove the alternative—that is, the only life-forms permitted are those we, along with others, see via the sciences (*naturalism*).
- The burden of proof is not only “to disprove” the existence of leprechauns, it is also to prove the methodological adequacy of the denial mechanism, science—that is, prove (or at least make a case other than a “science-of-the-gaps” case that the sciences will explain art, ethics, music, poetry, love, rights, morality, religion, beauty, truth, and so on (*scientism*)).

Christians have not abandoned efforts to offer proofs, and by proofs are meant evidences rather than a degree of evidential sufficiency which would demand assent. Even with those who see belief in God as a properly basic belief (e.g., Plantinga, 1983, 2000), there is a willingness to consider evidences (Plantinga, 2007). Those atheists that rise to the challenge of taking the burden of proof seriously seem to have a high ground comparable to the Christian theist exploring proofs.

### My Nephew’s Challenge

My nephew’s case can be extracted from his five quotes below (my comments in *italics*):

Q1. “It is safe to say that I'm agnostic; but I'm agnostic about god in the same way I'm agnostic about fairies or jinns. It can't be positively proven that these things don't exist, so I wouldn't ever claim it an absolute certainty that they don't.”

- *At one level, this seems to be a fair reason to select agnosticism as opposed to atheism.*
- *At another level, are there good epistemic grounds for placing God in the same category as fairies and jinns? I think not! This seems to be, in part, a category problem; and it does hint at a bias reflective of a choice.*

Q2. “The analogy was only to make a point of comparison about my agnosticism. It wasn't meant to be taken in any way as argument or corroboration for the unlikelihood of any of the aforementioned creatures (including god). I wasn't associating them with one another in terms of any strength for arguments supporting their existence. It was instead about how exactly it would be fair to refer to me as agnostic. I use the word

agnostic in reference to the notion that god exists, in the same way I would use it about the notion that a fairy does.”

- *He acknowledges there might be a difference re “strength” for an argument. This is good! Why? Because he may be inviting evidence, and be open to the epistemic merit (like Hume, and Lock, et al.) of proportioning belief.*

Q3. “I do not believe in fairies, or jinns, or unicorns. However, I would ultimately need to concede that at the root, I am agnostic about these things. This is so because a lack of evidence for something is not proof that it doesn't exist. For practical purposes though, as a result of this lack of evidence, I feel comfortable stating that they do not exist, since there is no good reason to believe that they do. I would argue the same is true for cases for god.”

- *Agnostic about fairies and jinns ...because there is a lack of evidence? Okay. As am I agnostic about fairies, but not just because of a lack of evidence; I also look to lack of sound arguments and common sense. Where does common sense fit in this mix of fairies, jinns and God? Is this muddling an epistemic sign of bad faith?*
- *Key idea: “no good reason to believe” with respect to “cases for god.” Or phrased better: there are no good arguments, evidence, or reasons for belief God. It is interesting that my nephew uses the lower case designate rather than the upper case for God. One could agree that the case for god, is different from the case for God. But for both of these precision is required. There is the case for gods in the Greek and Roman senses; the case for god in the Tolle sense (we are all divine), the case for god as Jesus argued it when challenged, the case for god as that which a greater cannot be conceived (Anselm), a case for the gods that are physical idols, and psychological idols. In some senses, lower case gods exist! And then there is the configuration of the case for the Judeo-Christian God.*
- *So I'm assuming: my nephew is arguing that: (1) there is no case for theism, and (2) there is “no good reason to believe” there is a “case” for the Judeo-Christian God?*

Q4. “I'm quite sure there was never a decision made on my part to become an atheist. This was a very gradual process, leading to an eventual admission to myself that any vocal claim I made about believing was insincere. In my rational mind, my heart, my gut, I didn't really believe; I wanted to, but I couldn't make myself. Theism was something that I tried to hold onto, until I couldn't any longer with any reflective sense of honesty or sincerity.”

- *Does a “gradual process” preclude choices? I think not. With such a trajectory are you thinking synchronically rather than diachronically with respect to choice?*
- *Recognition where one particular You (let's call it the “Upper-You”) looked objectively at another you (call it the “Lower-You”) as a thinker, feeler, and*



*entity, and then this Upper-You, judged that this Lower-You lacked evidence for belief in God. I realize this is a little convoluted!*

- *Interesting that you say you wanted to believe and tried to hold onto a belief. On accepting versus believing see the discussion of Jordan under [Preparatory Steps](#). The psychology of “accepting” may benefit from being fleshed out a little; there may be a hierarchy of “accepting” (i.e., bad-accepting, better-accepting, good-accepting, best-accepting) that would be worth exploring as an epistemological issue.*
- *You imply your adoption of agnosticism was driven by honesty and sincerity. Perhaps. But that’s not what Pascal et al. would suggest; and not what [Swinburne would suggest; he sees agnosticism as an evil](#). How would you challenge their claims, I wonder?*

Q5. “... there was never a point in my life that I chose to be an atheist. Rather, if there were a god, and I were made, I would have been made an atheist. What I mean by this is that I am incapable of genuinely accepting positive claims as true without evidence and reason to support them.”

- *No choice? See Jordan.*
- *Attributing your position to your nature, the way you were made? See Jordan.*
- *You seem to be open to evidence and reason as supports. Did you seek it out? See Jordan.*
- *You seem to rely on the “absolute evidentialist” epistemological position. As I read the epistemological literature such a position is seriously flawed; it doesn’t just falter, it falls apart.*

Do I have any reasons here for hope or expectation that my young nephew might change his mind?

- He seems to want to be open to reasons as he flags “no good reason to believe” as instrumental.
- He seems open to “practical purposes” which might be common sense pragmatism, and perhaps prudential epistemologies.
- He acknowledges there may be strength differences in arguments and evidence “I wasn’t associating them with one another in terms of any strength for arguments supporting their existence...”
- He sees himself as having fallen into agnosticism rather than opting for agnosticism “...quite sure there was never a decision made on my part to become an atheist...”

How do I craft an apologetic that honours evidentialism? Does such an apologetic go beyond my conventional scientific, or academic, evidentialism expressed above? This moves the

task into psychology, theology and philosophy; the task becomes even more complex. Then one might be in a position to adopt an authentic approach to evidentialism—one that acknowledges the compelling challenges to evidentialism in its various forms (Dougherty, 2011, Jordan, 2006).

### An Inclusivist Approach

My initial approach to what constitutes evidence was expressed above as: *I have been operating with a somewhat traditional academic view that evidence is provided—as, or by, or through—senses, observation, authorities, investigation, taxonomies, experimentation, arguments, logic, reason, theories, and finally narratives (biographies, histories, and “papers”) that show coherence, consistency, and resistance to defeaters.* After ruminations, readings, and recursivity, I would add additional resources for accessing evidence: (1) "inclinations" to believe, basic beliefs, basic propositions, probabilities, acquired beliefs, theories, and background evidence (Swinburne, 2011), (2) volitional epistemological beliefs (Moser, 2008, 2010), (3) the sensus divinitatis and properly basic beliefs (Plantinga, 2000), (4) the prudential epistemologies of Pascal, James, Jordan and others (see Jordan, 2006), (5) passional epistemology (e.g., Edwards, James, and Newman ( see Wainwright, 1995), (6) whatever grounds belief (e.g., in addition to sources already listed one finds the following: *memory, axioms, natural principle, education, training, gestures, signs, expertise, past acts, facial expressions, theory-of-mind, bird colouring, tree rings, and more*) (Rysiew on Reid, 2011), (7) common sense (Reid, 1818/2011), and (8) propositions, in that all evidence is propositional (Dougherty, 2011, Williamson, 2011).

At this point I think I would self-identify as a pluralist, or inclusivist, along the lines of Reid: “We give the name of evidence to whatever is the ground of belief.” This would include the externalist and internalist sources, or resources. I find Rysiew’s definition resonates. Rysiew (2011) offers a Reidian theory of evidence. He concludes “Insofar, then, as evidence is what indicates and impresses truth, as such, upon the (healthy, informed, suitably situated, etc.) mind, it’s perfectly scientifically investigable; and its effects are no more mysterious, and no less, than the fact that some things are just more or less obvious (2011, p. 224).” Evidence can precede belief and follow belief.

First, I want evidence. I value the basics of gaining evidence by testimony, observation, and experimentation. But there is more to the nature of evidence. These are resources, Level 1 resources, that one has access to, in order that one may gain evidence. And there are additional resources. At Level 2, there are resources linked to Faculty Evidentialism, for example. Three faculty sources are key: Perceptual Evidence/Knowledge (the Perceptual Faculty), Memory Evidence/Knowledge (the Memory Faculty) and a priori evidence/Knowledge (the Insight Faculty). At Level 3, one can consider evidence from (1) a doxastic perspective that encompasses synchronic and diachronic scenarios, (2) a Reidian theory of evidence, and (3) a propositional theory of evidence.

For a Doxastic perspective see Swinburne (2011). Swinburne notes evidence in the form of “inclinations” to believe, basic beliefs, basic propositions, probabilities, acquired beliefs, theories, and background evidence.

Rysiew (2011) offers a Reidian theory of evidence. He concludes “Insofar, then, as evidence is what indicates and impresses truth, as such, upon the (healthy, informed, suitably situated, etc.) mind, it’s perfectly scientifically investigable; and its effects are no more mysterious, and no less, than the fact that some things are just more or less obvious (2011, p. 224).”

Evidence is pre-eminent; evidence is broad-based; evidence is often post-hoc. Evidence compels. Evidence is situated. Evidence is there. At this point in the essay, I’m interested in the post-hoc evidential stance, the evidence-charisms.

### Level 1—“It’s Evident To Me From Primary Arguments” (Tilting Towards Belief)

I use the term “evident” here for two reasons. First, I wish to distinguish “evident” from evidentialism, particularly absolute evidentialism. Evidentialism often appeals primarily to empirical evidence, as rooted in the Enlightenment thinking of Locke and Hume, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Logical Positivism (Wolterstorff, 2011). A much broader basis for evidences, and inferences related to religion is evident, thus the term “Evident Arguments.” Furthermore, I divide these broader appeals into two categories: “Primary Evident Arguments” and “Secondary Evident Arguments.” Both push towards theism, or support theism in a post-hoc fashion, but some more forcefully than others.

### Anthropic Principle Arguments

#### **On The Positive Side**

##### A Popular Account

It does seem like the entire cosmos was designed for human life. As expressed in a popular account (Ferguson, 1994) writes: “...the more we discover about both the cosmic and microscopic levels of the universe, the more we seem to find ourselves again mysteriously reinstated as the kingpin. Laws and constants had to be set up with incredible precision at the instant of creation or we wouldn’t be here. ...We can’t escape the impression that some careful planning and exquisitely intricate fine-tuning must have occurred with us specifically in mind. Is the universe, as British astronomer Fred Hoyle dubbed it, a ‘put-up job’ (p. 163-164).”

##### Using Analogies

Two analogies or storylines seem to get reiterated with some variations. First is the fishing analogy. Second is the firing squad analogy. Leslie (1989) uses both in discussing the anthropic principle.

##### The Fishing Analogy

Leslie (1989) writes: “You know that a lake’s impenetrably cloudy waters contained a fish 23.2576 inches long, for you just caught the fish in question. Does this fact about the lake stand in specially strong need of explanation? Of course not, you tend to think. Every fish must have some length! Yet you next discover that your fishing apparatus could accept only fish of this length, plus or minus one part in a million. Competing theories spring to mind: first that there are millions of differently lengthed fish in the lake, your apparatus having in the end found one fitting its requirements; and the second, that there is just the one fish, created by someone wishing to give you a fish supper (p. 9).” The former scenario aligns with a multiverse explanation for the particular fish/apparatus phenomenon. The latter scenario aligns with a God hypothesis.

### The Firing Squad Analogy

Say fifty members of a firing squad all take shots at the prisoner (each gets two shots), and all shots miss their target. Is this design or chance? Well, with an infinite number of firing squads one could make the case that it is bound to happen eventually, by chance alone, that all 100 shots would miss their target. Such a claim aligns with the multiverse hypothesis. Is that a common sense view? What argument might be advanced to counteract a common sense view? One thing that has been advanced is that an “observational selection effect” is in play here in that the victim, the target, remains alive to consider the case. If he had died, as most would, he wouldn’t be around to consider the hypotheses (see Sober, 2004, who opts for a logical way out, and even Dawkins, 2006, p.144-145, who opts for the multiverse exit). The fact that the victim is here and alive, and we are here, is meant as a challenge to the import of the phenomenon. But this only works if there are multiple universes, or many multiples of firing squads. Leslie writes: “The proposed observational selection effect which inspires these stories—namely, that the universe which we observe must be in the class of life-permitting universes since how otherwise could we living beings be observing it?—cannot operate unless there is *more than one actual universe* (1989, p. 13).”

Again: “When the fifty sharpshooters all miss me, ‘If they hadn’t all missed then I shouldn’t be considering the affair’ is not an adequate response. What the situation demands is, ‘I’m popular with the sharpshooters—unless, perhaps, immensely many firing squads are at work and I’m among the very rare survivors (Leslie, 1989, p. 13).”

Leslie sees two options: “My argument has been that the fine-tuning is evidence, genuine evidence, of the following fact: that God is real, and/or there are many and varied universes. And it could be tempting to call the fact an observed one. Observed indirectly, but observed none the less (1989, p. 198).”

Why is the multiverse the preferred option for naturalists like Dawkins? Personal preference? Yes. A choice? Yes!

### Lennox On Dawkins

In his book “God’s Undertaker,” Lennox (2009) is primarily concerned with answering Dawkin’s (2006) claims in “The God Delusion.” Lennox too addresses the anthropic principle. He asks the question that others have asked: Should we be “...surprised at the order and fine-tuning we see in the universe around us, since if it did not exist then carbon-based life would be impossible, and we would not be there to observe the fine-tuning (p. 73).” Good question!

On the one hand, Dawkins makes a fundamental mistake in pitting the Anthropic hypothesis against the God hypothesis as Lennox notes. Lennox writes: “But this is false logic in two ways. Dawkins is not only presenting us with false alternatives, but the former of these does not belong to the category of explanation at all. All the anthropic principle does is tell us that for life to exist, certain necessary conditions must be fulfilled. But what it does not tell us is why those necessary conditions are fulfilled, nor how, granted they are fulfilled, life arose. Dawkins is making the elementary mistake of thinking that necessary conditions are sufficient (2009, p. 73).”

On the other hand, Dawkins opts for the multiverse explanation, apparently as his god of the gaps. That said, Lennox pushes the multiverse theory—and thus Dawkins—a little further with his reference to Plantinga. “Another version of the multiverse theory, the many worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, is that every logically possible universe exists. However, if every possible universe exists, then, according to philosopher Alvin Plantinga of Notre Dame University, there must be a universe in which God exists, since his existence is logically possible – even though highly improbable in the view of the New Atheists. It then follows that, since God is omnipotent, he must exist in every universe and hence there is only one universe, this universe, of which he is the Creator and Upholder (2009, p. 76).” Interesting!

#### Polkinghorne’s Addition

Polkinghorne (2004) adds a dimension to the God/Multiverse issue that favours the God side of the explanation. He writes: “However, once one looks beyond the immediate point at issue, the scales begin to tilt. There are many other reasons for belief in God – the deep intelligibility of the world (a kind of cosmological argument), the existence of moral and aesthetic values (a kind of axiological argument), the human encounter with the sacred (an argument from religious experience), and so on.... Together these constitute a cumulative case for theism, in which the God hypothesis does a number of pieces of explanatory work. On the other hand, the conjecture that there are many, varied universes seems to do only one piece of explanatory work. It is simply invoked as an alternative to theism in the metaphysical response to anthropic fine-tuning. An important form of argument in defence of any metaphysical position is the explanatory scope that it offers. In this respect, theism seems to score over the multiverse (p. 252-253).” The tilt is in the direction of theism.

#### Designed For Discovery

One final observation adding to the positive side is an argument advanced by Gonzalez and Richards (2004, 2010). They claim that the earth is a privileged place for scientific discovery.

“Think of the following features of our earthly home: the transparency of Earth’s atmosphere in the visual region of the spectrum, shifting crustal plates, a large moon, and our particular location in the Milky Way galaxy. Without each of these assets, we would have a very hard time learning about the universe.... We can make similar comparisons at the galactic level. If we were closer to our galaxy’s center or one of its major, and dustier, spiral arms, for instance, the extra dust would impede our view of the distant universe. In fact, we would probably have missed one of the greatest discoveries in the history of astronomy: the faint cosmic microwave background radiation. That discovery was the linchpin in deciding between the two main cosmological theories of the twentieth century (2010, p. 101-102).”

Further: “In *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos Is Designed for Discovery* we discuss these and many comparable examples to show that we inhabit a planet privileged for scientific observation and discovery (Gonzalez & Richards, 2010, p. 102).” This evidence does not compel belief, or even constitute an argument, along evidentialist lines; but it does enrich belief along post-hoc evidential-charism lines. Overall, the anthropic principle does seem to align with the God hypothesis more so than the multiverse hypothesis. As Polkinghorne (2004) puts it, there is a “cumulative case for theism, in which the God hypothesis does a number of pieces of explanatory work (p. 253).”

## On the Negative Side

### The Wrong Question?

Dawkins’ (2006) argument doesn’t seem to be particularly compelling. He frames the problem as: we live in a “life-friendly place” with the implied question, *Why?* The two solutions he sees are: “God is one. The anthropic principle is the other (p. 136).” It is more like a sleight-of-hand phenomenon here. The real question is the source of the order, and constants, captured by the anthropic principle: God or Chance, or in its expanded form: God or Multiverse. Lennox, as noted above, offers a critique that makes some sense. Dawkins may be trying to put a round peg in a square hole; the fact that he makes the square hole so large—by seemingly co-opting the anthropic principle, as a proxy for chance, is a problem. His position just doesn’t seem to circumvent, even in a seminal fashion, the positives noted above.

### Epistemic Status?

A more forceful challenge to anthropic reasoning has been advanced by Sober (2004). A critical point of Sober’s argument is the observational selection effect (OSE)—“We exist, and if we exist the constants must be right (p. 116).” This OSE functions as a blind spot which impacts epistemic status. To illustrate this point Sober revisits the firing squad analogy in the context of the Likelihood Principle. Analyzing the Firing squad analogy using a Likelihood Principle generates here an initial formulation:

(L1)  $\Pr(\text{The Prisoner survived} \mid \text{The marksmen intended to miss}) >$   
 $\Pr(\text{The Prisoner survived} \mid \text{The marksmen fired at random}).$

This formulation is immediately and intuitively compelling. Surely the marksmen intended to miss. But, when the observational selection effect, the blind spot, is factored into the issue the formulation falters.

In L2, where the observational selection effect has been added, there is now apparent equivalence, at best; we can't say whether chance or design is the cause.

$$(L2) \quad \Pr(\text{The Prisoner survived} \mid \text{The marksmen intended to miss} \ \& \ \text{The prisoner survived}) = \\ \Pr(\text{The Prisoner survived} \mid \text{The marksmen fired at random} \ \& \ \text{The prisoner survived}) = 1.$$

L1 discriminates between design and chance. L2 does not. Only when the prisoner's survival is evidence, as opposed to an Observational Selection Effect, is one in proper epistemic standing to opt for L1. Interestingly, as Sober points out, the prisoner's survival can't function as evidence for the prisoner, but it would function as evidence for a spectator "...who witnesses the prisoner survive the firing squad (p. 119)." The "prisoner and the bystander are in different epistemic situations, even though their observational reports differ by a mere pronoun (p. 120)." The prisoner is bound to L2, the spectator is permitted to infer L1.

It looks like the prisoner can't get to the level of evidential significance because of the OSE. "...The issue isn't whether the prisoner's survival 'requires explanation' but whether this observation provides evidence as to whether the marksmen intended to spare the prisoner or shot at random (Sober, 2004, p. 119)."

It is a good argument. Is it good enough? Is fine-tuning best explained by the God hypothesis or the multiverse/chance hypothesis? Is the God hypothesis precluded by the OSE? Challenges, with a potential tilt to the God hypothesis exist in various forms:

- (1) There is the cumulative case evidential thrust as suggested by Polkinghorne (2004, p. 252-253). This supports the God hypothesis.
- (2) There is an indirectly observed fact. "My argument has been that the fine tuning is evidence, genuine evidence, of the following fact: that God is real, and/or there are many and varied universes. And it could be tempting to call the fact an observed one. Observed indirectly, but observed nonetheless. (Leslie, 1989, p. 198)." If one has a good case for rejecting the multiverse option one is left with the "fact" supportive of the God hypothesis.
- (3) The assumption of multiple universes is not a given. Yet must be "Actual" as noted<sup>1</sup> by Leslie (1989, p. 14),
- (4) Plantinga's (2011) sense of "slight support." Plantinga finds arguments raised by fine-tuning critics invite the reasonable question: "How is it relevant (p. 196)?" After examining the major arguments he concludes: "The right conclusion, I think, is that the FTA offers some slight support for theism. It does offer support, but only mild support (p.224)." Thus, there is a tilt towards theism in the arguments and critiques.

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<sup>1</sup> Can One Assume Multiple Universes? "The proposed observational selection effect which inspires these stories—namely, that the universe which we observe must be in the class of life-permitting universes since how otherwise could we living beings be observing it?—cannot operate unless there is more than one actual universe. (No Observational Selection Effect without Actual Things from Which to Select!) Section 1.12 in effect made this the second moral to be drawn from the Fishing Story. The tale of the Firing Squad is just another way of making the point. But equally, a multiplicity of universes cannot help us much unless the observational selection effect is joined to it (Leslie, 1989, p.14)."

(5) epistemological factors broaden epistemic status:

1. Willingness. A volitional epistemology (e.g., Moser's volitional epistemology) can facilitate seeing the God hypothesis.
2. Laziness can preclude seeing the God hypothesis. Virtue epistemology (where laziness<sup>1</sup> is a factor to be considered) is a factor to draw into the issue.
3. Pascal's Wager. Which is the wiser bet?
4. Is there a preferential option for atheism regarding the FTA (e.g., naturalists like Dawkins, 2006, or Martin Rees, 2003<sup>2</sup>)? It is like the preferential option for atheism, or naturalism (Nagel, Lewontin).
5. Thought experiment: Could we assume that Martians would infer design (for both the firing squad, hit or miss, and the fine-tuning being a product of design? Yes, they are spectators. Are we in any sense spectators?

(6) On the thought experiment: Is there a case that prisoners, indeed all humans, function as both participant and spectator? As spectators we can see evidence for the God-hypothesis.

Are the challenges adequate to support the more positive approach to the anthropic issue? I think so! The God hypothesis is reasonable.

### Intelligent Design Arguments

The argument from intelligent design is compelling on several levels.

*The Intuitive Level.* At the simplest level, the intuitive level, one encounters the acknowledgement by opponents (e.g., Dawkins, Crick,...) that things appear designed. One has to work diligently to suppress the design inference according to such critics. Even Darwin seems to have wined. Plantinga (2011) cites a conversation between the Duke of Argyle and Darwin that seems to tap into this intuitive sense.

“I said to Mr. Darwin with reference to some of his own remarkable works on the *Fertilisation of Orchids*, ... and various other observations he made of the wonderful contrivances for certain purposes in nature—I said it was impossible to look at these without seeing that they were the effect and the expression of Mind. I shall never forget Mr. Darwin's answer. He looked at me very hard and said ‘Well, that often comes over me with overwhelming force; but at other times’ and he shook his head vaguely, adding, ‘it seems to go away’ (referenced in Plantinga, 2011, p.246).”

Which Darwin was right? Is the design inference properly basic?

*Building on the Intuitive Level.* The argument from Paley, that if the world in a sense parallels a clock (i.e., intricacy, function, purpose, and so on), then a “watchmaker” for the world

<sup>1</sup> Leslie (1989) writes: “In fact, sheer laziness might occasionally underlie this or that argument for multiple universes (p.100).” A pointer to virtue epistemology!

<sup>2</sup> As Lennox (2009) notes, quoting Rees: “It is interesting that Martin Rees concedes that the fine-tuning of the universe is compatible with theism but says he prefers the multiverse theory: ‘If one does not believe in providential design, but still thinks the fine-tuning needs some explanation, there is another perspective – a highly speculative one, so I should reiterate my health warning at this stage. It is the one I much prefer, however, even though in our present state of knowledge and such preference can be no more than a hunch’ (p. 75-76).” A hunch epistemology!



is a reasonable conclusion. If one stumbles upon a watch on the beach one's positing a watchmaker is reasonable. Similarly, when one stumbles upon the elements of the world (physical and biological) positing a personal creator is reasonable.

*The Level of Perception.* As Plantinga notes there are arguments for Paley's designer. Seeing this as an argument from analogy, or inductive reasoning, would be Hume's approach (2011, p. 244). Further, seeing it as an "argument to the best explanation" would be Draper's approach (2002) as Plantinga contends (2011, p. 244). The arguments seem to suffer from serious critiques, although not to such a degree that they no longer offer a bias, or tilt, in favour of intelligent design.

Plantinga, himself, seems to offer a route to get back to a more appropriate belief regarding Paley, and Paley's contention of design implying designer. He writes:

"But there is a quite different way of interpreting it: this so-called design inference isn't a matter of inference or argument at all. I encounter something that looks designed and form the belief that it is designed: perhaps this isn't a matter of argument at all (anymore than in the case of perception or other minds). In many cases, so the thought goes, the belief that something or other is a product of design is not formed by way of inference, but in the basic way, what goes on here is more like *perception* than like *inference* (2011, p. 245)."

Perception, rather than argument or intuition, according to Plantinga, was suggested by Paley as well.

*The Level of Argument and Evidence.* Biology points to design (see Meyer, 2009, for an interesting trajectory). Perhaps the most prominent voice in the argument/evidence field is Behe (1996, 2007). Behe, in *Darwin's Black Box*, makes the case for a principle of irreducible complexity that challenges natural selection. In a later work, *The Edge of Evolution*, he makes a more empirical case for the limits of natural selection. Such challenges may not serve as defeaters, but they are, ironically, eye-openers. Plantinga's (2011) discussion of the Behe case, and the scientific discourse, surrounding the case, is scholarly. And, while Behe's case may not be overwhelming, it does lead to a tilt, in the direction of a designer, an intelligent designer. Supporting the tilt is a growing multi-disciplinary literature base beyond the basics of biology and chemistry (i.e., law, medicine, philosophy, information sciences, etc.) with challenges to Darwinism, particularly natural selection. Interesting to me is that even a prominent Darwinist like Massimo Piatelli-Palmarini challenges natural selection (see Appendix D in S. Mazur, 2009, 2010, *The Altenberg 16: An Expose of the Evolution Industry.*). Equally interesting is Provine's challenge regarding natural selection as noted by Lennox:

Lennox (2011b) notes criticisms by Fodor, Provine, Reid, etc. Consider his comment and quote regarding William Provine: "Biologist William Provine, in a remarkable afterword published in a new edition of a classic work, explains that his views have 'changed dramatically': 'Natural selection does not act on anything, nor does it select (for, or against) force, maximize, create, modify, shape, operate, drive, favour, maintain, push, or adjust. Natural selection does nothing. Natural selection as a force belongs in the insubstantial category already populated by the

Necker/Stahl phlogiston or Newton's ether ... Having natural selection select is nifty because it excuses the necessity of talking about the actual causation of natural selection. Such talk was excusable for Darwin, but inexcusable for Darwinists now. Creationists have discovered our empty natural selection language, and the actions of natural selection make huge vulnerable targets (p. 180-181)."

*The Statistical Level.* At another level, statistics can be used to point to intelligent design (Dembski, 1998). "Even if we can't ascertain the precise causal story underlying an event, we have probabilistic information that enables us to rule out ways of explaining the event. This ruling out of explanatory options is what design inference is all about. The design inference does not by itself deliver an intelligent agent. But as a logical apparatus for sifting our explanatory options, the design inference rules out explanations incompatible with intelligent agency (such as chance) (Dembski, 1998, p. 9)." Dembski illustrates the application of the design inference rules in an interesting court case involving ballot rigging. The court had no trouble eliminating explanations related to unknown or known regularities. The court had no trouble eliminating an explanation related to chance given the odds of 1 in 50 billion. The court had no trouble in detecting agency, design.

Dembski notes other applications in the forensic sciences, intellectual property protection, the detection of data falsification in the sciences, cryptography, and even SETI research.

The design inference structure, and argument, can be cast in a verbal form or symbolic form. Using the verbal form and then its application to a combination lock clarifies the steps for working through explanatory options.

Premise 1: E has occurred.

Premise 2: E is specified.

Premise 3: If E is due to chance then E has small probability.

Premise 4: Specified events of small probability do not occur by chance.

Premise 5: E is not due to a regularity.

Premise 6: E is due to either a regularity, chance, or design.

Conclusion: E is due to design.

The example. Consider opening the safe that has a combination lock. It has occurred so Premise 1 is satisfied. "Because E is specified (the very construction of the safe specifies which one of the many possible combinations opens it) it follows that Premise 2 is satisfied as well. Premise 3 says that if the safe was opened by chance, then the opening of the safe was an SP [small probability] event.... Premise 4 is the Law of Small Probability, or LSP for short. LSP is the key regulative principle governing small probabilities (Dembski, 1998, p. 48)." Dembski has a worked out justification for LSP but uses it provisionally in this example. "Premise 5 states that the safe didn't open as the result of a regularity.... This premise too is satisfied since no known regularities account for the opening of safes with reasonably sophisticated combination locks. Premise 6 is the trichotomy rule. Trichotomy holds because regularity, chance, and design are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Together these six premises entail the conclusion that the opening of the safes combination lock must properly be attributed to design (Dembski, 1998, p. 48-49)."

As a case study Dembski (1998) applies the Explanatory Filter and the design inference argument to the creation-evolution controversy (p. 55ff) addressing both: (1) the Wilson and Weldon argument (they accept the premises including 3 and 5; end up with design, but “...their identification of design with the activity of an intelligent agent – much less the God of Scripture – does not follow by the force of this logic....” ), and (2) the Dawkins’ argument (he rejects Premise 3, and is not too clear regarding Premise 5). From both, though, with Dembski’s Explanatory Filter the emerging tilt is towards design, intelligent design, and theism.

## Teleological Arguments

Three different approaches to the influence of teleological considerations offer an impetus to tilt towards theism. First is the inferential approach; second is the perceptual approach. Third is the systems approach, that is, cognitive systems. These three approaches point to teleology. Teleology points to God.

*Inferred design.* First, the teleological argument links to intelligent design, fine-tuning, the anthropic principle, and the growing empirical challenges to neo-Darwinism. See the [above discussion](#) on intelligent design. Accumulating evidential arguments do lead one to infer design. If challenges to inference appear as significant challenges, one is still in the reasonable position of reliance on abduction—the cumulative case pushing one to accept design.

*Perceived design.* The teleological argument is linked to common sense, and the observations we see in nature unfolding everywhere. It seems to have elements of a basic belief an example of Faculty evidentialism. See Plantinga’s (2011) discussion [above of Paley’s intelligent design focus](#). Plantinga broadens the design horizon; he raises the idea of a contrast between design argument and design discourse. Essentially, design is viewed as perceived rather than inferred. If so, the tilt is towards God.

*A Systems Approach.* The systems approach adopted here is based on two distinct cognitive processing systems as advanced more recently by Kahneman (2003, 2011) and [described at an earlier point](#). Kahneman presented the two-processing system in 2003, as an Intuitive system—System 1—which displays processing characterized by: fast speed, parallel processing, automaticity, effortlessness, associativeness, slow-learning, and emotionality. The other system—System 2—is a Reasoning system and is characterized as: working at a slow speed, using serial processing, under executive control, requiring substantial effort, rule-governed, flexible, and showing emotional neutrality. This framework offers an opportunity to reflect on teleological views with the potential for integration.

The first application to this cognitive framework distinguishes between inferred teleology and perceived teleology. Plantinga (2011), as noted above, saw a rationale for distinguishing between these two approaches (inferred teleology and perceived teleology) in his discussion of Paley. Plantinga is suggesting teleology can be perceived or inferred. The argument from Paley, that if the world in a sense parallels a clock (i.e., intricacy, function, purpose, and so on), then a “watchmaker” for the world is a reasonable conclusion. If one stumbles upon a watch on the beach one’s positing a watchmaker is reasonable. Similarly, when one stumbles upon the

elements of the world (physical and biological) positing a personal creator is reasonable. These seem to be inferences.

Plantinga notes there are arguments for Paley's designer. Seeing this as an argument from analogy, or inductive reasoning, would be Hume's approach (2011, p. 244). Further, seeing it as an "argument to the best explanation" would be Draper's approach (2002) as Plantinga contends (2011, p. 244). The arguments, as inferences are open to critiques, although not to such a degree that they no longer offer a bias, or tilt, in favour of intelligent design.

On the other hand, the overlooked hand, Plantinga, himself, seems to offer a route to get back to a more appropriate belief regarding Paley, and Paley's contention of design implying a designer. As noted earlier, Plantinga writes:

"But there is a quite different way of interpreting it: this so-called design inference isn't a matter of inference or argument at all. I encounter something that looks designed and form the belief that it is designed: perhaps this isn't a matter of argument at all (anymore than in the case of perception or other minds). In many cases, so the thought goes, the belief that something or other is a product of design is not formed by way of inference, but in the basic way, what goes on here is more like *perception* than like *inference* (2011, p. 245)."

Perception, rather than argument or intuition, according to Plantinga, was suggested by Paley as well. Cognitively, perceived teleology would likely be housed in Kahneman's (2011) System 1 level thinking; inferred teleology would be a product of his System 2 level thinking. Where the inferred teleology of System 2 level processing is correct one would like to see it override faulty System 1 level perceived teleology. Clearly there is room to consider teleology as both perceived (intuitive, automatic, associative) and inferred (reasoned, effortful, and under executive control). The academic debate will continue at the System 2 level—are the inferences regarding teleology correct?

The second application of this systems approach draws upon Kelemen (1999) and addresses "Selective Teleology" versus "Promiscuous Teleology," primarily in children. Selective teleology holds that children have "...an innate teleological stance – a tendency to construe objects as 'designed for a purpose'...(Kelemen, 1999, p. 242)." It is intuitive; it is possibly based on analogical thinking—comparing artefacts with biological structures—or based on construal of function, or functional reasoning. There are degrees of engagement for perceiving teleology. "However the stance is less engaged when considering natural kinds such as mountains and their parts, either because such objects do not fall within the scope of the living thing module, or are not functional in any obvious sense (Kelemen, 1999, p. 243)."

Promiscuous teleology advances the notion that the teleological stance in the very young is rooted in "...understanding of agency and intentional object directed behavior." Understanding that objects are for use by agents is observed and generalized to all things—living and non-living. "Children may only begin to revise and restrict this belief once they begin to assimilate

more formal scientific ideas, both indirectly, through hearing the way adults talk about different phenomena, and directly, through schooling (Kelemen, 1999, p. 243).”

“Promiscuous teleology” is the label given to the propensity of human beings to perceive design. In the earlier research of Kelemen it is quite striking in children (1999, 2003), but also observed under certain conditions in adults (Kelemen & Rosset, 2009) even academically sophisticated adults (Kelemen, et al., 2012). The teleological issues have been linked to “promiscuous teleology” which is seen in children, and often expressed in adults as a belief-in-use, though denied as an espoused belief.

Promiscuous teleology seems to align with Kahneman’s System 1 level thinking; it is automatic, fast, and intuitive. Selective teleology aligns more so with System 2 level thinking; one is reflective and more selective of what is and is not characterized by teleology. Promiscuous teleology (System 1) can be viewed on a continuum with the child becoming better informed over time (System 2) so that the inferences of teleology map more accurately onto reality. System 2 level overrides of System 1 occur here.

A problem can arise at this point if one assumes that the System 2 override (via inference) of the System 1 perception is a good thing. Such an assumption is hinted at in Kelemen’s (2009) recent study where she leads with a reference to Intelligent Design. “As debates about teaching Intelligent Design in American Schools illustrate, there exists substantial popular resistance to scientific ideas (Kelemen & Rosset, 2009, p. 138).” A system 2 level override, which Kelemen and Rosset seem to posit as a good thing, can actually be good or bad—bad if System 1 got it right, good, if System 1 is wrong.

To illustrate the problem with a perception faculty: a System 1 level process involving perception sees the stick in the water as bent. A System 2 level of processing—based on experience, or perhaps, understanding of the physics of the reflection and refraction of light—presents an override. This is a good override! A System 1 level of processing indicates Whites and Blacks are equal human beings; a System 2 level override adjusts this basic perception, perhaps via the Supreme Court decision, or theological arguments of those with vested interests, or Darwin’s thoughtful speculations, and consequently, Blacks are positioned as inferior. This is a bad override! System 1 level processing was correct. The issue here, then, obviously is in distinguishing good overrides from bad overrides.

System 1 level teleology is really just a faculty paralleling our faculty for perception, or our faculty for memory. It makes perfect sense, then, that children would naturally function with what is called “promiscuous teleology.” That adults can “...preserve a tendency to see purpose in nature... (Kelemen & Rosset, 2009, p. 140)” is not necessarily a fault. In fact, the System 2 overrides that Kelemen and Rosset seem to assume as a scientific given, may prove to be bad overrides in the not-too-distant future. Recall the struggles of Darwin, Dawkins, Crick, and others, to continually remind themselves that the System 1 level offerings of promiscuous teleology must be overridden consciously by System 2 level principles—arbitrary principles at that. Teleology—System 1 level and System 2 level—pushes one in several directions: (1) guarded thought, (2) further thought, and (3) theism.

### Cosmological Arguments

Something exists. That “something” was caused. The causal chain traces back to prior causes and ultimately to a first cause, or sufficient reason, logically. Craig (2008) notes that the cosmological arguments have roots in ancient Greece, medieval theology (Islamic, Jewish and Christian) and the foundations of modern philosophical thinking (Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Leibniz). Do these formulations of, and reflections on, cosmological cases lead to a tilt in a particular direction? Yes. Reasonably one finds oneself tilting towards God.

*The kalam cosmological argument.* “Let’s look at the formulation of this argument by al-Ghāzalī (1058-1111). He reasons, ‘Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning; now the world is a being which begins; therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning.’ In support of the first premise, that every being that exists has a cause for its beginning, Ghāzalī reasons: anything that begins to exist does so at a certain moment of time. But since, prior to a thing’s existence, all moments are alike, there must be some cause that determines that the thing comes to exist at that moment rather than earlier or later. Thus anything that comes to exist must have a cause (Craig, 2008, p. 96).” Further Ghāzalī argues, as Craig notes, that an infinite regress is impossible given the problems of (1) “an end” at the present point of time, while infinities cannot end, and (2) infinities of different sizes presents us with absurdities, logical and mathematical.

*The Thomist cosmological argument.* This formulation is “...based on the impossibility of an infinite regress of simultaneously operating causes. It seeks a cause that is First, not in a temporal sense but in the sense of rank or source (Craig, 2008, p. 97).” Motion has a first cause. Existence has a first cause. The first cause is rooted in God. A third strand—beyond motion and existence—is “contingency.” As Craig frames it: “We see in this world beings whose existence is not necessary by only possible. That is to say, these beings do not have to exist, for we see them come to be and pass away. If they were necessary, they would always exist. But all beings cannot be contingent beings, for if everything were merely contingent, then at some point in time everything would cease to exist. Aquinas here presupposes the past eternity of the world and appears to reason that in infinite time all possibilities would be realized. Hence, if every being, including matter itself, were only a contingent being, then it is possible that nothing would exist. Thus, given infinite past time, this possibility would be realized and nothing would exist. But then nothing would now exist, since out of nothing, nothing comes. Since this is obviously absurd, not all beings must be contingent beings. Some being or beings must be necessary (2008, p. 98).” Here, half way through the contingency argument, I find myself tilting.

*The Leibnizian cosmological argument.* Leibniz looks for an explanation rather than a cause for existence. His famous question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” haunts. He looks for the reason or rational explanation to address the question. Craig frames this version of the cosmological argument, as with Aquinas, with a link to contingency: “Why does the universe exist? The reason cannot be found in any single thing in the universe, for each is contingent itself and does not have to exist. Nor is the reason to be found in the whole aggregate of such things, for the world is just a collection of these contingent beings and is therefore itself contingent. Nor can the reason be found in the prior causes of things, for these are just past states

of the universe and do not explain why there are any such states, any universe, at all. ...the reason for the universe's existence must be found outside the universe, in a being whose sufficient reason is self-contained; it is its own sufficient reason for existing and is the reason the universe exists as well. This Sufficient Reason of all things is God, whose own existence is to be explained only by reference to himself. That is to say, God is a metaphysically necessary being (2008, p. 99)." This Sufficient Reason is a principle. This principle tilts one towards God.

## Moral Arguments

For a strong case for the moral argument see the discussion on [Deduction](#). There Craig (2008) frames the issue such that one must logically deduce God's existence from objective morality. If objective moral values exist, then God exists. It is a strong argument, perhaps the strongest of the various framings of the moral arguments for God's existence, since one can point to objective moral values.

Paul Copan (2004) accepts the deductive moral argument but focuses on the point that objective moral values are properly basic. In a sense then both belief in God (see Plantinga for the Christian case, and McCauley for the secular case) and moral values are properly basic and a deductive argument is secondary. So what is Copan's case for the basicity for moral values?

As Copan develops the case for the moral argument we see he builds upon: (1) common sense, (2) illustrative stories, (3) probing questions, (4) weaknesses in the alternatives, and (5) cross cultural examination of morals. One story Copan presents captures all five of these strategies. He refers to a brilliant thinker in the minds of many 20<sup>th</sup> Century philosophers, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger was a Nazi, at least, for a large part of his mental life. Copan writes "...Martin Heidegger said of Hitler, 'He alone is the German reality of today, and of the future, and its law.' But when the Germans were defeated in World War II, the French confiscated Heidegger's property because of his Nazi sympathies. In response, he wrote an indignant letter to the commander of the French forces: 'What justice there is in treating me in this unheard of way is inconceivable to me.' To Heidegger's mind (that is, his beliefs-in-use, as opposed to his espoused-beliefs) there was not really a 'German reality' or 'German morality' and a different 'French morality.' Despite being mesmerized by Hitler, he was assuming some universal standard of justice that even the French could understand! (2004, p. 109-110)."

There was an appeal to common sense, much like Reid's appeal to common sense when challenging Locke, Berkley and Hume (Reid, 1818/2012). The story of Heidegger was illustrative and shows the weakness in alterative views; it captures the distinction between beliefs-in-use, and espoused beliefs. And it introduces the importance of cross cultural examination. There are moral absolutes. Copan draws upon C. S. Lewis' "The Abolition of Man" to make this point. One should add Brown (1991) and Gairdner (2008) to strengthen the clear case for universals and absolutes.

## Pascal's Wager

As a post-hoc evidential charism Pascal's wager works. A couple of interesting presentations on Pascal's Wager can be considered to help make the point. See [Wager and Choice](#) above to get a sense of the possible influence of Pascal's wager. As applied here, though, the wager is considered post hoc, that is, as a wise bet rather than a motivational bet.

## Level 2—"It's Evident To Me From Secondary Arguments" (Tilting Towards Belief)

### Deep Concord

Plantinga (2011) argues persuasively for deep concord between science and Christianity. The points of deep concord are: (1) the Image of God related to science, (2) Reliability and Regularity related to science, (3) Law related to science, (4) Mathematics related to science, (5) Experience and Induction related to science, (6) Theoretical Virtues related to science, and (7) Contingency and Empiricism related to science. Plantinga's intent is to show the deep concord between Christianity and Science. All of the points he addresses reveal a knowing "fit" between human beings and creation—implying intentionality on God's part. Thus, a type of evidence!

Moreover, the fit does not drive just science, or empirical knowledge. There is a case that could be made that this fit drives all knowledge, as well as rights, morality, democracy, freedom, exploration, curiosity, and creativity.

The Image of God (the Imago Dei) related to science, and more.

Empirical science is rooted in Christian theism. Plantinga (2011) writes: "All of the great names of early Western science, furthermore—Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, John Wilkins, Roger Cotes, and many others—all were serious believers in God (p. 266)." God is a knower, and we are made like Him. "God is omniscient, that is, such that he knows everything, knows that for any proposition *p*, whether *p* is true. We human beings, therefore, in being created in his image, can also know much about our world, ourselves, and God himself. No doubt what we know pales into insignificance beside what God knows; still we know much that is worthwhile and important. Crucial to the thought that we have been created in his image, then, is the idea that he has created both us and our world in such a way that (like him) we are able to know important things about our world and ourselves (p. 268)."

The "fit" between our world and our cognitive faculties is related to the imago dei. "God created both us and our world in such a way that there is a certain fit or match between the world and our cognitive faculties. The medievals had a phrase for it: *adequatio intellectus ad rem* (the adequation of the intellect to reality) (Plantinga, 2011, p. 289)." We are designed to acquire truth. It is in line with such a fit that the features of such a fit explored by Gonzalez and Richards (2004) in *The Privileged Planet* make added sense. Such a fit supports a tilt towards God.

From a scientific attitude—a truth acquiring propensity and purpose towards God and His creation—we then get the growth of knowledge, morality, beauty, democracy, and more. Even a representative of critical theory and American pragmatism, an apparent atheist like Jurgen



Habermas, would comment: “Christianity, and nothing else, is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights, and democracy, the benchmarks of Western civilization. To this day, we have no other options. We continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is postmodern chatter.” (Downloaded from <http://sciencestage.com/v/958> ). That is striking! And it does speak to the fit between the imago dei and the reality in creation.

### The Personal Argument

As Moser develops the idea of personalizing knowledge, one comes to see that even persons can function as evidence. People who functioned as evidence for me would be: C.S. Lewis, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Charles Colson, Peter Kreeft, my sister Sue, Malcolm Muggeridge, Lee Strobel, Greg Koukl, Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, Pascal, William Lane Craig, and on and on and on.

The evidences of persons on the atheist side (the early Flew, Dennett, Smart, Mackie, Hitchens, Shermer carried some weight but not enough, while others like Lobdell, Templeton, and Loftus carried no real weight.

The evidences of person via their personal testimony and arguments lead me in the tilt towards theism. And it is not just testimony and arguments that are forceful. There is the history of the growth of science, the self sacrifice of Christians, the charities, the hospitals, the orphanages, the concern for the suffering, the dying, the unborn, the underprivileged, the remote, the lost, and the hungry. Further there is the art, the music, the architecture, and the literature that is rooted in Christian psyches. And this goodness seems to prevail in spite of the smaller scale travesties that close up seem larger than they really are.

### The Knowledge Community

There are people in the science community who serve the dual function of personalizing evidence, and offering rational supportive argument. With respect to science there are scientists old (e.g., Newton, Kepler, Boyle, etc.) and new (e.g., Behe, Meyer, Collins, etc.). There are people in the religious community who serve the dual function of personalizing evidence, and offering rational supportive argument. For example: C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More, Greg Koukl, J. Budziszewski, Alvin Plantinga, Chuck Colson, Robert George, and so on, are knowledgeable people serving to compel.

### No Where Else To Go

In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ disciples are in a position of decision. When confronted with a doctrine they didn’t like, or found indigestible, they faced a choice: leave or stay. As John phrased it many left. When Jesus inquired as to whether there were others who planned to leave as well, it was Peter who showed the Pascalian wisdom: there is no better choice.

## Evil

Evil, it has been argued is a sufficient reason to reject theism. Or, at least it is a sufficient reason to reject either: (1) a good God, or rather, an omni-benevolent God, or (2) a powerful God, that is, an omnipotent God. The proposition unfolds as follows: surely, an omnipotent God who was omni-benevolent would not permit such suffering. Is this a compelling argument against God? Various searches into this issue are considered here.

### *The Ethologist's Search*

One could argue there is no such thing as evil if there is no God. Naturalists are not likely to consider spiders evil when the spider traps and kills the fly. Nor do they consider the killer whale pod evil as it pursues the mother humpback and her calf until the exhausted mother can no longer protect her calf. Naturalists might not like what occurs, particularly those with empathy, but they don't jump to the inference of evil. We feel for the mother humpback; we might wish the order of nature was different; we like the idea of the lion and lamb lying down together. We might even sense a cosmic ill will at play. But we are unlikely to attribute evil to the killer whales in spite of their name when wearing the naturalist's hat. While naturalists can smuggle the notion of evil into their discussions there is really no justification for such a construct for the naturalist. The naturalist simply describes reality; and they can offer a scenario of what they would consider to be better. To posit evil, in this scenario is to betray a credal position that presupposes morality, objective morality, and God. They have espoused a naturalist worldview but adopted a religious worldview as a belief-in-use if the draw in evil. In effect, then, "evil" tilts one towards theism.

### *Strobel's Religious Search*

The *anti-theist* charge is typically framed as Lee Strobel (2000) titles the first chapter in his book "The Case for Faith." The chapter title reads: "Objection #1: Since Evil and Suffering Exist, A Loving God Cannot." To flesh this issue out a little he offers the quote from Epicurus: "Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but he does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, and does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how comes evil in the world?"

Strobel begins his search for an answer by interviewing a famous Christian who opted for agnosticism when encountering this problem. It is an emotionally moving interview with Charles Templeton. Templeton had abandoned faith, for agnosticism, partly because of the evil he saw in the world: a mother holding her dead child because there was no rain in Africa; partly because of the incongruity between a God of love and hell; and partly because of his own Alzheimer's disease. Templeton's rationale was picked up for a chapter in Hitchens' (2007b) collection of essential readings for the non-believer. Reading Templeton's reasons for his turn to agnosticism might be persuasive if he also had dealt with any of the cogent challenges to his reasons. That is challenges offered by the Christian scholarly community across two thousand years of thought were not addressed in Hitchens' selection. Templeton might deal with the relevant challenges in his book: "A Farewell to God," but he doesn't address them in the chapter in Hitchens (2007b).

The *theist's* reaction is layered. The theist is sensitive to the suffering in the world and the power of their own personal emotional concern; the theist is sensitive to the emotional turmoil of others. But they explore possible answers. For example, the theist could ask: How

could evil function as evidence against God, since evil is a theological term, a term contingent upon God?

The *theist* realizes that in the naturalist worldview it is difficult to make a case for evil. The *theist* doesn't attribute evil to the Lion taking down the Zebra or the spider entrapping the fly, neither does the naturalist. Actions are simply described by the *theist* and the uniform *atheist* in nature. If one accepts evil, at least moral evil, whether theist or atheist, it seems one is accepting a theistic worldview as a belief-in-use if not an espoused belief. That's a challenge for an atheist.

Strobel faces the problem using his journalistic skills to interview people who may have answers. Regarding the problem of evil and suffering—which is the first objection to faith that he investigates—he begins by interviewing Peter Kreeft of Boston College. The dialoguing format allows Kreeft to provide a very good, albeit spontaneous, response to the problem of evil and suffering, particularly as had been raised, and phrased, by Templeton. Is Kreeft's response to Strobel more sophisticated, more cogent, and more compelling, as a response to the problem of evil and suffering than the cognitively-narrowed, and emotion-laden, response of Templeton? The basic points that Kreeft offers in his conversational form (in response to Strobel's questioning) are:

- *Openness to Possibility.* Is there a small possibility, a bare possibility, that a reasonable explanation for evil and suffering exists—an explanation that does not lead to atheism? That Templeton answered “No” to such a question is an answer that Kreeft sees as arrogant and unreasonable. Kreeft uses a metaphor involving the cognitive distance between (1) a bear and a human, and (2) a human and God. Consider how a bear typically misreads the actions of the human trying to free him from a metal trap; he misreads it as an attack. The sedating darts are an attack; the push further into the trap to release the tension on the spring is added sadism. Is there the slightest possibility that the distance between humans and God is analogically relevant? Yes! Is there the slightest possibility that we humans, like the bear, misread the data? Yes!
- *Free Will.* Choice, love, relationship, requires free will, and faith. We have free will, and this is a major argument with explanatory weight for illumination of the problems of evil and suffering. Admittedly, it is not an overwhelming argument, but it's on the table. Thus, given the theological place, and function, of faith and free will, there is an explanation for the hiddenness of God—in large part God is hidden. Why hidden? As Kreeft puts it: “God gives us just enough evidence so that those who want him can have him. Those who want to follow the clues will (Strobel, 2000, p. 33).” Those who do not want to enter His camp are not compelled to do so.
- *Evidential Breadth.* Okay, so suffering and evil pose as an argument against God. The possibility of an explanation exists; and the implications of free will, the nature of interpersonal-relationship, and the basis in love, raise challenges to this argument from evil. Yes. But consider that there are a slew of other arguments offering support for theism. Kreeft mentions that he has raised 20 theistic arguments in another book (see the

on-line text here: [http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/20\\_arguments-gods-existence.htm](http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/20_arguments-gods-existence.htm) ). One against, and 20 for, is an interesting evidential-breadth factor. See also the breadth offered more recently by Kreeft (2012).

- *Evil presupposes Good.* As Kreeft expresses it: “If Templeton is right in responding to these events with outrage, that presupposes there really is a difference between good and evil. The fact that he’s using the standard of good to judge evil—the fact that he’s saying quite rightly that this horrible suffering isn’t what ought to be—means that he has a notion of what ought to be; that this notion corresponds to something real; and that there is, therefore, a reality called the Supreme Good. Well, that’s another name for God (Strobel, 2000, p. 34).”
- “*The Democracy of the Dead.*” This is a term used by Chesterton to flag the notion of how many people believe something, when the entire history of the race is considered. It can be important for a democratic position. Of course, it also can be a logical fallacy to assume something is correct simply by appealing to how many people believe it. Nevertheless, it is surely interesting when numbers are at play. Kreeft asks Strobel to think about the numbers: “How is it possible that over ninety percent of all human beings who have ever lived—usually in far more painful circumstances than we—could believe in God? The objective evidence, just looking at the balance of pleasure and suffering in the world, would not seem to justify believing in an absolutely good God. Yet this has been almost universally believed (Strobel, 2000, p. 35).”
- *The Problem of the Logic Problem.* God is omnipotent. God is omniscient. God is moral. God is omni-benevolent. One of these premises must be wrong, since evil exists. Given the existence of evil the conclusion that God does not exist is a conclusion drawn by some. But the denial of God’s existence is not the necessary conclusion. Another conclusion: we must be misunderstanding a particular premise. For example, an all powerful God cannot make a square circle, or make  $2 + 2 = 5$ . An all powerful God cannot make agents with free will without the possibility of subsequent moral failings. “...the classic defense of God against the problem of evil is that it’s not logically possible to have free will and no possibility of moral evil (Strobel, 2000, p. 37).”
- *Suffering as a Good.* There is a case to be made for learning through suffering, character formation through suffering, wisdom through suffering, and even the avoidance of greater suffering through suffering. Kreeft offers examples of suffering, a discussion of suffering, the suffering of God himself, and the speechlessness of Job, all of which blunt our questions. The tilt towards God is not thwarted by evil and suffering. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him” –Job.

### *Baumeister’s Psychological Search*

Baumeister and his associates (Baumeister, 1997; 2005; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004a, 2004b) argue for a focus on self-regulation as a mechanism for understanding evil which would include: stupidity, foolishness, and misbehavior. With this focus it is possible to reframe their approach with a question: Can one end up doing what is evil, albeit with the intention of “doing

good?” Yes! Doing what one believes to be “the good” can end up obviously with one doing what is evil. In fact, it might be the case from a psychological perspective that all evil is driven by doing what one believes to be good. In effect, then, bad beliefs are evil, if they function as a source of evil!

While termed a “doing-good” model for the present discussion, this is an approach that links to the roots of evil—the four roots of evil as identified by Baumeister (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). The four roots are: (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure. Here’s the psychological irony: these roots of evil can be conceptualized as “doing good:”

- (1) when good is defined as getting what one wants, “gain” (Instrumentality),
- (2) when good is defined as dealing with threats to the self, “egotism” (e.g., defending one’s honour, image, and self esteem, etc.) and therefore image enhancement (e.g., self-protection, and the development of self-esteem),
- (3) when doing good is defined as doing what one believes to be right, “idealism” (ideologies like religion, humanism, liberalism, Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Nazism, de-colonialism, etc.), and,
- (4) when doing good is defined as obtaining reinforcement (discordant pleasure), even when the reinforcement emerges from such suspect sources as sexual sadism, children torturing insects, or adult schaudenfreude. The Law of Effect holds (i.e., behaviour that is followed by a good effect tends to be repeated).

Applying the four roots of evil on either a macro level or a micro level can illustrate the issue. On a macro level consider the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Was this “doing-good” with respect to: (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure? Yes. The evil can be configured as doing good as follows:

(1) *Gain*, here good is seen as getting what one wants (revenge, attention, the will of Allah, jihad, submission, etc.).

(2) *Egotism*, here good is defined as dealing with threats to the self (one’s honour, one’s culture, one’s self-image, one’s self-esteem, one’s religion, etc.) and therefore image enhancement (self-protection, and the development of self-esteem) Image enhancement was evident in two venues: a perplexing and immediate Islamic reaction (seen in dancing in the streets by some Moslems in the east), and later a perplexing and emerging Western reaction of overt deferral to appeasement practices towards Islam in the West.

(3) *Idealism*, here doing good is defined as doing what one believes to be right (implementing an ideology, particularly religious idealism).

(4) *The Law of Effect* (behaviour that is followed by a good effect tends to be repeated), here doing good is defined as obtaining reinforcement (even when the reinforcement emerges from such suspect sources as sadism or schaudenfreude, as in the apparent rewards which followed terrorist acts. There were such rewards as social attention, fund-raising increases, seventy-two virgins, etc.).

On a micro level consider the robbery of the local 7/11. Was this “doing-good” with respect to (1) gain, (2) egotism, (3) idealism, and (4) sadistic pleasure? Yes. These roots of evil can be configured as doing good as follows:

- (1) *Gain*, here good is defined as getting what one wants (money and cigarettes).
- (2) *Egotism*, here good is defined as dealing with threats to the self (an gaining of status, honour, image, self esteem, etc.) and therefore image enhancement (self-protection, and the development of self-esteem). Image enhancement that money and crime can buy is easily seen as a good, yet a root of evil.
- (3) *Idealism*, here doing good is defined as doing what one believes to be right (a sense of entitlement, redistribution of wealth, or a retributive sense of dealing with Marxist injustice).
- (4) *The Law of Effect* (behaviour that is followed by a good effect tends to be repeated), here doing good is defined as obtaining reinforcement (even when the reinforcement emerges from such suspect sources as sadism or schaudenfreude, as in the rewards which followed previous criminal acts).

At the macro level and the micro level “doing good” appears malevolently intertwined with doing evil.<sup>1</sup> Does this intertwining of good and evil support a tilt towards God? Such scenarios may temper judgments regarding culpability, but the very construct of evil, and human failures, tilts one towards the Judeo-Christian theistic worldview.

Opposed to such causal influences one hopes there is a self-control or self-regulation mechanism that ideally serves to police the lower or lesser “goods.” Unfortunately, one often defaults to lower level or lesser goods as a function of poor self-regulation. Baumeister (1997) makes a very good case for the conceptual and practical importance of self-regulation. And the explanations offered for failures in self regulation are informative, particularly since he is integrating thinking from various sources. For example, he argues, and presents empirical evidence, for the claim that self-regulation is tied to a limited resource (or power). When we are involved in a self-regulatory activity we can deplete that resource and thus fail at a subsequent task that requires self-regulation in another area. On the positive side, he offers a case for strengthening that resource much like one might strengthen a muscle (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011).

Further, Baumeister considers the possibility that failures to self-regulate may be tied to a shift in thinking towards low-level thinking in a manner proposed by Vallacher and Wegner (1987). Such low-level thinking fixates on the periphery, on mundane details, and on irrelevancies when higher level thinking encounters constraints (as in action identification theory). People can miss the big picture, or avoid the morally taxing questions, or switch from cognitively demanding rationales, when constrained, and thereby default to addressing the more mundane, albeit in an efficient way. There is a shift to belief deterioration or, at least, a shift to deterioration for “beliefs-in-use” if not espoused beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> Is smoking viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Is homosexuality viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Is over-eating viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Is pedophilia ever presented as doing good and doing evil? Is suicide viewable as both doing good and doing “evil?” Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes!

In another variant on thinking-shifts, Baumeister draws on Solomon and Corbit's (1974) opponent-process theory which helps explain how a person can be drawn to aversive conditions. Using examples like sky-diving, or bungee-jumping, one can see how opponent-processes could combine—the aversive sensation of falling is opposed by the subsequent pleasant sensation of safety, or relaxation. In effect, a failure to self-regulate to avoid an aversive situation can be facilitated by the reward associated with the subsequent situation, the favourable opponent-process. Afterward, one might choose to seek an aversive situation to attain the reward which follows. Indeed, there is the possibility that both the process, and the opponent-process, are rewarding but in different ways—one showing decreasing potency, while the other shows increasing potency. In such a scenario we can see how bad beliefs, or risky beliefs, can be rewarded, just like bad actions, or risky actions, can be rewarded.

If there is a limitation in Baumeister's claims it is likely linked to the source of self regulation. Worthington and Berry (2005) question Baumeister's "...explicit attempt to rely solely on scientific data (p. 157)..." in which case the "virtue" of self-control is a resident attribute (whether innate, acquired, learned, or developed). Having self-regulatory competence, like having a good memory, doesn't point one in the direction of where the application of the skill would be appropriate.

Indeed, wisdom would be a more descriptive, and more functional, master virtue. Wisdom would draw upon Convention, Synderesis, Social Conscience, Law, Deontology, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, Altruism, Selflessness, Self-interest, Moral Development, Character, and so on. A failure in wisdom would seem to be the more important problem than a failure in self-regulation since wisdom underpins sound self-regulation. Moreover, in this scenario a failure in wisdom would correspond to a failure in belief, and lead to subsequent evil acts.

Is there an ideal or universal standard that is tied to deep knowledge or a hardwired synderesis? Is there a knowledge that we can't not know? According to some there are general universals, or shared moral norms, or universal principles like "courage is a virtue" (Beis, 1964). As well, there are things that we "can't not know" as Budziszewski (1997, 1999, 2003) expresses it. Such hard-wired "deep knowledge," typically tied to natural law theory, is not simply religious. In fact, George (2001) carefully maps out the links to Socrates, Plato, Cicero and Aristotle providing a philosophical underpinning that coexists with the Judeo-Christian religious foundation. As a source of self-regulation, however, this hard-wired knowledge (or belief) is not a sufficient source. We often act contrary to our better knowledge, and better self, and thus the evil follows.

Is there a sufficient source for self-regulation? Baumeister and Vohls (2004) term a problem with self control as a proximal cause. Maybe it would be more informative to see the issue viewed in Aristotelian terms, that is, as a problem with a material cause, efficient cause, final cause, and formal cause. To illustrate, when one doesn't exercise a particular self-control option, say choosing to give up smoking, one is responding to competing final causes, and the "other" cause won. One may be hampered by a lack of the material resources (e.g., peer, parent, or social institutions and their constraints) to support the exercise of a particular self-control option. As an efficient-causal agent, one is choosing, or failing to choose, a particular self-control possibility. The notion of competing final causes and personal agency, it seems, are key

considerations. Thus, asking if there is a sufficient source for self-regulation leads one to respond: “at times.”

Rather, than focus on the presence or source of evil, it is probably, equally, informative to address the absence of good, or absence of the better good. If evil is the absence of good (or the better good) such a focus is appropriate. The solution to the problem of “doing evil while intending good,” then, is, in part, to formulate a policy on the “good” in terms of: (1) the definition of “good” in the context of a range of broader, and competing, goods, and (2) rank, where “goods” are ranked so that one might choose the better “goods.” The purpose of focusing on rank is to flag the notion that some “goods” are more important than others. The good associated with a full stomach (and thus a long term focus on preserving life) is less important than the good associated with a life preserved in the immediacy of a flailing, drowning-victim. There are competing goods, and one should forego the lesser for the better good. In terms of competing final causes, some final causes are better than others. Obviously, then, some beliefs are better than others.

Failures to self-regulate are tied to competing beliefs about competing goods (final causes)? Likely we are facing a failure to self-regulate in part only. At least one configuration of a failure to self regulate emerges from: (1) an inappropriate *belief* about the most appropriate good to choose, or (2) competing *beliefs* about the most appropriate good to choose. If one chooses the wrong level of good in the hierarchy we ask why she chose that. Is it simply as Woody Allen says, “The heart wants what it wants?” Or is this, rather, Woody Allen defaulting to lower level thinking, and lower level beliefs, the “evil” beliefs?

From this psychological approach one can sense the importance of beliefs in the philosophy of evil. Beliefs underpin evils, many evils that overt theists and covert theists put on the table. Beliefs can mask evils as goods. Beliefs can motivate one to pursue the commission of evil.

### *Swinburne’s Theological Search*

Swinburne (1998) has an interesting take on agnosticism and the problem of evil. He sees agnosticism as an “evil,” or at the very least, and less noxiously, as “bad.” He acknowledges that it is only bad, however, if there is a God. Fair enough! But true to a balanced scholarly approach he sees possible good: “Agnosticism is bad only if there is a God to be known about. If there is a God, then in containing these states, the world is a worse place than it would otherwise be; but I shall be arguing, these very states which make it worse make possible good states which could not otherwise occur (p. 193).” Swinburne is willing to argue for value in the possibility of sin, in punishment (here and hereafter), in failure, and in agnosticism.

Many seem to think that agnosticism is the safe position, the position that God will somehow honour, the evidentially honest position. Perhaps not! “If there are good arguments for the existence of God (as I think there are), then some human ignorance of God may be a moral evil. Humans may not have bothered to consider these arguments seriously, may not have told each other about them, and may have refused to allow themselves to feel the force of the arguments because in consequence they would see the obligation to lead a different sort of life (Swinburne, 1998, p.203).”

Agnosticism, as a moral evil, would call into question any agnostic, escapist position rooted solely in absolute evidentialism. As a moral evil, it should open up broader



epistemological vistas and a more realistic perspective incorporating virtue epistemology, prudential epistemology, pragmatism, common sense, and Moser's experiential, or existential, epistemology. In effect, it may be exceedingly dangerous (and self-deceptive) to be an agnostic, to choose the agnostic stance. Swinburne (1998) writes: "We need 'epistemic distance' in order to have free choice between good and evil (p.206)."

I see three important implications here with respect to choice. First: There is a need to make the correct choice—choose the good, or follow the tilt. Second: Okay, so absolute evidentialism is not sufficient for demanding a mandatory commitment. Nevertheless, it does provide the proper tilt towards theism; and it does explain a tilt towards theism, in spite of the demands, the evidential demands, that many atheists ask for—demands like sky-writing, or growing new limbs. Third: There is a need for a broader epistemological perspective. Evidentialism is not enough (Dougherty, 2011, Jordan, 2006). Combine evidentialism with other epistemologies, and the tilt towards theism increases dramatically.

### *Peter van Inwagen's Logical Search*

Peter van Inwagen (2005) explores the argument from evil by framing the debate between two individuals he calls "Theist" and "Atheist." They are not debating to influence each other so much as to influence the audience—an audience of agnostics. He approaches the problem of evil as an intellectual problem as opposed to an emotional, pastoral, or spiritual problem. As an intellectual problem the question that surfaces for the theist confronting the problem is: Why haven't you abandoned theism, given the problem? Does the theist have an intellectual response, or is there a simple deferral to evil being a mystery, or a simple appeal to trust—simple faith and trust in God? For the atheist—or rather, some types of atheist, that is, the scornful—confronting the problem the question is: Why have you displayed intellectual dishonesty in addressing the problem?

What's the basic problem? In its simple form the argument is phrased as: "If God existed, he would be all-powerful and morally perfect. An all-powerful and morally perfect God being would not allow evil to exist. But we observe evil. Hence, God does not exist (van Inwagen, 2005, Loc 2714)." It is a logical question, and question of logic, but clearly mitigated when narrowly framed, or when one defaults to lower levels of thinking as in action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987).

As an example of the scornful response consider the following quote from van Inwagen (2005). He embeds a quote from Mill (from Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*), and Mill is commenting on the impossibility of reconciling omnibenevolence, justice, and omnipotence: "... 'The attempt to do so not only involves absolute contradiction in an intellectual point of view but exhibits to excess the revolting spectacle of a jesuitical defense of moral enormities.' I am afraid I must accuse Mill (and the many other authors who have expressed similar sentiments) of intellectual dishonesty" (van Inwagen, 2005, Loc 2728--2740)." Such scorn is problematic for intellectual argumentation.

- It is the *easier response* than argument.

- It is the most *pleasant response* (at least for the one pouring the scorn) and therefore likely the *rewarding response* psychologically. It would lead to a learned or entrenched response pattern.
- It is the *safest response* because “...you can pretty much take it for granted that most people will regard what you have said as unanswerable; you can take it as certain that everyone who is predisposed to agree with you will believe you have made an unanswerable point (van Inwagen, 2005, Loc 2743).”
- It is the *incarceration response* as the opponent is imprisoned: “You can pretty much take it for granted that your audience will dismiss any attempt your opponent in debate makes at an answer as a ‘rationalization’—that great contribution of modern depth psychology to intellectual complacency and laziness (van Inwagen, 2005, Loc 2743).”
- It is the *deflector response*: “To people who employ the argument from evil and attempt to deflect critical examination of the argument by that sort of moral posturing, I can only say, Come off it (van Inwagen, 2005, Loc 2749).” As a deflector response, this emotive response is distinct from its cognitive cousins, the defeater and the defeater-deflector. The scornful response is suicidal in a sense.

The debate that van Inwagen sets up is between fictional characters he calls Theist and Atheist. They attempt to influence the agnostics in the audience by an intellectual response. Atheist makes the traditional attack: God must desire the nonexistence of evil being morally perfect, and effect the nonexistence of evil being omnipotent. Yet evil exists, so God must not exist. Theist responds noting there are relationships to consider between what one wants, what one can do, and what one will do. To illustrate this point van Inwagen uses the story of Alice, a nurse, whose mother is in pain and dying. Alice, having access to means for euthanasia, and a desire to end her mother’s pain, does not. She has “want,” and “can,” but the “will” does not follow; she has other reasons in play.

The important “other reasons” in play for God, and van Inwagen, are centered on the traditional theistic defense—free will. Van Inwagen develops the free will defence in its simple form and in an expanded form. He deals with objections and presents a plausible story line that attempts to address objections like: (1) the amount of evil outweighs the good, (2) free will doesn’t address the problem of natural evils, (3) horrors, and horror stories, turn one from God, (4) God can control free will as free will and determinism are compatible (at least for compatibilists), and (5) free will is incompatible with God’s omniscience. Van Inwagen presents interesting story lines, alternatives, and speculations—responses that challenge Atheist’s arguments. The responses are intellectually sufficient to meet the criteria of “possibly the case.” He offers a defense that supports the tilt to align with Theist, and the theists. And as an added bonus, there is no scorn poured.

Biblically, there is the orthodox claim that the entire human race is evil. The story of the judgment evident in the Noachic flood, which was designed to wipe out humanity, portrays the evil in human beings as cosmic, total, and terminal. Destruction, total destruction, as warranted can be argued, theologically; even today some ethologists and radical environmentalists might argue for the wisdom of the removal of human beings from the scene entirely. “The heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, who can know it?” “There is none that doeth good, no not one.”

Could God be justified in destroying humanity? How would you answer the following question: Was Kafka justified in asking his friend, from his deathbed, to destroy the unfinished manuscripts for “The Trial,” and “The Castle?” The manuscripts were Kafka’s creation; he was not happy with them; he did not want them out there representing him; and he was their creator. It seems he was justified in asking, and expecting, his friend to destroy them. Are you justified in tossing in the garbage that bad poem you wrote last night? Answering yes to these questions seems reasonable and moral. If Kafka was justified in destroying his creation, it is reasonable to argue that God could likewise be justified in destroying His creation.

### *Is Hell Required?*

Can some see merit in the concept of Hell (e.g., Prager, Berger, etc.) while others find the notion of Hell inconceivable and grounds for rejecting God (e.g., Lobdell, Templeton, etc.) or in need of mitigation (e.g., Stott, Bell, etc.)? Of the various positions which one is valid? Presenting the various positions in terms of three axes offers perspective. Axis 1 (*a decision axis*) can be formulated as: accept, reject, or nuance Hell. Axis 2 (*a traditional axis*) can be formulated in familiar terms: universalism (everyone is saved), annihilationism (the evil are annihilated), or orthodoxy (there is a Hell to be avoided). Axis 3 (*a scholarly axis*) can be formulated with the generation of multiple hypotheses and theories for consideration: universalism, hopeful-universalism, annihilationism, partial-annihilationism, orthodox-literal, orthodox-figurative, Ring’s NDE-Hell, Mystery, Other). Which position correctly maps onto reality?

### *Is Hell Good?*

Is it possible that Hell tilts one towards God, motivationally? Is it possible? If so, it could be considered good, in a pragmatic sense. Consider that Hell was part of God’s creation, and God saw everything that He had created and saw it as good. If so, Hell could be considered good, in a cosmological sense. Is it possible that Hell is integrated with justice like angles are integrated with geometry? If so, it could be considered good, in a moral sense.

### *A Non-Bifurcation View of Hell*

Christians, at least some Christians, are quite uncomfortable when backed into a corner by a comment like: “You believe that if I don’t believe what you believe, or believe in Jesus in accord with your doctrine, that I’m going to Hell, right?” This seems logical if one holds to an either/or view of the afterlife. It might be a bifurcation fallacy. Or it might be true. However, consider a possible non-bifurcation view of Hell, or, rather, the afterlife. The view can be drawn

from Wright's (2003) tome on the resurrection where he discusses Daniel 12:2-3. The Daniel text allows for the inference that there are more than two categories of human afterlife. Indeed, there may be three, or even four categories implied in this text.

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. –Dan. 12:2-3

A non-bifurcation view could look like the following: Some (i.e., group 1 are those raised to shame and everlasting contempt, or Hell). Some are raised to everlasting life or Heaven (i.e., group 2a, the wise; group 2b, the shepherds). Some, the middle group, well we just don't know whether they are annihilated, or consigned to some lesser rewards. As Wright (2003) expresses it: “Those who awake are ‘many,’ but not, it appears, all. The passage is not attempting to offer a global theory of the ultimate destination of the whole human race, but simple to affirm that, in a renewed bodily life, God will give everlasting life to some and everlasting contempt to others.... The rest – the great majority of humans, and indeed of Israelites – are simply not mentioned (p. 110).”

This non-bifurcation view is amenable to keeping Hell in play for some, amenable to keeping heaven in play for some, and amenable to keeping a nuanced and calibrated form of judgment and compassion in play for the middle group. A non-bifurcation view is consistent with a new heaven and a new earth. It is consistent with God's levels of judgment ranging from gold to wood, hay, and stubble. It is consistent with a partial-annihilationism.

Such a view in no way mitigates Jesus' warnings regarding Hell. Such a view is speculation, not doctrine. Such a view is not a “permission slip.”

#### *A Contemporary Jewish View - Dennis Prager on Hell*

The Jewish commentator Dennis Prager has an interesting take on hell. I post his article from November 30, 2004 here.

Is it ok to hope anyone is in hell?

[http://townhall.com/columnists/dennisprager/2004/11/30/is\\_it\\_ok\\_to\\_hope\\_anyone\\_is\\_in\\_hell/page/full/](http://townhall.com/columnists/dennisprager/2004/11/30/is_it_ok_to_hope_anyone_is_in_hell/page/full/)

The death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat raises an interesting and significant question: Is it morally and theologically acceptable to hope anyone goes to hell?

That was my first reaction to the death of the godfather of modern terrorism. But I recognize that many people, including many who share my moral assessment of Arafat, might reject such a reaction, let alone publicly express it. But there is a good case to be made for hoping that Yasser Arafat now finds himself in hell.

In order to do so, three issues need to be addressed:

First, is there a hell? Can rational people believe in such a thing?

Second, if there is a hell, does Arafat merit going there? And can any of us mortals judge a person worthy of hell?

Third, if there is a hell, is it acceptable to hope someone who we believe merits it goes there?

First, is there a hell?

Among those who pride themselves in being what is deemed sophisticated in our time, the notion of hell is either absurd, immoral or both. It is also identified with Christians, especially conservative Christians, and, therefore, the sophisticated feel particularly compelled to reject the concept.

Yet the belief that those who commit evil are punished after death is hardly restricted to Christianity. One of the Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith as laid down by the codifier of Jewish law, Maimonides (1135-1204), is that God rewards the good and punishes the bad.

One, therefore, need not be a conservative Christian to believe in some form of hell for the evil. All one need be is a rational believer in a just God. For if there is a just God, it is inconceivable that those who do evil and those who do good have identical fates. A just God must care about justice, and since there is little justice in this world, there has to be in the next. And belief in the next world is also not confined to Christianity. As the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, the greatest contemporary compilation of Jewish scholarship (edited largely by non-religious Jews) notes in the first sentence under the heading "Afterlife," "Judaism has always believed in an afterlife."

The second question is easily answered. Much of humanity has been adversely affected by modern-day terror. The lives of millions -- virtually all Palestinians and Israelis, for example -- have been terribly affected by Arafat. And there are hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been destroyed or shattered by him. At the same time, other than a few sycophants enriched by some of the billions of dollars he embezzled from the Palestinians, no one has had a better life because Yasser Arafat lived.

Throughout modern history, even terrorists had moral boundaries. Terrorists historically attempted to avoid murdering innocent men, women and children. Arafat, however, made the murder and maiming of completely innocent men, women and children the very purpose of terror and one of his life's major legacies.

Yasser Arafat single-handedly made nihilistic acts of cruelty routine, even respectable. Many people were horrified at the Palestinian slaughter of the Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. But humanity gradually became inured to Arafat-style slaughter. Palestinian and Muslim disciples targeted schoolchildren for death in the Israeli city of Ma'alot and later in the Russian city of Beslan; tortured and murdered American diplomats in Sudan; and Arafat created a society whose only exports were new forms of religious hatred and new expressions of barbarity. Thanks to him, the Palestinian name is identified among people of goodwill with barbarity just as the German name came to be associated with barbarity as a result of Hitler.

If, then, there is a just God, and Arafat was the particularly venal human being described here, the answer to the third question is obvious.

Just as any decent human being would want good people to be rewarded in whatever existence there is after this life, they would want the cruelest of people to be punished.

So, of course, I hope Yasser Arafat is in hell. It means that a just God rules the universe. If you think that is hard-hearted, consider the alternative, that one of the most corrupt and cruel human beings of the past half-century is resting in peace. Whoever isn't bothered by that is the one with the hard heart.

For Prager it seems the concept of hell is justified, reasonable, and desirable. If one agrees with his presentation as articulated above, then the concept of Hell also offers a tilt towards theism.

### *A Sociologist's View - Peter Berger On Hell*

Peter Berger (1990) noted in *A Rumor of Angels* that the doctrine of hell fulfills a deep human need, a need for assurance that those responsible for terrible, or wicked, exercising of malice, evil, and abuse, will reap justice. More than just a need, however, Berger situates the notion of Hell in the context of pointers to something beyond the natural realm. He calls them "signals of transcendence." The signals are presented as arguments: (1) the argument from ordering, (2) the argument from play, (3) the argument from hope, (4) the argument from damnation, and (5) the argument from humor. The argument from damnation contributes to the case for Hell.

Berger (1990) is not so much interested in trying to explain evil, or evil people. For example, he leaves Arendt's notion of "the banality of evil," with respect to Eichmann, on the table<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, he acknowledges socializing and resocializing processes operative in "a scientific frame of reference." He acknowledges relativizing. His concern is the "character and intention of our condemnation." What does it point to? It points to something beyond the natural. Consider the following quotes from Berger (1990):

"There are certain deeds that cry out to heaven. These deeds are not only an outrage to our moral sense, they seem to violate a fundamental awareness of the constitution of our humanity. In this way, these deeds are not only evil, but monstrously evil. And it is this monstrosity that seems to compel even people normally or professionally given to such perspectives to suspend relativizations (1990, p. 74)."

"The transcendent element manifests itself in two steps. First, our condemnation is absolute and certain. It does not permit modification or doubt, and it is made in the conviction that it applies to all times and to all men as well as to the perpetrator or putative perpetrator of the particular deed. In other words we give the condemnation the status of a necessary and universal truth. ... we must look beyond the realm of our 'natural' experience for a validation of our certainty. Second, the condemnation does not seem to exhaust its intrinsic intention in terms of this world alone. Deeds that cry out to

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of Arendt and evil see the comments under [naturalism](#) and how evil can be framed as [a "good."](#)

heaven also cry out for hell. .... No human punishment is ‘enough’ in the case of deeds as monstrous as these. These are deeds that demand not only condemnation, but damnation in the full religious meaning of the word—that is, the doer not only puts himself outside the community of men; he also separates himself in a final way from a moral order that transcends the human community, and thus invokes a retribution that is more than human (p. 75-76).”

“Hope and damnation are two aspects of the same, encompassing vindication. The duality, I am inclined to think, is important. To be sure, religious hope offers a theodicy and therefore consolation to the victims of inhumanity. But it is equally significant that religion provides damnation for the perpetrators of inhumanity. The massacre of the innocent (and, in a terrible way, all of history can be seen as this) raises the question of the justice and power of God. It also, however, suggests the necessity of hell—not so much as a confirmation of God’s justice, but rather as a vindication of our own (p. 77).”

Some crimes are so heinous that we know human punishment is not sufficient. The need to sense justice beyond this life is rooted in emotion, cognition, fundamental ontology, and theology. This rooted sense of Hell tilts one toward theism.

#### *A Conservative Christian View - J. I. Packer on Hell*

Packer writes a foreword to a book on Hell. It is worth quoting a large section of this foreword.

“The sense that death is to be feared because it is in some way retribution for wrongdoing is ineradicable, however much we try to rationalize it away with the filmmakers’ secular mythology of ultimate happiness after death and the new Age mythology of reincarnation. Deep down, everybody feels uneasy about death—and with good reason. After death we face judgment.

To believe what the Bible appears to say about human destiny apart from the grace of God is a bitter pill indeed, and no one should wonder that attempts are made to explore alternative understandings of God’s revelation on this topic. It is suggested that the Bible is unclear, or incoherent, or inconsistent, or untrustworthy, when it speaks of the outcome of judgment after death, or alternatively that virtually the whole church has for two thousand years misunderstood the texts. Are any of these suggestions plausible? I do not think so, nor does Dr. Dixon. He has mounted an argument that, however disconcerting, must be reckoned with in any future discussion of Bible teaching on human destiny (p.7).”

The tilt from comments on Hell (both Packer and Dixon), is towards theism.

Nevertheless, to be fair, it is clear that Hell seems to push many away from theism, or at least Biblical theism. The major attempts to deal with the elimination, or mitigation, of Hell, while still maintaining some attachment to Christianity, is via some form of Universalism. Packer (2011) unpacks the issue nicely in Chapter 5 (Does everyone go to heaven?) in the book:

“Is Hell For Real or Does Everyone Go To Heaven?” edited by C. W. Morgan and R. A. Peterson (2011).

Packer writes: “The deepest motivation for universalism has always been a revolt against the endless punishment of the unsaved (2011, p. 59).” He notes such lights, with such a flicker, as Madeleine L’Engle, Karl Barth, and John Hick. He notes the sociological supportive contexts which push one away from the concept of Hell and towards universalism. There are several such sociological supportive factors: (1) that multireligious communities operate in close proximity seems to foster inclusiveness and acceptance, (2) the Christians’ theological ignorance or immaturity, (3) the demise of Christianity as a cultural force in the West, and (4) the penchant for rapport with non-Christian neighbours can overpower the news that the house is on fire, speaking metaphorically. He notes, also, a theology trying to: (1) reconcile God’s love and Hell, and (2) establish social justice rather than a salvation through evangelism. Packer’s analysis of universalism, his hermeneutically principled approach to language and Scripture, and his faithfulness to the head over the heart in dealing with theological concepts support his conclusion: “Universalism does not stand up to biblical examination. Its sunny optimism may be reassuring and comfortable, but it wholly misses the tragic quality of human sin, human unbelief, and human death set forth in the Bible (2011, p. 71).”

Again, such analyses of Hell are consistent with the tilt towards theism. Hell is not a defeater for theism. Rather, it aligns with a tilt towards theism.

#### *A Near-Death-Experience Researcher’s Configuration of Hell*

The position considered by Ring and Valarino (2006) relates to the life review experience. They draw from the reports of several people who experienced the NDE, the life-review experience, and an aspect of Hell. There are several aspects to this life review experience that raise the image of Hell for a number of their NDE participants. During the life review experience people are seen to judge themselves albeit under the direction of the Being of Light. They experience unconditional love, forgiveness, understanding, and learning. Yet, people are seen to experience the pain of suffering they inflicted on others. “It occurs to me, what could be a more perfect form of justice than this: Everything you do becomes yours. It is not that we are rewarded for our good deeds or punished by our cruel ones; it is simply that we receive back what we have given out, and exactly as we have done it (Ring & Valarino, 2006, p. 162-163).” It is an interesting view of Hell that incorporates issues related to time (chronological clocks, quantum clocks, and Kairological clocks). It invites a rethinking of the sin against God, atonement and propitiation. It invites a rethinking of the penalty of sin.

The fundamental problems with this view for the Christian are three, at least. First, there is the diminishment of the sacrificial atonement (propitiation and expiation) offered by Jesus. If not nullified, certainly the atonement is mitigated, questioned, and marginalized. Secondly, there is the diminishment of sin—the problem of sin, the nature of sin, the effects of sin, and the remedy for sin. The entire creation is impacted by human sin. Animals suffer, the environment suffers, and God suffers, as a result of human sin (see Dembski, 2009). Taking this weight of sin to one’s self seems outlandish, even sacrilegious, for the Christian. Thirdly, there is the apparent hortatory value and advocacy for eastern religions that seems contiguous with such a view of hell.



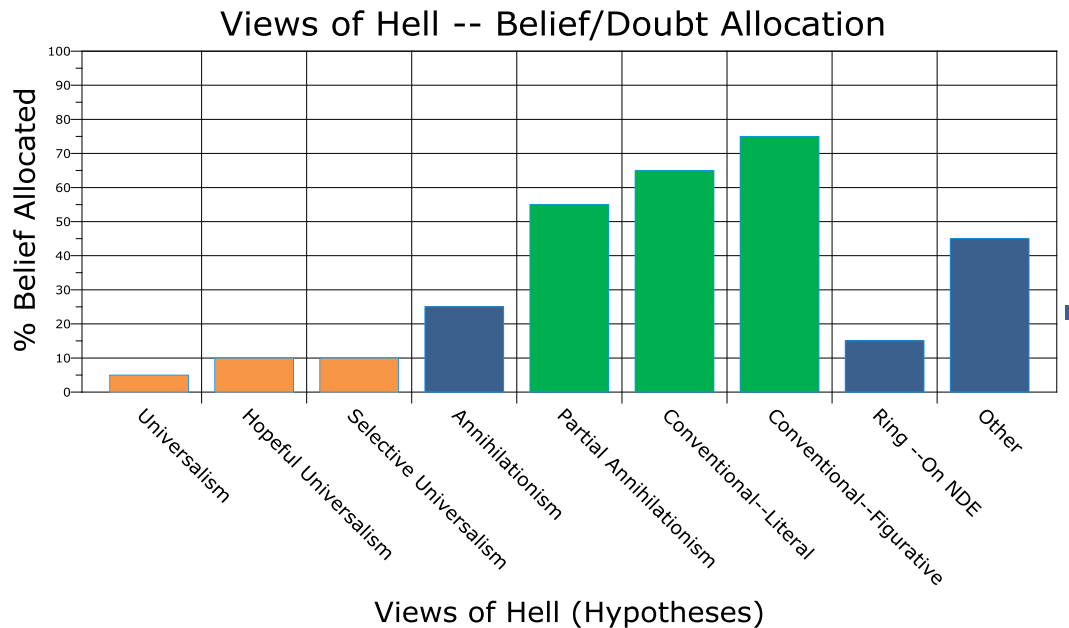
*The Prodigals' View on Hell*

Understandably, Hell is an offense to many. It can serve to push many from the Christian fold. Strobel (2000) noted that the very idea of hell was instrumental in Charles Templeton's shift to agnosticism. Hell just does not seem congruent with a God of love and mercy. Attempts are made to diminish Hell; for example, it is viewed as temporary, or purgatorial, or a mechanism for annihilation. These explanations, if rationalizations, are likely driven by:

- (1) Emotional aversion to torture, and theological aversion to torture; and this form of argument is often cast with pejorative language.
- (2) Normal empathy and human propensity to intervene to help others; and this form of argument is analogical—what do parents do, and strangers do, to deliver the suffering? They save.
- (3) Theologically shallow analyses; the arguments for Hell are cast as narrow considerations, unsophisticated, and “Bronze Age.”

So where does the stronger argument find a home? For orthodox Christians the stronger case aligns with belief in Hell. It is a case that reasonably fits in Christian theology and Biblical exposition (Packer, 2011), and yet finds a comparable home outside of Christian theology (cf Prager and Berger), though it is most clearly developed in Christian thought. The arguments against Hell are weak from a theological perspective; only if one adopts naturalism (and atheism), or humanism, as a worldview, is the abandonment of Hell apparently warranted. A conservative creedal worldview supports some variant of Hell; the various attempts at forms of universalism to mitigate Hell are not compelling in a sophisticated theological sense. Creedal arguments for a mitigation of Hell are interesting, but weak. Any view of the existence of Hell (for purging, for pedagogical purposes, permitting post-mortem evangelism, for total annihilation), seems to be built on rationalizations. The strong view of Hell tilts one towards theism.

In terms of a belief allocation protocol the views with the greater credibility are seen in the following Figure 7. The weightings could change with subsequent evidence and argument, but for the moment the traditional view seems to hold the greater weight. And possibly there could be other formulations in the future.



*Figure 7. Showing subjective allocation of belief to various views of Hell. Three get a green light given current arguments.*

### The Option for Free Will

If there is no God, there is no free will. Naturalism, determinism, and event causation would reign supreme. But, if the mugger, the murderer, or the marauder has libertarian free will they are responsible for their acts—perhaps in vary degrees, or at times tempered by extenuating circumstances—but they are judged to be responsible in some way. It is this issue of responsibility, or culpability, that provides an argument for free will for some philosophers (e.g., van Inwagen, 1983).

Alternatively, if one’s will is simply compatible with the determinants of their particular nature (and the mere mediator of earlier determinants), it is difficult to assign responsibility in any meaningful way. Ironically as well, the assigning of responsibility, or not, is a choice, and itself presupposes libertarian free will, or so it seems. More ironic still, the assigning of responsibility leads deductively to God as a “belief-in-use” which might very well conflict with one’s espoused belief. Consequently, and up front, we human being presuppose libertarian free will; libertarian free will is the working hypothesis in the reflection advanced here.

When considering the place of choice in the formation of an orientation, or a belief, or a behaviour, it would be assumed—if there is a real choice, or authentic choice, as opposed to apparent choice—that choice presupposes a meaningful form of wilfulness on the part of an agent. Therefore, the nature of wilful choices are necessarily on the table for consideration—wilful choices in the form of determinism (no real free will), compatibilism (situated, complimentary and apparent will), and libertarian free will (true agent causation as prime mover).

On a bi-polar scale one can ask if human beings have a free will and expect a simple yes or no answer. Is free will real, or is determinism the reality we face?<sup>1</sup> Is free will real, or is the notion of free will just an illusion? And pushing beyond the bipolar scale one can ask two relevant questions: (1) does free will co-exist with determinism as some variant of compatibilism? (2), can free will exist at one point in time only to atrophy into determinism, or compatibilism, at a later point in time?

One camp holds that free will is real. The opposing camp holds that it is not possible to have free will in a deterministic world governed by natural laws. In this opposing camp, naturalism as a worldview is quite “at home” with determinism, that is, hard determinism. In the naturalism camp, for the most part, free will is an illusion (see Wegner, 2002), although some try to circumvent the illusion by contending on the one hand that “free will is an illusion (Harris, 2012, p. 5)” and then adding “The truth about us is stranger than many suppose: *The illusion of free will is itself an illusion* (Harris, 2012, p. 64).” Who knows what to make of Harris, and his event-caused claims?

Between these two poles a third camp (or set of camps) holds that both free will and determinism can be considered real and that they are compatible (Taylor & Dennett, 2002). However, those who fall in this camp still seem to view all causation as “event causation,” which, at best is a soft determinism, if not defaulting to outright determinism in the final analysis. In fact, the critique of this compatibilist position seems sufficient to justify one being quite suspicious of the soft determinism position (Berofsky, 2002).

If determinism is true (at least hard determinism, and possibly soft determinism) all events, including, beliefs, emotions, behaviours, orientations, and choices, are determined by prior events. Agent causation, that is, the agent as originator, is apparent only—it is not real, in such a view. Agent causation has no ontological base and thus no real originating power, and therefore, no authentic status as originator of an action, a belief, an orientation, and so on. At best, agents are simply mechanical mediators between outcomes and prior events.

Arguably, and reasonably, determinism is the only logical mechanism to explain causation in a naturalist’s worldview. If determinism is true there is no case for personal responsibility. An apparent choice (to commit suicide, to choose a same-sex partner, to opt for sex with animals, to opt for sex with children, to obsessively practice the piano, to pursue creative writing, to smoke, to conduct scientific experiments, etc.) is merely the product of previous events, albeit, a variegated and complex constellation of previous events. The simplest analogy (and one used by Moreland & Rae, 2002) is the analogy of dominoes falling; the fall of one domino is due to the fall of the preceding domino in the causal chain. The original cause in the distant past is fuzzy, ignored, and ultimately reduced to an unknown—a self-organizing product of (1) something like dust in motion, and chance collisions, it seems, or (2) the posits of

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<sup>1</sup> Ironically, as indicated above, to answer this question “yes, there is a free will” could be viewed as simply a pre-determined response by the naturalist, or determinist. For the hard determinist to even attempt an answer (which would be founded upon freedom and choices, albeit rational choices) seems counter-intuitive, perhaps self-refuting, and somewhat suspicious, at least. Free will seems to be a required presupposition for any meaningful cognitive-based dialogue.

the mind of a complexity-theorist, or (3) “something,” since something exists, or (4) nothing. There is no agent causation, no initiating domino that is an agent manifesting an act of will.

How much credibility can be allocated to such a view of pure determinism where all causation is event causation? To play a little with this question we could suggest using a *five-point credibility scale* (None, Minimal, Moderate, Considerable, Total) to face the question. Using this scale, one could say: “In a pure naturalist worldview 100% event causation reaches a credibility level of ‘Total’ (hard determinism).” Another might answer: “In a broad naturalist worldview event causation reaches a credibility level of ‘Considerable’ (soft determinism), with some room for agent causation,” even if only as a cop-out.

In a more conservative, or religious, or commonsense, worldview the belief allocation for a hard determinism drops to the more “Moderate” or “Minimal” range. Determinism is not ruled out; rather, it co-exists with free will, a libertarian free will. Thus, in these latter worldviews there is a place for free will, or true agent causation, alongside deterministic event causation. When, where, how, and how much agent causation is exercised is an open question. At times, agent causation, though real, seems to be minimal as it is only operative at certain choice-points or pivot-points. Likely, agent causation is quite fragile, and can be easily lost (though not obliterated) once a certain course of action is set in motion. The trigger is pulled; and then a series of cascading events surface, unfolding like a pinball bouncing around. These events work their harm, or their help.

The compatibilist position argues that a form of free will is compatible with determinism. Of the compatibilist position Swinburne (1998) writes: “...the basic idea is that someone has free will in this sense if they do what they want and value (and do not act in consequence of psychological or physical pressure), even if they are fully caused to want and value what they do (p. 33).” It seems to be a logically flawed claim, however, perhaps even self-refuting as the “wanting” and “valuing” are “fully caused.” Indeed, there is a problem with this view with respect to accountability and responsibility. As Swinburne further notes: “If the only free will humans have is compatibilist free will, there will be no distinction to be made between God allowing some human to do a bad act, and causing him to do it. For then humans will inevitably do the acts they do because of the way they are made (1998, p. 34).” Acknowledging free will, that is, libertarian free will, tilts one towards God!

In a sense many choices can be seen as real but constrained somewhat by one’s nature, and a complex constellation of determinants. In such a scenario an agent choosing X is advancing a choice determined “partially” by influential situational determinants (peers, parents, education, experiences, biology, multiplier effects, development, developmental history, etc.) and one’s cognitive/volitional architecture which itself is built from previous events. Here the agent is minimized. But the agent still has power.

From a theological perspective one might speculate that perhaps a person has libertarian free will by design, but has fallen victim to compatibilist determinism by a corrupted nature, or corrupted environment. In a sense the will is now bound by a broken nature as Luther might phrase it (Luther, no date) following Augustine (see Greer, 1996), and Paul (Romans 7: 14-21). The free will can be compromised.

Alternatively, the will might be bound by adverse situational determinants (e.g., brain damage or dysfunction, parenting, poverty, education, politics, indoctrination, propaganda, etc.) or bound by adverse cognitive determinants (e.g., beliefs, dogma, cognitive style, personality, etc.), or bound simply by the consequences of an earlier freely-willed act, unfolding over time. If so, it is easy to see how one can have difficulty implying wilfulness and thus personal responsibility given either compatibilism or hard determinism. The will can be bound, but for the libertarian, not exonerated given one's developmental history of choices, and not obliterated given one's "oughtness" to change.

Is it possible that we are, in part, responsible for the poverty, the beliefs, and the dogmas, that now drive our acts? Is there a libertarian spark, always? If so, then we might be responsible for the consequences. If we have true libertarian agency we can be the source of a subsequent cascade. We can be responsible for the initial act/s that set a sequence in motion; then we might be responsible for the consequences even though all apparent causes are now seen as event-causation. For some things, responsibility is lost in the dark recesses of our past. In the present, we can be responsible for the redirection—new acts that set a new sequence in motion; then we might be expected to change, called to change.

Are we responsible for our beliefs? The libertarian might answer "Yes" because of our wilful choice along a continuum of choice-points. The compatibilist could answer "Yes" because of our nature (but probably more likely due to the compatibilist's intuitive sense of responsibility). The determinist would answer "Yes" given several constraints: (1) *verbally*, because humans (the determinist included) have been programmed to believe in responsibility by a natural selection process that values belief in responsibility, (2) *behaviourally*, because such pontification presupposes wilful cognitive acts, and (3) *pragmatically*, because it's a coin toss, and just as likely "no" will be the answer tomorrow.

In a compatibilist position personal responsibility is accepted—perhaps for psychological reasons, perhaps for a purely philosophical reason—but the responsibility is clearly mitigated, if not obliterated, when probed. Moreover, the position doesn't seem logical unless one situates agent causation within a constellation of determinants that constrain an agent. However, since this position does posit a degree of free will, and agent causation, it does merit more belief allocated to it than pure determinism would merit; thus, though arbitrary, one could assign a moderate level of tentative credibility to compatibilism.

The third position is linked clearly to the concept of libertarian free will. Human beings (and perhaps animals) are in the position to implement true agent causation; that is, they can act contrary to pre-determinants and influences, and, in effect, originate a new direction. One position adopted in this essay, and as foundational for the argument considered, is that free will is real and therefore an important determinant of action. In terms of allocated belief a level of "Considerable" credibility is assigned to libertarian free will. This position, then, would be most consistent with responsibility assigned to the individual and subsequent accountability for their choices, including "belief" choices.

It is possible that future shifts in belief-allocation for these three positions could occur. The level of credibility for libertarian free will could decrease and the belief-allocation for compatibilism could increase as a function of additional information, or reflection. Such a shift,

either way, might affect the assignment of responsibility. A shift to forms of compatibilism would be seen as negating liability given the underlying attributions to event causation; and surely a shift to a preferential allocation of belief to hard determinism would negate responsibility.

As a consequence of opting for libertarian free will, the element of personal responsibility and accountability remains significant. However, since free will is intertwined with various reasons for acting, responsibility must be contingent upon a composite of determinants. Such a composite would be constructed from: (1) ontological reasons for actions (broadly speaking the reference is to nature, nurture, and their developmental interactions), (2) cognitive reasons for actions (logical, psychological, neuropsychological, and social-psychological), and, (3) selfist reasons for action (pleasure, security, survival, self-esteem, etc.). This constellation of determinants interacts with two other broad categories of determinants which anchor acts in our moral nature<sup>1</sup>. The first of these is wilful choices of a free agent. The second category is beliefs. Since personal beliefs may underpin the broad constellation of determinants, as well as free will choices, beliefs are the important partner in freely willed positions.

This constellation of nature, nurture, agency, responsibility, reasons, determinants, influences, and beliefs can be considered in a particular individual in a *cross-sectional manner* (like a static snapshot). This is usually the first line of consideration. More importantly, though, these same factors can be considered in a *longitudinal manner*, which involves a more reflective and nuanced consideration of the trajectory of a particular life, or even the trajectory leading to a particular act, a particular belief, or a particular thought.

At a primary level, then, human beings are considered to have free will and function as agents initiating actions for which they are responsible at some level. However, when viewed in a *cross-sectional manner* responsibility can be dramatically mitigated, or even masked, by extenuating factors. In a *longitudinal approach* responsibility would be seen to play its more prominent role since later acts, though constrained and appearing determined by events, are actually products contingent, in part, on earlier free will acts.

The will is a key consideration when one is arguing for the significance of choice in learning. This consideration easily extends to the significance of choice in character formation, in decision-making, in beliefs, in understanding, in personal responsibility, and so on. Furthermore, this consideration applies to simple choices, to seminal choices, to choice-points, to the personal history and trajectory of choices, or the far ranging influences on choices. The responsibility for choices is tied to the freedom of the will and the actions of the will. Thus, it is essential to consider the nature and validity of a construct like free will with respect to beliefs and disbeliefs.

As indicated above, the position adopted in this essay aligns with a libertarian view of free will as most credibility is allocated to this position of the three major positions. Mele's

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<sup>1</sup> As an aside one could ask: do animals have free will? Do they show agent causation? A knee-jerk reaction would be to say "no." But, after watching a pet dog decide to chase the bird one time and ignore it the next time in seemingly similar circumstances makes one think this looks like a choice on his part. Supposing animals do manifest agent causation where does the difference with humans reside? Likely, it resides in the fact that human choices are rooted in morality, in part.

(2001) reference to van Inwagen resonates with libertarian free will as the appropriate working hypothesis: “Peter van Inwagen has said that the following (enthymematic) argument is ‘the strongest argument for the existence of free will,’ and indeed, ‘the only strong argument for the existence of free will’: ‘moral responsibility requires free will and we are responsible for at least some of the things we have brought about’ (Mele, 2001, p. 243).”

Mele, himself, seems to lean more towards agnosticism about incompatibilism, while attempting to keep moral responsibility on the table. Such a position is seen in his comment about “...going compatibilist. If compatibilism is true, there is little to block our rationally believing that we are free and morally responsible on the (partial) basis of our experience of our own agency (2001, p. 247).” This would not likely be convincing to Swinburne as noted above. Nevertheless, a change to a more compatibilist position may be kept open as a possibility should future arguments warrant. However, the working position at this point is the libertarian view.

Moreland and Ray (2003) put the view as follows: “In our view, the core component of intentional action is intentional endeavoring—exercising an active power as a first or originating mover in trying to bring about some effect for a reason (p. 124).” Reasons are key; although in one configuration the role of “reasons” is as final cause (but the causal weight is still with the agent), whereas, in another configuration the role of “reasons” is a necessary condition and the causal weight is attributed to both the agent and reasons in combination.

The support for such a libertarian position emerges from common sense as well as more formal philosophical arguments (Kane, 2002; Moreland & Ray, 2003; O’Connor, 2002, 2005; Swinburne, 1998; van Inwagen, 1983, 2002)). On the common sense side Swinburne (1998) offers two brief points, although he develops more sophisticated arguments at other places. His two “brief points” are: “The first is that it does often seem that it is up to us how we are to choose, and it is...a mark of rationality to believe that things are as they seem to be, in the absence of counter-evidence. The second, is that the mental life (of sensation, thought, desire, and purpose) is, evidently, so very different from normal physical events in the inanimate world that the brain (in sustaining a mental life) must be very different from other physical systems (which do not sustain mental life); and so there is not too much reason for supposing that any virtual determinism which operates outside the brain operates within it (p. 105).”

On a more formal level Moreland and Rae (2003) offer four arguments for libertarian agency. First, our “fundamental awareness of and belief about ourselves...as the absolute originators of our actions (p. 132-133),” serves as an argument for libertarian agency. Second, there is an argument from weak-willed action or “akrasia.” We have the sense that we sometimes act contrary to our strongest preferences, or beliefs, or desires. This sense of acting contrary to our better self, or wiser self, or wiser will (i.e., acting in line with akrasia rather than the known “better will”) suggests to our psyche a bent consistent with personal agency—a bent that is seminal or generative and independent of our better selves, or best interests.

The third argument is based on “causal deviancy.” A consequence might follow from an agent’s act or an accident. It can be read as either caused by an event (an accident) or by an agent’s intent, both of which would lead to the same effect. The example that Moreland and Ray

(2003) offer is a scenario along the lines of the following: (1) a spy arranges to send a signal to confederates, (2) the signal is the removal of a light from the window, (3) the light is knocked over by accident but the confederates read it as the signal, (4) nevertheless, the spy intended to remove the light and send the signal, (5) the deviance from the intended act-plan still leads to the intended consequence. The philosophical problems behind causal deviancy do seem to offer at least a mild argument for libertarian agency, in this case the failure of libertarian agency suggests the reality of libertarian agency.

The fourth argument is “the transitivity of causality.” Basically, if *a* causes *b* and *b* causes *c*, then *a* causes *c*. Such transitivity is quite at home in determinism, and apparently in some forms of compatibilism. But, if the person has freedom at all, freedom to originate an act, a belief, a position, it must be libertarian freedom. “The central core of agency must be the absolute origination of action within the agent, and this is precisely what libertarians affirm and compatibilists deny.” These arguments serve to tilt one in the direction of libertarian agency.

Admittedly, there are serious arguments against the notion of free will, and thus significant challenges to the notion of responsibility. In a naturalist worldview, in fact, this would be the reasonable stance. Although, perhaps ironically, one wonders how a case for “reasonable” can be made—a case that is itself beyond mere causal transitivity. In other words, the belief in determinism, or naturalism, has been determined for some. And if so, the belief in libertarian free will has been determined for others.

Of course such a deterministic view obliterates responsibility. Others step in and argue for a form of compatibilism (the notion that free will and personal responsibility may be (or are) compatible with determinism. This would be an appealing route—indeed, a necessary route—if one had a prior commitment to naturalism and determinism, and still valued or posited personal responsibility, or sought to explain the sense of personal responsibility.

In a religious worldview where determinism is not a basic assumption similar problems can arise that challenge libertarian agency. For example, there is a Christian notion that the will is subject to a corrupted human nature and that an agent is constrained to act in accord with this nature (see the later Augustine); thus all acts are tainted, or sinful (see Luther’s response to Erasmus in *The Bondage of the Will*). This form of argument might contend that people do act freely, but the act is consistent with their nature; since their nature is corrupted, their freely initiated acts are also corrupted, so it is a qualified freedom. In effect, our libertarian free will has been lost.

One final approach is from those (determinists) who hold the idea that free will is an illusion (Wegner, 2002). As one reads through Wegner’s book one gets drawn into the strength of the argument given the empirical evidence he offered. It is a fascinating read. Vancouver and Zawadzki (2007) sense this as well with their comment that Wegner offers “compelling evidence that our introspections of willed control are largely illusory (p. 317). They also find Dennett’s compatibilistic defaulting to determinism forceful. Nevertheless, Wegner has received significant critiques from philosophers (see Mele, 2009, 2010; O’Connor, 2005) that diffuse his argument dramatically. In particular, the critique of the empirical evidence advanced by Wegner—evidence which is based on Libet (1985)—is satisfactorily deconstructed by Mele (2009).



All things considered, then, it is a libertarian view of agency that is adopted in this current essay. It is “reasons” for an act (either teleological reasons related to final cause, or sufficient reasons as part of the sufficient/efficient cause) that inform the place of will. Reasons are based on beliefs; thus beliefs are the important determinant of agency. In a deterministic or a compatibilistic formulation of free will, beliefs would be a transitive element in the causal chain; in a libertarian formulation the person can act upon the beliefs with a constellation of determinants which include a choice-component (agency), and not as a product of necessity. That tilts one towards theism.

Is there a worldview issue here? That is, is the naturalist forced to assume there is no agent-causation since all effects are caused by something previous, some previous events? The answer is: yes. The naturalist paradigm is deterministic. To posit agent causation one needs a worldview that allows for a causal source for some acts, at some point, that is pure agent, and uncaused by any prior events. The fall of the dominoes is caused by a pure first cause—an agent.

The bottom line here posits two types of responsibility. Type I responsibility is rooted in our libertarian free will, and the choices we make as a function of our nature interacting with our free will decisions, albeit situated free will decisions. Type II responsibility is rooted in our compatibilistic free will: the choices we make reflect “the transitivity of causality,” they are a function of previous events, our existing nature and our current situation. In Type I responsibility there is room; in Type II responsibility there is doom. In Type I responsibility there is opportunity for the suicidal, the obese, the agnostic, the atheist, the bully, the musical, and so on, via prescription and choice; in Type II responsibility there is only description. Free will, true libertarian agency, tilts one towards God.

#### The Free Will Debate Goes On

One on-line debate makes the case that free will and consciousness are arguments favouring theism. Goetz and Taliaferro make the argument here:

[http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/stewart\\_goetz/dualism.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/stewart_goetz/dualism.html)

We are aware of our choices not having causes. (I suspect they mean full-event causation.)

The response is offered by Melnyk here:

[http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/andrew\\_melnyk/against-dualism.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/andrew_melnyk/against-dualism.html)

#### Signals of Transcendence (Order, Play and Humor)

In the earlier discussion of Hell, recall that Berger (1990) situated the notion of Hell in the context of pointers to something beyond the natural realm. He calls these pointers “signals of transcendence.” The signals are presented as arguments: (1) the argument from ordering, (2) the argument from play, (3) the argument from hope, (4) the argument from damnation, and (5) the argument from humour. Berger’s argument from damnation was discussed earlier. An argument related to hope is discussed with respect to [epistemology here](#). That leaves order, play and humour as pointers to the transcendent.

With respect to order, Berger sees the human trust in order, like the fundamental trust we have in reality, as a pointer to transcendence. This trust is applied to societies, civilizations and individuals. “Man’s propensity for order is grounded in a faith or trust that, ultimately, reality is ‘in order,’ ‘all right,’ ‘as it should be.’ Needless to say, there is no empirical method by which this faith can be tested. To assert it is itself an act of faith. But it is possible to proceed from the faith that is rooted in experience to the act of faith that transcends the empirical sphere, a procedure that could be called the argument from ordering. ... every ordering gesture is a signal of transcendence (Berger, 1990, p. 61).” This tilts one towards the theism.

With respect to play one enters another world, a world other than the “serious world.” In this other world there is joy, loss of time, an absence of pain and death, and peace. “Joy is play’s intention. When this intention is actually realized, in joyful play, the time structure of the playful universe takes on a very specific quality—namely, it becomes eternity. When adults play with genuine joy, they momentarily regain the deathlessness of childhood (Berger, 1990, pp. 65-66).”

Play points to the transcendent. “The logic of the argument from play is very similar to that of the argument from order. The experience of joyful play is not something that must be sought on some mystical margin of existence. It can be readily found in the reality of ordinary life. Yet within this experienced reality it constitutes a signal of transcendence, because its intrinsic intention points beyond itself and beyond man’s ‘nature’ to a ‘supernatural’ justification. Again, it will be perfectly clear that this justification cannot be empirically proved. ...The religious justification of the experience can be achieved only in an act of faith. The point, however, is that this faith is inductive—it does not rest on a mysterious revelation, but rather on what we experience in our common, ordinary lives (Berger, 1990, pp. 67-68).” This tilts one towards the transcendent, to the supernatural.

Then there is the argument from humour. Drawing upon Freud and Bergson, Berger (1990) notes that both base humour on discrepancy—either the discrepancy between superego and id with respect to libido (Freud), or the discrepancy between the living (humans) and the mechanical (Bergson). Berger finds these rooted in a fundamental discrepancy: “the discrepancy between man and universe (p. 78).” This discrepancy “...makes the comic an essentially human phenomenon and humor an intrinsically human trait. The comic reflects the imprisonment of the human spirit in the world (p. 78).”

In addition to reflecting the human situation, and recognizing the human situation, humour relativizes it. In relativizing the human situation, humour “...thereby suggests that the tragic perspective on the discrepancies of the human condition can also be relativized. At least for the duration of the comic perception, the tragedy of man is bracketed. By laughing at the imprisonment of the human spirit, humor implies that this imprisonment is not final but will be overcome, and by implication provides yet another signal of transcendence—in this instance in the form of an intimation of redemption (Berger, 1990, p. 79).” And again one smiles while tilting towards theism.

Signals of Transcendence (Creativity, Music, Poetry, Fiction, Curiosity, and Science)

Further signals of transcendence can be suggested. For example, Creativity, Music, Poetry, Fiction, Curiosity, and Science all can serve to point to something above the natural, something transcendent. Music seems otherworldly, although not empirically evident. A cognitive psychologist like Pinker might see music as an evolutionary spandrel, but others in the cognitive domain see something more. Levitin (2006) in his book “This is Your Brain on Music” reports an encounter with Pinker: “Pinker argued that language is an adaptation and music is its spandrel {spandrels as advanced by Gould are by-products). Among the cognitive operations humans perform music is the least interesting to study because it is merely a by-product, he went on, an evolutionary accident piggybacking on language. ...’Music is auditory cheesecake’ he said dismissively (p. 248).”

Levitin has a different read on music. Levitin (2008) in his book “The World in Six Songs” takes a much higher view. He sees music as formative. He asks: “What role did the musical brain have in shaping human nature and human culture over the past fifty thousand years or so? In short, how did all these musics make us who we are? (p. 7).” The six songs he refers to are thematic: friendship, joy, comfort, knowledge, religion, and love songs. And interestingly, all six songs seem indicative of Berger’s (1990) signals of transcendence?

Curiosity is an engine of growth. It is like a gift. Kashdan (2009) plots the sequence as follows: “Curiosity is about recognizing and reaping the rewards of embracing the uncertain, the unknown, and the new. There is a simple story line for how curiosity is the engine of growth.

By being curious we explore.

By exploring we discover.

When this is satisfying, we are more likely to repeat it.

By repeating it, we develop competency and mastery.

By developing competence and mastery, our knowledge and skills grow.

As our knowledge and skills grow, we stretch and expand who we are and what our life is about.

By dealing with novelty, we become more experienced and intelligent, and infuse our lives with meaning.

Curiosity begets more curiosity because the more we know, the more details we attend to, the more we realize what there is to learn (p.19-20).”

Curiosity, then, seems to be a signal of transcendence; or perhaps an actual lever of transcendence. Likewise, creativity in its literary, mechanical, or scientific forms functions as a signal of transcendence, and perhaps even an engine of transcendence.

Of course, there can be a dark side to curiosity, and the engine of curiosity can be instrumental in destructive acts. As curiosity can be a signal of transcendence yet lead to a dark side, so creativity can signal transcendence, yet open one to a dark side (see the edition edited by Croyley, Croyley, Kaufman and Runco, 2010). In fact all “signals of transcendence” could have elements of a dark side. The signals that Berger presented are positive but can have a dark side. Play can be harmful. Humor can hurt. Order was a characteristic of Nazi efficiency—a good that was used to malevolent purposes. Some music seems have a dark side. Some literature has a dark side. Some art is not edifying. Some poetry lacks the poetic. Some science destroys. Such signals, whether pushing edification, or destruction, still point to transcendence. Light enlightens; the dark can enlighten as well. A tilt to transcendence is a tilt to theism.

### Signals of Transcendence (Beauty)

I posit here three types of beauty as an assist to my own thinking about beauty. I suspect the beautiful is a direct perception rather than an inference, conclusion or construction. The beautiful, regardless of type or level, has the power to tilt one in the direction of our creator.

*Type 1 beauty* is seen in specifics like the movement of a panther or leopard, the flight of an eagle, a sunset, a landscape, a mountain, a canyon, the gratuitous colouring of the butterfly, the sun sparkling on water, the sound of wind in willows, flowers, trees, the taste of a strawberry, and the overwhelming general elegance of every corner of creation. *Type 1 beauty* is also seen in the creativity of the creations, like human beings, for example, and their art, music, architecture, poetry, stories, theories, and knowledge.

Such beauty strikes some as evidential. While not compelling at a primary level, it does push one, at a secondary level, to lean towards an amazing creator who is intentional, purposeful, graceful, and himself, beautiful—freely offering gratuitous beauty.

*Type 2 beauty* is more covert. It is seen in laws of nature, equations, mathematics, and even the dyadic nature between humans and knowledge of nature. In the debate between Collins and Smith in the “God or Blind Nature Debate” (Draper, 2007-2008), Collins points to beauty (the beauty and elegance of the laws of nature) as both evidence and argument for theism. Collins’ text follows:

“The beauty and elegance of the laws of nature also point to Divine design. Nobel Prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg, for instance, devotes a whole chapter of his book *Dreams of a Final Theory* to explaining how the criteria of beauty and elegance are commonly used with great success to guide physicists in formulating laws. As Weinberg points out, ‘mathematical structures that confessedly are developed by mathematicians because they seek a sort of beauty are often found later to be extraordinarily valuable by the physicist’ (1992, p. 153). Later, Weinberg comments that ‘Physicists generally find the ability of mathematicians to anticipate the mathematics needed in the theories of physics quite uncanny’ (1992, p. 157). Indeed, one of the most prominent theoretical physicists of this century, Paul Dirac, has gone so far as to claim, as Einstein did, that ‘it is more important to have beauty in one’s

equations than to have them fit experiment' (1963, p. 47). The beauty, elegance, and ingenuity of mathematical equations make sense if the universe was purposefully designed like an artwork, but appear surprising and inexplicable under the nondesign hypothesis. Weinberg, who is a convinced atheist, even admits that 'sometimes nature seems more beautiful than strictly necessary' (1992, p. 250).

Some have claimed that the beauty we see in nature is merely subjective, like seeing the Big Bear or Big Dipper in the random pattern of stars in the night sky. To say that the beauty of the mathematical structure of nature is merely subjective, however, completely fails to account for the amazing success of the criterion of beauty in producing predictively accurate theories, such as Einstein's general theory of relativity. We would not expect merely subjective impressions to lead to highly successful theories (Collins, 2008)."

*Type 3 beauty* is transcendental, or perhaps spiritual. The beauty of holiness! The beauty of a mother's love! The beauty of grace! The beauty of God! Beauty! Here, as well, such beauty strikes one as evidential. While not compelling at a primary level, it does push one, at a secondary level, to lean towards an amazing creator who is intentional, purposeful, revelatory, rational, and himself, deeply beautiful—freely offering discoverable beauty.

#### Signals of Transcendence (Love)

*The virtue aspect.* Love was considered as an epistemological virtue [earlier](#). Love as a choice to do the good, the agape form of love, is also a virtue. The key aspect here is choice. Virtue drives choice.

*The emotional aspect.* The very experience of love, at an emotional level, is a signal of transcendence. The love of a parent for a child and the child for a parent is striking. The personal experience of love as a reciprocal process between a male and a female is striking. The observation of love in others is striking. The love of friends is striking. The literature of love is striking. It strikes me as something transcendent. Such love aligns with beauty, harmony, order, creativity, mystery, otherworldliness.

*The problematic aspect.* Love is good, indeed, yet there are loves that seem to signal something awry: the obsessive love, the stalker, the fetishist, and more. When people say love is the answer one can be tempted to respond: "perhaps love is the problem." How could this be so? Well, there is a dark side to love. Appeals to love can sound good, but such appeals can be disarming.

Yes, appeals to love sound good, after all love, arguably, is more important than politics, more important than opinions, and more important than ideologies, surely. Love floods our culture; it aligns with popular music, the popular Hollywood feel-good films, and centuries of popular literature. Still, it is fair to raise the question: does the construct of love provide a balm

or a bomb? Indeed, one could make the case that love is, in fact, the problem. If so, love is not the solution, not the trump card, suggested in popular criticisms.

How can it be the case that love is the problem? First, consider the popular half-notion, voiced in public discourse, that the Bible says . . . “money is the root of all evil.” I say “half-notion” because the actual text that this comment is based on is from Paul. Paul actually says “the love of money is the root of all evil” (I Timothy 6:10). It is not money that is the problem; it is “the love” in the human being that orients towards money that is the problem. There are those who love bribes (Isa. 1:23), love pleasure (Prov. 21:17), love wine (Prov. 21:17), love sleep (Isa. 56:10), love strife (Prov. 17:19), and so on. Love is not the solution, not the trump card. Love is the problem.

Not to dwell on Paul but he further lists some problems with love which are reminiscent of problematic sexual love. In II Timothy 3 he lists some awkward characteristics like self love (φίλαυτος), a covetous type of love (φιλάργυρος), a love lacking natural affection (ἄσποργος), a love of pleasure (φιλήδονος), and the desire for what is forbidden (ἐπιθυμία). Love is a problem. It has a dark side.

Secondly, and beyond the simple semantic issues, there is an intriguing logical consideration emerging from a conceptual analysis of one sexual form of love that Paul considers problematic. Consider that in a homosexual dyad, prior to the love of a person of the same sex, there is a love-of-type—the same-sex type. In effect, love-of-type precedes love of a particular person. Love-of-type is a selection filter with consequent complications, just like love of money is a selection filter that presages problematic relationships with money (*acquiring* as in theft or with burdensome interest rates; *hoarding* as opposed to wise savings and use, *spending* recklessly or compulsively, and so on). Given the priority of love-of-type one wonders if there might be what could be called an “autoandrophilic” quality to homosexual attractions (and homosexual, male-to-female transsexuals). The attraction would be to an idealized masculine self. This seems to be the case with autogynephilic transsexuals (or homosexuals) who are attracted to themselves as a perceived female (Blanchard, 2005).

Thirdly, reflecting on types of love like the four loves addressed by C. S. Lewis (Lewis, 1960) the agape love in Paul’s famous Corinthian formulation has some markers that, at least, raise the question about the qualities of sexualized love (with the emphasis on the sexual, that is, eros) as distinct from same-sex friendship (with the emphasis on brotherly love, phileo, and willful, agape, love). Paul notes of love: “. . . love does not brag, and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own . . . does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with truth; bears all things . . .” (I Cor 13: 4-7, NASB). I’m not sure there is a consensus that all sexualized forms of love align with these markers itemized by Paul. So, again, love could be the problem rather than the “trump card” offered up by the “Love” criticism. Upon closer inspection, at least one should be open to consider the equivocation fallacy with respect to the term “love.”

Furthermore, shifting from sexuality to the analogy with smoking can be informative. It seems to be a commonplace notion that some people show an inordinate “love of smoking.” Perhaps it is an acquired love but expressions like the following are not uncommon: “I’d love a cigarette right now,” or “I love that first drag.” However, such expressions do not cast smoking in a sanctified light. Love is not a great sanctifier! At least, not all forms of love or stages of love can be considered as a pre-eminent rationale for that which “the heart wants.”

The appeal to “love” in Christian moral thought as a vehicle for consideration of appropriate evaluations of sexual variants, say homosexuality (e.g., Ward, 2005), seems to have a similar flaw. Ward writes: “...the one thing that does seem clear in the New Testament is Paul’s teaching that Christ is ‘the end of the law’, that ‘the letter kills but the Spirit gives life’, and that the whole law is summed up in love of neighbour. If Paul teaches that the whole law has been set aside by Christ then appeal to the law to back up a moral view has been rendered impossible (p. 25).” The problem with this comment is at least threefold. First, where Ward sees the whole law as summed up by “love of neighbour,” others see this as half the law only, the second half. After all, Jesus did go to the first half, first, when summarizing the law—namely, “love of God.” So Ward’s claim seems to have a bias that is somewhat limiting. Second, there are *categories* of law (e.g., moral law, ceremonial law, natural law, physical law, covenantal law, ...) that should be factored into the analyses. Third, there are *functions* of law (salvation, education, protection, revelation, ...) that should be factored into the analyses. When Ward deals with the Sabbath law from the Ten Commandments as somewhat analogous to judgments regarding a variant sexuality, say homosexuality, there may be a propensity to entrapment, or self-deception, via an equivocation fallacy. He doesn’t situate the claim within the broad domain of law where there are categories of law and functions of law to consider.

True, Ward does seem to admit an uncertainty regarding the distinction between a primitive taboo and a universal moral command on the topic, but he tilts towards “primitive taboo” for both legs of the analogy. He writes: “My conclusion is that the question of acceptability of homosexual practice cannot be decided by appeal to the law, which is superseded, or to the explicit teaching of Jesus, which is unspecific. It is to be decided by the New Testament criterion of whether homosexual love shows true love of neighbour, whether it respects human personhood, and whether it expresses the compassionate and self-giving love that was seen in Jesus (2005, pp. 25-26).” So, love is his principal criterion.

A first-order reaction to his claim would be to question whether this reasoning, and these criteria, could apply equally well to the incestuous love relations possible (e.g., father-daughter, brother-sister, sister-sister)? It seems to me it/they could apply. Love, respect, compassion, and self-giving love would work here. To illustrate this possibility, consider the following thought experiment posed by Haidt (2006, pp. 21-21):

“Julie and Mark are sister and brother. They are travelling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least, it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie is already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom, too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other.

Do you think it is acceptable for two consenting adults, who happen to be siblings, to make love? How would you justify your judgment?”

Ethically, it is difficult to judge Julie and Mark on the bases of intentions (they have good intentions), or consequences (there are no detrimental biological or emotional consequences that follow); so, one reverts to other arguments. Actually, these other arguments typically revert to a deontological criterion—laws, codes, and rules, etc.—which can offer a first rate criterion, the wisdom of the ages, the wisdom of authorities, the wisdom of deep reflection, the wisdom of revelation. So, what trumps what? Love? I don't see how Ward can escape the logical commitment to support Julie and Mark given his criterion.

As a further illustration, and my second question: what about polygamy? Would Ward's principle apply to polygamy? It seems to me it would. Love, respect, compassion, and self-giving love would work here too. Indeed, love in the Old Testament polygamous relations might at times be considered respectful, compassionate and self-giving (e.g., Jacob and Leah and Rachel) though differentiated by degrees.

My third question—and much more dramatic and disarming for Ward—would be to ask if this principle he advocates could apply to zoosexuality? It seems to me it could. Such an application, in this current cultural milieu, seems to be a less egregious situation now that zoosexuality has been: (1) *sanitized* somewhat, with a prominent ethicist weighing in on the issue in a less than condemnatory fashion (see Singer, 2001), (2) *humanized* somewhat, with empirical referencing to participants who report sex-with-animals along with their regular education level, normal careers, apparent normal mental health, attachments, love, and affection (see Williams & Weinberg, 2003), and (3) *normalized* somewhat, with Kinsey reporting for adolescents that about 6% of the total male population have been involved in sex with animals during early adolescence, dropping to about 1% over 20 years of age, unless they are part of an unmarried rural sample in which case the incidence figures drop from 11% to 4% at age 25 (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948, p. 262)<sup>1</sup>. The accumulative incidence for females in pre-adolescence was 1.5% and in adults 3.6% (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin & Gebhard, 1953, p. 509).<sup>2</sup>

In further support of zoosexuality is the contention it meets the criteria for an orientation (Miletski, 2005a), with historical and conceptual parallels to homosexuality (Miletski, 2005b; Beetz, 2005). Beetz, for example, comments on the notions of “sexual attraction,” “love and affection,” the proportions of participants who view the behaviour or attraction as “innate” (57.5%) or learned (17.7%), all of which seem to offer conceptual parallels to the homosexual literature, at least in part. Such analogical parallels support arguments for both emotional and cognitive parallels at some level.

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<sup>1</sup> While the incidence levels from Kinsey are less than those levels for homosexual activity reported in the Kinsey data, they are comparable to more current estimates of homosexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Of interest, a group of university students (N = 424) were asked among other questions the following: “How much would it bother you to think about someone having sex with an animal?” A little over 92% responded that it would bother them “Some,” “Some to a Lot,” or “A Lot.” After filtering out those who were reluctant to respond we see that 1.5% had no qualms, and 2.2% tended to have no qualms about this outlet (Daly & Morton, unpublished data). Thus, somewhere between 1.5% and 7.5% of an educated young adult population are not offended by sex with animals, numbers somewhat reminiscent of Kinsey. A crosstabs analysis showed 6.3% of the males unbothered and 2.5% of the females unbothered, Chi-square (1) = 3.55,  $p > .05 < .06$ .



An appeal to historical/cultural parallels might add to the case, but the support is weak. Yes, there are historical cultures that did not condemn sex with certain animals. For instance, in the Hittite Code sexual intercourse with certain types of animals was a capital crime (dog or pig) but not so with other types of animals (horse or mule), for which there was no punishment (Hittite Code, item #199). In item #187 sexual intercourse with a cow was identified as a capital crime, but it is noted the king may pardon this offender. One wonders about all other animals, and what the reasons might be for the two categories being identified here. Is it size—large animal vs small animals? Is it function—animals the culture eats vs animals the culture uses? Is it religious? At best though, cultural diversity, does not offer a substantive argument for zoophilia; cultural relativity is descriptive, not prescriptive. Love? Love of the animal is claimed on the part of some practicing zoosexuality. Those with pets understand how deep love for a pet can be. Would Ward be supportive?

More substantive support for the acceptability of sexual diversity (and thus the proxy for diverse love) may be drawn from the observation of animal behaviour in nature. This variant of a biological argument for diversity has been applied to homosexuality and readily parallels zoosexuality as well. The parallel is extracted from the Bagemihl (1999) book “Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity.” At a primary level the book reports evidence of the dramatic homosexual behaviour of various species. Indeed, it is truly an interesting collection of observations and facts, and it is an interesting read. Clearly there is what could be termed “homosexuality”—at least for the sake of argument—in nature, and for many species. In a naturalist worldview, or an ethological paradigm, such diversity is simply observed, simply accepted, and simply valued at face value. But for those who venture into paradigms other than the ethological, or worldviews other than naturalism, the Bagemihl book, or the Bagemihl thesis might prove too much!

How does the book prove too much? Well, admittedly, there is apparent “homosexual activity” documented in multiple species by Bagemihl. But, and here’s the “rub,” there is also evidence provided of: (1) zoosexuality (cross species sexual activity), pedophilia (sex with the young and the premature representatives of one’s species), (3) necrophilia (sex with the dead), (4) infanticide, (5) cannibalism, and so on. So what is nature teaching us? Is nature teaching us that there is a good case for necrophilia, homosexuality, zoosexuality, pedophilia, and so on? Or is there a better inference: an inference that we need a case for rising above our nature with respect to certain constructs?

Is nature teaching us these behaviours are normal because they occur in nature? Or, is nature teaching us these behaviours are acceptable because they occur in nature? Yes, in a naturalist worldview or an ethological paradigm. But surely another level of analysis is needed to transcend simple naturalism when considering human behaviour. What worldview transcends naturalism—humanism, postmodernism, existentialism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc.? What is the foundation of the transcending worldview? Will it bear the moral weight to contend that necrophilia, infanticide, zoophilia, etc. are wrong? Do such parallels teach us something about our worldview, a worldview defect, a clash of worldviews? Is naturalism an inadequate worldview for defending such practices as homosexuality, without at the same time defending polygamy, incest, zoophilia, pedophilia, necrophilia, and so on? Where does love point at this point? It is a signal of transcendence!

What's your worldview? Assume naturalism. Infanticide is practiced in many species, and arguably may have survival value for the species—in effect, pruning the species. Infanticide is reported in some cultures specifically (e.g., China, Japan, Africa) and perhaps all cultures generally, some time periods (e.g., ancient Sparta and early Imperial Rome), and some ethical systems (e.g., Singer, 1993). If infanticide is wrong in some cultures, and acceptable in other cultures, is the moral determination based merely on cultural norms and rules? What's the worldview at play in such practices? What's the worldview beyond naturalism that permits infanticide? Where does love point at this point? It is a signal of transcendence!

Ward, in applying his “Love” criterion, does look for safeguards like “loyalty” and “total commitment.” But these could apply to incest, polygamy and zoosexuality as well. He seems to make a factual error, moreover, in assuming some form of essentialism. For example, with respect to homosexuality he assumes “. . . a sexual relationship between two people of the same sex who are by nature attracted to one another is acceptable and natural (Ward, 2005, p. 26).” There is a more compelling case to be made that it would be more accurate to specify an acquired attraction, or a learned attraction, or an entrenched attraction, with various determinants in the interactive mix. One wonders if Ward would welcome this diversity of argumentation, this challenge to his position. All in all, his Love criterion is suspect.

There is the dark side to love. Does love—the virtuous aspect, the emotional aspect, and the problematic aspect—act as a signal of transcendence? I think so. Berger (1974) argued that even Hell—a dark phenomenon—can serve as a signal of transcendence. It points to cosmic justice. So the dark side of love—love awry—serves as a signal of transcendence; it points to pre-eminent love, the higher standard, the Love of Being. Love, light and dark, leaves some tilting towards the transcendent. Me included!

### Signals of Transcendence (Rationality)

Surely rationality points to God. Think about it! Think along the lines of those who point to rationality as irrational in a materialist worldview (e.g., C.S. Lewis, 1949, 1947/1974; Plantinga, 1993b, 2002; Nagel, 2012).

### Privileged Access

Gonzalez and Richards (2004) make a fascinating presentation and case for the privileged location (spatial and temporal) that human beings find themselves in at this “small blue dot.” It is a spot of privilege in what it permits: life, habitability, discoverability, and measurability. One response is to simply overlook, or ignore, the gratuitous, gracious, amazing environs. Another response is to see incredible luck—a type of amazement. Gonzalez and Richards see this response in Ward and Brownlee who do indeed see the many improbabilities which they document in their book: “Rare earth: Why complex life is uncommon in the universe.” Gonzalez and Richards note: “In a lecture after the publication of *Rare Earth*, Peter Ward remarked, ‘We are just incredibly lucky. Somebody had to win the big lottery, and we were it’ (2004, xiii).” The third response tilts toward theism.

Gonzalez and Richards present evidence and argument reasonably, neither polemically nor as an apologetic. Their position is:

“Our argument is subtle. However, and requires a bit of explanation. First, we aren’t arguing that every condition for measurability is uniquely and individually optimized on Earth’s surface. Nor are we saying that it’s always easy to measure and make scientific discoveries. Our claim is that Earth’s conditions allow for a stunning diversity of measurements, from cosmology and galactic astronomy to stellar astrophysics and geophysics; they allow for rich diversity of measurement much more so than if Earth were ideally suited for, say, just one of these sorts of measurement (2004, p. xiii).”

“Even more mysterious than the fact that our location is so congenial to diverse measurement and discovery is that these same conditions appear to correlate with habitability. This is strange, because there’s no obvious reason to assume that the very same rare properties that allow for our existence would also provide the best overall setting to make discoveries about the world around us. We don’t think this is merely coincidental. It cries out for another explanation, an explanation that suggests there’s more to the cosmos than we have been willing to entertain or even imagine (2004, p. xv).”

While the information and argument developed by Gonzalez and Richards may not be overwhelmingly compelling, it does build the evidentialist case, somewhat, and strength the pragmatic and prudentialist case even more, as the tilt to theism increases.

Collins also sees merit in discoverability. His comments from his debate with Draper enrich the notion of privileged positioning for human beings:

“Finally, the laws of Nature themselves seem to be carefully arranged so that they are intelligible, and in addition discoverable, by beings with our level of intelligence--like solving a clever puzzle. This has been stressed by many prominent physicists. Albert Einstein, for example, famously remarked that ‘the eternal mystery of the world is that it is comprehensible.... The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle’ (Quoted in Calaprice, 1996, p. 197). Similarly, in his famous essay, ‘The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Physical Sciences,’ Eugene Wigner, one of the principal founders of quantum mechanics, famously claimed that ‘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’ (1960, p. 14). As theoretical physicist Paul Davies notes, a common reaction among physicists to remarkable discoveries of the sort discussed above is a mixture of delight at the subtlety and elegance of nature, and of stupefaction: ‘I would never have thought of doing it that way.’ If nature is so ‘clever’ that it can exploit mechanisms that amaze us with their ingenuity, is that not persuasive evidence for the existence of intelligent design behind the physical universe? (1984, pp. 235-36)

Further, Davies notes, ‘uncovering the laws of physics resembles completing a crossword in a number of ways.... In the case of the crossword, it would never occur to

us to suppose that the words just happened to fall into a consistent interlocking pattern by accident....' (1984, pp. 235-36).

Work on articulating detailed examples of this intelligibility and discoverability has just begun in the last ten years. For example, Philosopher Mark Steiner's recent book, *The Applicability of Mathematics as a Philosophical Problem* (1998), is devoted to this issue, where he concludes that the world is much more "user friendly" for the discovery of its fundamental mathematical structure than seems explicable under naturalism (1998, p. 176)' (Collins, 2008)."

The cumulative case keeps accumulating.

### Ontological Argument

I wouldn't argue that the ontological argument, in the Anselm version, leads to a tilt towards theism. It doesn't seem to have such a push. Yet, what does have some force is the fact that others are attracted to the argument. Besides Anselm, consider that Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hegel, Godel, and more recently Plantinga, also invested time and effort in versions of the ontological argument. If not a tilt towards theism, such interest is at least a nod. Such interest would suggest keeping it on the table.

### Level 3—"It's Evident To Me From Tertiary Arguments" (Tilting Towards Belief)

#### The Scriptures.

On the one hand, the appeals to Scripture as an apologetic approach do not seem very convincing. However, one can reasonably find appeals to evidence contained in biblical documents, as historical documents. This can be quite informative. Scripture can be used as an information source. On the other hand, there is a case to be made that scripture indicates God uses Scripture in some supernatural fashion (Swinburne, 2007; Wright, 2005). In effect, there may be a *natural* use and a *supernatural* use.

*On the natural use.* While I hold, personally, a high view of Scripture, that view is based primarily on my high view of Jesus. Therefore, the high view of scripture as authoritative is secondary to a high view of Jesus as authoritative. Apologetically, then, the prior appeal is to Jesus. Scripture would be viewed on a *natural* use base first. Historical facts, the human authorship, and the elements of language (i.e., syntax, genre, semantics, pragmatics, paralinguistics, sociolinguistics, narrative, and so on) are prior considerations.

*On the supernatural use.* Here human responsibility is properly contextualizing text. Humans have the responsibility to frame the text, or preface the text with "Paul says..." or "In the

Gospels we are told that...” or “I believe Scripture is revelation from God and there we are told...”. The point here is that the Scripture is offered gently, not hammered home heavily.

Arguments favouring the authority of Scripture are sufficient for the Christian (Swinburne, 2007; Wright, 2005). I’m not sure they are helpful in informing an epistemology for non-Christians, agnostics, or atheists, however. It is the Christian who seems to benefit from the increasingly higher view of Scripture—Scripture as a post hoc charism. So then, what about the evidence in the Scriptures that would be of benefit to those open to *natural* use? Foremost evidentially would be the resurrection, prophecy, coherence, and the confluent operation of the text and the Holy Spirit.

The scriptures are purported to offer “doctrine, correction, reproof, and instruction in righteousness.” By implication then they are not offering: anthropology, astronomy, biology, cosmology, physics, chemistry, embryology, paleontology, botany, zoology, history, biography, linguistics, psychology, sociology, neurology, cognition, politics, warfare, religion, navigation, meteorology, and so on. The “correction, reproof, and instruction in righteousness” should lead to a progressive development of the better way along a path of continuous improvement. One sees elements of this with the growth of knowledge, the amelioration of such problems as infanticide, slavery, female oppression, child abuse, disease, empathy, care, and service. Arguably, one sees a progressive unveiling of better doctrine as well—doctrine contextualized by the growth of human understanding. What the Scriptures are is important for the Christian; what the Scriptures are not is equally important.

### The Resurrection

The resurrection, and the historical case for the resurrection, as developed by Craig (2008), Habermas and Licona (2004), Habermas (2006), Wright (2003), and Overman (2010) is evidentially, and argumentatively, strong. Not unqualified, but strong.

Craig (2008) focuses on three independently established facts as support for the resurrection as a historically authentic event. The facts are: (1) the empty tomb, (2) the post-mortem appearances, and (3) the origin of the Christian faith/church.

With respect to the empty tomb, Craig considers several lines of evidence, which could be grouped into a few categories.

1. *Historical reliability of the story of the burial.* Drawing upon multiple attestation, language analyses, Jewish beliefs regarding resurrection, the personal involvement of the Sanhedrist Joseph of Arimathea, all support the historical reliability of the narrative.
2. *The discovery of the empty tomb.* Again, drawing upon multiple attestation, logic, language usage, tradition, discovery of the empty tomb by women, contemporary Jewish opposition, and timelines, (evidenced by the Markan version which lacks legendary development), support the historical reliability of the narratives.
3. *Naturalistic explanatory hypotheses are considered and critiqued.* The conspiracy hypothesis, the apparent-death hypothesis, the wrong-tomb hypothesis, and the displaced-

body hypothesis, are all diffused in Craig's critique. Again the tilt is toward something supernatural.

With respect to the post-mortem appearances Craig looks at: (1) *some of the facts* (e.g., appearance to Peter, to the twelve, to "five-hundred brethren," to James, and to Saul of Tarsus, (2) the *nature of the appearances* (physical, bodily, etc.), and (3) the *epistemological interface with the facts*.

Finally, Craig offers the origin of the Christian faith/church as evidence. On the one hand, this has some weight. It does seem unreasonable to expect such growth without a strong driver. On the other hand, there are other religious growth phenomena that are striking (e.g., Islam, and Mormonism). This may be the weakest, then, of Craig's evidential thrust.

Habermas (2006) narrows the focus, and analysis, to the post-mortem appearances, and the disciples' experiences of the risen Jesus. He presents eight pointers to the risen Jesus—four from Paul and four from other sources. The four pointers from Paul are: (1) his personal experience in meeting the risen Jesus, (2) his use of an oral tradition, (3) his two trips to Jerusalem for checking for confirmation with apostles who were witnesses, and (4) his narrative reports indicating he knew what the apostles were proclaiming regarding the resurrection. The other four pointers are: (1) the belief and testimony of James the skeptical unbeliever, Jesus' brother, prior to the crucifixion, (2) creedal traditions, as in the book of Acts, (3) critical scholars agree that the disciples believed they encountered the risen Jesus, and (4) critical scholarship where the majority (> 70%) agree the tomb was empty.

Further, Habermas lists three philosophical approaches to account for the facts: (1) naturalism, (2) agnosticism, and (3) an actual resurrection. As for the naturalistic explanations, Habermas cites scholars noting these are "gratuitous," "fail to provide more satisfactory explanations," and are "weaker." As for the agnostic plea, the position is rooted in a preferential option for scepticism. The third option is acceptance in some form or other. Habermas (2006) writes: "...by far the most popular option at present is that Jesus was actually raised in some form, either as an objective vision or in a transformed body. The former view was more popular a few decades ago, while the latter appears clearly to be the majority view at present (p. 294)."

Most thorough is the analysis of the resurrection by N. T. Wright (2003). Wright deals with the full context in terms of Paganism, The Old Testament, Post-Biblical Judaism, Paul, Early Christianity, Non-Canonical early Christian texts, and details (weird and wonderful) in the Easter story. Wright, the scholar, is convinced.

The analyses are historical. The history gives a tilt in favour of theism—a tilt in favour of belief rather than disbelief. This would be particularly the case with the historical data related to the resurrection of Jesus.

### The Miracles

Do miracles give a preferential tilt towards Christian theism? Miracles—the reports of the miracles in the Bible—did not reinforce theistic belief for me. The one exception was the resurrection of Jesus. That one, the resurrection, was crucial and compelling; it was central; it was, and is, the seminal point and the doorway. The other miracles may have had some evidential thrust for those who experienced them, or for those who witnessed them, but most of us are too far removed—either by time or appropriate cognitive structures—to benefit evidentially. I considered them tentatively. I accepted them, at best, with the caveat: “possibly.” Initially, though, there was no tilt in the miracles either for or against theism.

Nevertheless, it seemed incumbent that I revisit miracles here as an aspect of belief determinants. Unexpectedly, the miracles gained in evidential weight for belief. Applying a triangulation methodology ([a methodology described more fully earlier](#)) was appropriate to apply. Using the triangulation methodology one attends to three legs of investigation equally: to *revelation*, to *reason*, and to *reflections* (i.e., authorities). I started with the *reflections* leg and looked to a few authorities. First, I reread *Miracles* by C. S. Lewis (1947/1974). Next, I read Lennox’s (2011) recent book intentionally attending to his comments on miracles. Then thirdly, I read sections of the two volume work on miracles by Keener (2011). The evidential value of miracles was gaining ground. For the *reason* leg of the approach I drew initially upon Lewis, Lennox and Keener. But I also extended the historical, dialectical, analogical, and philosophical thinking by drawing upon Earman’s (2000) detailed analyses of the one person considered to have offered the classic, or definitive, reasoned argument against miracles, that is, David Hume. Moving then to the third leg, with respect to the *revelation* component, I was attending primarily to the various resurrection miracles (not the resurrection of Jesus) reported in the New Testament. The triangulation method led me to conclude the miracles, at least, can function as post-hoc charisms that carry some meaningful evidential weight. And, there was an additional step: the triangulation experience allowed one to see there was a cumulative case building related particularly to healings. This cumulative case generated the tilt to the theistic side of the ledger.

#### The First Leg--*Reflections* (Authorities)

*C.S. Lewis’s Categorizations.* Lewis offers a few systems for categorizing miracles that served as working frameworks. One system was simply contrasting the mythical (e.g., talking trees) with the Biblical (e.g., healing a leper). The Biblical miracles considered are of a qualitative difference from the mythical miracles. That two-category system was not in play here, however, as the focus was on the Biblical miracles.

At the Biblical level, Lewis offers classification on two axes. The first axis is a two-category classification system where miracles are of two major types—miracles of “the Old Creation” and miracles of “the New Creation.” The second axis is a categorization system as follows: “(1) Miracles of Fertility (2) Miracles of Healing (3) Miracles of Destruction (4) Miracles of Dominion (5) Miracles of Reversal (6) Miracles of Perfecting or Glorification (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 421).” These two axes offer frameworks, or lens, for considering Biblical miracles, but not just Biblical miracles.

Lewis seems to see the “Old Creation” miracles of “the incarnate God” as alternate configurations (sort of, on a downsized scale, or time-compressed scale) of what God is responsible for doing naturally (on a large scale, and by design). So, for example, converting water into wine is something God does naturally in the larger scheme of things, albeit with a few intermediate steps; the miracle at Cana constricts the time, and steps. Another example is turning a few fish into a lot of fish, or turning a bit of wheat into a lot of wheat; these too are things God does naturally in the larger scheme of things. The miracle of feeding the crowds (the 4000 and the 5000) is another time constriction of a natural process and phenomenon.

In addition to these “Miracles of Fertility” there are the “Miracles of Healing.” What they seem to offer also is a stimulation, or simulation, of Natural function. God has gifted his creation with natural recuperative processes. In some supernatural healings certain blockages have been removed, or processes speeded up, but these too are congruent with the natural, larger scheme of things. Picturesquely, Lewis phrases it as: “The Power that always was behind all healings puts on a face and hands (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 426).”

Then there is the “Miracle of Destruction”—the fig tree. But it too is simply the time constriction of a natural process; after all, all trees die. Is there a moral in the destruction? No doubt! That aside, these miracles—Fertility, Healing, and Destruction—are miracles of the Old Creation. They are rooted in Natural processes.

In an intermediate category are the “Miracles of Dominion.” Some of them are of the Old Creation (e.g., calming the storm, which happens naturally in the larger scheme of things), some are of the New Creation (e.g., walking on water, which does not happen naturally). Although Lewis does not extend intermediacy to “Miracles of Reversal,” seen in the raising of the dead, this may be questioned. Actually, some “Miracles of Reversal” may be of the Old Creation, and some of the New Creation.

The clear miracles of the New Creation are striking. There is no linkage to natural processes as we know them. Walking on water is not natural. In the “Miracles of Reversal” the dead are raised. In the “Miracles of Perfecting or of Glory” we encounter the Transfiguration, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Perhaps even the descent and indwelling of the Holy Spirit would fit here. These are arguably new!

*John Lennox (2011).* I refer to Lennox (2011) and his chapter on “Are Miracles Pure Fantasy?” as an initial means to address the weight given to Hume in the modern approach to miracles. Lennox diffuses Hume (along with Hitchens and Dawkins) quite nicely. The arguments and analogies offered by Lennox are easily readable, smooth, illustrated, and confident. Hume is seen to be caught up in circular argumentation and the begging the question fallacy. Lennox’s (2011) conclusion with respect to Hume is quite convincing: “The New Atheists follow him like sheep. But, on this issue, he is a blind guide (p. 177).” So there is reason to challenge Hume. Both Lewis (1947/1974, particularly Chapters 13 and 15) and Keener (2011, particularly chapters 5 and 6) also address the flaws in Hume’s reasoning.



*Craig Keener (2011)*. On dismissing Hume, Keener (2011) offers a sufficient case. At a summary level a few key points can be offered here. First, for example, Keener points to the fact that antismiraculism is just a presupposition that Hume holds. Hume is presupposing atheism along with antismiraculism. Hence, miracles are out of the question on principle. Second, Hume assumes determinism with respect to natural law. Third, Hume reasons deductively (in a “deductive circle”), while claiming to reason inductively. As Keener notes: “He argues, based on ‘experience,’ that miracles do not happen, yet dismisses credible eyewitness testimony for miracles (i.e., others’ experience) on his assumption that miracles do not happen (2011, p. 108).”

A focus on the examples of miracles offered by Keener is enriching. Reading a number of the examples he offers shows he is tentative as one would expect from someone applying a virtue epistemology. He also shows breadth; the two-volume work covers a massive amount of terrain. One gravitates towards the more dramatic miracles and those that are well documented. Reading through those cases can be a faith-increasing experience in spite of a propensity to look for natural causes. Many of the miracles seemed to be examples of Lewis’s Old Creation Miracles; the natural processes were time-compressed, speeded up, or unblocked. Still, the edification was there. The tilt towards faith was stronger after this endeavour.

### The Second Leg--*Reason*

While Lewis, Lennox and Keener offer an adequate case against Hume, it is the critique offered by Earman (2000) that offers the most depth with respect to the reason leg of the triangulation. The thorough critique of Hume offered by Earman addressed the issue historically and philosophically. Earman presents a great deal of the historical context including Hume’s textual changes over time, the responses of Hume’s contemporary critics over time, and the development of probability thinking subsequent to Hume. His conclusion following a dramatically thorough critique is that Hume ends with an “abject failure.”

Hume fails with his view of inductive reasoning in his work “On Miracles.” Earman contends Hume’s goals there are “ambiguous and confused.” Then he adds: “Worse still, the essay reveals the weakness and the poverty of Hume’s own account of induction and probabilistic reasoning (Earman, 2000, Loc 60).” Earman reasonably notes: “Any epistemology that does not allow for the possibility that evidence, whether from eyewitness testimony or from some other source, can establish the credibility of a UFO landing, a walking on water, or a resurrection is inadequate. At the same time, of course, an adequate epistemology should deliver the conclusion that in most (all?) actual cases, when all the evidence is weighed up, little credibility should be given to such events. Hume’s account of inductive reasoning is incapable of satisfying these dual demands (2000, Loc 76).” As Earman sees it Hume was blind to this problem and perhaps the blindness was a consequence of his agenda to unseat miracles (Loc 99).

Earman also sees problems with Hume’s definition, or rather definitions, of a miracle: (1) “a violation of a law of nature,” and (2) “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by interposition of some invisible agent (Loc 138).” The assumption here is that a “law of nature” is an “exceptionless regularity.” Hence miracles are impossible! The logical fallacy is: begging the question. Of course this fits with the Naturalist’s worldview.

The analogy with Locke's King of Siam story, and Hume's Indian Prince version of the story, is instructive. Basically, the story unfolds to the King that the Dutch ambassador reports a situation where men and horses can walk and ride on rivers when it is cold enough. "No way!" says the King; "everyone knows people sink in the river." Water is not hard. In Siam every observer concurs. The Dutch ambassador, must be lying, deceived, delusional, a sorcerer, or whatever. The inductive experience of everyone in Siam confirms the King. At least, as an analogy one should be encouraged to see the point of keeping possibilities open. The testimony of a few others can be truthful, even though our inductive experiences, and the testimony of all our acquaintances in Siam, say otherwise.

A major strength of Earman's analysis is his attention to probability and Bayesian analyses. For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were new sets of questions emerging, with a second set, particularly interesting for Earman. For example: Earman, quoting Wootton, notes questions like the following two types: (1) "Is it likely that the Gospel narrative is accurate?" and (2) "How good is the evidence for God's existence?" These questions are indicative of a shift. This shift is interesting as a branch of reasoning diminishing Hume in that "...the most subtle and interesting arguments offered by theists of this era relied on the emergence of probability and that the irreligion promoted by Hume's attempts to answer the second set of questions is, in a word, sophomoric when examined under the lens of Bayesianism (Earman, 2000, Loc 446)." For Earman, and for sound reasoning itself, "...epistemology is most fruitfully discussed not in terms of all-or-nothing belief but in terms of degrees of belief (Earman, 2000, Loc 449)."

The Bayesian calculus takes into consideration prior probability,  $\Pr(H/K)$ , and posterior probability,  $\Pr(H/K\&E)$ .  $H$  is the hypothesis,  $K$  is the background knowledge, and  $E$  is the new evidence. Reconfigured  $\Pr(E/K)$  is the prior likelihood of  $E$  (addressing how surprising the new evidence  $E$  is);  $\Pr(E/K\&H)$  is the likelihood of  $H$  (addressing how well  $H$  explains  $E$ ).<sup>1</sup> The important points here are: (1) the role of probabilities, (2) the time (prior and posterior) and (3) background knowledge. The outcome: a particular degree of belief properly contextualized!

The cumulative case effect is a dramatic outcome. Getting there is straightforward. Earman notes a distinction between logical positivism and logical empiricism. "As a representative of the latter camp, Hans Reichenbach rejected the verifiability and falsifiability criteria of meaningfulness, which would have relegated not only religion but large portions of science as well to the limbo reserved for gibberish. Instead, he opted for a confirmability criterion which required cognitively meaningful hypotheses to admit of probification by the evidence of observation and experiment (Earman, 2000, Loc 1176)." A probability theory of meaning! Such a theory permits facts and propositions—onto the knowledge table—facts and propositions that are not immediately givens or verified, or even verifiable. Degrees of belief can be allocated. Earman sees the consequence as follows: "Belief formation in natural religion can proceed inductively as it does in science and everyday life on the basis of observation and

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<sup>1</sup> Earman (2000) notes that *subjectivist* Bayesians hold that there are no constraints on priors; *objectivist* Bayesians hold there are additional constraints.

eyewitness testimony. And the resulting degrees of belief are to be deemed rational as long as they satisfy the strictures of Bayesianism (2000, Loc 1184).”

Objectivity is then achieved in two ways. First, one can look to “incremental confirmation of hypotheses about miracles and religious doctrines (Earman, 2000, Loc 1184);” second “...given minimal assumptions about the reliability of witnesses, convergence to certainty, as the number of witnesses increases, about the occurrence of miraculous events can be proven again as theorems of probability (Earman, 2000, Loc 1184).” Incremental confirmation, increasing number of witnesses, and convergence to certainty, support the cumulative case effect.

Reason is on the side of the angels here. There is a case for considering miracles, eyewitness testimonies, and degrees of belief allocation. The position is consistent with a [belief allocation protocol used earlier](#), and the cumulative case scenarios utilized by [Swinburne later](#).

### The Third Leg--*Revelation*

Two of Lewis’s categories of miracle are explored here. They are the evidential “Miracles of Reversal” and the evidential “Miracles of Healing.” The purpose of such miracles is not immediately clear. The purpose may be the offer of evidence. The purpose may be prophetic signs linked to history and prophecy. The purpose may be simple compassion. The purpose may be restoration of individuals. There may be no primary purpose but rather the simple consequence of an interpersonal encounter with the “incarnate God.” Whatever, the “Miracles of Reversal” are dramatic for individual witnesses, but it is the “Miracles of Healing” that gain more evidential weight over time.

### *On the Miracles of Reversal*

*Back-to-life Phenomena.* Questions arise with respect to the “Miracles of Reversal.” First, there is the human propensity for confusion with respect to appearance/reality distinctions. In the back-to-life reversal how does one distinguish the appearance from the reality? Secondly, using Lewis’s two category axis: are these Old Creation Miracles (utilizing Natural laws albeit in a time constricted fashion) or New Creation Miracles (something totally new)? Such questions reflect an honest critical disposition. Do I believe there could be Miracles of Reversal? Yes. But, I believe individual examples with different levels of credibility, doubt, and caveats. My initial belief allocation chart for the New Testament accounts of several back-to-life reports follows (Figure 8).

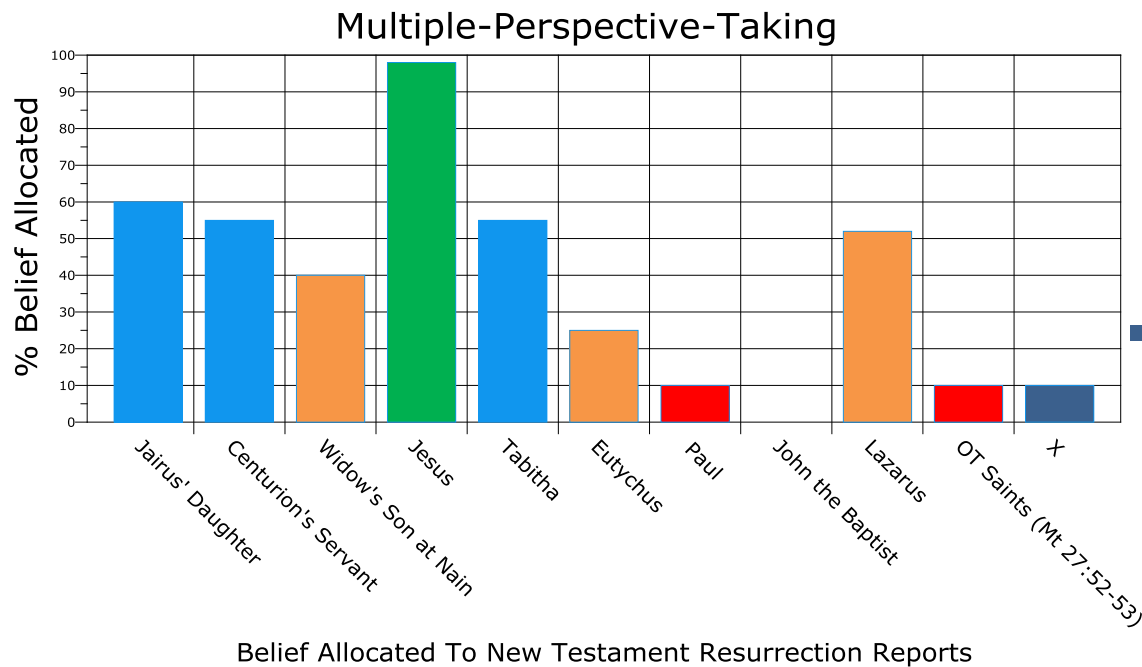


Figure 8. Belief allocated to various resurrection reports in the New Testament. The green coding indicates exceptionally high credibility. The light blue coding indicates greater likelihood than not. The orange coding indicates some substantive reservations. The red coding indicates major reservations. The white coding for John the Baptist indicates no credibility.

In the “Belief Allocation Chart” (Figure 8) with respect to the people for whom back-to-life claims or statements are made, there are degrees of credibility. The *colour coding* reflects differing broad degrees of credibility: Green = next to certainty (e.g., Jesus), Blue = highly credible (e.g., Jairus’s daughter), Orange = credible but with substantive doubts (e.g., Eutyclus), Red = it stays on the belief-table but there is more dramatic weight on the doubt side of the balance (e.g., OT saints raised at the time of the crucifixion, Mt 27:52-53), and White = total doubt (e.g., Herod’s postulate regarding John the Baptist being raised). The *number coding*, the use of numbers (percentages ranging between 0 and 100) simply offers a more fine-grained weighting system helping to capture differences within categories. While these are subjective weightings, they have a base in informed thought, and in a Bayesian prospect.

Some preliminary points to consider when focusing on the New Testament stories of being brought “back-to-life” are: (1) some hermeneutical principles, (2) the nature of death, (3) the nature of recovery, (4) the context of others experiencing back-to-life phenomena, that is, the context of diversity of experience, and (5) the broad stance of science.

An intriguing question is: Are some “back-to-life” experiences Old Creation Miracles while others are New Creation Miracles? Where does Lazarus fit? Is he the prime exemplar of the New Creation Miracle? Certainly his resurrection was not comparable to the resurrection of Jesus. But the resurrection of Lazarus does seem more compelling than the resurrection of Eutyclus.

### Some Hermeneutical Principles

- *Multiple Attestation.* The story of Lazarus, for example, only occurs in the Gospel of John. This raises a hermeneutical issue regarding whether this text rises to the level of history. Historians like multiple attestation, and the case of Lazarus lacks multiple attestation. It is interesting narrative though! Do I believe it? Yes, but with some reservations which could be mitigated with future *reflections* and future *reasoning*.
- *Types of genre.* Given such genre as history, metaphor, hymns, letters, anecdotes, invention, speculation, redaction, etc. it is wise to remain open, and tentative. Are back-to-life stories history or figurative genre? Is the back-to-life story of Lazarus history? Or is it a genre different from the type of history one sees in the Synoptic Gospels?
- *Authorship.* Another genre issue relates to authorship. While there is pretty much a consensus that the apostle John is the author of the Gospel, there is some question about Lazarus (the beloved disciple) possibly being the author of this fourth Gospel. If so, this would cast this resurrection report as a report of a personal experience. While not a particularly compelling argument, it is a piece of information on the table.

### The Nature of Death

- There is text in John that raises questions about levels of death (i.e., “sleeping”). With respect to Lazarus it seems like he was dead given the time entombed. But what constitutes death? There are cases of people reviving after burial. Furthermore, “sleep” can be a metaphor for death (Dan 12:2-3), and Jesus refers to it as such, although he also says clearly that Lazarus was dead (John 11:11-14).
- Also, “paradise” adds a dimension possibly related to an intermediate state of death. Jesus refers to it (e.g., the thief on the cross being with Him in paradise that very day). Wright (2003) sees the “many mansions” as referencing the intermediate state. In fact, the term for “mansions” is the term for the tents Roman soldiers pitched on their travels; they were temporary and transitional. Logically, the final state follows the final resurrection.
- One suspects, regarding Lazarus, that Jesus was referring to “bone-box death.” His death was real, actual death, even with the use of the term “sleeping.” We moderns have finer nuances for death.
- There are levels of death of increasing severity for modern taxonomies:
  - Breath-Death (no breathing)
  - Heart-Death (no pulse)
  - Brain-Death (no brain activity)
  - Near-Death-Experienced (NDEd) (out-of-body death)
  - Silver-Cord-Death (the “cord” attaching the body to the spirit or soul is broken-- Eccl 12:5-7)
  - Bone-Box-Death (in ancient Israel, after a year or so, the bones of the dead person are collected and placed in a bone-box).

These levels of death and dying could be factors in the back-to-life experiences of those reported in the New Testament. We spectators are unsure of the nature of the death phenomenon in the case of each miracle reported. There can be a problem with appearance/reality distinctions. With the exception of Lazarus we are on precarious grounds.

### The Nature of Recovery

Types of “back-to-life” phenomena to consider are:

- Spontaneous Resuscitation (A naturalist explanation). There are accounts of people apparently reviving after being pronounced as dead. (This has occurred in morgues, and there are reports of such resuscitations throughout history for burials prior to current embalming procedures <http://www.snopes.com/horrors/gruesome/buried.asp> . This would offer some evidence of spontaneous resuscitation even after funeral procedures).<sup>1</sup> This has some credibility.
- Resuscitated –Spontaneous –But Known via Omniscience (A naturalist explanation, but Jesus had knowledge that certain supposedly “dead” individuals, like Jairus’s daughter, were not truly dead and would, or could, revive. This foreknowledge would also be evidence of the miraculous, however). It seems to have some merit, so belief allocated to this view is higher.)
- Resurrection (re-embodiment)—(The seemingly “dead” person is brought back to life).<sup>2</sup> Belief allocated to this view is moderately high. I’m actually at the 50/50 point on this one, as I opt to give the benefit of the doubt to biblical reports with respect to Lazarus, the Centurion’s servant, and Tabitha. Although Lazarus should be the strongest, the case is weakened a little by: (1) lack of multiple attestation and (2) the different genre of John’s Gospel when compared to the Synoptic Gospels.
- Reappearance (though dis-embodied). This could not be the case for Lazarus as he was reportedly around subsequently and participated in daily life bodily. I see little merit in this view and wouldn’t allocate much belief to this view for any of the back-to-life accounts.
- Resurrection (a new body)—This would be paralleling Jesus’ resurrection which was different and unique (cf N. T. Wright, 2003). I see no grounds for belief allocated to this view for any of the New Testament “back-to-life” reports with the exception of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> The more suspect back-to-life events are coloured orange in the chart (e.g., the son of the widow of Nain, and Eutychus) as being more suspect (lacking multiple attestation), or the equally compelling possibility (e.g., merely being knocked out from a fall, as in the case of Eutychus). The case of Paul is also suspect given the limited textual claims. These carry less credibility, so, less belief allocation.

<sup>2</sup> Back-to-life phenomena in the blue range are somewhat credible given the multiple attestation (e.g., daughter of Jairus, and the Centurion’s servant), the apparent historical intent of Luke (reporting on Tabitha), and the events reported surrounding the deaths (timelines, etc.). Whether they are resuscitations (somewhat natural) or re-embodiments (NDEs where the spirit is separated from the body but drawn back), or re-embodiments (where the person was actually dead but God reanimates the body) I have no best guess. I nevertheless find they lead me to a mild tilt towards faith in God.

Jesus is the one and only person at this point in history to have experienced this new phase of God's re-creative activity, as I see it.

- A metaphorical story presented to illustrate a point. There may be a case that the Lazarus story is metaphorical or genre-based. Why?
  - (a) There is only one report of the raising of Lazarus in the four gospels, and lack of multiple attestation weakens the historical claim.
  - (b) Such a remarkable miracle seems to warrant highlighting; one would think it would be in more than one Gospel account,
  - (c) Why doesn't Paul report, or allude to, these "resurrection" events (Lazarus and others) in his letters? His arguments do not seem to appeal to the miraculous, with the exception of the resurrection of Jesus. Why not?
  - (d) There may be other reasons.
- A genre The resurrection of some Old Testament saints at the time of the crucifixion (Matt 27:52-53) may be a genre, rather than a historical actuality. See N T. Wright (2003) on the correlates of the crucifixion event.<sup>1</sup> Note that the belief allocated to this view—as a historical event—in the belief allocation chart is small.
- A fraudulent report, 1<sup>st</sup> Century. With respect to Lazarus, I lean towards the credibility (and validity) of the report in John more so than to any fraud. So belief allocated to the Lazarus back-to-life phenomenon is still moderate.
- A fraudulent report, 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> Century. Not too believable!

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<sup>1</sup> The most troubling back-to-life account is the reported resurrections of OT saints at the time of the crucifixion (Mt 27:52-53).

- Arguably this account could reflect Matthew's use of a genre. Wright puts on the table the possibility of Matthew drawing upon a "vivid way of speaking" or a "dramatic metaphor (2003, p. 634)."
- It could reflect Matthew reporting from existing source documents, and anecdotal accounts circulating at that time, accounts that report such events. As Wright expresses it: "He may know a tradition which speaks of these strange happenings, and is retelling it in such a way as to give a biblically alert reader a sense of their meaning: this is the real return from exile, the dawn of the new age, and perhaps even the harrowing of hell (2003, p. 633-634)."
- It could reflect Matthew attempting to incorporate OT prophetic texts (Ez 37:12-13; Is 26:19; Zech 14; and Dan 12:2), consciously or unconsciously. Links to the OT are a characteristic feature of Matthew's Gospel. The OT texts may be driving expectations consciously. As Wright acknowledges, Matthew may have "invented a story to fit with, and fulfil" biblical texts and "other subsequent Jewish texts (2003, p. 634)."
- Alternatively, with such a prophetic mindset one might unconsciously activate two cognitive mechanisms that can facilitate seeing things that are not really there. The two cognitive devices are the "Hyperactive Agency Detection Device" (HADD) and the left hemisphere ability or propensity to confabulate missing data in order to achieve coherence, explanation, and closure. These psychological processes could factor in to the surface level activity in this biblical report. Wright favours the notion that "Matthew knows a story of strange goings-on around the time of the crucifixion, and is struggling to tell it so that (1) it includes the biblical allusions, (2) it makes at least some minimal historical sense (the earthquake explains the tearing of the Temple veil, the opening of the tombs, and particularly the centurion's comment), and (3) it at least points towards, even if it does not exactly express, the theological meaning Matthew is working towards...(2003, p. 635)."
- Of interest to me are the other reports that there were strange goings-on around the crucifixion. It is not limited to biblical reports only. In Jewish and Roman literature there is much intriguing commentary about the strange goings-on in the period identified as "40-years prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD," that is, at the time of the crucifixion (see Plummer, 2005 p.s., if you are intrigued by Plummer's article, and these "strange goings-on" let me know. I have it as a pdf file. It is interesting and heavily referenced. I read it on two levels—once reading just the text; a second time reading the footnotes. Both levels are rich.)
- I note also that Wright adds: "Some stories are so odd that they may just have happened. This may be one of them, but in historical terms there is no way of finding out (Wright, 2003, p. 636)." That he keeps the possibility on the table is admirable, and scholarly. However, if he is right that it happened it is more likely that people there were seeing disembodied spirits (a la Samuel confronting Saul) rather than re-embodied spirits. The new body which Jesus manifests as the first-fruits, is to come at the end of the age.

- A Cognitive Hyperactive Agency Detection Device (HADD) (+confabulation). This could explain the saints resurrected in Matthew 27. It might even be in play with respect to back-to-life phenomena related to Paul, Eutychus, and the others. We do have a propensity to posit agency for certain puzzling natural phenomena. I still lean more heavily towards true miracles—“Miracles of Reversibility.” But I’m not sure whether they are of the Old Creation (and therefore linked to the “incarnate God” utilizing natural processes) or the New Creation (and therefore something totally new). Lazarus, at best, may be a new creation Miracle of Reversibility.
- Hallucination This is different from HADD in that the triggers are internal. It doesn’t carry much credibility with respect to the New Testament miracles.

### Diversity—The Context of Others Experiencing Back-to-Live Phenomena

In Figure 8 above I apply subjective weightings to the various reports of back-to-life events reported in the New Testament. While I lean towards accepting them as Miracles, the caveats related to diversity—diversity of experiences, diversity related to the type of death, diversity related to the type of recovery, and diversity related to the types of reports—suggest caution is warranted as coexistent with any belief allocation. Hence the science stance!

### The Science Stance

The various epistemologies when brought to bear on the issue of back-to-life phenomena are conducive to a faith that continues to tilt towards theism. This holds for the dozen or so epistemological approaches discussed [earlier](#).

Particularly relevant would be Virtue epistemology, Existential epistemology, Prudential epistemology, Passional epistemology, Light epistemology, and Death-Signs epistemology. One brings to the task of analysis, in any knowledge building domain, such virtues as diligence, breadth of perspective, consideration of other arguments, and so on. For a fuller discussion of such virtues and vices see [Virtue Epistemology above](#), and the [related epistemologies](#). Such epistemological openness is a science stance.

So what is the evidential tilt with respect to the Miracles of Reversal revealed by resurrection reports? Strong views on the resurrection of Jesus, as discussed in the earlier section, are warranted. I find compelling evidential tilt there. On these biblical stories of other resurrection stories the evidential tilt is mitigated. With respect to a Triangulation approach, a satisfactory level of harmony exists between *revelation, reason, and reflections*. The miracles gain in credibility because: (1) there are a number reported which serves to offer support for a cumulative case, (2) they are connected to Jesus as a credible authority given the evidence for



His resurrection, (3) there is a broad historical base of authorities arguing for acceptance, and (4) the critics, like Hume, are defanged or “abject failures” (Earman, 2000). I can accept something miraculous was happening. But the evidential tilt for the back-to-life miracles is still minor.

### *On the Miracles of Healing*

Similarly, the evidential tilt for the stories of healing in the Bible was also minor. I can accept them at some level. I can triangulate the sources *revelation*, *reason*, and *reflections* and find more reason for belief than doubt. Still the tilt is minor for the Biblical cases. Nevertheless, Miracles of Healing continue across history, and it is this continuance that potentially increases the evidential tilt. There is support from *reflections* (authorities, for example, Keener, 2011), and there is support from *reason* (e.g., the cumulative case phenomenon described by Bayesians like Earman, 2000, and Swinburne, 2004). While *reason* is amenable to the miraculous, empirical issues complicate conclusions. There are two levels of Miracles of Healing that illustrate the continuance over time of examples and eyewitness reports: those with problematic credentials and those with good credentials.

*Problematic Credentials.* The reason for questions arising here with respect to the “Miracles of Healing” is multi-fold. First, there are the problems of the *person*: charlatans, the greedy, fraudsters, charismatic personalities, God-helpers, and so on. These characters feed suspicion. Secondly, there are the problems of *context*: healing crusades, emotional frenzy, crowd psychology, subcultures, cultural styles, and so on. These environments feed suspicion. Thirdly, there are the problems of the *nature of the healing*: imagined, temporary, exaggeration, reality-denying, and so on. This sub-typing feeds caution. Fourth, there are the problems related to *psychology*: psychosomatic effects, placebo effects, confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, and so on. Such effects advise caution. Fifth, there are problems related to *theology*: Why are only a few healed? Why is that person healed rather than this person? The paucity of healings raises troubling questions. Why healing at all at this time in God’s history? These problems, or some of them, may be mitigated somewhat with analysis, and theodicy, but the evidence for a tilt towards theism is currently not evident from all purported miracles of healing.

*Good Credentials.* The reason for a shift to evidential value here are the credentials offered for a number of healing episodes. Keener (2011) reports on numerous healing stories (see his chapter 11), and many of those reported seem to have better documentation, and eyewitness caliber, than others. Understandably, those with the better documentation carry more weight. Two examples selected at random follow.

Example 1. There is the story of Ed Wilkinson. His son (aged 8 years) had two holes in his heart—atrial septal defect. Surgery was scheduled, but his son started giving away his toys, expecting to die. The father did take his son to a healing service in the church and urged his son to go forward when a request was made. The following week the journey is made to the hospital for further tests which confirmed nothing had changed. The next day the six-hour surgery is set in motion. An hour later several members of the team call the father into a consulting room. Showing him the films from the previous day and now immediately prior to the surgery it was clear the holes had walled over. Apparently such spontaneous closure can happen in infants,

...but an eight-year-old? The surgeon explained: “You can count this as a miracle (Keener, 2011, p. 432).” And so it seems!

Example 2. A nine-year-old deaf girl—deaf without her hearing aid—is prayed for. The audiologist was amazed. Tests the following day revealed normal hearing. “The doctor’s report admitted, ‘Her hearing returned completely to normal... I was completely unable to explain this phenomenon ... I can think of no rational explanation as to why her hearing returned to normal, there being a severe bilateral sensorineural loss’ (Keener, 2011, p. 434).” Can one count this as a miracle? It seems so!

Keener offers a collection of similar reports along with potentially suspect and weak reports. It is the more credible reports, however, that serve to help build a cumulative case. Using Bayesian statistics,  $\Pr(H/E\&K)$  will build cumulatively over time as  $K$  (background knowledge of more and more cases) builds. As noted under the *reason* leg: Objectivity is then achieved in two ways. First, one can look to “incremental confirmation of hypotheses about miracles and religious doctrines (Earman, 2000, Loc 1184);” second “...given minimal assumptions about the reliability of witnesses, convergence to certainty, as the number of witnesses increases, about the occurrence of miraculous events can be proven again as theorems of probability (Earman, 2000, Loc 1184).” Incremental confirmation, increasing number of witnesses, and convergence to certainty, support the cumulative case effect.

Given the two type of miracles—resurrection and healing—which carries the more substantive evidential weight? Some, if not most, *back-to-life miracles* are in the red zone on my belief allocation chart. Why? Because there are grounds for increased suspicion of such miracles evidentially! Natural causes! Concurrent problems like fraud, charlatans, crusade scenarios, lack of evidence, and so on. The *healing miracles*, however, are more compelling. Orange zone! Why? Because evidence reported in the form of medical records for current healing narratives is compelling! They are likely still in the category Lewis calls Old Creation Miracles; the natural healing process is time-compressed. The major problem is the low frequency of those restored, and the masses not so fortunate.

*The Problem of Those Not Healed.* This is a major problem theologically. How does one understand this phenomenon from a theological perspective? Questions to ask: (1) Is there a sign purpose in miracles? (2) Is there an individual healing purpose in miracles? (3) Is there an edification-of-the-church purpose in miracles? (4) Is there a “clocks problem” in understanding miracles (i.e., healing for some in compressed time, for others in chronological time, and for most who pray for healing in dilated time—that is, the future)? (5) Are miracles purely natural phenomena? (6) Are miracles purely contingent on faith? (7) Are miracles contingent on social context (e.g., “Jesus could work no miracles there”)? (8) Are miracles culturally coloured? (9) Are miracles, or some miracles, originating from “principalities and powers?” (10) Are miracles secondary phenomena, contingent phenomena? (11) Are miracles functional veils? (12) Where do miracles fit in epistemology? (13) How do miracles align with anthropological studies? (14) Do miracles upset paradigms and worldviews, humbling the worldly-wise? (15) Do miracles trigger curiosity opening deeper insights for saintly sages? (16) Are miracles comparable to the

dangerous “spectator evidence” that Moser (2008, 2010) questions as contrary to God’s intentions for a purposively volitional epistemology, a Gethsemane epistemology ([see Moser’s epistemology above](#))? The problem of those not healed is complicated.

In the miracle-mess there is both chaos and order. Along the lines of “The Privileged Planet” (Gonzalez & Richards, 2004) and the question of Epistemic Privilege (Wray, 2012; van Fraassen, 1989, 2002) one wonders if what could be called the “Miracle Mess” is something of a gift—giving humans another “privileged position” to understand some things important for human knowledge building, faith and wisdom. Understanding power, powers, kenosis, authority, positioning, and so on, might be better understood because of the miracles-mess phenomena. What do I now see that I didn’t see before? Wheat versus chaff! The wheat is evidential! The paucity of miracles is informative, probative, provocative, and challenging. Looking for the deeper meaning can be invigorating.

### The Prophecies

Like miracles, the reference to prophecy as evidential, or as a resource for strengthening an evidentialist case, had never been particularly compelling for me. For the most part, the prophecies were interesting, even individually striking (as in Psalm 22, Isaiah 7:14, 9:6, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:24-27, Zechariah 12:10, and so on). Yet, they were puzzling; they were pieces of a puzzle; they were puzzle pieces that often left more incomplete than complete in the emerging picture. They were enigmatic. Yes, there were enough pieces of the puzzle that clicked together so that one could see a picture forming; but the picture was obscured, partially veiled still.

My preferential approach, I suspect, was to wait and see how subsequent thinking allowed pieces to fit together more graphically, or more coherently. Consequently, prophecy was rarely advanced for me as an argument, or apologetic, with compelling force. It offered a slight tilt toward Christian theism. That sufficed then! Now I’m wondering about the nature and direction of such evidential tilts!

Why did prophecy not rise to the level of compelling-belief, or even knowledge, in line with empirical science? After all, observation, artefacts, testimonies, explanatory power and scope, prediction, and theoretical coherence, were there for consideration. Indeed, there were many of the appropriate elements of a knowledge-based investigation with all the fundamentals of science. Of course, there was one science-exception—the exception of the experimental sciences. So, what were the constraints?

I suspect my initial downplaying of prophecy-as-evidence could have been due to cognitive bias, immaturity, distraction, doubt, superficial consideration, laziness, or dispositional-naturalism. But also the prophecies seemed so peculiar. Thus, my downplaying of prophecy-as-evidence was due to an epistemological failure: a failure with respect to light epistemology, virtue epistemology, and obstinacy epistemology? Was prophecy an offer I ignored, an offer of a post-hoc charism (“faith in search of understanding”) rather than an evidential motivator? What were the constraints driving my avoidance of prophecy-as-evidence?

### Constraints when considering prophecy.

*First Order Constraints.*

1. *Loose connections.* Prophecies that were only loosely connected (e.g., the “called out of Egypt,” prophecy: Matt 2:15, Hos 11:1, Ex 4:22), were loosely evidential. Linking two events often seemed to be a stretch. Was Matthew looking for connections however oblique? Was he looking for patterns? Were tenuous connections somehow permissible prophetically? Was prophecy ontologically and epistemologically fuzzy intentionally?
2. *No Connections.* I had/have trouble seeing Zechariah 13:6 as a pattern applying to Christ; yet some do (e.g., McDowell, 1972). It is certainly not evident on the surface that Zechariah 13 is referring to the Messiah. In fact, it seems relatively clear from the immediate context that the reference is not to Jesus as the prophet in focus.
3. *Double fulfillments.* That a particular historical prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 7:14), or event, is subsequently taken to link to the future Messiah seems to be open to a challenge of “confirmation bias.” For example, the prophecy of the virgin birth lacks the kind of precision that moderns call for, or hope for. Isaiah 7:14 is a prophecy of a young woman conceiving a son and his birth being a sign to the nation of Israel. Matthew sees this as a sign of a virgin bringing forth a child with a much larger application. Matthew may not be alone in this as the Septuagint translates “almah” with the Greek work for virgin. Those of us quite removed from both events play with the puzzle pieces to see if there is a pattern that makes sense. Are these post-hoc patterns errors, impositions, or real insights? Traditionally, the prophecy is explained as double fulfillment; but this seemed potentially dubious, sort of double-dipping. (Compare also the historical events surrounding the 30 pieces of silver, from Zechariah 11). Is it double-dipping? It raises a suspicion, a hesitation, though not an outright rejection. Furthermore, it raises questions about the very nature of Biblical prophecy.
4. *Poetry as Prophecy.* Does prophecy comport with poetry? Many prophecies flagged in the New Testament, are rooted in Old Testament Poetry, and are oblique communications rather than clear evidential communiqués. Of course, if this aligns with God’s intention, God’s method of communicating via prophecy, then one could delight in the study of such prophecy and prophetic poetry. Perhaps, there is an analogy in the following: one who expects all mammals to navigate by sight could miss the beautiful, informative mystery of the navigational systems of the bat, the fly, the butterfly, and more. Moreover, there does seem to be some striking parallels in Poetry with respect to history and prophecy (e.g., Psalm 22). It raises a suspicion, a hesitation, though not an outright rejection.
5. *Intentional Fulfillments.* Was there effort on the part of Jesus, and perhaps his disciples, to work to intentionally fulfil what were perceived as prophecies? The planning of the entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was designed and orchestrated. It raises a suspicion, a hesitation, though not an outright rejection. More troubling: there is the suggestion that Matthew’s account of anomalous supernatural events at the time of the crucifixion was an effort to find prophetic fulfillment (Wright, 2003, see [footnote on Wright](#) above).
6. *Levels of Authoritative Confirmation.* Who authenticates the prophecy? In decreasing influence, a list of authorities might look like the following: (1) Jesus as authenticator which would carry the most weight, (2) Apostolic authority as secondary importance, (3) Old Testament Prophet when the prophecy is more clearly direct (e.g., Isaiah 53), (4) OT

Prophet when the prophecy is more indirect yet empirical (e.g., Amos 8:9), (5) History when the evidence is empirical confirmation (e.g., destruction of the temple, Matthew 24:2, the destruction of Tyre, Ezek 26), and (6) Patternicities where there are apparent connections between events that seem beyond meaningless coincidences (e.g., Ps 69:20-21 and Matt 27:34).

### *Second Order Constraints.*

A second level of constraints would be principles for facilitating interpretation. What are the proper or possible approaches to help readers clarify prophecy, understand prophecy, and judge prophecy?

1. *Categorization.* One approach would be to categorize the prophecies. There are prophecies that relate to the Messiah. There are prophecies that relate to Israel. There are prophecies that relate to cities. There are prophecies that relate to individuals. Such categorization—typing and sub-typing—may be helpful in theological knowledge building.
2. *Hermeneutics.* Language (literal, figurative, allegorical,...), Genre (history, poetry, prophecy, parable, proverb, ...), Cultural context (concordance, biases, ...), Authorship (authorial intent, authorship/s, redaction, compilers,...), Worldviews (Epicurean, Stoicism, naturalism, paganism, pantheism, ...), Theological systems (Torah, works, grace, gospel, righteousness,...), Time (prophecy vs fulfillment, Kairological vs chronological, single vs double fulfillment, ...), and so on. Various hermeneutical principles are in play including : a Transcendence principle (The divine intent principle. The big picture), and a Concordance principle (accommodation by God to the hearers and their social context).
3. *Epistemologies.*
  - a. *Evidentialism* (Giving the preferential or sole place to absolute evidentialism is a serious limitation). Prophecy may be more than evidence.
  - b. *Virtue Epistemology* (Failing to engage the virtues of a virtue epistemology when considering prophecy is a major constraint). Understanding prophecy requires work.
  - c. *Prudential Epistemologies* (Sometimes it is the better part of wisdom, to say “maybe,” or “perhaps,” or “let’s see what happens.” Let’s see how the pieces of the puzzle might go together! That’s prudent!). Prophecy meshes with patient wisdom.
  - d. *Obstinacy Epistemology* (Failing to stick with the task and push through the surface problems, and “flies in the ointment,” is a constraint. Failing to stick with the God who prophesies is a constraint).
  - e. *Light Epistemology* (Failure to permit the working of the Light, Jesus and His Holy Spirit, is a catastrophic constraint).

These epistemologies may not be amenable to testing or experimentation, but they certainly invite exploration and abduction. Nevertheless, there may be an argument that various epistemologies—the volitional epistemology (Moser 2008, 2010), the prudential epistemologies, the existential epistemology, and even virtue epistemology—invite forms of experimenting. It may be the case that only the

pure experimental forms of science (control groups, lab settings, double-blinds, etc.) are precluded.

### *Third Order Constraints -- The Cognitive Science Framing.*

How does cognitive science act as a constraint, or a facilitator? Prophecies can be seen as patterns, patterns that correctly map onto reality, or patterns that are illusory. In the following analysis I take Shermer's (2011) discussion of *patternicity* as a starting point. There is something in patterns that is cognitively intriguing. Shermer looks at *patternicity* as a source of sound beliefs (i.e., correctly mapping onto reality) and faulty beliefs (i.e., superstitious learning and magical thinking). In essence, *patternicity* can be advanced to explain the acceptance of true beliefs and false beliefs—Type 1 errors and Type 2 errors. Shermer's analysis, however, benefits from further thought. Additional exploration argues for further development of the cognitive construct of *patternicity*.

#### 1. *The Patternicity Principle.*

This principle draws upon Shermer's (2011) urging to understand *patternicity* as the source of belief, whether accurate beliefs or faulty beliefs. Shermer (2011) contends that human beings are designed by natural selection to be good pattern detectors. Leaving aside criticisms of the power of natural selection<sup>1</sup> for the moment, for the sake of argument, we could agree that good pattern detection should serve survival well. Those who see a pattern in the rustle of branches-in-bushes, a pattern that indicates a predator is present, are more likely to flee, and therefore survive, than those who see no such pattern. As an added benefit, those who think they see the predator pattern in the bushes are also likely to flee and survive. Thus, whether the pattern is real (true belief) or imaginary (false belief) both serve survival. In fact, there are four categories of response that situate pattern detection responses. As may be seen in the matrix below, as researchers have long held, and as Shermer notes, there are two types of errors. The Type 1 error, while a false belief, can have survival value, along the lines of "it's better to be safe than sorry." The Type 2 error, missing a true belief, puts one in a precarious position. In accord with natural selection arguments, the person predisposed to make the Type 2 error is less likely to be around to pass on the genes driving such a predisposition. He doesn't survive as well.

Matrix showing the four types of responses one can make for pattern detection in view of two dimensions: reality and belief.

<sup>1</sup> Re criticism: Consider the comment of Lennox (2011b) and his quote from William Provine who is a staunch atheist: "Biologist William Provine, in a remarkable afterword published in a new edition of a classic work, explains that his views have 'changed dramatically': 'Natural selection does not act on anything, nor does it select (for, or against) force, maximize, create, modify, shape, operate, drive, favour, maintain, push, or adjust. Natural selection does nothing. Natural selection as a force belongs in the insubstantial category already populated by the Necker/Stahl phlogiston or Newton's ether ... Having natural selection select is nifty because it excuses the necessity of talking about the actual causation of natural selection. Such talk was excusable for Darwin, but inexcusable for Darwinists now. Creationists have discovered our empty natural selection language, and the actions of natural selection make huge vulnerable targets (p. 180-181).'"

		Reality	
		Real Predator	No Predator
Belief	Real Predator	Motivating Belief	Type 1 Error
	No Predator	Type 2 Error	Neutral Belief

- a. Hits
  - i. Real patterns, authentic patterns, are detected (the rustle in the leaves is really due to a lion lurking).
  - ii. Pseudo patterns are judged as meaningless (the rustle in the leaves is viewed as due to wind or a squirrel, etc. One believes there is no danger, and there isn't any danger.).
- b. Misses:
  - i. Type 1 Errors (Assuming a meaningful pattern—predator—when there isn't one. The rustle in the leaves is not a predator but one believes it is and sets off running away.)
  - ii. Type 2 Errors (Assuming there is no meaningful pattern when there is one. The rustle in the leaves is a predator but one believes it is not and continues along ...to become dinner.)

Shermer (2011) correctly links patternicity to learning, particularly association learning. For him, *patternicity* is developed via natural selection. His discussion of the topic offers interesting examples. Examples of detecting patterns that are not really there are evident in the images people see in clouds, or the images (i.e., faces) some see in photographs of various formations on Mars photographs. That individuals may differ in susceptibility to seeing such patterns as a function of personality variables (e.g., locus of control), and anxiety levels, adds another layer. Arguably, there are many more layers to consider.

The association learning phenomenon, or *patternicity* as Shermer frames it, is not unique to humans. In the animal kingdom sign stimuli are patterns that can function to trigger behaviours. A critical period for imprinting, in some species, is a striking example of a response to patterns. The movie “Fly Away Home” shows the story of a young girl who has young geese imprint on her. She and her father then train the maturing geese to follow the girl in a light aircraft so that they can migrate south as winter approaches. This *patternicity* presented by Shermer, holds promise; but it would benefit from extension beyond types of errors, links to association learning, and examination in the animal kingdom.

*Patternicity* can be amplified as a construct that allows for branching: (1) branching more deeply into cognitive, psychological underpinnings, (2) branching more effectively to systems of cognitive processing, and (3) branching more widely into alternative framings that permit a positive approach to non-naturalist considerations as well as the naturalist worldview. It is the branching that builds a framing for considering prophecy as more than simple Type 1 Errors in pattern recognition. It is this branching that facilitates a prudent approach to prophecy.

2. *Proper Function and Patternicity.*

Here a comparison is made to Plantinga (1993a, 1993b) and his noted limits for warrant [see above](#). Plantinga first points to the importance of the “proper function” of a system. Pattern recognition, pattern detection, and patternicity are amenable to being considered as cognitive processes one can view as showing “proper function” or improper function. Improper function, by implication, leads to functional limitations. Limitations could show up in the following:

- a. By-products
- b. Glitches
- c. Functional multiplicity
- d. Competing plans
- e. The optimal environment assumption

In terms of the earlier discussion functional limitations would be evident with Type 1 errors and Type 2 errors. The proper response is to see merit in “patternicity” and develop the notion further with respect to proper function. This would involve acknowledgement of functional problems; and it would involve addressing functional problems.

### 3. *Patternicity and Cognitive Psychology.*

Drawing upon cognitive psychology the roots of pattern recognition can be explored from a perceptual perspective, a developmental perspective, and theoretical perspectives. From the perceptual perspective we note several theories advanced to explain pattern recognition. The first model advanced is “*the template approach*.” The idea here is that humans have stored templates of patterns. They use these templates to judge patterns encountered. The problem is that the number of templates required would likely overwhelm our limited cognitive resources. A second model is based on *feature detection*. Features like “straight line,” “diagonal line,” “curved line,” and so on, are used to form judgments. “In general feature theories claim that we recognize whole patterns by breaking them into the building-block features they contain. Rather than matching an entire template-like pattern for capital G, then, maybe we simply break down the G into its features.... Successful feature matches would be the necessary evidence of categorization, deciding that the pattern is indeed a G (Ashcraft, 2002, p. 91).”

An elaborative, yet succinct, discussion of the feature detection theorizing of Eleanor Gibson is presented by Farnham-Diggory (1992). Key points are listed here:

- Perception increases with development. “...picking up patterns is a hallmark of cognitive development...(p. 188)”
- People learn to perceive. “Gibson then realized that learning and development must be attributable to the child’s increasing ability to pick up progressively more complex information about what had always been there (p. 189).”
- “Differentiation.” Differentiation is the mechanism of perceptual growth. Gibson saw this as detecting three things not previously recognized: properties, patterns and features. “She didn’t think you ever integrated anything into a whole. If you perceived a part, you perceived some particular property, pattern, or feature. If you perceived a whole, you perceived a different property, pattern, or feature (p. 189).”
- Some perceptual abilities are inborn. Babies have an inborn understanding of “near and far checkerboard cues.” This is evident from the visual cliff studies.



- “Abstraction.” This is a learning process. Many properties and patterns must be learned via abstraction—detecting what is constant versus variable in experiences. This is a purposive process; constancies are sought to eliminate uncertainty.
- Development. Improvement over time is evident in three characteristics
  - *Increasing specificity of discrimination.* The older child is more cautious, considers more information (e.g., features), and narrows his focus to the important or salient features.
  - *Increasing optimization of attention.* There is more exploratory activity with age and it is a function of decisions.
  - *Progressive economy in the extraction of information.* For example, it is more economical to read the word “cat” as a unit than to read each letter and then compile the letters to form the perception “cat.”

#### 4. *Patternicity and Top-down processing.*

In Ashcroft’s (2002) critique of feature detection theories a major element is flagged. There is a top-down processing component—one’s background knowledge and conceptual development—that assists the processing of lower level bottom-up features available. Patternicity is not simply a response (Hits, Type 1 errors, and Type 2 errors) to properties, patterns, and features encountered. The response is conceptually-driven as well. Executive functions are as important as the patterns. Patternicity, then, is analyzed in terms of features and properties but also involves developmental variables, background knowledge, learning, ability (innate and developed), decisions, skills related to attention, discrimination, and efficiency. Error responses, then, can be rooted in a variety of factors—bottom-up factors and top-down factors. Overactive top-down factors are clearly instrumental in certain errors. For example, both “change blindness” and “inattentive blindness” are based in top-down factors (Matlin, 2009). These occur concurrent with proper function. If there is improper function, perhaps due to brain damage or disorder, the errors (e.g., prosopagnosia) are categorically different.

#### 5. *Patternicity and System 1/System 2 Thinking.*

Drawing upon Kahneman as he presented the two-processing system in 2003, there would be two types of patternicity processing to consider. First, in an Intuitive system—System 1—processing is characterized by: fast speed, parallel processing, automaticity, effortlessness, associativeness, slow-learning, and emotionality. The second system—System 2—is a Reasoning system and is characterized as: working at a slow speed, using serial processing, under executive control, requiring substantial effort, rule-governed, flexible, and showing emotional neutrality.

Patternicity processing in System 1 would be intuitive, automatic and effortless. This seems to align with Shermers’s (2011) approach to patternicity. The pattern of rustling in the bushes that triggers the flight response, whether an accurate perception or a Type 1 error, is more likely to activate automaticity and intuition, that is, System 1 level processing.

Patternicity processing in System 2 would be effortful, reflective, investigative, and rule-governed. This is characteristic of a deeper approach that would be aligned with: (1) Plantinga’s notion of proper function and warrant, and (2) theories addressing feature detection from a

cognitive science perspective. System 2 level processing looks for the possible deeper meanings, and broader meanings.

#### 6. *Patternicity -- A Deeper Framing.*

Shermer (2011) operates within a naturalistic paradigm, and consequently, the patterns he would address are natural patterns. However, there are psychological, physical, and theological positions that push beyond straightforward natural patterns. The Jungian notion of synchronicity (Jung, 1952/1960), for example, doesn't align with conventional naturalism. Furthermore, theorizing in physics with respect to quantum mechanics opens doors to broader considerations related to time, space, clocks, causality, and so on. Theology introduces what could be termed a diachronicity principle, as well as epistemological factors related to types of evidence. Even naturalism itself is open to a wider range of considerations.

- a. Naturalistic variants (Natural, causally connected effects, though perhaps not fully understood:
  - i. *naive naturalism* (a normal causal connecting principle with connections ordered sequentially and immediately in time);
  - ii. *God-perceived naturalism* (God sees what is unfolding naturally over time and reveals the natural future);
  - iii. *God-released naturalism* (God enhances what is unfolding naturally over time, perhaps by constricting, dilating, or unblocking time factors. This would parallel Lewis's notion of "Miracles of Fertility" (e.g., water into wine, or a few fish into many fish) where time was compressed. In effect, in the prophecy time could be compressed, dilated, or altered in some way);
  - iv. *divergent-naturalism* (a causal connecting principle connected in time, but mysterious, or not yet understood). This could be seen, for example, in linkages (peculiarities or striking coincidences) that have been reported for: (1) identical twins raised apart <http://lornareiko.wordpress.com/2009/10/08/identical-twins-who-were-separated-at-birth-what-are-they-like/>, (2) eerie parallels such as (a) the story of "The Wreck of the Titan" written in 1898 yet with peculiar parallels to the reality of the maiden voyage of the Titanic in 1912, (b) the story of the cannibalism of Richard Parker on the high seas, and the striking presaging parallel from Poe (see Hutchinson, 2011); and
  - v. *parapsychological naturalism* (events and phenomena that have a natural cause yet to be understood).
- b. Diachronicity (Supernatural patterns, across time, with a clocks/time issue, and God as the causal connection, though perhaps with a varying typology:
  - i. *naive prophecy* or direct propositional precise claims, that is, spectator evidence;
  - ii. *poetry-as-prophecy* or opaque, allegorical, and figurative prophecy;
  - iii. *conditionally-perceived-prophecy*, or information given to the volitionally prepared;

- iv. *seed-prophecy* to start a chain of reasoning, thinking or investigating;
  - v. *motivational-prophecy* to engage curiosity, the will, and reasoning processes; and
  - vi. *prophetic-fragments*, opportunities to put the pieces together for those so inclined.).
- c. Synchronicity (Non-natural patterns, showing simultaneity, but neither naturalistic nor evident theistic causal connection).
- i. *coincidence with beneficial effects* (cf Jung, 1952/1960).
  - ii. *parapsychological trans-naturalism* (events and phenomena that have a non-natural cause yet to be understood).
  - iii. *cthoncity* (interference of malevolent forces)
  - iv. *autocthoncity* (self-deception, a form of the Type 2 error—failing to see a legitimate pattern that is there to be perceived).

Openness to the broader cognitive framing, and the possible deeper patterns, is a stance that, at the very least, offers broad possible benefits. Precluding such openness on the basis of an elementary worldview like *naive naturalism*, does not appear to be the better part of wisdom. Pattern detection is an area one needs to consider when patterns map onto Biblical events and such patterns are advanced as prophetic.

### *The Judicial Stance*

What is the *judicial stance*, the wise stance? The *judicial stance* with respect to prophecy would involve attention to the following:

- Openness to the possibility of Type 1 errors.
- Attention to Patterns (detection of properties, patterns and features)
  - Acknowledging: Inborn predisposition to see some patterns.
  - Acknowledging: Developmentally increasing ability to detect patterns.
  - Acknowledging: Learning involved in detecting patterns.
    - Differentiation –detecting things not previously recognized re properties, patterns and features, whether parts or wholes. Increasing caution, and narrowing of focus to relevant features.
    - Abstraction –learning what is invariant.
    - Attention optimized.
    - Decisions made about what to attend to.
    - Increased economy of resources.
  - Acknowledging: Key role for executive processes, and top-down processing.
    - Concept-driven influences on perception of patterns.
    - Background knowledge influences on perception of patterns.
    - Overactive top-down processing errors are types of faulty perception.
- Acknowledgement of “Proper Function”
  - Awareness of normal error sources given proper function
    - Glitches, by-products, functional multiplicities, competing design plans, and so on.

- Overactive top-down processing.
  - Awareness of improper function and hence abnormal error sources: brain damage, disease, disorder, functional imbalance, biochemical imbalance, toxins, drugs, medications, ....
- Acknowledgement of different processing systems engaged in a judicial stance (System 1 and System 2)
  - Pattern detection for system 1 is automatic, intuitive, associative, and fast.
  - Pattern detection for system 2 is reflective, thoughtful, effortful, and slow.
- Acknowledgement of philosophical issues:
  - The possibility of *naive naturalism* as the explanation for the pattern.
  - The possibility of a *God-perceived naturalism* as the explanation for the reported prophecy (a causal connecting principle connected in time)
  - The possibility of a *God-released naturalism* as the explanation for the reported prophecy (a causal connecting principle connected in time).
  - The possibility of a *divergent-naturalism* as the explanation for the reported prophecy
  - The possibility of transcending naturalism.
    - The possibility of *diachronicity* (a supernatural causal connecting principle across time) (The conventional view of prophecy).
    - The possibility of *divine hiddenness* (a supernatural causal, yet variable, connecting principle across time) (Contingent on Divine sovereignty).
    - The possibility of *synchronicity* (an acausal, or covert-causal, connecting principle at the same time) (Jung, 1952/1960).
- The implementation of a belief-allocation protocol for various hypotheses.
- The implementation of a triangulation protocol involving *revelation*, *reasoning*, and *reflections* (of authorities<sup>1</sup>).

Given this *judicial stance* how does one best approach certain prophecies? My initial shallow approach to prophecy was a failure of virtue epistemology. Originally, my intuitive sense that the evidence was compromised and weak was impulsive and shallow processing. As a similarity, I see Shermer's approach of attribution to *patternicity* (a Type 1 error given naturalism) weak as well. There are patterns in espoused prophecies. But what is the nature of these patterns? Yes, these prophetic patternicities, in some prophecies, may be in the reader's psyche only—Type 1 errors. Yes, one wonders if this was the case for some prophecies flagged by Matthew's psyche, for example. Type 1 errors for Matthew? Yes, there are legitimate questions about the mind of the prophet. Any type of reasonable position in line with a virtue epistemology would require an investigation of some prophecies, at least. A good principle would be to start small, but not too small. Focusing on a single prophecy can be too small, especially if one looks at one of the more problematic prophecies first. Focusing on a small group would be more informative. Considering various groupings there are three that I would

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<sup>1</sup> Reading Michael Brown's three volume work "Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus" (2000a, 2000b, 2003) served as an authority. Brown is Jewish, well versed in Jewish history and rabbinical thought, and the original languages holding a PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures. As a messianic Jew he opens evidential windows. Pieces click together as the jigsaw puzzle fills in. Prophecy can give me a dramatic tilt towards theism, specifically, Judeo-Christian theism. Other authorities used are Sandoval (2010) for the critical side, and the edited collection by Newman (2001) for the Christian orthodox side.

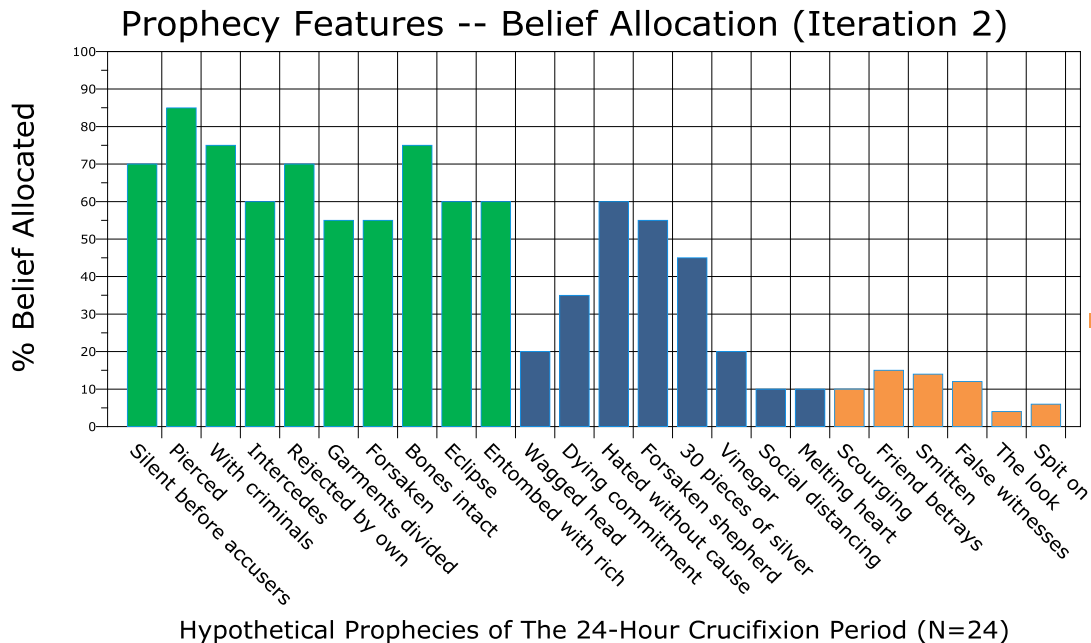
consider as candidates from McDowell (1972): (1) Prophecies For a Single Day (i.e., the 24-hour period surrounding the crucifixion, N=29), (2) Prophecies Related to the Messiah (N=332), or (3) Prophecies General (Historic and Geographic). The 29 espoused prophecies surrounding the crucifixion seem manageable for an initial study.

Applying a virtue epistemology now, and a judicial stance, would involve exploration in some depth, showing openness to possibilities, applying diligence in considerations, drawing upon various authorities, and probably adopting a tentativeness where warranted. Hence, I opt to examine a small group of prophecies, the “Prophecies For a Single Day” (i.e., the 24-hour period at the time of the crucifixion) ([see Appendix 4](#)).

### Prophecies For a Single Day

In this first foray (here and in [Appendix 4](#)) into the study of subset of prophecies, there is the possibility of learning something about: (1) the theology of prophecy, (2) the mechanics of prophecy, (3) the cognitive context of prophecies, (4) the meaning of specific prophecies, (5) the value of clusters of prophecy, (6) evidential merits of prophecy, and (7) God himself.

McDowell (1972) has the number of such prophecies set at 29. My regrouping in Appendix 4 allows for a chart with the espoused prophecies reordered somewhat into clusters of varying credibility. In the following chart (transposed here from Appendix 4), the green colour signals “high credibility;” the blue signals “substantial credibility;” and the orange signals “weakened credibility.” The percentages of belief allocation are subjective refinements on the colour-categories.



*Gaining prophetic credibility.* The green level prophecies gain that weighting for various reasons. First, a clear Old Testament prophecy (e.g., Isaiah 53 or Amos 8:9) where the prophetic intent is specified serves credibility. Secondly, authentication by Jesus that a certain event or text is prophetic gives credibility. Thirdly, apostolic authority carries some weight in building credibility. Fourthly, multiple attestation builds credibility. Fifthly, patternicities that are not clear errors, or possible errors, can carry some weight in building credibility.

Given the pointers to credibility it is also possible to consider a prophecy in terms of the three major typologies addressed above: naturalistic, diachronistic, and synchronistic. Some prophecies are possibly best seen in this more fine grained light.

*Challenging prophetic credibility.* Prophecies at less than the green level may have some problems or possible limitations. First, one could ask: can poetry be prophecy? Arguing that poetry is prophecy seems to be a stretch. Or, are there various vehicles for prophecy with adjusted evidential weights as a function of the vehicle? Secondly, there are situations where the prophecy was fulfilled earlier leaving the notion of double fulfillment as an add-on which gives the appearance, on the surface, of being in a suspect position. Thirdly, the original Old Testament text doesn't seem to be pointing to the future event it gets attached to subsequently. This weakens a prophetic claim for 21<sup>st</sup> century types who look for linguistic precision. Fourthly, the Old Testament text seems contrary to its future application. Fifthly, patternicities can be examples of errors, Type 1 errors. Sixthly, there are challenges from authorities that raise significant questions; and often the prophetic interpretations seem confusing, fuzzy, messy, and hopelessly irresolvable. The proper approach seems to align with the following: be tentative, go slowly, and develop a belief allocation protocol<sup>1</sup> considering multiple sides (hypotheses) of an issue or argument.

Given these concerns prophecies may best be seen to fall on a continuous scale (with varying degrees of belief or credibility) rather than a categorical scale (with a Yes/No response). This makes some sense if prophecy is viewed as producing belief rather than knowledge. Hence, contrary evidence does not refute the prophecy; rather, contrary evidence mitigates the belief allocated to the prophecy. The move from belief to knowledge is a cumulative case phenomenon much like the cumulative case for belief in God (Swinburne, 2004). It builds over time.

### Some Conclusions

1. Prophecy is likely a post-hoc evidential-charism. Prophecies are for insiders not outsiders, as a rule. Prophecy is more likely informing for those purposively available (Moser, 2008, 2010) rather than spectator evidence. Yes, there are times when a prophecy is directed towards an outsider, but that is usually in the form of a judgment or

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<sup>1</sup> There are types of authorities approaching prophecy: (1) those out to refute all prophecy (a confirmation bias), (2) those out to confirm all prophecies (a confirmation bias), and (3) those out to consider some (or all) prophecies to see which ones warrant varying levels of credibility, and how much credibility. It is this latter approach which aligns with virtue epistemology.

enticement<sup>1</sup>. If prophecies are gifts to the church this may explain partially the paucity problem. The gifts are distributed with a purpose.

2. Prophecies serve to build belief framed as both faith (trust) and knowledge (understanding). Standing in the presence of a prophecy cluster is a privileged position; one sees something about God, His activity in history, His power, His purpose, His concern, and His gifting. And, one sees something about God's creation.
3. Reflection on prophecies encountered does lead to a tilt towards theism. Study of prophecy clusters leads to a stronger tilt. There is a cumulative case effect (Swinburne, 2004) that builds across the accretion of prophecies examined.
4. Prophecies contribute to the cumulative case that builds across the accretion of all evidences (see Swinburne, 2004).

### *The Church History*

The history of the Christian church, that is Christians, in spite of the blemishes (you'll weep reading Brown's, 1990, book: "Our Hands Are Stained With Blood"), is striking with respect to charities, hospitals, education, medical missionaries, politics, philosophy, science, slavery, and more. As noted earlier: Even a representative of critical theory and American pragmatism, an apparent atheist like Jurgen Habermas, would comment: "Christianity, and nothing else, is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights, and democracy, the benchmarks of Western civilization. To this day, we have no other options. We continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is postmodern chatter." (Downloaded from <http://sciencestage.com/v/958> ). Such a history gives one a tilt in the right direction!

One is duped if led to think Christianity has been more of a blight on civilization than a blessing. Yes, horrors were committed by human beings in the name of Christianity (see brown, 1990). But to paraphrase that brilliant reframer, G. K. Chesterton: the amazing thing is not that so many were killed under Christian rule, but that so few were killed. Alongside our malevolent human nature is the self-corrective mechanisms that work to get "back on the tracks." The analyses by Dinesh D'Souza (2007) and Alvin Schmidt (2001), amongst others, help set the record on a scholarly footing, not the peculiar polemics of some of the footloose. In chapter 18, D'Souza challenges the exaggerations of the likes of Carl Sagan, Stephen Pinker, and Sam Harris, with respect to the Crusades, witch-burning, and wars. In chapter 14, Schmidt pens a pensive look at literature emerging from Christians—quite a literary foundation. Ironically, Pinker in his latest work sees literature, literacy, the novel, as mechanism for a redemptive tool: "The growth of writing and literacy strikes me as the best candidate for an exogenous change that helped set off the Humanitarian Revolution (2011, p. 174)." Firmly planted in mid-air?

The impact of Jesus on human history, human nature, and human folly has been redemptive. Ortberg (2012) presents the positive impact of Jesus on human dignity, women and

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<sup>1</sup> Prophecy can serve as data at some levels: (1) seed-evidence, that is, curiosity-inducing evidence, (2) evidential-charism, that is, gifting for certain individuals, with the purpose of edifying (informing, and wisdom-generating), (3) semiotic, that is signaling of transcendence and direction, or (4) knowledge-building, that is, knowing God at a deeper level.

children, marriage, art, education, politics medicine, science, and more. Yes, there have been problems, but the wheat in the fields is distinguishable from the weeds.

*The History of the Jews*

Three issues can be raised here with respect to the Jews that seem to some extent evidential: the history of the Jews, the impact of the Jews, and the animus against the Jews. First the history! *Is the history of Israel striking, even evidential and conducive to a tilt towards theism, and the God of the Jews?* Tracking the history of the Jews in the Bible through Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and so on, is remarkable. Tracking the Jewish history in the Diaspora (in Egypt, Babylon, Roman-rule, Islam, Christendom, and Europe) is striking. Jewish history in the inter-testament period, then under Rome, through Zionism, and into the Holocaust, is striking. Tracking the history with the rebirth of Israel in 1948 for many has the aura of a significant signal. The history of Israel's survival through many 20<sup>th</sup> Century wars in Israel seems miraculous at times. It tilts some towards the very transcendence to which Israel arguably points.

*Is the impact of Israel striking, ...even evidential and conducive to a tilt towards theism?* Such a tiny segment of the world's population yet the impact of Jews is striking. Forget whether or not any portion of Jewish literature is inspired writing, the literature of the Jewish prophets is considered one of the four great bodies of literature (along with Greek tragedies, Shakespearean English, and Russian novels). Consider the seminal impact on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century alone via Freud (psychology), Marx (economics), and Einstein (Physics). Jewish history from slavery in Egypt, oppression in Babylon, brutalized under Rome, scattered abroad in the diaspora, pogroms and holocaust is well known; yet the Jews rise to the surface in all fields through history. Dorothy Lee, a social anthropologist, writes of the Jewish shtetl in Eastern Europe before World War II (see Pronko, 1969). Lee notes the terrible educational and pedagogical conditions (no games, no diversions in the 10-hour day, crowded rooms, poor ventilation, noise, an unfamiliar language for instruction, endless repetitions, few books, in fact some students learned to read only upside down while sitting across from the teacher who had the sole book, ...). "Yet out of this miserable schoolroom came people whose one desire was to be a scholar for life; who, when the path of secular studies was open to them, became great philosophers or teachers or men of letters or scientists (p. 206)." It is a striking impact upon academic and cultural communities manifested by Jews.

Then there is the impact on scientific and technological innovation. Solway (2012) writes: "Israel is a world benefactor without which life as we live it and take for granted would be far poorer (Loc 2662)." This extends to "...cybernetics, desalination, hydrology, energy technology, security, productive agricultural methods and life-saving medical technology... (Loc 2662)." He goes on to list such contributions: Windows XP, Vista, Microsoft Office, firewalls, wireless LAN, voice mail, cell phones, TV remote control, Google's search algorithm Orion, microchips (Intel chips, Pentium microprocessors), anti-terrorist screening techniques, drip irrigation, state-of-the-art solar power plants and water technology programs, reverse osmosis desalination, the drug Copaxone for MS, small medical video cameras, coronary stents, surgical lasers, and more and more (Loc 2662-2679).



*Is the persistent anti-Semitism directed against Jews, and the state of Israel, striking and in any way evidence of a tilt towards theism?* There have been many examples of racial oppression, even genocides, in human history, but the Jewish experience seems unique. Solway (2012) in his book “The Boxthorn Tree” asks the puzzling question in the last chapter: “Why Are Jews Different from History’s Other Victims?” What are the differences? “One answer to this question that is frequently met with has to do with the bureaucratic and industrialized nature of the monstrosity perpetrated against the Jewish people. The Shoah was meticulously planned at the highest levels of government, a blueprint for infamy carefully prepared and a complex technology devised to carry it out (Loc 3747-3764).” While numerically monstrous mass murders occurred under Stalin (of Ukrainians) and Mao (of Chinese “dissidents”) neither “wanted to erase a ‘nation.’ Hitler did (Loc 3764).” One major difference is the Time factor—the history. “For the campaign against the Israelite has an inordinately long pedigree, going back to the Egyptian captivity, the Babylonian exile, the Roman wars and dispossession, the mass killing of Jews during the First Crusade, the Edict of Expulsion from England during the reign of Edward I, the Alhambra Decree in Spain ordering the expulsion of the Jews the Chmielnicki massacre in 17<sup>th</sup> century Ukraine, and the innumerable purges in between and since, in both Christian and Muslim lands, leading to its culmination in the Holocaust (Loc 3781).” What Solway (2012) flags is that “It keeps happening (Loc 3781).” Moreover, the assault is both secular and religious—“...by secularists on the left who regard Israel as a colonial implant in the Middle east and by Muslims commanded by the Koran and the Ahadith to kill Jews wherever they may be found. Jews are perhaps the only people in the world who live in the crosshairs of two implacable enemies, one avowedly secular and the other driven by a theological mandate (Loc 3799).”

Anti-Semitism is deep, almost too deep to grasp at any naturalistic level. “For what sets Jews apart from other victims of human malignancy is the hatred and violence, the demonising, never go away. Such is the nature of anti-Semitism: it is not a singular event but a perpetual sentence of condemnation. It is what we might call an ontological compulsion, an antipathy that has been reified (Loc 3834).” It seems demonic! Does the demonic offer a tilt towards theism?

Further: What about the attributes of the oppressors? The oppressors often occupied supposed high ground—intellectual and moral. Arguably, the most academically advanced country on the earth was Germany in the 1930s. Yet, the professorial ranks, the students, and the medical profession seemed particularly vulnerable to such evil propensities. Arguably, Christianity held the moral high ground over the past millennium yet fell to horrendous oppressor roles of Jews (Brown, 1990). And today the “intelligentsia” (the left), and those claiming the moral high ground (the religious Muslims, and the social-justice Christians) again turn on the Jews.

And then there is the prophetic tracking of the Jewish history (see Bloom, 1988/2001; Johnston, 1988/2001; Kellog, 1988/2001). That prophetic tracking is striking. And it tilts one towards Judeo-Christian theism.

## Conclusion

The bottom line at this point is: There are overwhelming underpinnings as determinants for belief. These determinants are evident in manifold ways. Many determinants are properly basic. Some determinants require careful analysis. Some require overcoming, or circumventing, limitations and constraints. Key determinants require action—for initiation, for critique, for investigation, and for testing. Again, there are overwhelming underpinnings evident in support of theism, even Christian theism. The overwhelming underpinnings support consideration of a cumulative case.

## Evidence From Cumulative Probabilities (The Belief-Choice Is Probably Right)

### The Cumulative Case For God -- Swinburne.

A cumulative-case argument for theism aligns with the thrust of this essay, a thrust which has noted that there are “overwhelming underpinnings” for belief in God. Such a case can be aligned with subjective probability estimates that are accumulative probabilities. Philosophically, it can be rooted, in part, in Swinburne’s (2004) cumulative case for belief in God.

Also, there is a cumulative case for considering, and explaining, disbelief in God (dyspistemology). As the constraints and liabilities against theistic belief are developed one infers that a full commitment to theism is hampered, hampered by cumulative constraints and liabilities growing.

Overall, as the arguments (evidential, analytical, critical, and historical) for God are developed it is clear they fail to be decisive. Yet, as argued here each seems consistent with a tilt towards God. When considered as a package, with each argument concatenated to earlier arguments, the probability-estimate increases or decreases as a function of the quality and force of the argument, and the danger and likelihood of the constraints and liabilities. As Swinburne might frame it:  $P(h|e \& k) > 0$  (or .5 as he sees it, but actually  $> 0$  will suffice since the point is that the p values can increase as positive arguments accumulate whether for God, or for understanding the constraints), where P is probability, h is the hypothesis that God exists, e is the evidence (the new evidence) and over time the conjunction of the cumulative evidence ( $e_1 + e_2 + e_3 + \dots e_n$ ), and k is the background evidence or knowledge (what Swinburne terms “tautological evidence” at one point, but also the evidence of constraints and liabilities).

Evidential arguments accumulate such that minimal probabilities (say the minimal, but positive, p-value for  $e_1$ ) when added to the minimal, but positive, p-values of a subsequent argument (say  $e_2$  and  $e_3$ ) lead to an increase in overall probability as arguments accumulate through the various  $e_1$  to  $e_n$  arguments ending with the conjunction, e. In effect, the second argument might even be expressed as  $P(h|e_2 \& k_{P(h|e \& k)}) > P(h|e \& k)$ . Admittedly, I am taking some liberties here as Swinburne does not expand k; rather he treats k in this new formulation as the premise from  $e_1$ . However, the background knowledge, k, could increase with each new minimal increase from a new argument, if the argument offers a tilt in God’s favour. Thus, the increasing probabilities from additional arguments for and against God ( $e_1$  to  $e_n$ ) could be further

enhanced by the increases in background knowledge  $k$  (including knowledge of likely constraints and liabilities). This supports a move towards God. When paired with a prudential epistemology the case is even stronger supporting a move towards God.

Applying this variant of Swinburne's probability argument is furthered by considering not just the arguments for God, but also considering the restraints against belief in God. Again, by restraints I'm not thinking of arguments against the existence of God (e.g., evil, hiddenness, etc.); I'm thinking of the disbelief-drivers (e.g., constraints, liabilities, and choices over time) that make human beings vulnerable. Such disbeliefs and blindnesses factor into the  $k$  term in Swinburne's formulation. Addressing blindnesses in a systematic fashion would strengthen the  $k$  term and further increase the probability of theism, Christian theism.

In effect, advancing cumulative-case arguments for God, and addressing cumulative case obstacles hindering belief in God, increases the probability, at least the subjective probability, for God thereby supporting the prudential move to God.

#### The Cumulative Case For The Resurrection -- McGrew and McGrew

A cumulative case for the resurrection would be a subset of the overall case for theism, but it does illustrate the use of cumulative-case approaches. The file presenting the McGrew and McGrew argument can be downloaded here:

<http://www.lydiamcgreww.com/Resurrectionarticlesinglefile.pdf> .

Their substrate for their argument:...

“To state the matter modestly and slightly loosely, the probability that God exists is higher if there is significant independent evidence that Jesus rose from the dead than if there is no such evidence, and this is true because the probability that the resurrection took place is virtually nil if there is no God and higher if there is. On any plausible background assumptions, if Jesus of Nazareth died and then rose again bodily three days later, the probability of T is approximately equal to 1.”

“The resurrection is also positively relevant to Christianity. On any construal of Christianity worth the name, the assertion that Jesus rose bodily and miraculously from the dead is one of its core assertions. It is fairly easy to see that the probability that Christianity is true is greater given that the resurrection of Jesus occurred than it is otherwise on our present background evidence.”

While their argument focused on miracle, the cumulative case could be expanded by focusing on historically authentic facts (see Craig, 2008), the broad compelling facts and arguments (see Habermas, 2006; Habermas & Licona, 2004), and the full hermeneutical context (see Wright, 2003). See the [discussion above on resurrection](#).

Their conclusion:...

“Although we have offered a cumulative case for the resurrection, we make no pretense to have offered the whole of the case, much less the whole of the case for Christianity. We have focused on those facts we consider most salient, but the argument can be elaborated in numerous ways: buttressing assumptions, deflating or deflecting criticisms, and taking additional facts into account. Ultimately, it can be embedded in a comprehensive argument that marshals all the resources of natural theology.”

“Yet as Butler points out in the *Analogy of Religion*, the argument from miracles is one of the direct and fundamental proofs; no competent presentation of the evidence for theism can afford to omit it or to treat Hume’s essay as the final word on the subject. Hume could not himself be bothered to descend into the fray and discuss the argument in detail. But philosophers who wish to evaluate the evidence provided by testimony to the miraculous must move beyond this shallow treatment and come to terms with the argument in its most plausible and persuasive form, following Bacon’s wise advice “to examine things to the bottom; and not to receive upon credit, or reject upon improbabilities, until there hath passed a due examination” (Bacon, 1862, p. 124).”

The prudential step makes sense as the evidences accumulate!

Beyond the cumulative case approaches and the evidential arguments weighting probabilities to arguments and evidences there stands the reformed epistemologists holding that belief is rational. Arguments are not necessary. As Mavrodes notes: “Both Plantinga and Wolterstorff, I think, completely reject the project of making theistic faith rational. Like Calvin they have no intention of providing unbelievers with reasons to believe, or, for that matter, of providing believers with reasons to continue in their faith (Mavrodes, 1983, p. 195).” That said it is clear that Plantinga is not hostile to arguments and evidences ([see his comments above](#)). What he does do is defuse the evidentialist thesis by arguing that foundationalism is false (see Wolterstorff, 2012). Still: “Every now and then one still hears the old bromide that religious belief is irrational and should, for that reason, be kept out of the university. The new atheist Sam Harris, for example, continues to spout the most juvenile form of evidentialism. And even those philosophers and other academics who write seriously about faith and reason often exhibit no acquaintance whatsoever with development in analytic epistemology over these past forty years. I submit that if you want to talk about rationality in general, or about the rationality of religious belief in particular, you must engage analytic epistemology of the past forty years; everything else pales in comparison (Wolterstorff, 2012, p. 210).” In effect, it is just that probability arguments, evidentialist arguments, and cumulative case arguments are not the whole story, or even the first story or the best story.

## Conclusion - Choose To Follow

### Prodigals, Prudence, Predisposition, and Preparation

In the earlier discussion of prodigals like Templeton, Lobdell, Loftus, and Shermer, one faced the question: Do the trajectories, claims, and questions of those who leave Christianity rise to a level that would tilt one from theism? Many seem to think so. Do the arguments of the atheist rise to the level of compelling a turn away from Christianity? Many seem to think so. It is not just the questions raised by the prodigals that argue for a tilt away from theism. J. L. Mackie (2007), for example, actually uses the term “tilt” to describe his own bias away from theism. Many see the tilt in the direction of theism; many others (like Mackie) contend the tilt is to atheism.

Reflections on the prodigals, and the apologists, discussed in this text, argue that the reasonable tilt is towards theism, and in fact, Christian theism. Moreover, it is not a rationalization to hold such a position. Indeed, it is the wise choice, the *prudential* choice, and even the *predispositional* choice.

In fact, at times, part of me would wish, perhaps even hope, that my position is wrong. I too don't like the notion of hell, or seemingly gratuitous suffering, or the fact that so many seem so lost, and so without hope. Innate empathy pushes me, at times, to philosophical universalism, or near-universalism, in some deep place. But then the reasoned analyses, the evidence, the prudence, and predisposition, invite me back toward Christian orthodoxy. The answers offered to the critics, and the positions adopted by the Christian camp, are sufficient to justify my reading of the tilt, and I tumble towards theism, Jesus, and Christianity.

That said, whether the needle tilts towards the left, atheism, or the right, theism, one is called upon to choose. It is *prudent* to choose theism. But one's choice is also influenced by evidence, argument, passions, and dispositions. Belief precedes belief! In such a cognitive context, Jordan (2006) discusses the Anselmian project which he frames as:

O. The evidence renders theism more likely than not;

P. A right disposition is necessary for appreciating the evidence supporting theism

“According to (P), one must believe in order to understand. There is a strong version of (P), and a modest one. The strong version is that only those rightly disposed can grasp the evidence. A right disposition provides access to the evidence—an access closed off for those not rightly situated. So, according to the strong view, there is evidence for theism, but only those rightly disposed have access to that evidence. The modest version is that a right disposition allows one properly to appreciate the evidence. While the evidence is available to all, only those properly situated understand the significance of the evidence. Different perspectives provide different weightings of the evidence (Jordan, 2006, p. 166).”

Drawing upon Thomas Morris, who holds to the strong version, Jordan reports two interesting developmental paths that Morris suggests. In *Path A* there is a three-step move from context to behaviour. It is assumed that psycho-social context influences perception, which in turn influences our emotions, which then influences our behaviour. In *Path B* there is a reversed three-step pattern with a move from behaviour to emotion, to perception, and then to a new context. One's behaviour influences one's emotions which then influence one's perception, leading to a new objective situation, a new context.

Jordan notes: "Morris's reversed chart is not intended to suggest that our perceptions cause or determine the objective situation. It is intended to illustrate the idea that our perceptions of the objective situation are at times influenced—distorted perhaps, or rendered more reliable—by our behaviour. Construed this way, proposition (P) implies that only those rightly disposed can grasp important facts. Right disposition might include proper training, or having taken the preparatory steps necessary to acquire the means to perceive what is there. In short, one must first believe in order to know (2006, p. 168-169)." *Preparation*, preparatory steps can be chosen.

Jordan goes on to discuss the importance of the passions in the belief-formation process drawing from various pragmatists. The arguments from William James, as a representative of the modest version, along with William Wainwright, make a good case "that grasping the significance of the evidence in support of theism is influenced by one's passions (Jordan, 2006, p. 169)." Jordan, himself, seems to favour the modest version as it carries "a lower exposure to error," for one thing. He structures his own argument for plausibility, drawing upon Wainwright (who noted the fact that two equally intelligent and informed scholars can draw different assessments of the same evidence<sup>1</sup>), as follows:

1. There are basic disagreements about matters of fact in which there is no objective adjudication available. So,
2. The cause of these basic disagreements is not due to the lack of evidence, intelligence differentials of the disputants, bad faith of the disputants, or lack of philosophical astuteness. But,
3. The subjectivity of the disputants is different. Therefore,
4. It is plausible to hold that the disagreements arise through differences in subjectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> The most striking illustration of this conclusion, for me, is seen in the online debate: "God or Blind Nature? Philosophers Debate the Evidence (2007-2008). Edited and with Introductions by Paul Draper." Downloaded from: <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/debates/great-debate.html>. The arguments are strong on both sides, but seem much stronger to me on the theistic side; yet I'm sure the atheist reader would find the alternate side, and inference, more palatable. Of interest here: Jordan is one of the contributors to the debate.

“There are two ways that subjectivity might influence reasoning, a negative way and a positive way. The negative way holds that subjectivity (of a sort) blurs or distorts the evidence present to one. One just does not appreciate the evidence one has available because of a blind spot that interferes with a proper grasp of the facts. Theists usually describe this blind spot as the noetic or cognitive effects of sin. Sin is the willful violation or disregard of God’s commands, and the distortion resulting from sin is something like wearing spectacles that systematically distort one’s perception of reality (Jordan, 2006, p. 171-172).”

Varieties of “blindness,” expressed as disbeliefs, have been a key focus in the current text. Awareness of the negative side of subjectivity, the potential for blindedness, helps one understand one’s own doubts, the prodigals, the agnostics, and the atheist. More important is the subjectivity that is willing to consider God, reflect on God, honour God, glorify God, and thank God, with a prudential epistemology and a virtue epistemology as precursors to an evidential epistemology.

### Preparatory Steps for a Predisposition

What are the important *preparatory* steps that facilitate the gain of a positive subjectivity—a *predisposition*?

- *A virtue epistemology* (Baehr, 2008, 2011, Greco, 2011). Critical in this framing are character and virtues like “...carefulness and thoroughness in inquiry, inquisitiveness, attentiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and intellectual integrity (Baehr, 2011, p. 98),” and (2) attention to effects or vices such as “... intellectual laziness, inattentiveness,, lack of intellectual discrimination, gullibility, carelessness,, disregard for truth, ignoring and distorting counterevidence, self-deception, and the like (Baehr, 2011, p. 98).”
- *An intentional epistemology* (Moser). Critical in this framing is a method that is “volitional” and attentive to authoritative purposeful revelation (Moser, 2008, 2010). This is like an *existential epistemology*: there is a process where doing precedes knowing/believing. One is gaining beliefs (and knowledge) from reading, from authorities, from research, from experimentation, from trial and error, from examination, from looking, and from failures. Doing precedes knowing. This holds for reflective beliefs (Barrett, 2009); and it could be the case for the acquisition of non-reflective beliefs, or possibly the refinement of non-reflective beliefs. Doing involves intentionality, and thus choosing. One’s choices, then, are foundational for one’s beliefs. Essentially, under this epistemological jurisdiction one must choose to do, and do, in order to know. There is evidence for belief that is available for those willing to choose a particular path. This approach is readily linked with Jesus call to do in order to know. (“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”—John 7:17).
- *A scientific methodical epistemology* –Critical in this framing is an approach to tasks which involves using scientific principles and methods. This would require attention to:

(1) hypotheses, models and theories, (2) deduction, induction and abduction, (3) conjecture and refutation, (4) creativity, thinking “outside-the-box,” curiosity, (5) principles, laws, hermeneutics, (6) attention to context, history and development, (7) collaboration, publication, peer review, standing on the shoulders of forerunners, and (8) critique, tentativeness, and excitement.

- *An epistemology of hope.* Critical in this framing is an attention to affections. Consider the issue of surviving death? Jordan (2006) presents the cases for the prudential reasons for hope, say the hope of surviving death, as developed by both Pascal and James. But he also offers some fascinating comments on Mill. With Mill the pragmatic argument is not as well developed as with William James, or Pascal, but it is interesting.
  - Consider: “...for our purposes the item of interest is Mill’s claim that ‘any one who feels it conducive either to his satisfaction or to his usefulness to hope for a future state as a possibility, there is no hindrance to his indulging that hope.’ This license to hope is issued in part upon pragmatic grounds. It is permissible to hope if and only if:
    - L1. For all one knows or justifiably believes, the object of one’s hope could obtain; and
    - L2. One’s hope fits with one’s beliefs; and
    - L3. One believes that hoping contributes to one’s own happiness, or to the well-being of others.
  - The first condition ensures that one’s hope coheres with one’s justified beliefs. One is not hoping in the face of evidence, or despite the evidence, as long as one is in compliance with (L1). The second condition (L2) employs the notion of fit, a weaker notion than entailment, but a stronger notion than mere coherence. Mill believed that one could hope for survival of death in part because one is justified in believing in a deity—a deity who may, for all we know, have the power to grant survival. The hope for survival is neither entailed, nor made much more likely than not, by a belief in a deity, in the sense that it would not be surprising that there is survival if a deity exists. ...Such a hope is a natural fit with such a belief. The third condition, (L3), is straightforwardly pragmatic and restricts hope to those who have goals either of personal happiness or of contributing to the well-being of others (Jordan, 2006, p. 189).”

Exploring hope, cultivating hope, checking the “fit” for hope, is easily preparatory.

- *Acceptance as the Prudential Step* (Jordan, 2006). The prudential epistemologies drawing upon Jordan, Pascal, James, Morris, and others are compelling. The point to make at this point—a point related to a preparatory step—is the distinction between *acceptance* and *belief*. While belief as a choice would hold in some situations (e.g., belief allocation), it does not hold in all situations of belief, that is, doxastic voluntarism is not a viable position. However, acceptance is a choice, and is a viable position. The distinction



between *acceptance* and *belief* casts choice itself as a potentially important preparatory step. The following points from Jordan help to make the case for acceptance and choice.

- “What is it to believe a proposition? Believing a proposition is being disposed to feel that it is probably the case (Jordan, 2006, p. 204).”
- “Belief and acceptance typically converge, but they can diverge, since one can believe a proposition that one does not accept. Think of the gambler’s fallacy (Jordan, 2006, p. 204).”
- And one can accept a proposition that one does not believe. “The relevance of this distinction is that one can accept that God exists, even if one does not believe that God exists. Since acceptance is under our direct control, one can choose to accept, even if one cannot choose to believe (Jordan, 2006, p. 204).”
- “...I know of no good reason for thinking that, if God were to value acceptance, acceptance would preclude one from a deep relationship with God (Jordan, 2006, p. 204).” The challenge that “absolute evidentialism” provides a good reason to reject such a position cannot be sustained. Jordan points to situations where it can be morally obligatory, and reasonable given a particular situation, to reject absolute evidentialism. “While it is true that the evidentiary situation may be ambiguous, it is manifest that the pragmatic situation is conclusively tilted towards theistic belief. All persons have overwhelmingly good reason to accept that God exists and to inculcate theistic belief. This is a point clear for all to see. A common way of trying to elude this point is via an unfounded allegiance to Absolute Evidentialism—an allegiance that proclaims, perhaps arrogantly, not enough evidence God, not enough evidence—despite the fact that there is abundant reason to believe (Jordan, 2006, p. 206).”
- Jordan offers “A Story,” an interesting story! He reasons: “...if the story is possible, it may be that every human is in a position freely to accept that God exists, and freely to take steps to try to bring about a belief that God exists. A deep and meaningful relationship with God may require, for all I know, that the requisite belief is earned through free acceptance and through taking steps to inculcate that belief, rather than just finding oneself saddled it (Jordan, 2006, p. 209).”
- What’s the story? “Suppose God exists and desires that humans choose to enter into a relationship with Him. God desires, that is, that humans accept Him as a vital concern in their lives. Moreover, since belief is a passive state over which one has no direct control, God would not present one with evidence sufficient to elicit theistic-belief, since such ‘automatic belief’ would not preserve the free

choice to align oneself with God. What God values is the initial choice freely to accept, the freedom to choose to align oneself with God, and the effort to try to bring about belief, the free inculcation of belief. God would present reason sufficient to motivate one to choose to accept God, but God would not expose one to strong evidence, since he desires the decision to accept to be as unfettered as possible. Presenting a religiously ambiguous creation God preserves the freedom both of acceptance and of the inculcation of belief (Jordan, 2006, p. 207).”

- A further variant of the story draws upon the analogy of “The Teacher” and what a teacher does. “While the teacher should certainly not provide the answers by showing the students a purloined copy of the exam, he should provide students the students with three things: enough information to prepare for the exam; the motivation to try their best, and the requisite skills to apply what they have learned in original ways, as opposed to being ‘taught to the test’ (Jordan, 2006, pp. 208-209).”
- One chooses to accept! And then there is the converse: one chooses to reject!
- *A meta-epistemology.* A broad umbrella epistemology that draws upon consideration of all epistemologies. Such an approach would capture humility as opposed to arrogance, openness as opposed to narrow-mindedness, and corporate considerations as opposed to individualism. Further it would capture possibilities, creativity, curiosity, exploration, and discovery. A breadth of perspective that sets competing explanations onto the table is an admirable epistemic goal.
- *Attention.* (1) Attend to others: words, thoughts, claims, propositions, theories, biographies, testimonies. (2) Attend to one’s inner knowledge: what one really believes, one’s “beliefs-in-use,” not the espoused beliefs we might adopt from our idols; attend to what one “cannot not know;” attend to the fact that what one knows makes sense, common sense. (3) Attend to nature: the creation, the heavens, the languages, the beauty, .... all the signals of transcendence.
- *Attunement.* Listen to others.

A coin has been tossed. It is in the air. Call it! That’s one scenario.

“Call out!” The coin has landed. Many have seen it and reported on it. It’s heads up. They have made their case. Heads up! That’s another scenario.

### The Scientific Skeptical Stance

Is it possible that our most valued approach to knowledge, scientific methodology, can blind us, or contribute to our blinding? Yes. As argued earlier the adoption of naturalism can blind us (Rea, 2002). As argued earlier, System 2 (Kahneman, 2011) processes—where the sciences reside—can override System 1 processing which is a major problem when System 1 contributions to our cognitive mixing-pot are correct. As argued earlier, the scientific “circling of the wagons” can blind those trying to break free (Feyerabend, 1975, 2011; Kuhn, 1970; Lakatos, 1970). As argued earlier, the sciences are filled with fraud, fudging, rigging, gate-keeping abuses, self aggrandizement, ambitions, and so on) blinding the unsuspecting. As argued earlier, the imprimatur of authorities can blind one. As argued earlier, the professional can be primed to a blindness, which would blind others. As argued earlier, learning theory can blind one. As argued earlier, technology can blind one via shallowing-of-thinking and narrowing thinking as in action-identification theory. As argued earlier, a broader epistemic scope is needed than the pure absolute evidentialism of the sciences. Sciences can blind! Look far afield. There’s more! Love science, but love more!

### A Predisposition Is An Orientation!

A predisposition, like a disposition, is an orientation. Believing in God might be reasonably viewed as an orientation. It parallels orientations like the heterosexual orientation, the homosexual orientation, the pedophile orientation, the zoophilic orientation, the food addict, the suicidal, and more. Orientations emerge from a mix of factors: biological predispositions, environmental influences, luck, chance, interactions between these determinants, and choice. As an illustration, smoking is an orientation. Smoking is driven by biological factors, environmental factors, luck, chance, and choice. Mormonism is an orientation; it is driven by biological factors, environmental factors, luck, chance, and choice. Atheism is an orientation; it is driven by biological factors, environmental factors, luck, chance, and choice. Christianity is an orientation; it is driven by biological factors, environmental factors, luck, chance, and choice. Theism is an orientation; it is driven by biological factors, environmental factors, luck, chance, and choice.

One takes a stance. The Christian takes a stand with God, his son, Jesus, his church, humanity, and creation. Like all orientations it is a stance influenced by biological factors, environmental factors, luck, chance, and choice. The Christian, like Luther, says: “Here I stand. I can do no other.” Other Christians express it as “Here I stand. I can do other.” What’s the difference? There is a time when the latter stance dominates; there is a time when the former seems firm. Again, by way of illustration: The early smoker says: “Here I stand. I can do other.” The later smoker says: “Here I stand. I can do no other.” The orientation solidifies. The choice atrophies.

### A Final Thought!

It is clear to me that theism wins the coin toss. It is clear to me that Christianity is the “best fit” worldview given all the evidence, arguments, and speculations that have been set on the table. It is clear to me that a meta-epistemology incorporating attention to a virtue epistemology, an existential epistemology, an evidential epistemology, a prudential epistemology, a passional epistemology, and more, place one comfortably on a rock.

It is clear to me that the framework developed here captures many sources of disbelief, and belief. Such a framework functions to facilitate edification—understanding, commitment, wisdom, and hope. Such a framework facilitates acceptance and belief.

It is clear to me that the passional epistemologies are at the forefront. The heart leads. The evidence follows. The mind first, then what matters. One who captures this endeavour succinctly is James Spiegel (2012) in his chapter on Wisdom. In less than 20 pages he draws in the relevant Biblical texts, the foundational importance of Plantinga, the epistemological importance of behaviour, the epistemic costs of vice, the benefits of virtue, the blindnesses, the broader epistemologies (virtue, passional, and prudential), and choice. The end is wisdom, sought and found. “Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace.”—Proverbs 3:17.

I’m thankful that my young nephew set me off on this exploratory journey. My faith has been credibly, incredibly strengthened. The exploration has been a preparatory step. Actually, a staircase! To a table set before me!

There is promise in broadening perspective as flagged in Action-Identification Theory. Action-Identification Theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987) applies to thinking—high levels of thinking and low levels of thinking. People can default to lower levels of thinking when facing liabilities and constraints. Along similar lines, there is a default to lower levels of epistemology under constraints and liabilities; that is, those with a particular stance, the academics, for example, can be constrained by their academic views and default to absolute evidentialism. Also of interest, the constrained can default to lower levels of love—say eros, for example. And then when even more constrained by media, constrained thinking, authorities, and so on, even lower levels of love emerge: pedophilia, narcissism, zoosexuality, necrophilia, and more. Finally, there is morality; people can default to lower levels of moral reasoning, say a focus on harm, or fairness/equality when constrained by an ideology like liberalism (see Haidt, 2012). Higher levels of moral reasoning are broader and more inclusivist; such higher reasoning adopts bases which include harm and fairness/equality arguments but also add Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity bases to the list. The case for multiple-perspective-taking, and multiple-belief-allocation protocols, is not limited to information processing, science, and knowledge-building. It applies to faith, hope, love, and morality as well. Look up! Look out!!!

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## Appendix 1: An Illustration of Triangulation Applied to Scripture

As an illustration the application is framed as stages:

1. Stage 1. Scripture is viewed 100% human as a product. It offers history, historical information, stories, arguments, allegories, proverbs, and more.
  - a. One approaches this text firstly as history, yet with the intent to construct an interpretation, a story-line, a history, a biography, a doctrine, a philosophy, an ethic, an understanding. It is propositional.
  - b. One judges this text according to traditional scholarship rules, traditional rules for approaching history, scientific rules for applied hermeneutics, and critical rules with respect to dispositions (e.g., openness, doubts, and critiques) and critical thinking skills.
  - c. By “traditional” one does not mean the consensus view, the reigning paradigm, or the worldview such as “naturalism-only,” or “inerrant-and-infallible-only.” One does not mean naturalist principles only; nor does one mean supernaturalist principles only. Such an approach is too limiting under a triangulation protocol. One attends to multiple levels, various approaches and diverse possibilities: worldviews like Naturalism and Supernaturalism are in play; paradigms like Psychological, Behavioural, Ethological, and Political, are in play here. Cultural perspectives are included. Gender perspectives are included. Minority perspectives are included. It is a broad-based, epistemologically-rich, truly scientific approach.
2. Stage 2. The constructs that emerge from a rigorous historical approach to Scriptural data are then up for further consideration and formulation from the other triangulation streams: *reason* and *reflections*. What are the important points, facts, and ideas? Can they be ranked? Can they be weighted? Can they be challenged? Can they be elaborated? Can they be contextualized? Can they be categorized? Can they be framed as hypotheses, models, and theories? Can they be tested? Can they be revised under the constraints offered by each stream in the triangulation: *reason*, *reflections* and *revelation*?
  - a. Stage 2a. The most important historically-based point, as I see it, is the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is compelling historically and not just theologically (see the [discussion of the resurrection above](#)).
  - b. Stage 2b. The fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus pushes one to build a context for the story of Jesus and the biography of Jesus. This is more than the search for the historical Jesus given the apparent fact of the resurrection. The text then is further explored as the biography is contextualized by others, culture, language, geography, autobiographical statements, expressions, arguments, character, behaviour, and so on.
  - c. Stage 2c. Build a history (using a science of history which is multi-paradigmatic and involves multiple-perspective-taking), a history that integrates with a sound and reasonable hermeneutical system.
  - d. Stage 2d. Apply a belief-allocation-protocol to the historical points, the biographical points, the philosophical points, the interpretations, the hermeneutically derived points, the truth claims, and the inferences drawn.

- e. Stage 2e. Balance the truth claims, the beliefs, and the opinions, as well as the facts, the hypotheses, and the theories.
3. Stage 3. Triangulation
  - a. Stage 3a. Drawing upon, and applying, *reason* (deduction, induction, abduction, analogy, figurative language, logic, epistemologies, etc.) to *revelation*, where does the communication lead? How does it unfold?
  - b. Stage 3b. Drawing upon, and applying, *reflections* (authorities, Fathers, psychology, archeology, theologians, rabbinical literature, linguists, theories, paradigms, constraints and liabilities, etc.) to *revelation*, where does the communication lead? How does it unfold?
  - c. Stage 3c. Drawing upon the emerging constructs from the triangulation where does the composite lead? What shape does it take?
4. Stage 4. The general reliability of *reason*, the general reliability of *reflections* (authorities, arguments, evidences), and the general reliability of the *revelation* (general and special) support a reasonableness to the constructs generated as the data are triangulated.
5. Stage 5. Is Scripture as God's word at the 100% level? If so, how? There is a surface structure (that which was written by human authors) and a deep structure (that guided, or better, undergirded, by God's intentions). Levels!
  - a. Does "*revelation*," or at least special revelation, have levels of structure? Possibly! For the orthodox Christian, scripture has a surface structure (the human component) and a deep structure (the divine component). To help illustrate this point consider how this parallels language. Language has a universal deep structure (syntax and perhaps semantics) and a surface structure (the various human languages constructed and in use). There are also parallels with respect to conscience which has a deep structure (synderesis) which postulates universal absolutes like "Thou shalt not murder," and a surface structure which reflects the various cultural moral codes in operation.
    - i. Does *revelation* at the surface level deteriorate? Lewis would say yes. In *Miracles* he writes with respect to what happens when the miraculous enters the natural realm: "Miraculous wine will intoxicate, miraculous conception will lead to pregnancy, inspired books will suffer the ordinary processes of textual corruption, miraculous bread will be digested.... Its cause is the activity of God: its results follow according to Natural law (Lewis, 1947/1974, p. 353-354)."
    - ii. Does *revelation* at the surface level show mitigation as a function of language, genre, context, idiom, and so on? Swinburne (2007, 2011) argues: "Yes."
    - iii. Does *revelation* at the deep structure level show blurring? Well, we do "see through a glass darkly." Revelation seems progressive, developmental, and at times, concordant with, or accommodating to, the human situation.
    - iv. Does *revelation* at the deep structure level require the triangulation input from *reason* and *reflections*? It seems so.

- b. Does “*reason*” have a deep structure and a surface structure? Yes, arguably. The deep structure would align with Truth-mechanisms, and more specifically, the witness of the Holy Spirit, the *sensus divinitatis*, and possibly properly basic beliefs. The surface structure would align with the various attempts and strategies to attain truth (e.g., logic, empiricism, experimentation, pragmatism, induction, abduction, taxonomies, theorizing, modelling, and exploring). Truth, when correctly posited aligns with deep structure; verisimilitude aligns with surface structure configured: (1) as approximations to truth and (2) by default, as error, whether residual error, malevolent error, or epistemological blunders. Furthermore, there is the real possibility that (1) reason at a surface level involves induction, deduction, abduction, analogy, intuition, logic, thinking, memory, common sense, detection of logical fallacies, and so on, and (2) reason at a deep level involves the same processes but interfacing with the influence of the Holy Spirit convicting, leading, informing, and transforming.
- c. Does “*reflections*” have a surface structure and a deep structure? Yes, arguably. The deep structure would be that which maps onto reality in the writings, arguments, postulates, theories, and so forth, of the authorities. The surface structure would be that which shows verisimilitude, or closer and closer approximations to accurate mapping onto reality.
6. Stage 6. Drawing upon CONFLUENCE. The deep structures, whether for *reason*, *reflections* or *revelations*, are rooted in God. The surface structures are rooted in the human. Assuming confluence one can build better and better approximations to mapping the surface structure onto the deep structure. Triangulation facilitates this endeavour at both the surface level and the deep level.

What centers triangulation is self. What centers the self is choice. If the self chooses to give pre-eminence to any one of the three key sources (*reason*, *reflections*, or *revelation*) one is assigning a superior role to that source. However, *reason*, *reflections*, and *revelation* are better viewed as ministerial sources, or resources; they facilitate the understanding of a case, the building of a case—an accumulating case—for God, or for the rejection of God. The Holy Spirit convicts the human of sin, righteousness and judgment in the context of the three key sources (*reason*, *reflections*, or *revelation*). Choices follow! The *sensus divinitatis* encounters *reason*: one then tilts towards understanding or disbelief. The *sensus divinitatis* encounters *reflections* in the form of the wide circle of authorities: one then tilts towards understanding or disbelief. The *sensus divinitatis* encounters *revelation* in nature and text: one then tilts towards understanding or disbelief. Finally, one interacts reciprocally with all three ministering forces and builds the case-positive, or the case-negative. Along the way choices play!

Triangulate:

- (1) Education—openness to clear thinking, *reason*, cognitive and literary resources, *reflections*, and revelatory communiqués, *revelation*.
- (2) Triangulation! –draw upon *reason*, cognitive and literary resources, *reflections* (authorities), and revelatory communiqués, *revelation*.
- (3) Make choices. Prudent choices!

## Appendix 2: A Taxonomy of Disbelief Determinants

### Self generated

- Chosen and therefore culpable
- Preferential Option To Disbelief
- Self-deception
- Suppression of Belief
- Rationalization
- Denial
- Unconscious, yet culpable (Choice has atrophied over time, and no longer is potent)

### Innate

- Developmental, mitigated culpability
- Developmental, no culpability
- Damage Physical
- Damage Cognitive
- Cognitive Heuristics (Kahneman's Cognitive Heuristics)
- Developmental limitations (partial culpability)

### Research base limitations

- Flawed
- Fraudulent
- Selective
- The Reigning Paradigm
- Lakatos and The Heuristic

### Professions

- Iatrogenics
- Professional Blindness
- Imprimatur of Authorities

### Will

- Depletion
- Conservation
- Scattered

### Belief-Mechanics

- Deflector Beliefs
- Deficient Beliefs
- Fallacies
- Biases
- Illusory Thinking
- Anchoring
- Overconfidence
- Illusory correlations
- Ease of representation
- The Othello Effect
- The Historian's Fallacy
- Shallow sight

### Epistemology

- A failure of virtue epistemology
- A failure of prudential epistemology
- A failure of evidentialism
- A failure of passional epistemology
- A failure of natural-sign epistemology
- A failure of death epistemology
- A failure of obstinacy epistemology

### Psychology

- Memory Failures

- Action-Identification Shifts
- Ironic effects
- Ideomotor Actions
- Dissonant Thinking
- Folly (plain and blind)
- Four Roots of Evil
- Culture Blinds
- Family Blinds
- Peers Blind
- Morality Blinds (cf Haidt, 2012)
- Confirmation Bias
- Dichotomized Thinking
- Philosophy
  - Naturalism
  - Absolute Evidentialism
  - Science
  - The Heart
  - MINDBlindness
- Other-generated
  - Systems Blind
  - The Establishment Blinds
  - The Education System Blinds
  - The Religious System Blinds
  - Media Blinds
  - Propaganda Blinds
- Theology
  - God generated
    - Judgment
    - Deliverance
    - Grace
  - Demonically generated
    - Principalities and Powers
    - "Has God said...?"
  - Faculty-generated
    - Agency
    - Cognitive
  - Self-generated
    - Idolatry
    - Pride
  - Memory Failures

### Appendix 3: Panoramic Thinking

Panoramic thinking has been expressed as multiple-perspective-taking throughout the essay at several points. It has been encouraged at a cognitive level: (1) in terms of getting all ideas on the table, (2) in terms of various framings like paradigms, stances, and worldviews, and (3) in terms of allocating both belief and doubt to each position proportionate to evidence and arguments currently available. In an earlier appendix (Appendix 1) the notion was applied to triangulation as an approach to revelation. At this point, it would be helpful to broaden the notion even further, and include multiplicity-in-approaches to morality and epistemology as well. Hence, there are two new framings.

#### Multiple-perspective-taking (MPT)

Multiple-perspective-taking (MPT), refers to using multiple paradigms, frameworks and stances to consider an issue or claim. Even multiple world views are considered. Basically, it can be pictured as “all ideas are on the table” for consideration. All ideas are kept on the table for future consideration, even weak ideas. All ideas are weighted with varying degrees of credibility, or merit, and conversely, doubt. With respect to paradigms the following are in view:

- A medical paradigm. In play are variables related to physical structure, function, physiology, biochemistry, damage, toxins, allergens, and so on.
- A psychological paradigm. In play are variables related to intelligence, processes (auditory, visual, etc.) personality attributes, self-esteem, and so on.
- A neuropsychological paradigm. In play are variables related to localized brain function, neural networks, hemisphericity, plasticity, and so on.
- A cognitive paradigm. In play are variables related to information processing, memory, attention, cognitive strategies, cognitive systems of thinking, heuristics, biases, and so on.
- A developmental paradigm. In play are variables related to normal developmental pathways, vertical decalage, horizontal decalage, delays, and so on.
- A behavioural paradigm. In play are variables related to learning theory, behaviour modification, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, extinction, and so on.
- An ethological paradigm. In play are variables related to individual and group differences, individual and group commonalities, and the survival value of each.
- A political paradigm. In play are variables related to policies, funding, ideologies, and so on.
- A religious paradigm. In play are variables related to the psychology of religious development, the theology of religious doctrines, the impact of religious institutions, and so on.

With respect to stances, the multiplicity was configured as:

- The Defensive Stance. What are the liabilities, constraints, and threats to valid beliefs? It is a broad academic stance. Understanding such threats allows for the defensive proactive posture. It is a meaningful starting point as it situates belief in the context of a variety of factors that can impact belief formation.



- The Common-Sense Stance. Here attention is placed on: (1) that which is properly basic, (2) the seminal/supernatural starting points for theistic belief, and (3) the reality and importance of choice in belief acquisition, formation, consolidation, and change. In the essay this stance is seen largely in the sections related to Basicity (properly basic beliefs), the Gaps (e.g., the nothing to something gap; the matter to life gap; the simple life to complex life gap), and Reid's notion of common sense. As well, the stance draws upon the former stance, the defensive stance. Part B of the essay addresses elements of this stance. Moreover, common sense is always a reasonable starting point.
- The Inclusivist-Epistemological Stance. Here attention is placed on the full range of epistemological positions and issues. In the essay this stance is encompassed by the broad attention to various epistemologies, and not just the absolute evidentialist stance so common with popular critiques. Part B of the essay addressed elements of this stance. As well, the stance builds upon the former stances, the defensive stance and the common sense stance.
- The Evidential-Charisms Stance. Here attention is placed on the full range of evidences often acquired as gracious confirmations of belief, and often as post-hoc influences. In the essay these are addressed as "evidential charisms," that is, principles, arguments, evidences, reflections, speculations, observations, hypotheses, theories, and historical facts that emerge in the supportive role. A grateful attitude, even love, naturally follows such graces. Part B of the essay addressed elements of this stance. As well, though, this stance builds upon, gratefully, the former stances—the defensive stance, the common sense stance, and the inclusivist-epistemological stance.
- The Cumulative-Case Stance. Here attention is placed on the full range of evidences, arguments, and probabilities. In the essay the cumulative-case probability factor is addressed. However, the more forceful cumulative case really draws weight from all stances addressed. Part B of the essay concludes with this composite stance.
- The Science-Based Stance. Overall the collective of approaches is science-based. Attention is placed on the full range of evidences, arguments, authorities, theories, models, and probabilities. Multiple hypotheses, theories, and models are placed on the table, and kept on the table, for consideration. Even weak hypotheses, and politically incorrect hypotheses, find a place at the table. Belief is allocated on the basis of evidence, argument, experiment, and coherence. A unilateral position is adopted tentatively, and only in the context of competing models, theories, and hypotheses. The science virtues of a virtue epistemology are in full force. This composite stance is science-based.

### Multiple-morality-taking(MMT)

Using the same approach to moral considerations, Kohlberg's stages of the development of moral reasoning first comes to mind. There are three broad levels of moral reasoning, each with two subdivisions.

- Preconventional morality

- Obedience to avoid *punishment*
- Obedience to attain *rewards*
- Conventional morality
  - Obedience to *please others*
  - Obedience to *rules, laws, social order,*
- Postconventional morality
  - Obedience to rules that make sense in terms of *social contracts*
  - Obedience based on abstract, *universal ethical principles*

Ideally one's thinking progresses to higher levels of moral awakening. But the analysis of moral behaviour draws upon all six levels of moral reasoning in judging a particular behaviour from a moral perspective. Furthermore, one recognizes that there is a developmental consideration here. Young children are not likely to be operating at Level 6. Adults should be operating at higher level (4-6) but in fact could quite easily be operating at Level 1. While one level might dominate at a particular time, it is conceivable that all six could be on the table for consideration. To illustrate: An adult who has spent the last 15 hours of his weekend at a homeless shelter preparing meals, doing repairs, and counselling those in desperate need might find himself on the way home sitting at a red light at 3 in the morning. No other people or cars are around. His investment of his time and energy at the homeless shelter was likely postconventional morality (level 6); his sitting at the traffic light is likely conventional morality (level 4), or even pre-conventional morality (level 1).

Another framing that facilitates multiplicity—multiple-moral-waking—is offered by Haidt (2012). The six moral drivers are:

- Care/harm
- Liberty/oppression
- Fairness/cheating
- Loyalty/betrayal
- Authority/subversion
- Sanctity/degradation

One particular interesting observation from Haidt's (2012) research is the difference manifested by liberals and conservatives with respect to the use of these drivers. It seems that liberals are narrower in their perspective, or more limited in perspectivizing, tending to rely firstly, and most heavily, on a Care/harm driver (see p. 297), secondly, and less so, on the Liberty/oppression driver, and thirdly, and still less on the Fairness/cheating driver. The other three are weakly weighted if at all. Conservatives on the other hand seem to have the broader perspective and draw heavily upon all six drivers, with a relatively equal weighting for each (see chart on p. 306). It seems the conservatives would show the multiple-moral-waking more so than the liberals. Of note, Haidt, himself, is a self-identified liberal.

### Multiple-epistemology-taking (MET)

What are the multiple epistemologies that could be in play?

- Evidentialism

- Natural Signs Epistemology
- Existential Epistemologies (emotions, choices, )
- Passional Epistemology
- Virtue Epistemology
- Prudential Epistemologies (Pascal, etc.
- Gethsemane Epistemology
- Love epistemology (Rom 5:5)
  - Linked to faith, hope, grace,
  - Linked to tribulation, perseverance, character, hope
- Accompaniment Epistemology or perhaps Ecclesial Epistemology (learning from travelling with the person, and his followers, those alive or not. Like apprenticeship, or discipleship, ...).
- Obstinacy epistemology as developed by C. S. Lewis (1960b) in “On obstinacy of belief.”
- Y
- Z

Applying multiple epistemologies is an arduous task. It is a task formulating a taxonomy of epistemologies. It is a task mapping a particular epistemology onto a problem. It is a task mapping multiple epistemologies onto an issue. It is a task using the epistemologies. They can be quite demanding.

#### A personal application.

My own approach to these multiple epistemologies is considered in terms of my life history as a Christian. My earliest memory of religion, formal religion, was sitting in a dank basement of the United Church at 3:00 in the afternoon of a sunny Sunday. I was listening to some religious rumblings, well-intentioned, and probably attached to a felt board. It was dank as I recall. I encountered better news of Christianity initially from a mother and an aunt; they seemed to stroll more closely with God than others. I was intrigued by their religious claims. Children believe (Barrett, 2004, 2009, 2011). I was a child. I had no reason to doubt. As an adolescent, hearing the story of Jesus proclaimed in a church, His offer, and an invitation to respond to his call, was enough to impel a positive response. I responded to the call. In fact, several times I responded, as I recall the recall. I responded to the call over the course of my adolescence. My own judgment was that it “didn’t take” as I was soon back on an old road, with old ideas. Now, I think that *an emotional epistemology*, or an *existential epistemology*, was in play; I was at a seminal stage of building some groundwork, some knowledge that could, or would, serve foundationally later. One needs some knowledge at a foundational level, I suspect. It was an emotionally driven epistemology, *an existential epistemology*.

The next level epistemologically was cognitive commitment, and perhaps rooted in an *evidential epistemology*, and a *natural theology epistemology*. At 25-years of age I was in a position to make a cognitive commitment. I had been considering the arguments and evidences in a much broader context (historical, theological, psychological, and logical) for years. I remember the big commitment, the step across the fence, clearly. It followed a discussion with my sister and my father regarding the basis for faith and hope: my merits, or God’s grace? I,

along with my father argued successfully—or what appeared to be successfully—for human merits as foundational; but, at a deeper level I saw that it was God’s grace that I needed to count upon, not my feeble efforts. At that point I stepped into the Christian camp and decided to follow. It was cognitive more than emotional. A cognitive, rational, *evidential epistemology* was in play; a *prudential epistemology* was in play. Jordan’s (2008) “[castaway metaphor](#)” made sense, prudentially. I saw that it was reasonable to build the fire and signal for help even if there was no help coming.

The third level epistemologically was *Gethsemane Epistemology* (Moser 2012), and it was soon in play. I had this overwhelming urge to abandon my reliance on the intelligentsia, my books, my friends, my own knowledge acquired. I felt pressure to sell all my books and give the proceeds to the poor. I wrestled with this drive for months, ...a year or more. I was saying okay, but how do I do it? It was a Gethsemane struggle. A long night! I remember finally bringing a potential buyer to view the books with the option of buying them. It didn’t pan out. But, following that point this burden lifted.

The next *Gethsemane Epistemology* moment occurred within a year. I had to make a decision about whether to take a new job offered to me, and start the normal more traditional family route, or go back to school and start a challenging, likely tumultuous, discipleship route. I chose the latter. It was choosing more formalized knowledge, an *evidential epistemology*.

The next few forks in the road were knowledge oriented and likely rooted in *evidential epistemology* (building knowledge, understanding and wisdom from all academic domains), the reasonable underpinnings of *natural theology*, *virtue epistemology*, and *accompaniment epistemology* or perhaps *ecclesial epistemology* (learning from travelling with the person and his followers, those alive or not). Wonder-filled years!

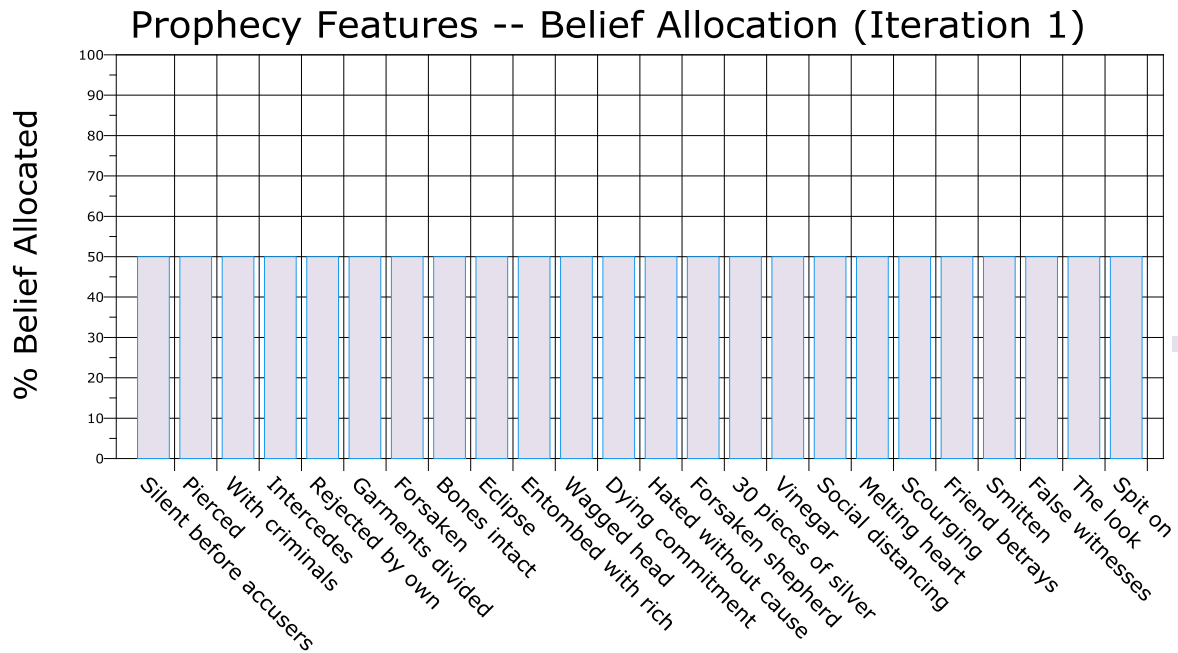
The moral failings were like a streak of dark years twisting over and over through the warp and woof of the ever-present finely-woven garment I wore. The Gethsemane epistemological moments iterated interminably with no resolve. The dominant epistemology of those years would be termed the *obstinacy epistemology* as developed by C. S. Lewis (1960b) in his essay “On obstinacy of belief.” I trusted in spite of my failures—the decadent decades. The flower came in my latter years. He has satisfied my latter years with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle (Psalm 103). I sense wisdom, knowledge and understanding. I sense peace, joy, love, and hope. I sense growth, no longer at the dry, slow level of the stem or the stalk, but at the level of the leaves, the flowers, and the fruit. I sense roots in multiple epistemologies, multiple moralities, multiple perspectives, all cohering.

#### **Appendix 4: Cursory Belief Allocation To “Prophecies For a Single Day”**

Prophecies for a single day (McDowell, 1972) are considered here in a first iteration and then in second and third iterations. The entire undertaking is basically a cursory examination of a unique cluster of purported prophecies. The Biblical texts noted in the chart are pointers only; their broader contexts were considered but are not included here in the interests of space.

Iteration 1

The question here is how much weight, or credibility, can be allocated to each prophecy under consideration. As can be seen in the next figure the weights are set at 50/50. In effect, the reasonable approach is to keep an open mind. There are three types of authorities approaching prophecy: (1) those out to refute all prophecy (the cynics and critics), (2) those out to confirm all prophecies (superficial polemicists and apologists), and (3) those out to consider some (or all) prophecies to see which ones might warrant varying levels of credibility, and how much credibility (disciples). It is this latter approach which aligns with virtue epistemology.



Hypothetical Prophecies of The 24-Hour Crucifixion Period (N=24)

Figure 9. Initial belief allocation to various prophecies regarding the 24-hour period surrounding the crucifixion.

An examination of these purported prophecies and fulfillments follow in the next chart. Some problems, or concerns, are flagged. There is a subsequent judgment—seminal opinions—concerning the credibility levels of the various prophecies. The judgments are colour coded as: Green --Serious credibility; Blue --Substantial credibility to Moderate Credibility; and Orange --Weakened credibility. The prophecies also receive an initial judgment regarding the three types discussed earlier: [naturalistic](#), [diachronistic](#), or [synchronistic](#), along with their subtypes. In addition the likelihood of making the Type 1 error (seeing a meaningful real pattern when there isn't one) is noted.

Prophecy	Fulfillment	Explanation	McDowell Number	Possible Type 1 Error
<a href="#">Silent before accusers</a> <a href="#">Is 53:7</a>	Mt 27:12-19 12And while He was being accused by	<a href="#">Naturalism</a> <a href="#">God-perceived</a>	39	Not Strong

<p>7He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.</p>	<p>the chief priests and elders, He did not answer. 13Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" 14And He did not answer him with regard to even a <i>single</i> charge, so the governor was quite amazed.</p>	<p><u>Diachronicity</u>  Formal Prophecy in Isaiah  Authenticated Prophecy: -In OT prophet -By apostle  Problems: -Is the silence a big issue? -There are Jewish authorities who apply Isaiah 53 to Israel.</p>		
<p><u>Pierced</u> <u>Ps 22:16</u>, 16For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; <b>They pierced my hands and my feet.</b>  <u>Zech 12:10</u>  <b>10</b> "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, <b>so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced</b>; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.</p>	<p>Lk 23:33; <b>33</b> When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.  Jn 19:34; 34But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.  35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.  36For <b>these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture</b>, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." 37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."  Jn 20:25 25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."  <b>26</b> After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u>  <u>Diachronicity</u> <u>God intervenes</u>  Authenticated prophecy. -OT prophet -Apostolic authority -Multiple attesting -Jesus pointed to Psalm 22  Problems: Poetry as Prophecy?</p>	<p>40, 44, 59</p>	<p>Not Strong</p>

	My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”			
<p><b><i>Punished with Criminals</i></b>  <a href="#">Is 53:12</a>                      12Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,                      And He will divide the booty with the strong;                      Because He poured out Himself to death,                      And was numbered with the transgressors;                      Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,                      And interceded for the transgressors.</p>	<p>Mt 27:38;  <b>38</b> At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.                      39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads                      40 and saying, “You who <i>are going to</i> destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”</p> <p>Mk 15:27, 28</p> <p>Luke 23  <b>33</b> When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.</p>	<p><a href="#">Naturalism</a>  <a href="#">God-perceived</a></p> <p>OT Prophetic authority</p> <p>Multiple attesting</p>	45	Not Strong
<p><b><i>Interceded for persecutors</i></b>  <a href="#">Is 53:12</a>                      12Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,                      And He will divide the booty with the strong;                      Because He poured out Himself to death,                      And was numbered with the transgressors;                      Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,                      And interceded for the transgressors.</p>	<p>Lk 23:34                      34 But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.                      (Heb 9:24; I Jn 2:1)</p>	<p><a href="#">Diachronicity</a>  <a href="#">God intervenes</a></p> <p>Authentic OT prophecy</p> <p>Apostolic authority</p>	46	Not Strong
<p><b><i>Rejected by his own</i></b>  <a href="#">Is 53:3</a>;                      3He was despised and forsaken of men,                      A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;                      And like one from whom men hide their face                      He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.</p> <p><a href="#">Ps 69:8</a>;                      8I have become estranged from my brothers                      And an alien to my mother’s sons.</p>	<p>Jn 7:5,                      5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.                      Jn 7:48;                      48 “No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?”</p> <p>Jn 1:11,                      11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.</p> <p>Mt 21:42-43  <b>42</b>Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures,</p>	<p><a href="#">Diachronicity</a>  <a href="#">God is actively involved</a></p> <p><a href="#">Naturalism</a>  <a href="#">God-perceived</a></p> <p>Isaiah is authentic OT prophet</p> <p>Jesus points to a Psalm (118)</p>	47	Not Strong

<p><a href="#">Ps 118:22</a>  <b>22</b>The stone which the builders rejected          Has become the chief corner <i>stone</i>.</p>	<p>‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER <i>stone</i>;          THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD,          AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES’?          43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.</p>			
<p><b>Garments divided</b>  <a href="#">Ps 22:17</a>          18They divide my garments among them,          And for my clothing they cast lots.</p>	<p>Jn 19:23-24  <b>23</b> Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and <i>also</i> the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece.          24 So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, <i>to decide</i> whose it shall be”; <i>this was</i> to fulfill the Scripture: “THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS.”          25 Therefore the soldiers did these things.  <b>But</b> standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the <i>wife</i> of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.           Luke 23: 34          34 But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.</p>	<p><u>Naturalistic</u>  <u>God-perceived naturalism</u>           Authentic prophecy           Jesus pointed to Psalm 22           Apostolic authority.           The ring of pathos</p>	<p>52</p>	<p>Not Strong</p>
<p><b>Forsaken</b>  <a href="#">Ps 22:1</a>          1My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?          Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.</p>	<p>Mt 27:46  <b>45</b>Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.          46 About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u>  <u>God-perceived</u>   <u>Diachronicity</u>           Authentic prophecy.           Authority:          -Jesus          -Apostolic</p>	<p>55</p>	<p>?</p>
<p><b>Bones intact</b>  <a href="#">Ps 34:20</a>  <b>19</b> Many are the afflictions of the righteous,          But the LORD delivers him</p>	<p>Jn 19:33  <b>31</b> Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that</p>	<p><u>Diachronicity</u>           Authentic prophecy.           Apostolic</p>	<p>57</p>	<p>Not Strong</p>



<p>20 out of them all. He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken.</p> <p><a href="#">Ps 22:14</a> 14I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.</p>	<p>Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and <i>that</i> they might be taken away.</p> <p>32 So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him;</p> <p>33 but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.</p> <p>36For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN."</p> <p>37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."</p>	<p>authority</p> <p>Issue: Here poetry is a vehicle for prophecy</p> <p>Multiple attesting</p>		
<p><i>Entombed with the rich</i> <a href="#">Is 53:9</a> 9His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.</p>	<p>Mt 27:57-60</p> <p>57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.</p> <p>58 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given <i>to him</i>.</p> <p>59 And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away.</p>	<p><u>Diachronicity</u></p> <p>Prophetic authority</p>	61	Not Strong
<p><i>Eclipse</i> <a href="#">Amos 8:9</a> 9 "It will come about in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon And make the earth dark in broad daylight.</p>	<p>Mt 27:45</p> <p>45Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u></p> <p>Patternicity OT Prophetic authority</p> <p>Check eclipses</p>	60	Not Strong
<p><i>30 pieces of silver</i> <a href="#">Zech 11:12</a> (sold) 12 I said to them, "If it is <b>good in your sight</b>, give <i>me</i> my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty <i>shekels</i> of silver as my wages.</p> <p>Zech 11:13 (thrown) 13 Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, <i>that</i> magnificent price at which I was valued by them." So I took the thirty <i>shekels</i> of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD.</p> <p>Zech 11:13 (potter) 13 Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, <i>that</i> magnificent</p>	<p>Mt 26:15; 27:3 (sold) "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.</p> <p>Mt 27:5 (thrown) 5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.</p> <p>Mt 27:7 (potter) 7And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>Divergent</u></p> <p>Patternicity (A hit)</p> <p>Apostolic authority authenticating as prophecy.</p> <p>Problem: not identified as prophecy in Zechariah, rather it seems</p>	34, 35, 36	?

<p>price at which I was valued by them.” So I took the thirty <i>shekels</i> of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD.</p> <p>Jeremiah??</p>	<p>strangers.</p> <p>8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.</p> <p>9 Then that which was spoken through <b>Jeremiah</b> the prophet was fulfilled: “AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel;</p> <p>10 AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER’S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME.”</p>	<p>to be history, or story, or</p> <p>(Problem: attribution to Jeremiah)</p>		
<p><b>Forsaken Shepherd</b> <a href="#">Zech 13:7</a></p> <p>“Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.</p>	<p>Mk 14:27 27And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, because it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.’”</p> <p>Mark 14:50 49“Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but <i>this has taken place</i> to fulfill the Scriptures.” 50And they all left Him and fled.</p> <p>Mt 26:56, 31 56“<i>But all this has taken place</i> to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.” Then all the disciples left Him and fled.</p> <p>Matt26:31 31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’”</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u></p> <p><u>Patternicity</u> (A hit)</p> <p>Authenticated Prophecy: -By Jesus -By apostles</p> <p>Problem: Context of Zech 13? Judgment. Against the sheep? One third refined, redeemed?  Is it historical for Zechariah?</p>	<p>37</p>	<p>Not Strong</p>
<p><b>Hated without cause</b> <a href="#">Ps 69:4</a>;</p> <p>4Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies; What I did not steal, I then have to restore.</p> <p><a href="#">Is 49:7</a></p> <p>7Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel <i>and</i> its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by</p>	<p>Jn 15:25 25 “<i>But they have done this</i> to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’”</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u></p> <p>Patternicity</p> <p>Psalm is authenticated by Jesus</p>	<p>48</p>	<p>?</p>

<p>the nation, To the Servant of rulers, “Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.”</p>				
<p><i>The dying commitment</i> <a href="#">Ps 31:5</a> 5Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, O LORD, God of truth.</p>	<p>Lk 23:46 46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” Having said this, He breathed His last.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u>  Patternicity.  A hit.</p>	56	?
<p><i>Mocked</i> <a href="#">Ps 22:7-8</a> 7All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 8 “Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”</p>	<p>Mt 27:31 31 After they had mocked Him, they took the <i>scarlet</i> robe off Him and put His <i>own</i> garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u>  Patternicity  But Psalm 22 was pointed to by Jesus</p>	42	?
<p><i>The wagged head</i> <a href="#">Ps 109:25</a> 25I also have become a reproach to them; When they see me, they wag their head.  <a href="#">Ps 22:7</a>  6But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people. 7 All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, 8 “Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”</p>	<p>Mt 27:39 38 At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, “You who <i>are going</i> <i>to</i> destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking <i>Him</i> and saying, 42“He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u>  Patternicity  Authenticated by Jesus pointing to Psalm 22.</p>	50	Yes
<p><i>Suffering thirst, vinegar offered</i> <a href="#">Ps 69:21</a>  20Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, And for comforters, but I found none. 21 They also gave me gall for my food</p>	<p>Mt 27:34; 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, 34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting <i>it</i>, He was unwilling to drink.  Jn 19:28-29 28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u>  Patternicity</p>	53, 54	?

<p>And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.</p>	<p>things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty." 29A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon <i>a branch of hyssop</i> and brought it up to His mouth.</p>			
<p><b>Melting heart</b> <a href="#">Ps 22:14</a> 14I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.</p>	<p>Jn 19:34 34But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u> Patternicity Poetry Jesus pointed to Psalm 22</p>	<p>58</p>	<p>?</p>
<p><b>Social distancing</b> <a href="#">Ps 38:11</a> 11My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague; And my kinsmen stand afar off.</p>	<p>Lk 23:49; 49And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.  Mk 15:40, 40There were also <i>some</i> women looking on from a distance, among whom <i>were</i> Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. 41 When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and <i>there were</i> many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.  Mt 27:55-56 55 Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. 56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u> Patternicity Multiple attesting</p>	<p>49</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p><b>Betrayed by a friend</b> <a href="#">Ps 41:9</a> Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel</p>	<p>Judas Mt 10:4; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. Mt 26:49-50</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u> Patternicity</p>	<p>33</p>	<p>Yes</p>

<p>against me.</p> <p><a href="#">Ps 55:12-14</a></p> <p>12 For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, Then I could bear <i>it</i>; Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, Then I could hide myself from him.</p> <p>13 But it is you, a man my equal, My companion and my familiar friend;</p> <p>14 We who had sweet fellowship together Walked in the house of God in the throng.</p>	<p>48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."</p> <p>49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.</p> <p>50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, <i>do</i> what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.</p> <p>Jn 13:21</p> <p>21 When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me."</p>	<p>Poetry as Prophecy?</p>		
<p><b>False witnesses</b></p> <p><a href="#">Ps 35:11</a></p> <p>11 Malicious witnesses rise up; They ask me of things that I do not know.</p> <p>A general attack on the innocent, falsely! Returning evil for good.</p>	<p>Mt 26:59-61</p> <p>59 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.</p> <p>60 They did not find <i>any</i>, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward,</p> <p>61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'"</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u></p> <p>Patternicity</p> <p>Poetry</p> <p>Descriptive of a general human nature?</p> <p>General nature.</p> <p>Poetry as prophecy?</p>	<p>38</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p><b>Scourging</b></p> <p><a href="#">Is 53:5</a></p> <p>5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being <i>fell</i> upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.</p> <p><a href="#">Zech 13:6</a></p> <p>6 "And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your arms?' Then he will say, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'</p>	<p>Mt 27:26</p> <p>26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus <b>scourged</b>, he handed Him over to be crucified.</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u></p> <p>Patternicity</p> <p>Isaiah authoritative</p> <p>Zech 13:6 seems out of place. The wounded one doesn't seem to be Jesus.</p> <p>Synchronicity?</p> <p>Is this a type 1 error for contemporaries?</p>	<p>40</p>	<p>?</p>
<p><b>Smitten</b></p> <p><a href="#">Is 50:6</a></p> <p>6 I gave My back to those who strike <i>Me</i>, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;</p>	<p>Mt 26:67;</p> <p>67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him,</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u> <u>God-perceived</u></p> <p>Patternicity</p>	<p>41</p>	<p>?</p>

<p>I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.</p> <p><u>Mic 5:1</u></p> <p><b>1</b> “Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us;  <b>With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek.</b></p> <p><b>2</b> “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, <i>Too</i> little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”</p>	<p>Lk 22:63</p> <p><b>63</b> Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him and beating Him,  <b>64</b> and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, “Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?”</p>	<p>Some features apply</p>		
<p><u>Spit upon</u>  <u>Is 50:6;</u>          6I gave My back to those who strike <i>Me</i>, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.</p>	<p>Mt 26:67;  <b>67</b> Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him,</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u>  <u>God-perceived</u>          Patternicity</p>	<p>41</p>	<p>?</p>
<p><u>The look</u>  <u>Ps 22:17</u>          17I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me;</p>	<p>Lk 23:35  <b>35</b> And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One.”</p>	<p><u>Naturalism</u>  <u>God-perceived</u>          Patternicity          Synchronicity</p>	<p>51</p>	<p>Yes</p>

**Iteration 2**

After reflecting on the prophecies the belief allocation chart is constructed using the colour coding and the subjective belief allocation weights which emerge from the consideration of the prophecies. As can be seen in the revised chart below some prophecies seem more credible than others. They all receive a degree of credibility, but there are corresponding levels of doubt. Subsequent thinking, reflection, analysis, attention to authorities, could change the weights dramatically for iteration 3. As the figure stands for iteration 2 there seems to be sufficient warrant for considering that there is a reasonable tilt towards theism in these prophecies (or at least some of these prophecies) for a single day.

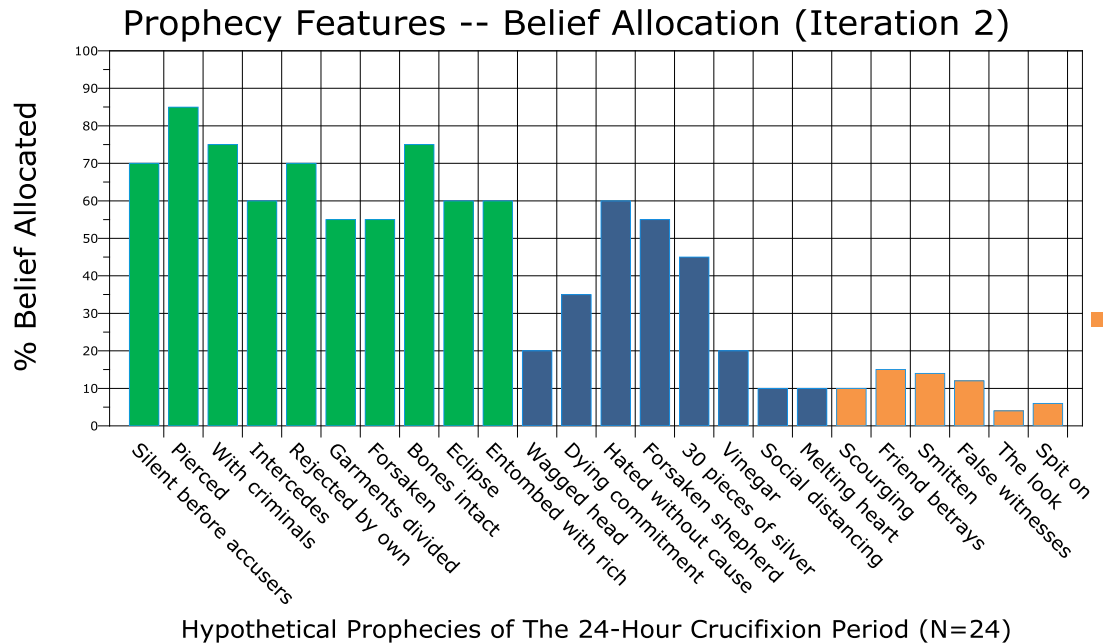


Figure 10. Belief allocation, after reflection, to various prophecies regarding the 24-hour period surrounding the crucifixion.

### Iteration 3

In a third iteration a number of the prophecies get an increase in belief allocation. Why? The reason is twofold. First, there is the continued application of *reasoning* as seen in the [Judicial Stance](#) argued above. Second, there are *reflections* related to an involvement of authorities; not authorities looking at these particular prophecies, but authorities looking at particular prophecies. To illustrate, Sandoval (2010) offers a critique of the prophecy relating to the destruction of Tyre. His critique claims to show that the prophecy fails. However Manweiler's (1988/2001) analysis is more nuanced and it seems there is a pretty sound argument that claims of failure, such as that proposed by Sandoval (2010), actually fail, or falter, upon closer inspection. Consequently, the Tyre prophecy can be seen to have good credibility, with potential problems explained. The critique of the serious skeptic falters when an alternate explanation is offered. Generally, this serves to bolster credibility, or a tentative openness, for other prophecies as well. Open mindedness increases mindfulness. It leaves one with the sense that there is often a case for allocating further credibility upon deeper inspection. This confidence itself can serve to place a little confidence in other prophecies. Thus, several of the prophecies for a single day gain some credibility by virtue of the fact that other prophecies are seen to gain credibility with further analysis. There is a rise in confidence.

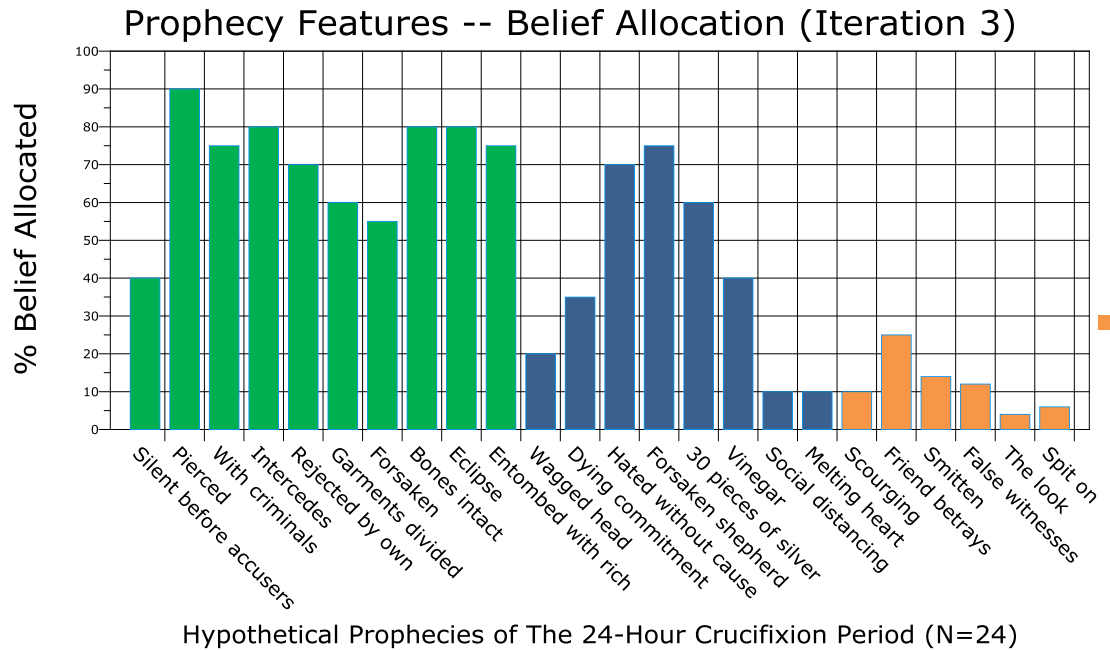


Figure 11. Belief allocation to various prophecies, after further reflection, regarding the 24-hour period surrounding the crucifixion.

What’s the conclusion? Some of these prophecies considered here are striking. Maybe the prophecies are not technically evidentially convincing; but they strike one as sufficient to offer a tilt towards a positive consideration of prophecy, to remind one of the importance of a virtue-epistemology with respect to prophecy, and to tilt one further towards Christian theism. Here I would reiterate the same conclusions itemized earlier when considering prophecy.

Some Conclusions

1. Prophecy is likely a post-hoc evidential-charism. Prophecies are for insiders not outsiders, as a rule. Prophecy is more likely “informing” for those purposively and volitionally available (see Moser, 2008, 2010) rather than for those seeking simply spectator evidence. Yes, there are times when a prophecy is directed towards an outsider, but that is usually in the form of a judgment or enticement<sup>1</sup>. If prophecies are gifts to the church this may explain partially the paucity problem. The gifts are distributed with a purpose.
2. Prophecies serve to build both faith (knowledge, assent and trust) and knowledge structures (scientific understanding and existential wisdom). Standing in the presence of a

<sup>1</sup> Prophecy can serve as data at some levels: (1) seed-evidence, that is, curiosity-inducing evidence, (2) evidential-charism, that is, gifting for certain individuals, with the purpose of edifying (informing and wisdom-generating), (3) semiotic, that is signaling of transcendence and direction, or (4) knowledge-building, that is, knowing God at a deeper level.



prophecy cluster is a privileged position; one sees something about God, His activity in history, His power, His purpose, His concern, and His gifting. And, one sees something about God's creation.

3. Reflection on prophecies encountered does lead to a tilt towards theism. Study of prophecy clusters leads to a stronger tilt. There is a cumulative case (Swinburne, 2004) that builds across the accretion of prophecies examined.
4. Then further, prophecies contribute to the cumulative case that builds across the accretion of all evidences (see Swinburne, 2004).