

# BIBLICAL AND THEISTIC ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EVOLUTIONARY ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURALISM

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*Abstract.* Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism states that evolution cannot produce warranted beliefs. In contrast, according to Plantinga, Christian theism provides (I) properly functioning cognitive faculties in (II) an appropriate cognitive environment, in accordance with (III) a design plan aimed at producing true beliefs. But does theism fulfill criteria I–III? Judging from the Bible, God employs deceit in his relations with humanity, rendering our cognitive functions unreliable (I). Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that God's purpose would be to produce true beliefs in humans (III). Finally, from the theistic/religious perspective, it is impossible to tell whether observations have natural or supernatural causes, which undermines an appropriate cognitive environment (II). Reliable identification of deceit or miracles could alleviate these problems, but the theistic community has failed to resolve this issue. Dismissal of parts of the Bible, or attempts to find alternative interpretations, would collapse into skepticism or deism. Thus, Plantinga's problem of epistemic warrant backfires on theism.

*Keywords:* cognitive functions; deception; evolution; evolutionary argument against naturalism; miracles; naturalism; Alvin Plantinga; supernatural intervention; theism

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The evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN) proposed by Alvin Plantinga (1994; 2008) is an influential claim asserting that beliefs based on naturalism in general and evolution in particular would not be warranted. The EAAN is also cited by creationist authors to support their dismissal of evolutionary theory (Weinberger 2007; Puolimatka 2009, 614–15). The argument states that, given naturalism and modern evolutionary theory,

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natural selection operates on the neurophysiological components of an organism (Plantinga 2008, 36–40), selecting for adaptive properties. Even though some of those structures would be complex enough to give rise to beliefs, the beliefs themselves would not affect fitness and thus not be a target of natural selection. Beliefs would be “invisible” to evolution. If a belief has no effect on survival, there is no reason to expect it to be true, so the probability of its being true would be random, for instance, fifty percent. Given evolutionary naturalism, it would therefore be very unlikely for us to have a preponderance of true beliefs within our belief system. Plantinga (2008, 40) states that “natural selection selects for structures that have adaptive neurophysiological properties; as it happens, these structures are of sufficient complexity to generate content; but there isn’t even the faintest reason to think that content true. . . . Given naturalism, the belief in question is as likely to be false as to be true.” This means that, ultimately, naturalism is self-defeating and should be discarded.

How does the EAAN work? First, Plantinga (2008, 12–13, 19) claims that, within the naturalist framework, organisms and their adaptations would not have “proper function,” as this by definition requires design by an intelligent agent. Second, by using a slippery slope argument (Dowden 2015), Plantinga (2008, 19, 30) claims that naturalism leads to doubt about one’s own cognitive faculties; that is, accepting naturalism provides a *defeater* for reliable beliefs: “if you have a defeater for the belief that your faculties are reliable, then you also have a defeater for each of the beliefs produced by those faculties; you therefore have a defeater for each of your beliefs. That means that you have a defeater for your belief in naturalism itself; hence naturalism is self-defeating.”

*Criticism of EAAN.* Plantinga’s argument has been criticized in detail from the viewpoints of natural sciences and philosophy of science. Within the field of evolutionary science, critics admit that organisms can be deceived, although not to the degree that Plantinga’s argument would suggest (Ruse 2004; Boudry 2013). Several authors have criticized Plantinga for attaching “low or inscrutable” probability values to evolution’s capability of producing true beliefs without any empirical support. For example, Branden Fitelson and Elliott Sober (1998) have argued that his probability arguments are vague and would require more specific probabilities. Others have argued that evolution actually does care about truth (Law 2012; Wilkins and Griffiths 2013; Boudry and Vlerick 2014), because every organism needs to be able to navigate its environment in a reasonably reliable manner: organisms need a representation of the world that is accurate enough for survival and reproduction. Systematically wrong beliefs would thus be mostly selected against according to evolutionary theory. Recently, researchers have investigated the possibility of “adaptive misbelief,” that is, beliefs that are biologically adaptive despite their falsity. For example,

unrealistic perceptions of one's capabilities and talents, as well as unwarranted optimism about the future, could lead to higher performance and thus be fitness-enhancing. Even if adaptive misbeliefs exist, however, they remain rare, and no single category of adaptive misbelief is undisputed. By and large, as Ryan McKay and Daniel Dennett (2009) argue, true belief pays off, and adaptive misbeliefs may be the exceptions that prove the rule.

Critics of Plantinga's argument also note that although our cognitive faculties are indeed fallible and can sometimes give rise to false beliefs, Plantinga presents too strong a dichotomy, making either all of our beliefs or none of them reliable (Boudry and Vlerick 2014). In fact, it has long been known that our cognitive faculties are sometimes prone to biases (Nickerson 1998; Schacter, Guerin, and St. Jacques 2011; Wilson and French 2014), but these biases can only be detected against a background of accurate and reliable belief formation. If our biases were as pervasive as Plantinga suggests, scientists could not even investigate them, because they could never be escaped from.

William J. Talbott (2002) has also examined the EAAN and concludes that its definition of rationality depends too heavily on our past errors. However, rationality encompasses the capability of entertaining new hypotheses in the light of new evidence. Similarly, Michael Levin (1997) has noted that although we can be misled by our faculties, "we can find this out and correct for it by comparing the predictions of our theories to observation." In addition to assessing our individual cognitive faculties, Plantinga also disregards the quality of collective cultural knowledge and the improvement this brings through experimentation and observation (Childers 2011). Hence, even the very "belief that one's perceptual faculties are unreliable can be rationally revised in the light of appropriate perceptual evidence" (Talbott 2002). William Ramsey (2002) has noted that some cases of unreliable cognition are predicted by the theory of evolution, precisely because evolution is unguided and subject to several constraints. Evolution is a satisficing process that finds imperfect but workable solutions to adaptive problems. By contrast, this pattern would not be expected of intelligently designed organisms. Thus, the existence of cognitive biases could backfire against theism.

In response to the claim that true beliefs are adaptive, Plantinga (2002, 8–9) has discussed the possibility of evolutionarily adaptive or fitness-enhancing but still false beliefs. For Plantinga, beliefs can be false but still useful, for example, a person could believe that hazardous phenomena are caused by witchcraft but their avoidance would still be beneficial regardless of the false belief. Critics have argued that Plantinga relies on contrived examples, and has failed to show how false beliefs can be systematically adaptive (Fales 2002; Boudry and Vlerick 2014). In addition, Plantinga (2002, 10) admits that it would be useless to calculate exact probabilities for truth values but simultaneously claims that vague estimates would be

sufficient for the EAAN. He asserts that it is hard “given materialism, to envisage a way in which the content of a belief could get causally involved in behavior” and reinforces his claim that the evolutionarily produced physiological faculties producing beliefs would not be reliable.

*New Arguments against EAAN.* Although the naturalistic or philosophical criticism of Plantinga’s claims has produced a large amount of philosophical debate, the issue of the theistic alternative is scarcely scrutinized. Fitelson and Sober (1998) have noted that a theist is faced with a similar skeptical predicament and cannot just presuppose “the fact that the human mind was designed by a God who is no deceiver.” This would lead to the same type of global skepticism that Plantinga accuses naturalism of. While Fitelson and Sober (1998) do not examine this possibility further, we shall concentrate on this issue in detail, starting with Plantinga’s (2008, 3) presumptions about the qualities of the God in his argument. He assumes that his God is rational, omniscient, and omnipotent, and that the Bible is an infallible source of true information: “a proper source of knowledge and justified belief” (Plantinga 1974, 26; 1991; 2008, 3–4). Accordingly, he holds Scripture in high esteem, stating that “no doubt science can correct our grasp of Scripture; but Scripture can also correct current science” (Plantinga 1991).

We aim to analyze Christian theism in the form associated with Plantinga’s EAAN (holding the Christian belief system as a reliable source of knowledge) as well as a more general tenet of theism (supernatural intervention) to see if these worldviews would produce warranted beliefs. It is one thing to show that Plantinga’s argument fails to undermine naturalism. It would be even more interesting to show that it backfires against his own worldview. We decided to investigate the Bible as such and to see if the divine attributes described therein provide any epistemic warrant for our beliefs. God’s characteristics, as presented in Biblical texts, are relevant for Plantinga’s argument, as he accepts that the Bible is the word of God (see also Plantinga 1992). The specific aim of this essay is to assess Plantinga’s argument as follows: If we accept his claim that evolutionary naturalism is self-defeating, does the theistic worldview fare any better? Does (Christian) theism offer us a way out of global skepticism or does it fall prey to the same problems? We assessed this by (1) examining the Biblical texts for instances that would jeopardize the warrants for proper beliefs and by (2) discussing the theistic/religious worldview regarding supernatural events and miracles and their effects on the possibility of producing reproducible scientific patterns or theories.

#### CHRISTIAN THEISM AS A WARRANT FOR TRUE BELIEFS?

In the context of the EAAN, Plantinga (2008, 11–12) suggests that Christian theism would offer a reliable foundation for our beliefs and

science. He argues that because God governs the world, ensuring constancy and natural regularity, science and technology are possible and humans can act and learn (Plantinga 2008, 4). This means that “theism is . . . not only hospitable to science, but enthusiastic about it.” Furthermore, theism would produce reliable knowledge in contrast to mere belief. This would require epistemic warrant. Plantinga includes several prerequisites for proper warrant:

- I. A belief is warranted if it is produced by *properly functioning cognitive faculties* (we will call this clause I).
- II. Cognitive faculties must be in *an appropriate cognitive environment* (e.g., not affected by hallucinogenic gases; clause II).
- III. The processes producing beliefs must have *a purpose to produce true beliefs*. There must be an underlying *design plan successfully aimed at truth* (clause III).

As a result, the belief-producing process “will constitute knowledge.” According to Plantinga, all this is realized in theism in general and in Christianity in particular. Thus, in the Christian context (if Christian theism is true), beliefs produced by our cognitive faculties would be warranted. This is in contrast with naturalistic theories, such as the Big Bang, thinking about which brings us “close to the limits of our cognitive powers; it is then very easy for us to make mistakes” (Plantinga 2008, 14).

#### THE EAAN FROM THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

We concentrate here first (1) on Christian theism, which accepts the Bible as a principal source of its knowledge about God/designer, and then (2) more generally on the theistic or religious worldview that accepts supernatural intervention, that is, miracles as real events that can shape the world and individual lives. According to Plantinga (2008, 13–14), the Christian God designs appropriate cognitive faculties in a suitable environment with a design aimed at truth. In our analysis, we follow the assumption that the Christian creator God would be omnipotent and omniscient, in line with the Christian tradition and also as endorsed by Plantinga (2008, 3), and that uses supernatural means to create and to intervene in history.

For the Biblical (Christian) worldview to give more confidence in our cognitive faculties than naturalism, clauses I–III of Plantinga (2008, 11–12) should find support in the Bible, if it is considered a source of information about the characteristics of the Christian deity. In other words, assuming the Christian framework as revealed in its sacred texts, we should be able to trust our senses and our reasoning faculties, as provided to us by the alleged creator. We should also be confident in trusting the information provided by our surroundings (appropriate environment), or at least be able to recognize potentially flawed information (purpose to produce

true beliefs). Thus, if our beliefs and scientific research were based on the Christian worldview instead of naturalism, we should also be able to trust the source of rationality, the divine creator. But is this picture compatible with the Bible?

In fact, we find several instances where the Biblical God deceives people. Regarding the Old Testament, this takes place, for example, via God's prophets deceiving people with apparently false information. In the New Testament, direct deceit by God in the form of delusion is expressed. For our examples, we quote the King James Version, which remains an influential translation and is also referred to by Plantinga (2000, 218, 255). He cites, in addition, at least the New International Version (NIV; e.g., Plantinga 2000, 211), so crucial parts of the quotes are also given in their NIV form. Some examples (our emphasis is in *italic* typeface) are as follows (King James Bible; pivotal parts also quoted from the NIV):

1 Kings 22:20–23: And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and *I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets*. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, *the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee*. [NIV: I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets . . . So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours.]

2 Chronicles 18:22: Now therefore, behold, *the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets*, and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee. [NIV: So now the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouths of these prophets of yours.]

Isaiah 19:14: *The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit* in the midst thereof: and *they have caused Egypt to err* in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit. [NIV: The LORD has poured into them a spirit of dizziness; they make Egypt stagger.]

Isaiah 37:6–7: And Isaiah said unto them, Thus shall ye say unto your master, Thus saith the LORD, Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, *I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumour, and return to his own land*; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. [NIV: When he hears a certain report, I will make him want to return to his own country.]

Jeremiah 4:10: Then said I, *Ah, Lord GOD! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people* and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul. [NIV: Alas, Sovereign LORD! How completely you have deceived this people.]

Ezekiel 14:9: And *if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet*, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. [NIV: And if the prophet is enticed to utter a prophecy, I the LORD have enticed that prophet.]

Ezekiel 20:25–26: Wherefore *I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live*; And I polluted them in their own gifts, in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the LORD. [NIV: So I gave them other statutes that were not good and laws through which they could not live.]

2 Thessalonians 2:11–12: And for this cause *God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie*: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. [NIV: For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie.]

If we trust the Biblical narrative in these cases, we must accept that the data provided by our senses are not necessarily accurate. We could be deluded or deceived by God. In addition, we would not necessarily know how to discern the deception. Thus, within the Christian–theistic frame, there is a distinct possibility that God can deceive us directly or through His prophets.

- We can have false beliefs because of God’s deceit.
- God can give statutes that are “not good.”
- We are not always able to spot deceit.

If we now return to Plantinga’s (2008, 11–12) argument about true beliefs, it is possible to assess its validity within the Christian frame.

- Clause I: we should have properly functioning cognitive faculties. This is undermined by deception. If we cannot spot deception, we cannot be certain of our observations nor our beliefs. If the Biblical text is true, clause I fails.
- In the same manner, clause II fails. If a properly functioning cognitive environment is required for warranted beliefs (Plantinga [2008, 11] refers to “a subtle gas pervading the atmosphere” causing the environment to be unsuitable for proper cognition), deception creates an environment that is unreliable, because it might contain unreal sensory input (delusions), and so on.
- Clause III does not survive either as, in contrast to a design plan “aimed at truth,” divine actions in the Bible include the possibility of deception.

Based on this, we must conclude that if we believe that the Christian faith is true and based on the Bible, and that the Bible is reliable, there remains a distinct possibility of deceit, which we would not be capable of discerning. Within the Christian–theistic worldview, this conclusion yields Biblical support to the notion of Fitelson and Sober (1998) mentioned above, that there are no guarantees against a deceiver–God. In line with this conclusion, Massimo Pigliucci (2013) mentions that within Christian theism “there

are a number of respects in which God did not bother to make us similar to himself,” and we should not simply assume that the reliability of beliefs would be among the similarities. James Van Cleve (2002, 124) has similarly argued that if a human being is made in God’s image while “falling far short of God in power and goodness,” it is possible that “he might fall equally short in the reliability of his cognitive faculties.” Evan Fales (2002, 55) also points out, in line with our analysis, that there are different—mythical or historical—interpretations of, for example, Genesis and Exodus, and that the theist should not simply assume that our cognitive faculties would be “good ones in their limited way.”

Plantinga (2002, 11) himself has raised the possibility of a “Cartesian demon” as a hypothetical creator. He states: “Suppose . . . I have been created by an evil Cartesian demon who takes delight in fashioning creatures who have mainly false beliefs . . . then I have a defeater for my natural belief that my faculties are reliable.” Based on the analysis of just a few Biblical verses, the possibility of God being Plantinga’s “Cartesian demon” producing false beliefs cannot be excluded. In this manner, the theistic approach to the reliability of our beliefs has no absolute warrants. As there are no limits to the level and ingenuity of deception that an omnipotent being is capable of, the Christian approach faces problems that are at least as serious as those of the naturalistic approach.

*Potential Counterarguments.* The assertion that theism produces reliable, “true beliefs” could, perhaps, be salvaged if some issues were resolved. (1) If we could spot deceit or predict situations where it occurs, maybe we could dismiss it as an insignificant possibility. Furthermore, (2) if the Biblical verses suggestive of divine deceit would not affect theistic scholars, such as Plantinga, or (3) if the instances where deceit is mentioned could be explained away by Biblical scholars in a rational manner, then the EAAN would potentially have more support.

While some verses mentioned above indicate that people could be victims of divine lies, it could be argued that deceit is only aimed at sinners/unbelievers/enemies of God (Clarke 1980, 330; Greenberg 1983, 368–369; Gorday 2000, 113) and that a sufficient level of Christian–theistic faith would no longer make one a target of potential deceit. This, however, easily leads into the “no true Scotsman” fallacy, which Bradley Dowden (2015) defines as an “*ad hoc* rescue of one’s generalization in which the reasoner re-characterizes the situation solely in order to escape refutation of the generalization.” For example, a member of a religion/belief system who has committed a violent act is easily dismissed as not being “a true follower” of that religion. In Plantinga’s case, the definitions of “adequate” faith would be extremely difficult to construct: those who have enough faith are not deceived, and the ones who are deceived must not have had enough faith. Even if the scholar regarded him/herself as theistic



and obedient to his/her beliefs, it would be very hard to assess objectively that he/she is good enough a Christian not to be affected by delusions. Is not everyone burdened with original sin, as Christian doctrine stipulates? Is it not presumptuous to think that one is among the few “pure” believers, untainted by sin and free from divine deception? The Christian worldview warns against such hubris and human vanity (e.g., Philippians 2:3–4). Problems also arise when trying to construct a method for recognizing deception. If no deception is apparent, does that mean that God has spared us? In fact, the impression of not being deceived may itself be a part of God’s deceptive plans. The most thorough form of deception is one in which the victim is blissfully unaware of being deceived. Of course, it is hard to demonstrate that it is impossible for a theist and a proponent of the EAAN to escape from this skeptical predicament. In any case, we invite them to formulate reliable methods to determine who could fall victim to divine deception.

We acknowledge that the Biblical texts can and do offer many alternative interpretations that are sometimes mutually incompatible. For instance, the first chapter of the Bible (Genesis 1) has produced both the doctrine of young-earth creationism, with a literal creation within six days approximately 6,000 years ago, old-earth creationism that interprets Biblical “days” as long periods of time, and various metaphorical interpretations for the proponents of intelligent design and theistic evolution (reviewed in Nieminen and Mustonen 2014; Nieminen, Mustonen, and Ryökäs 2014; Nieminen, Ryökäs, and Mustonen 2015). The texts selected above concentrate on the possibility of the Biblical deity having qualities that would not be compatible with the development of true beliefs. Interpreting these passages as metaphorical is certainly a possibility, but this would not save Plantinga’s (2008) argument. Instead, it would make the theistic approach perhaps even more difficult, because accepting different interpretations as equally valid would give us another defeater for reliable beliefs. It would lead us into a predicament in which the possibility of arriving at reliable conclusions about sacred texts would be low, which means that there would be no reasons to favor belief in a trustworthy deity over a deceptive deity. This is the same skeptical situation that Plantinga attributes to naturalism *cum* evolution.

Dismissing or disregarding the Bible verses containing deception will not do. While they may not be considered the most significant ones regarding Christian faith, there are quite a few Biblical scholars who accept them as involving actual deception. This is exemplified by the Isaiah verses, where deceivers are defined as spirits sent by Yahweh causing delusion/confusion (Wildberger 1997, 256; 2002, 403–404), and the Ezekiel examples referring to “the shocking idea that God misleads those who anger him into sin” (Greenberg 1983, 369). Ralph W. Klein (2012, 265) suggests that in the 2 Chronicles verse “Yahweh himself has sent out that lying spirit,” and

a commentary by James W. Clarke (1980, 330) on 2 Thessalonians also mentions deliberate delusion caused by God: “there has come upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false. This delusion has come from God.” We acknowledge that there might be several interpretations among Biblical scholars regarding these verses. However, simply dismissing them or interpreting them as metaphorical would also undermine Biblical theism, as this would eventually lead to skepticism about the truth value of the Bible. Either the human scribe would have received erroneous information from God, he would have misunderstood it, or the message would have been distorted over time. Thus, warranted belief based on the Bible fails in any case and, if we apply Plantinga’s model to theism, would eventually lead to Biblical theism being self-defeating, once again similar to the situation described above. If Biblical scholars of various denominations cannot agree on the possibility of divine deceit, this alone makes the theistic alternative to naturalism suspicious and unreliable, instead of providing the warrant that Plantinga (2008, 11–12) is looking for. Furthermore, it is clear that Plantinga is expecting to find evidence in contrast to mere belief (Plantinga 2008, 4), making religious belief something that requires extrinsic proof. This sets Plantinga apart from those theologians who wish to keep religious faith and reason/evidence in their respective and mutually exclusive domains (Dawes 2015). In this essay, we follow the example of Gregory W. Dawes (2015), as we are critiquing the purported warrant of (Christian) theism, not religious faith itself.

But suppose that the Bible would not contain any verses suggestive of divine deception. Suppose that all the verses we mentioned were absent or that theologians could conveniently interpret them to apply only to the category of unbelievers or heretics who have angered God. Even that scenario would be of little comfort to the theist. If God really was prone to deception, why would he inform us about this in his revelation? Indeed, to do so seems to undercut the effectiveness of deception. If God really wanted to deceive us, he would remain silent about this in his revelation, pretending that he is wholly benevolent and wants us to know nothing but the truth. In other words, the fact that an omnipotent being presents himself as trustworthy and reliable in some revelation—supposing this being was really its author—does not give us ample reason to conclude that he is. The theist may object that the theist God is by definition benevolent, and that large-scale deception would not be compatible with this image of God. But to that we can retort along the lines of the classical theological response in the face of evil and suffering in the world: God may have reasons that we cannot fathom. For all we know, living in an illusion produced by divine delusion could really be for our own benefit. Perhaps, God knows that we cannot handle the truth, being only finite beings, and has therefore decided to subject us to a benign form of paternalistic deception? In short, once you posit the existence of invisible and omnipotent

beings, which by definition have unlimited powers of deception, all bets are off.

*Miracles, Rationality and Causality: General Theistic Arguments against EAAN.* Another issue that is central to the theistic or religious worldview is the supernatural involvement of a deity, Biblical God or other, in history and in people's lives, or a "God who can interfere at will in his creation and violate the natural order" (Boudry 2013). There are alleged supernatural apparitions, communication of texts, and miracles conjured up by a deity or transmitted through prophets. These phenomena are in contradiction to a rational view of the world governed by causal laws. It would be difficult to predict how natural phenomena proceed, for instance, looking at some Biblical examples, when the dead do not remain dead (Luke 7:13–15), a sea is parted (Exodus 14:21) or a rock brings forth water (Exodus 17:6). In addition, devout believers put forward assertions of miraculous experiences, for example, supernatural healing and protection. These occurrences violate physical laws and break the usual course of events determined by natural sciences and empirical evidence. This undermines the notion of a deity that prizes regularity and constancy (Plantinga 2008, 4) in His creation.

The possibility of supernatural intervention makes it impossible to rely on the laws of nature, as they can be broken or suspended by a deity at any given time. A similar notion has been expressed previously by Maarten Boudry (2013): "What reasons do we have . . . to assume that God will not act capriciously, that he will continue to sustain the natural order?" If we look at Plantinga's (2008, 11–12) conditions for warranted beliefs, this most effectively disproves clause II about a proper cognitive environment. Miracles that occur in an unpredictable fashion create an environment that is uncertain and beyond the rational rules of cause and effect. In addition, clause III is weakened, because supernatural intervention makes it difficult to form consistent, true beliefs. If scientific research were based on a worldview that includes the possibility of miracles, the laws described by science would not hold universally, as miracles could always overthrow the natural, lawful outcome. We would not be able to know

- if phenomena were natural based on the laws of physics or if they were supernatural deviations from the natural chain of causality;
- if a pattern of cause and effect can be deciphered, where similar conditions would sometimes lead to the expected outcome (e.g., a fatal disease not cured by prayer) and sometimes to a situation that defies natural laws due to supernatural intervention.

Potential counterarguments are quite similar to the ones introduced above in the context of supernatural deceit. If it was possible (1) to identify

miracles, at least a significant proportion of the time, and (2) to predict situations where supernatural intervention would be expected, miracles could be assessed rationally and in a statistical manner in scientific studies.

However, there is a controversy even about the concept of a miracle within theistic and religious communities. Some authors define them as violations of the laws of nature, while others claim that miracles suspend the laws of nature; and still others feel that even natural phenomena (rainfall, and so on) can sometimes be regarded as results of supernatural causation (Ward 2002; Driscoll 1911). The actual presence of miracles in the theistic and religious worldviews is hardly questioned. John T. Driscoll takes them to be “so interwoven with our religion, so connected with its origin, its promulgation, its progress and whole history, that it is impossible to separate them from it” (1911, 346). To make these alleged phenomena subjects of scientific study, they would need to have reliably testable effects. Usually, however, the identification of miracles is based on personal accounts and testimonials of eyewitnesses. This inevitably leads to a multitude of interpretations that have not been assessed in any systematic manner that would provide a tool to recognize supernatural intervention reliably. In addition, events can be taken to be supernatural although they are subtle and practically indistinguishable from the natural course of events (Boudry and De Smedt 2011). Thus, complex stochastic and chaotic processes (weather, success in sports), poorly understood phenomena (being cured from a disease), and alleged conjunctions of natural and supernatural causes (yielding additional strength for a duel) can make the presence of supernatural causality impossible to discern consistently. Indeed, the notion that God “moves in mysterious ways” can be seen as a form of divine deception again, with a deity disguising his miracles behind a screen of natural causes and effects. The deity, especially the Christian God, does not offer himself up for observation but instead moves about in subtle and indiscernible ways. This makes it impossible for us to determine with any confidence whether or not a miracle has taken place. For all we know, deities could be working miracles all the time, without us being aware of it. Therefore, this potential counterargument fails.

Or is it possible to imagine a situation where miracles take place in a predictable manner? For example, a certain disease or accident could be reversed by supernatural intervention if the patient/victim was innocent from the Christian point of view. This is quite similar to the possibility of finding out who would and would not fall victim to deception, as discussed above. Without any objective criterion for assessing Christian “innocence,” however, this could lead to the “no true Scotsman” fallacy (Dowden 2015). Again, we invite the proponents of the EAAN to elaborate on their claim by assessing the difficulties that supernatural intervention poses for their assertion. For example, being a “pure” or a “good” believer is no warrant against being the target of supernatural harassment.

Especially regarding Christian theism, the story of Job in the Old Testament describes a totally pious man experiencing supernaturally induced sickness and loss of family and fortune because of a capricious bet between God and Satan. In this case, even Biblically proven worthiness does not save Job from being the target of supernaturally induced tribulations admittedly inflicted by Satan but simultaneously allowed by the omnipotent God.

### CONCLUSIONS

When we examine the conditions for warranted beliefs that Plantinga (2008, 11–12) requires and attaches to Christian theism, we must discard them for the following reasons:

- Claim I: properly functioning cognitive faculties. The claim fails because of *deceit by God*.
- Claim II: an appropriate cognitive environment. The claim fails because of *deceit* and *supernatural intervention breaking the natural course of events*.
- Claim III: truthful design. The claim fails because of a design that includes *deceit* and *unpredictable breakdown of physical laws*.

The ability to identify deceit or to predict supernatural intervention could save the theist argument, but at present, no such methods have been provided in a manner that even the various Christians denominations would accept. Divergent interpretations of the relevant passages in the Bible only highlight the difficulty of arriving at a clear conception of God and the reliability of His communications to human senses. In contrast, within a naturalist framework, it is well known that our cognitive functions are sometimes unreliable, and we are starting to recognize situations where this arises. The theist may choose to dismiss divine deceit or supernatural intervention, but this would cause significant modifications to the Christian belief system, including the reliability of the Bible, the efficacy of prayer and God's supernatural participation in history. Theism would be reduced into deism—a God that never intervenes—which would essentially lead to the naturalistic worldview regarding sciences. This is not the God of Plantinga, as he clearly asserts that “The Christian community knows that God is constantly active in his creation, that natural laws, if there are any, are not independent of God” (Plantinga 1996). In the traditional Christian worldview, which accepts the Bible as authority, Plantinga's argument for warranted beliefs in Christian theism fails. If anything, in theism, we have even fewer reasons to believe that our cognitive faculties are reliable. The naturalist does not have to worry about divine deception and capricious supernatural invention. He/she can investigate the strengths and weaknesses

of our cognitive faculties by using these very faculties in a rational manner, bootstrapping his/her way out of the skeptical predicament. Naturalistic philosophers can tackle the problem of radical skepticism by using the scientific method. In a similar manner, theistic philosophers should face up to skeptical doubts, which are, if anything, even more pressing in their worldview than in that of the naturalists.

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