

EXPOSING THE EMPEROR'S NAKEDNESS

Why the Naturalists' Stonewall Against Debate with Intelligent Design is Logically Fallacious

Fifteen Examples

A major strategy of scientific naturalists in the creation/evolution controversy involves their refusal to grant advocates of Intelligent Design (ID) the dignity of a debate. Yet such snubbing of ID in the name of “protecting science,” merely echoes the boasting of Hans Christian Andersen’s haughty emperor.¹ Now science does need protection, and this writer stands in complete support of the scientific method. However, the naturalists’ claim that ID undermines science lacks solid foundation. It is time that the “emperor’s nakedness” be exposed.

Of course, it is legitimate in principle for naturalists to challenge the “God hypothesis,” even as it is legitimate for theists to rebut their challenge. But the naturalists’ stonewall against debate rests finally on a faulty sophistry and not reason. Naturalists are resorting to “*argumentum ad baculum*” (the fallacious *argument of the stick*) in an attempt to intimidate and censor ID dissenters. This, in spite of the fact that the latter includes hundreds of leading scientists.²

Since the question of a Creator is more philosophical and theological than it is scientific, scientists speak with no *special* competence on the *singular* question of God’s *intervention* in nature.³ Scientists are the experts on the relationship of events *within* nature, including questions of biochemical possibilities, of the *actual* (as opposed to *desired*) potentiality of natural selection to achieve a so-called evolutionary “goal,” and of the *actual* degree of conformity (or disconformity) of the fossil record to Darwinian predictions. And theism is rightly liable to the judgment of scientific analysis by its claim that a supernatural being has extended his activity into nature. Beyond that matter science has no authority. For all their expertise in their own fields as scientists, nothing Richard Dawkins knows from zoology, or Carl Sagan knew from astronomy, has qualified them to decree dogmatically that the material is all of *knowable* reality. They are amateurs on this *philosophical* matter, and so are obligated to logically ground their case rather than act as demagogues. Yet despite their bold assertions materialists have failed to produce a philosophically coherent and logically sound rationale for refusing debate with ID.⁴

Logic is neither trivial nor optional. It is the law of reasoned discussion. And reason demands that the opposition to debate be judged by

the canons of logic. My paper furthers the challenge of logic by secondly highlighting the *straw man* fallacy. Naturalists are seeking to circumvent debate with theists on the assertion that science and religion are, in the words of Stephen Jay Gould, “*non-overlapping magisteria*.”⁵ Yet Gould clearly misrepresents the latter in this matter. While he correctly states that science works within the sphere of nature and empirical fact, he **incorrectly** limits religion to the realm of subjective values.⁶ Building in part on this **erroneous definition** of Christianity, he argues that it is pointless to give theists a voice regarding origins. Yet, again, his distinction shows itself to rest on a religion of **his own invention**.

Clear attention to the nature of the naturalistic challenge is appropriate here. The philosophy Gould represents, **scientific naturalism**, holds that nature is the entirety of reality so that scientific inquiry is the *only* means for ascertaining fact. One variation, “methodological naturalism,” holds that whether or not God exists, science operates as if he does not. But that distinction is not important for this paper since creation is categorically excluded either way. Naturalists argue for total exclusion of “theistic tainting” from the question of beginnings. The *American Atheists* (AA) accurately encapsulates the naturalist position as follows:

“Because an intelligible use of the term “creation” must imply the existence of a “creator,” and because the creator of all of nature must be, quite literally, super-natural, we see that the fundamental force operating in “creation science” is a super-natural force—which is a polite term for magic. Science, however, involves the study of natural forces only, and ceases to be science when it attempts to explain phenomena by means of super-natural forces.”⁷

Before addressing a third fallacy I do concede one agreement I share with scientific naturalists. I too disagree with “young earth creationists” (YEC) who “do science” from their Bibles, that is, who demand that scientific study *begin* with the Bible and then force science’s findings to fit with their *interpretation* of it.⁸ Science is rather the **unhindered** study of nature, and moves between hypothesizing, *empirical* observation, and logical analysis. This has no bearing on whether Scripture can super-naturally tell the truth about nature. It can and does! But it also means that scientific *data* is ascertained by *empirical* study, not *Bible* study. Now having expressed disapproval of YEC, it is now appropriate to challenge the

naturalists' demand that *all* scientific hypotheses yield naturalistic causes. The dismissal of ID because misguided YEC embrace it commits the *genetic fallacy* (guilt by association). This fallacy dismisses an idea because of an irrelevant similarity with an unwelcome party, regardless of evidence. Now the real problem with YEC is not that they approach science from a belief system (**all** scientists do), but that they demand *in advance* of their investigation only one outcome⁹...which is exactly what naturalists demand!¹⁰

The fourth fallacy involves the **ambiguous** nature of the major premise in the AA argument which states that science considers only naturalistic causes. The minor premise says theistic causes are *supernatural*. The conclusion is there can be no intelligent Creator of nature. Now this illustrates the *non-sequitur* fallacy. One question crying for clarity is, is the naturalist making a claim about the extent of nature, or about the limitations of science? Yet in either case nothing from the conclusion logically follows from either premise. Regardless how naturalists delineate science or nature, their definition will be **irrelevant** to whether God can act in nature. What is at stake is not the overthrowing of normal cause and effect in nature since most theists (excepting YEC) are committed to the scientific method and the validity of established facts in nature.¹¹ The true source of contention is whether an intelligent being can cause nature or impact it *from the outside*. It is **deep seated confusion** to leap from naming (correctly) the material world as the *object* of science's study, to asserting dogmatically that God either doesn't exist, or that He can neither create nor impact nature. This is especially so in light of big bang cosmology pointing to an absolute beginning of the universe, and the dawning realization that language and information¹² and not mere complexity make up the DNA strand. Imagine a forensic scientist studying a corpse laying in his pool of blood at the end of an alley to determine the cause of death. What confidence should be engendered if the investigator decided in advance to rule out murder (an intelligent cause) and consider only death by natural causes? The *out-of-hand* rejection of a super-natural intelligence as a *potential* cause of the universe is just as absurd.

Theists add that the recent exclusion of religious insight from scientific inquiry exposes a failure to understand the history of science. It is no accident that the orderly scientific exploration of nature (as opposed to hit-and-miss inventions in Chinese culture, for example) began in a culture that believed God created the physical universe and called it "*good*" (Genesis 1:3). It was the scientists' belief in a rational and trustworthy

Creator that encouraged exploration of that nature they said must *therefore* be rational and knowable.¹³ Had there been no such confidence in an Intelligence who created both an orderly and an intelligible universe, science as we know it would likely not have been born at all.¹⁴ The occasional friction (often exaggerated) between certain scientists (Galileo, who did believe in God) and church authorities does nothing to overthrow the reality that faith in God grounded the scientific movement at the beginning.¹⁵

The fifth logical problem with the naturalistic stonewall involves an illegitimate use of the major premise in the attempt to prove their position. Their argument asserts that naturalistic conclusions alone are worthy of consideration on the claim that “nature is all there is.” Yet it is logically fallacious for scientific naturalists to guarantee their conclusion on matters of fact by means of definition only. The “*polite*” term for protecting a desired conclusion with a self-serving definition (see note 3) as the major premise, is “*begging the question.*”

A sixth logical problem with the naturalistic stonewall, is that it is *self-refuting*. Scientific Naturalism, even when espoused by advanced degree scientists, is nevertheless philosophy and not science.¹⁶ Once scientists divert their focus away from the direct study of nature and turn their attention toward defining science and setting its parameters, they have left the realm of science altogether and entered the arena of philosophy. Now whenever naturalists assert that only things known *empirically* have the status of fact,¹⁷ it follows logically that their *philosophical* position (science is the sole determiner of truth) cannot be a fact either. Naturalists therefore on their own terms tear out the very foundation by which to legitimate themselves! Karl Popper noted this problem by stating, “*They [positivists] are constantly trying to prove that metaphysics by its very nature is nothing but nonsensical twaddle-- ‘sophistry and illusion’ -- as Hume says, which we should commit to the flames.*” In the related footnote (no.3 in his text) Popper concludes, “*Thus Hume, like Sextus, condemned his own Enquiry [to the flames] on its last page.*”¹⁸

Logically extended, naturalism also leads to philosophical *incoherence*. It was already noted that science rests on certain metaphysical commitments. This includes belief in truth itself. If the materialistic picture of reality were actually correct so that the human psyche is reduced to an electro-chemical machine, then even the notions of truth and thought become meaningless.¹⁹ What obligates one to embrace materialistic

“arguments” that can be reduced to the mere inter-play of atoms? And just who or what is to be identified as the “*knower*” of such “*knowledge*?”

An eighth logical problem with the naturalistic stonewall involves resorting to a ***double standard***. In truth its proponents are not consistent in their rejection of theistic interference in nature, but abstractly refer to said interference whenever it becomes convenient. In *The Panda’s Thumb*,²⁰ Stephen Jay Gould argued that the Panda’s paw is so ineptly constructed that it argues against the notion of a designer. Other appeals to apparent incoherence in nature echo this same challenge that blind nature alone lies behind the many bizarre features in the so-called evolutionary train of life. Let it be stated first of all that most allegations of poor design have been more than adequately rebutted.²¹ The bigger philosophical problem for champions of naturalism is that they **try to have it both ways**. Yet if apparent design in nature is not allowed to argue *for* the existence of a supernatural designer because “theistic implications don’t belong in science,” then by their same principle it follows logically that apparent poor design in nature (which also has theistic implications) should not be allowed to argue *against* an intelligent designer. Now evolutionary champion Richard Dawkins misses no opportunity to assert that evolution spells the death of belief in God. Yet whenever naturalists accept so-called damaging evidence for theism, they betray their double standard by their outright dismissal of positive evidence *for* creation. Theists are prepared to answer the challenge of alleged poor design as the logical price consistent with their proposal that clear design argues *for* a Creator. Scientific naturalists ought to be logically consistent and open themselves to the other side of that equation.

The ***double standard*** continues in the naturalistic **demand for testability**. Now if by testability is meant employment of a prediction model that is falsifiable, certain theists are addressing that expectation.²² But if by testability is meant repeatability, this definition ***begs the question*** since a naturalistic outcome is demanded by the very nature of that criterion. But more to the point, scientific naturalists fail to abide by those standards that they impose onto theists. For example, the actual state of the fossil record, (the Cambrian explosion, sudden appearance of new life forms, utter lack of transitional fossils, stasis, etc.),²³ and the negative results from origin of life experiments (no plausible “pre-biotic soup” has been conceived of or created in the laboratory, and no evidence of the same has been found in the earth’s crust)²⁴ both undermine predictions arising from the naturalistic

model. Yet in contradiction to their demand for testability they have failed to abide by Darwin's own standard that his theory has been falsified.²⁵

Naturalism **also fails** the demand for testability by their failure to present positive and non-ambiguous evidence *for* their theory. This includes the absence of a plausible change mechanism that actually meets the demands of **macro**-evolutionary ("amoeba to man") theory.²⁶ Yet in spite of this massive black hole in their roster of "evidence," they continue to insist that Darwinism is a fact beyond challenge. Their blurring of the distinction between micro-evolution for which there *is* evidence (Finch beaks, etc.), and macro-evolution, for which there is *no* viable mechanism, illustrates the "**bait and switch**" fallacy. Philip Johnson wisely warns, "*Don't let anybody tell you the mechanism is a mere detail; it's what the controversy is mainly about.*"²⁷

The stonewall against the theistic challenge commits the **red herring** fallacy in several ways. Naturalists, for example, charge that assertion of an "Intelligent Designer" is "religiously motivated." TRUE! But it was this same motivation that *began* the scientific enterprise (endnote 13). Indeed, virtually all scientific exploration (the pure sciences as opposed to the applied) is motivated beyond the mere grasping of facts to actually *understanding* the natural world. For many this attempt to understand nature is *naturalistically* motivated! Yet that motivation does not, in itself, disqualify naturalism from being true. Neither then is theism disqualified! In the final analysis the accusatory assigning of a motive to one's opponent, called the **motivism fallacy**, is largely irrelevant to whether the position in question is actually supportable by the facts.

The **red herring fallacy** is repeated when naturalists badger ID into admitting the designer is God. Now there is nothing irrational in naming God as the designer. And naturalism so far offers no feasible alternative. But since the fundamental question is whether undirected natural forces can produce life in all its complexity, the **irrelevant** diversion to precisely *identify* the designer, at bottom, leaves that central problem with the naturalistic claim unaddressed.

On the other hand, once the identity of the designer is made the issue, naturalism **poisons the well** by its determination to **confuse** Biblical theology with either magic or mythology. But magic defined involves "**human control over supernatural agencies or the forces of nature,**"²⁸ as

opposed to belief in *God* as Lord of history and creation. Mythology by definition personifies the plethora of inanimate objects in nature by naming as gods such things as the sea, the sky, the underworld, trees, etc. Belief in the one transcendent God of the Bible, by contrast, led logically to the **DE**-deification of natural objects, thereby opening the way to the scientific analysis of nature. It was the polytheism and pantheism of mythology that stifled scientific exploration and is one reason that the ancient Greeks gave us philosophy and mathematics but not science.²⁹ The point of theism is that since natural objects have no capacity to “guide” blind processes, the creator and designer must transcend (stand above and outside of) nature.

Another fallacy actually urged by naturalists concerns the **illegitimate** assignment of the *burden of proof* onto the theistic position as though atheism has nothing to prove but theism does.³⁰ This tactic assumes that atheism is established and affirmed merely by an absence of outright proof for theism (this warning goes both ways). But atheistic claims in rejection of God’s existence are of the same category of argument as the theistic claims *for* God’s existence. It is agnosticism and **not** atheism that occupies the neutral (default) position philosophically with respect to God’s existence.³¹ Atheism is every bit as much of a faith position as is belief in God.

The naturalistic stonewall finally commits the *fallacy of exclusion*³² by out-of-hand rejecting critical evidence. While most people find design to be a ubiquitous trait of the universe, a vocal minority mockingly charge that design is illusory.³³ But at some point, philosophical objection must *face* the massive evidence to the contrary. The fingers-in-the-ears approach of the naturalist actually betrays a fear of what legitimate challenge will do to their cherished naturalistic beliefs. Yet not all are so closed-minded. The most academically rigorous atheist in recent history (note 30) recently renounced atheism to embrace deism. The chief evidence that converted Antony Flew to belief in God was big bang cosmology and the incredible design and complexity of the living cell. Trumped up *philosophical* arguments thereby gave way to fact.³⁴

The burden of this essay has not been to prove the existence of an Intelligent Designer, but to highlight the nonsense that obstructs clear and honest debate on this very important matter. The typical theistic response to the naturalistic stonewall has so far been way too timid, though some theists are now charging at the dam with a superior model that is testable and viable

(note 22). But we ought also to challenge and expose the naturalistic bluff. Their “*emperor*” *has no clothes!* The exposure of **15 logical problems** with the naturalistic stonewall should put the burden back on the naturalist to answer the scientific challenge from theism as opposed to blowing it off.

¹ The Stories of Hans Christian Anderson. “*The Emperor’s New Clothes.*” Diane Crone Frank, ed. (Duke Press, 2005), p.105f.

² Over 600 scientists who are leaders in their fields publicly question aspects of Darwinism. See www.dissentfromdarwin.org/. This figure is very conservative. Stepping forward as they have takes much courage since it involves professional risk. The tenures of professors, the academic standing of students, and careers of professional scientists and editors of scientific periodicals are all on the line if they publicly challenge the Darwinian paradigm or merely participate in the free interchange of ideas to that end.

³ See Antony Flew. There is a God. (Harper 2007), p.88f. ** Richard Dawkins states in his The Blind Watchmaker. (Norton 1996), “*To explain the origin of the DNA/protein machine by invoking a supernatural Designer is to explain precisely nothing, for it leaves unexplained the origin of the Designer*” (p.141). Here Dawkins finds himself in a simple logical bind. If he demands that God must have a beginning (a being who by definition is transcendent and self-existent) because every effect must have a cause, then that same demand is logically placed back onto the naturalist to explain how matter brought itself into existence out of absolute nothingness.

Niles Eldridge asserts, “*We humans directly experience nature through our senses, and there is no way we can directly experience the supernatural. Thus, in the enterprise that is science, it isn’t an ontological claim that a God does not exist, but rather an epistemological recognition that even if such a God did exist, there would be no way to experience that God given the impressive, but still limited means afforded by science. And that is true by definition.*” (The Triumph of Evolution and the Failure of Creationism. (Free-man, 2000), p.23). Eldridge’s comments must be judged a **house of cards** built on the following logical fallacies: begging the question (“...*that is true by definition*”), *non-sequitur* (the limitations of science allegedly restrict God’s capacity to communicate), the confusion of definitions (what God can or cannot do is stated as an epistemological matter when in truth it is an ontological matter).

⁴ One might have expected philosopher Daniel Dennet to meet that challenge in his lauded book, Breaking the Spell. (Penguin, 2006). Were there an actual attempt to engage with ID that was followed by a successful and systematic rebuttal of its points, then ID would be silenced. Instead, readers are fed a hodgepodge of loosely-connected quotations that are never made to serve a cogent point.

⁵ Stephen Jay Gould. Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life. (Ballantine, 1999). p.22.

⁶ Gould’s definition of religion is **factually incorrect, self-serving, and simplistic** (the world’s religions in *fact* fundamentally differ from each other on major points). Whether

or not Christianity in particular is successful in its' self-claims (I argue it is), it does make claims for God's cosmic creative activity (Genesis 1:1) and his intervention in history (John 1:1-3, 14), thereby impinging on **both fields**.

⁷ http://www.atheists.org/evolution/creation_science.html.

⁸ *Back to Genesis* founder Ken Ham asserts that the stars were created on day four a few thousand years ago just because "*the Bible says so*" (KGNW, AM 820, Seattle, 09/20/06). What is ironic about his statement is that Hebrew vocabulary, grammar, and context (Genesis 1:1) allows another interpretation, while modern cosmology utterly repudiates Ham's position. See my essay, "*The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look: What Genesis One Really Says About Creation.*"

⁹ I too believe Genesis 1-3 is God's revealed Word (2 Timothy 3:16), and because I believe in the God of the Bible, I expect there to be consistency between the author of Genesis (God!) and the actual facts of science. Since that consistency is demonstrated (Hugh Ross, *Creation as Science*. (NavPress, 2006), Genesis vindicates itself as supernatural revelation, not merely by tautology, but by correspondence with actual facts. Despite the sincere desire of YEC to glorify God, by their refusal to submit their interpretations to scientific scrutiny they effectively discredit God in the eyes of the legitimate scientists. Augustine wisely warns, "*It is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on [matters of science]; and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn.*" (*Literal Meaning of Genesis*, J.H. Taylor, S.J., tr. (Newman, 1982), v.I, p.42f.).

Exegetical openness is necessary for two additional reasons: First, while the Bible calls people to belief in the spiritual world *above* nature (2 Kings 6:15f.), it NEVER commands readers to reject the witness of *nature* as a test of one's faith in God. Rather it commands us to receive nature as a trustworthy witness of God's creation and power (Is. 40:18f. and Rom. 1:18f.). Those who dismiss science as unreliable on purely dogmatic grounds (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*. (Concordia, 1950), v.I, p.468.) are obligated to move beyond abstract pronouncements and actually confront and rebut the specific evidence in question. This would include the broadly and rigorously confirmed objective evidence supporting the big bang. Second, the refusal to allow science its autonomy undermines the authority of the very "evidence" YEC attempt to draw on. Once scientific insight is made subservient to religious dogma, the "evidence" to which dogma appeals is demoted to the status of a propped-up foundation, which is an **oxymoron**.

¹⁰ Op.cit. (5).

¹¹ Concerns, often wildly exaggerated, that the introduction of "miracle" will destroy science are unsupported by history. It was in fact belief in God that brought the world confidence in the uniformity of nature in the first place. As C.S. Lewis put it, "*Theology*

says to you in effect, 'Admit God [the guarantor of uniformity] and with Him risk of a few miracles, and in return I [theology] will ratify faith in uniformity as regards the overwhelming majority of events.' ” (Miracles. (Macmillan, 1960), p.103).

¹² To suggest an intelligence as the cause of information does not commit the “god-of-the-gaps” fallacy, but instead posits the only hypothesis that squares with information theory. See W. Dembski and J. Kushiner, eds. Signs of Intelligence. (Brazos, 2001).

¹³ Rodney Stark. For the Glory of God. ch. 2, “*God’s Handiwork: The Religious Origins of Science*.” (Princeton, 2003).

¹⁴ Alfred North Whitehead. Science and the Modern World. (Free Press, 1967), p.12,13.

¹⁵ Stark. Op.cit. (13), p.160.f.

¹⁶ Indeed, it is naturalists who are mired in “pseudo-science.” How ironic it was that Dr. Peter Ward labeled Intelligent Design “*dogma*” at a debate with Dr. Stephen Meyer on April 26, 2006 at Seattle Town Hall when it was he who *decreed* that a transcendent designer *cannot* impact the material world. By contrast, proponents of I.D., building on accepted principles for discerning intelligence in the forensic sciences (S.E.T.I., archaeology, forensic medicine, etc.) use “*inference to the best explanation*” to name an Intelligent Designer as the source for what they observe as design, language, information, and specified complexity in nature. (Op.cit. (12)).

¹⁷ David Hume closes his famous essay, “*It seems to me, that the only objects of abstract science or of demonstration are quantity and number, and that all attempts to extend this more perfect species of knowledge beyond these bounds are mere sophistry and illusion.*” An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding. (Harvard Classics, Collier & Son, 1910), v. 37.

¹⁸ Sir Karl Popper. The Logic of Scientific Discovery. (Routledge, 2002), p.12.

¹⁹ Lewis. Op.cit. (11). p.103f.

²⁰ Stephen Jay Gould. The Panda’s Thumb. (Norton, 1980).

²¹ Stephen C. Meyer. “*Where Science Meets Faith: Seeing Eye to Eye*.” Lee Strobel, ed. The Case for Faith. (Zondervan, 2004), p.86f.

²² Fuzale Rana and Hugh Ross. Origins of Life. (NavPress, 2004), Hugh Ross. Creation as Science. (NavPress, 2006).

²³ Percival Davis and Dean Kenyon. Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins. (Houghton, 1996), ch.4.

²⁴ Op.cit. Rana and Ross. (22), ch.7.

²⁵ Charles Darwin wrote that a failure to eventually uncover an **abundance** of (“*every stratum full of such*”) transitional fossils should utterly discredit his theory. (On the Origin of Species. (New American Library, 1958. Reprint from 1859). p.152.

²⁶ Evolutionist James Shapiro writes, “*There are no detailed Darwinian accounts for the evolution of any fundamental biological or cellular system, only a variety of wishful speculations.*” Cited in Philip Johnson. Defeating Darwinism. (Intervarsity, 1997), p.79.

²⁷ Johnson. Ibid. p.59.

²⁸ “*Magic.*” Websters New Universal Unabridged Dictionary. (Barnes and Noble, 1989).

²⁹ Op.cit. (13), p.151f.

³⁰ Antony Flew. The Presumption of Atheism. (Pemberton, 1976), stated, “*The burden of proof must be on the theist*” (p.14).

³¹ Philosopher Paul Copan makes this point at <http://4forums.com/political/showthread.php?t=3861> .

³² One glaring example of the **fallacy of exclusion** is found in Daniel Dennett (Op.cit. 4) where he writes that if pastors who are skeptical of Darwin “*claim to have gotten it from scientists, they have been duped, since there are no reputable scientists who claim this. Not a one*” (p.61). This **falsehood** is **refuted** in note 2 above. Elsewhere Dennett disqualifies ID as science merely on the grounds that assertion of an intelligence “*explains nothing*” (Daniel C. Dennett. “*Show Me the Science.*” www.edge.org/3rd_culture/dennett05/dennett05_index.html). For my response see note 4 above.

³³ Richard Dawkins. Op.cit. (3).

³⁴ Antony Flew. There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind. (Harper, 2007).

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