

**"Insuppressible Fallacy-
Mongers"**

C. S. Lewis

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Title quote from E. M. McDonald,
Design Argument Fallacies

Requiem for Lewis

Preface

"For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me.... But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46 & 47)

In an early attempt at philosophy, I wrote that, according to naturalism, if it exists it is natural. Events themselves don't prove or disprove naturalism; naturalism is chosen prior to reckoning. I incorporated the last sentence into my book *Stubborn Credulity*. I used the back cover of the book (which, of course, is not included in digital versions) to defend my position. It seems now that I should have digressed a little more in the body of the text, where it counted. In the text, I hinted at the idea that my position was, arguably, the Christian one. Didn't Jesus say, through his parable, that "if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31)?

Isn't he saying that presuppositions matter? He is, at the very least, saying that.

"Naturalism entail[s] atheism."¹

"[T]heists are committed to the denial of naturalism, and naturalists are committed to the denial of theism."² "What Naturalism cannot accept is the idea of a God who stands outside Nature and made it."³ Can you tell by the above quotes whether the author is a believer or an unbeliever? The last statement was provided by none other than C. S. Lewis. I wish to focus our attention on his early work for the remainder of this Preface. I believe that, in the early days at least, he inadvertently did atheists a favor.

First, some background. I have been saying and writing for some time now that events themselves don't prove or disprove naturalism; naturalism is chosen prior to reckoning. I think now that I misspoke. I can't mean that something—anything—is *chosen* prior to *all* thinking. Perhaps, I should have written "adopted" instead of "chosen". I, however, don't believe that I missed the mark

by that much. Coming from a social science background, I was aware of what have been referred to as visions. A vision, according to the economist Joseph Schumpeter, is a "pre-analytic cognitive act".⁴ Certainly, what is true about a vision is even more the case with respect to what Lewis referred to as a "preconception".⁵ Lewis was concerned about whether he could "trust [his] own thinking to be true."⁶ It is ironic, then, that he directed attention toward the one act that is, arguably, anterior to all thinking.

Let's begin with what should be a famous passage (at least among philosophers of religion) from the sermon (not the book) "Miracles". According to Lewis,

[S]eeing is not believing.... Whatever experiences we may have, we shall not regard them as miraculous if we already hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural. Any event which is claimed as a miracle is, in the last resort, an experience received from the senses; and the senses are not infallible.

We can always say we have been the victims of an illusion; if we disbelieve in the supernatural this is what we always shall say. Hence, whether miracles have really ceased or not, they would certainly appear to cease in Western Europe as materialism became the popular creed. For let us make no mistake. If the end of the world appeared in all the literal trappings of the Apocalypse, if the modern materialist saw with his own eyes the heavens rolled up and the great white throne appearing, if he had the sensation of being himself hurled into the Lake of Fire, he would continue forever, in that lake itself, to regard his experience as an illusion and to find the explanation of it in psycho-analysis, or cerebral pathology.... Experience proves this, or that, or nothing, according to the preconceptions we bring to it.⁷

Atheists may wish to deny that what Lewis said about materialists applies to themselves, but, frankly, I am not sure why or if they should. As I

explained in an earlier work, naturalism "can lead to false negatives." I discussed the consequentialist arguments for naturalism there. As noted there, I got one of them secondhand from Lewis's sermon.⁸

To further show why the sermon, as opposed to the book, "Miracles" is one the most reasonable and insightful of Lewis's works, I'd like to draw attention to a debate between William Lane Craig and Keith Parsons. The relevant part is a discussion about the miraculous:

Craig: What I fear from your response is that this watchword, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," is really just an excuse for an *a priori* rejection of the miraculous because you weren't—you didn't give any sort of evidence that would satisfy you with respect to one of these extraordinary claims and made it sound like—to me, you were saying that nothing would convince you no matter...

Parsons (interrupting): All sorts of things would convince me...

Craig (interrupting): Well, with respect to the resurrection, though, I mean, you, instead of—if there was a video camera, you would say it was a fake stone that was rolled away.... [audience applause] What sort of...

Parsons (interrupting): The more reasonable hypothesis under the circumstances.

Craig: But, see that's what I fear. It is—it's just an *a priori* rejection of the miraculous here. You're not—there isn't any kind of literary testimony, historical testimony that would convince you.

Parsons: Once again—common sense. If we appeal to court cases—in court, on what basis do we believe certain testimony? We believe testimony often on how likely or unlikely we think it is that somebody is telling the truth. On the basis of all sorts of [?]

circumstances. Now, in court cases, generally speaking, there are no claims of supernatural action. There are no claims to anything occurring which was physically impossible or against the laws of nature, however one wants to phrase it.... Yet we still judge guilt or innocence and send people to the—to execution or not on the basis of what we consider to be likely or unlikely on the given circumstances.... So once again, ... "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" in no way implies a bias against the supernatural. It is simply an application of a rule which we use in our daily lives.

Craig: But you're saying that these—when you say "extraordinary," really what you're saying is "No amount of evidence would—could convince me of these extraordinary claims."

Parsons: Sure it would. If tomorrow morning, immediately after breakfast, suddenly there was an earthquake, you

know, and a silvery light shown from the sky, and the leaves dropped from the trees, and I dashed outside, and there towering over us like a[n] [?] Everest was this giant figure with lightning flaying around from his Michaelangeloid face, and he pointed down and said, "Be assured, Keith M. Parsons, that I do, in fact, exist, and I'm sick of your logic-chopping." Uh, Dr. Craig, I would join you in the front pew of the church the next Sunday.⁹

[applause]

Craig: You don't think that you would have said, "Boy! I was having an [sic] hallucination."

[roaring applause¹⁰]

Parsons: Not if you saw it too. You know, then [cross-talk] I'm assuming five hundred brethren...

Craig (interrupting): You appeal to multiple...

Parsons: I'm assuming that it's on the evening news, that [?] goes to see it, you know, that sort of thing. In that case, it would be like what David Hume says—that there was a darkness over the earth for eight days, and all nations and all languages, that sort of thing. In that case, if that's a hallucination, everything's a hallucination.

Whether any of our sense data constitutes proof of something extra-mental (veridical) is an issue that Lewis addressed. Some discussion of that topic will be saved for later. What concerns us for the moment is Parsons's criterion for deciding when he's hallucinating and when he's not. Surprisingly, Parsons never really denied Craig's accusation;¹¹ he just said that he would reject the hallucination hypothesis if the experience was inter-subjective. Because Parsons did concede quite a bit to Craig, it's not much of a stretch for even an unbeliever to agree with Lewis up to this point.

Before moving on, it should be noted that Lewis never stopped viewing naturalism as

a presupposition. Perhaps I should have written that naturalism was contracted, in the sense of a disease, prior to thinking: "[T]he mere idea of a New Nature, a Nature beyond nature, a systematic and diversified reality which is 'supernatural' in relation to the world of our five present senses but 'natural' from its own point of view, is profoundly shocking to a certain philosophical preconception from which we all suffer.... We are prepared ... for the sort of reality that Naturalists believe in. That is a one-floor reality: this present Nature is all that there is."¹² Although I don't agree that naturalism is as widely accepted as Lewis seemed to indicate (The vast majority of people believe in God if I'm not mistaken), I think that it's useful to think of naturalism as a preconception or presupposition.

Returning now to the sermon: Lewis was determined to prove the existence of the Nature beyond Nature ("Supernature"). As I hope to show, here, we are free to part ways with him because his arguments fail. One of Lewis's worst blunders is an early version of

what is known as the Argument from Reason.¹³
He included it in his sermon:

The belief in ... a supernatural reality itself can neither be proved nor disproved by experience. The arguments for its existence are metaphysical, and to me conclusive. They turn on the fact that even to think and act in the natural world we have to assume something beyond it and even assume that we partly belong to that something. In order to think we must claim for our own reasoning a validity which is not credible if our own thought is merely a function of our brain, and our brains a by-product of irrational physical processes.¹⁴

If the above sounds like sophistry, it is because it is. Even an author sympathetic to Lewis had to agree that "in his [Lewis's] original argument against naturalism Lewis failed to distinguish between irrational and non-rational causes."¹⁵ As an anonymous blogger observed, "evolution is not 'irrational'. Evolution is not a process of

thought and therefore cannot be rational or irrational."¹⁶ Even if we replaced "irrational" with "non-rational," the argument is still fallacious. As I hope to demonstrate in the body of this work, Lewis confused non-rational (ultimate) causes with "not rational" opinions. I suspect that he didn't know the difference between "non-rational causes produce his opinions" and "he has non-rational opinions." (The fact that he often used another ambiguous word, "mindless," gave the game away.¹⁷ Keep reading for examples.) Lewis tried to salvage his argument. In that long process, he made additional errors. He never gave up.

Requiem

I would like to discuss C. S. Lewis's writings and speeches in chronological order. Unfortunately, a very important speech is of uncertain date but can be roughly dated to the early forties. Because of its importance, I will discuss it first. In the speech, Lewis taught that inference or reasoning was a way to give us empirical knowledge. Kant, I believe, acknowledged such reasoning and called it

"anticipation of perception."¹⁸ According to Lewis, "We find that matter always obeys the same laws which our logic obeys. When logic says a thing must be so, Nature always agrees."¹⁹ Reasoning almost totally eclipsed presuppositions in Lewis's work from that point on, as far as I can tell. Before delving into why I personally find this development to be unfortunate, let's consider what mainstream philosophers believe about the veracity of statements. I am going to reproduce some of what my professor and his colleague wrote. Before deciphering what will look like jargon to many, it should be clarified that philosophers use words in counter-intuitive ways. When people think of the word "synthetic," they think it is synonymous with "fake". To philosophers, however, "synthetic" means roughly the same thing as "true". Keep that in mind for just a little longer. The following table, included in a book co-authored by my professor, is the best pedagogical tool for explaining the different types of statements we may encounter in our daily lives:

	Analytic	Synthetic
Apriori	A	B
Aposteriori	C	D

As the authors explained, "the columns are headed by the concepts of analytic and synthetic, which depicts whether application to the real world is in force: no in the former case, yes in the latter. In contrast, the rows are labeled Apriori and Aposteriori, which categorizes ways of knowing, or epistemology. Here, the former means logic, the latter through experience."²⁰ Synthetic Aposteriori statements are just true statements derived from experience. Everyone uses statements from that category. Analytic Aposteriori statements don't exist.²¹ Analytic Apriori statements do exist, but they are about "purely definitional matters". That leaves us with Synthetic Apriori. These statements can't be denied without self-contradiction, yet they "apply to the real world." The authors mentioned that it is the "cornerstone of logical

positivism ... that B [Synthetic Apriori] ... is a null set."²²

References

¹ Evan Fales, "Naturalism and Physicalism," *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) p. 118

² Graham Oppy, "Lowe on 'The Ontological Argument,'" *Debating Christian Theism*, eds. J.P. Moreland et al (Oxford UP, 2013) p. 72

³ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* Revised (1960; HarperOne, 2001) p. 11

⁴ quoted in Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions* Revised Edition (Basic Books, 2007) p. 4

⁵ C. S. Lewis, "Miracles," *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) p. 26

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1948) p. 32

⁷ C. S. Lewis, "Miracles," *God in the Dock* pp. 25 & 26

⁸ Jonathan Giardina, *Stubborn Credulity: A Contribution to a Critique of Supernaturalism* (CreateSpace, 2019) pp. 183 & 184

⁹ See chapter 1 of Keith Parsons, *God and the Burden of Proof* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1989) for a full discussion.

¹⁰ Pro-Craig youtube videos end here.

¹¹ He said, "Not if you saw it too," suggesting that if only he saw it, then he *would* conclude that he was hallucinating.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* Revised p. 251

¹³ John Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 58

¹⁴ Lewis, "Miracles," *God in the Dock* p. 27

¹⁵ Victor Reppert's position in John Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* Revised and Updated (Amherst: Prometheus, 2007) p. 178

¹⁶ Author, "Three Presuppositionalist Arguments from C.S. Lewis,"

<www.strongatheism.net/library/counter_apologetics/presup_arguments_from_lewis/> accessed 2/11/2019

¹⁷ S. T. Joshi's comment "the argument ... is an argument of *words*, not of *facts*" seems applicable (*God's Defenders*, Amherst: Prometheus, 2003, 110 & 111).

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Amherst: Prometheus, 1990) pp. 117 & 118

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, "De Futilitate," *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (1967; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992) p. 64

²⁰ William Barnett II & Walter E. Block, *Essays in Austrian Economics* (New York: Ishi Press, 2012) p. 8

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Amherst: Prometheus, 1990) p. 7

²² William Barnett II & Walter E. Block, *Essays in Austrian Economics* p. 9