

# C. S. LEWIS'S ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURALISM

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**Abstract:** This paper is an evaluation of the argument of Chapter 3 ("The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism") of the second edition of C. S. Lewis's *Miracles*. This argument is an attempt to demonstrate that naturalism implies that none of our beliefs is based on reasoning—a "cardinal difficulty of naturalism," since a belief in naturalism that was not based on reasoning would be irrational. The conclusion of the paper is Lewis's argument fails to show that naturalism implies that none of our beliefs is based on reasoning.

*[W]e philosophers are lovers of wisdom, and while both truth and our friends are dear to us, piety demands that we honor truth above our friends.*

Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a 15)

## 1 Introduction

My purpose is to evaluate C. S. Lewis's argument against naturalism—the argument that was presented in Chapter 3 ("The Self-Contradiction of the Naturalist") of *Miracles* (1947),<sup>1</sup> and in revised form in Chapter 3 ("The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism") of the second edition of *Miracles* (2001).<sup>2</sup> The earlier version of the argument was criticized in a paper that the philosopher G. E. M. Anscombe presented at a meeting of the Oxford University Socratic Club early in 1948,<sup>3</sup> and it is generally recognized both that Lewis admitted that many of Anscombe's criticisms were well-taken

<sup>1</sup>Shorter versions of the argument can be found in Lewis (1967a,b).

<sup>2</sup>The second edition was originally published by Fontana Books in 1960. In this essay, "stand-alone" page references are to the HarperCollins printing of the second edition.

<sup>3</sup>Anscombe's paper ("A Reply to Mr C. S. Lewis's Argument that 'Naturalism' is Self-Refuting") is included in Anscombe (1981). The paper is printed together with a brief summary of Lewis's response, and a one-paragraph note by Lewis in which he distinguishes the "cause and effect relation" from the "ground and consequent relation." The summary was probably written by J. F. Goodridge, who was a pupil of Lewis's and a friend of Anscombe's. See Lewis (2004, 936 n). Anscombe's paper (and the summary and Lewis's note) originally appeared in *The Socratic Digest* (1948).

and that the revised version of the argument was an attempt to meet those criticisms.<sup>4</sup> I believe that the argument of the second edition is superior to the argument of first. In my view, the statements Anscombe made many years later concerning her criticisms of the argument and Lewis's revision of the argument in the second edition are accurate and fair:

The rewritten version is much less slick and avoids some of the mistakes of the earlier one; it is much more of a serious investigation. He distinguishes between 'the Cause-Effect *because*' and the 'the Ground-Consequent *because*', where before he had simply spoken of 'irrational causes'. If what we think at the end of our reasoning is to be true, the correct answer to "Why do you think that?" must use the latter *because*. On the other hand, every event in Nature must be connected with previous events in the Cause-and-Effect relation. . . . "Unfortunately the two systems are wholly distinct". . . . And "even if grounds do exist, what exactly have they got to do with the occurrence of that belief as a psychological event?"<sup>5</sup>

Rereading the argument of the first edition and my criticisms of it, it seems to me that they are just. At the same time, I find them lacking in any recognition of the depth of the problem. I don't think Lewis' first version itself gave one much impression of that. The argument of the second edition has much to criticize in it, but certainly does correspond more to the actual depth and difficulty of the questions being discussed. I think we haven't yet an answer to the question I have quoted from him: "What is the connection between grounds and the actual occurrence of the belief?" (Anscombe 1981, ix and x)

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<sup>4</sup>I think it is important to point out that Lewis, in the second edition of *Miracles*, does not mention Anscombe at all. Indeed (at least in the HarperCollins printing), the only indication in the second edition (unless one counts casual references to sputnik and the year 1959 in illustrative examples) that it is a second or revised edition occurs in very small print in the copyright information at the bottom of the dedications page:

MIRACLES. Copyright 1947 C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. Copyright renewed  
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Pte. Ltd.

Lewis's failure to acknowledge in the revised edition the fact that Anscombe's criticisms had, in his view, necessitated a revision of his argument does not do him credit. The closest thing to an acknowledgement of this fact, and it is not very close (for he does not mention Anscombe), that can be found anywhere (other than in the note mentioned above) occurs in his 1958 essay, "Rejoinder to Dr Pittenger," which is included in Lewis (1972).

<sup>5</sup>Anscombe is quoting Lewis. The sentences "Unfortunately the two systems are wholly distinct" and "But even if grounds do exist, what exactly have they got to do with the occurrence of that belief as a psychological event?" both occur in Lewis (2001, 24).

Because I agree with Anscombe on this point—because I believe that the argument of the second edition is much better than the argument of the first—I will examine only the argument of the second edition.

In Part 2 of this essay, I provide a statement of naturalism, the doctrine or thesis that Lewis's argument purports to refute (or at least to confront with a "cardinal difficulty"). In Part 3, I will give a statement of his argument. In parts 4 and 5, I will examine the argument and explain why—although (like Anscombe) I am no naturalist<sup>6</sup>—I believe it fails to present the naturalist with a "cardinal difficulty."<sup>7</sup> In Part 6, I will say something about where the burden of proof lies in the debate between Lewis and the advocates of naturalism.

## 2 What is Naturalism?

In his popular television series *Cosmos*, a well-known astronomer—the late Carl Sagan—famously said that the cosmos or physical universe was "all there is or was or ever will be." This is not a bad statement of naturalism. ('Nature' is one more name, perhaps a rather old-fashioned one, for the cosmos or physical universe. When I use 'nature' in this sense, I will follow Lewis's usage and capitalize it. And I will call the thesis that Nature is all there is or was or ever will be 'Naturalism' with a capital.) Naturalism implies that everything that exists is a part, large or small, of the physical universe, and that the laws of physics, the laws that govern the behavior of and the mutual interactions among the parts of the physical universe, apply universally and without exception to everything that exists. Naturalism was a popular doctrine (popular among scientifically minded philosophers and philosophically minded scientists) in the 1940s when Lewis devised his argument against it, and it is if anything even more popular today. And it is certainly easy to see why a book written in defense of miracles in a time when Naturalism was a popular doctrine would open with a refutation of Naturalism, for Naturalism entails that miracles do not and cannot exist. Not at any rate in any sense of the word in which the occurrence of a "miracle" implies that a supernatural agent has caused something to happen that in some way involves a local "exception to" or "suspension of" the laws of physics—for, according to Naturalism, there are no supernatural agents and the laws of physics can never be suspended. And it was the occurrence of miracles in just that sense of 'miracle' that Lewis was writing in defense of.

Lewis gives an extended account of Naturalism (in the second chapter of *Miracles*, "The Naturalist and the Supernaturalist"; in the presentation of his argument against Naturalism in the third chapter, several of his

<sup>6</sup>Anscombe was a theologically very conservative Roman Catholic. I am an Anglican whose theological views differ from Lewis's only on minor points.

<sup>7</sup>For a contrary view, and for an extended defense of Lewis's argument, see Reppert (2003).

incidental remarks expand on and clarify the account given in the second chapter), but this account unfortunately incorporates elements that no philosopher or scientist of the present day (and few if any at the time at which he was writing) would accept. The most important of these “elements” is this: On Lewis’s account of Naturalism, Naturalism implies that the way things are is the only way things could possibly be. Consider, for example, the fact that there was a hot summer in 1959. Lewis’s account of Naturalism implies that if Naturalism is true, then the very idea of a cold summer in 1959 is a contradiction in terms, an impossibility on the order of a round square or a married bachelor. But no one who would call himself or herself a Naturalist (with or without the capital) would assent to *that* thesis. No one would say that, as Lewis puts the matter, ‘There was a hot summer in 1959’ was a *tautology* (31)—a statement like ‘No circle has corners’ or ‘All bachelors are unmarried’.

What many Naturalists *have* believed, however, is that the laws of physics, the laws that govern Nature, are *deterministic*. Some Naturalists, that is, have believed that these laws govern Nature so strictly that at any given moment Nature has only one possible future. They have believed that, *given* the way the world was at some precise instant in, say, 1066 (they do not say it could not have been some other way at that instant), and *given* the laws of physics (and those, too, might have been otherwise—at least as far as anyone knows), there *had to be* a hot summer in 1959. But that is like saying, ‘*Given* that this building is square, its sides have to be equal’. It does not follow from that statement that the building had to have equal sides: for all the ‘given’ statement says, it was perfectly possible for the building not to have been square and to have had unequal sides. “Physical determinism”—the thesis that the laws of physics are deterministic—is thus a weaker thesis than ‘The way the physical universe is is the only way it could be’. The latter thesis implies physical determinism, but physical determinism does not imply that the way the physical universe is is the only way a physical universe could be.

An examination of Lewis’s argument shows that it does not actually depend on his thesis that Naturalism implies that the way the physical universe is is the only way it (or any physical universe) could be. It does, however, depend on the premise that Naturalism implies physical determinism. Now not all Naturalists are physical determinists. In fact very few are, owing to two facts: that quantum mechanics is a central and essential component of modern physics and chemistry, and that on the most popular interpretation of quantum mechanics, physical determinism is false.<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>8</sup>Lewis alludes to the supposed indeterministic implications of quantum mechanics (18–20). In his view, physicists who accept physical indeterminism cannot really be consistent Naturalists. In my opinion, his reasons for supposing this rest on a philosophical mistake. But I need not discuss the question whether Naturalism really does imply that the laws of physics are deterministic, since I shall simply assume (for the sake of argument, as it were) that those laws are deterministic.

what follows, however, I will simply ignore this awkward fact. I will treat Naturalism as the following theory:

Nature (the cosmos, the physical universe) is all there is or was or ever will be: everything that exists is a part of Nature. All the parts of Nature—from sub-atomic particles to clusters of galaxies—are governed by the same set of exceptionless deterministic laws.

I will ask whether Lewis's argument presents Naturalism—so understood—with a “cardinal difficulty.”

### 3 A Statement of Lewis's Argument

If Naturalism is true, then *we* are parts of Nature and all our thoughts and actions are governed by the same set of deterministic laws that governs the behavior of falling apples and beams of light and neutrons and clouds of intersidereal gas. The core of Lewis's argument against Naturalism is this: If our thoughts are indeed so governed, then none of our beliefs is based on reasoning. And if the Naturalists concede this much, if they agree that none of our beliefs is based on reasoning, then they must also concede that their own belief in Naturalism is not based on reasoning. The remainder of this section is a fuller statement of the argument.

Let us use ‘anti-rationalism’ as a name for the thesis that none of our beliefs is based on reasoning—the thesis that reasoning plays no role in the explanation of why anyone holds any belief. Anti-rationalism is a position that cannot be *rationally* accepted. It cannot be rationally accepted because, as one might say, it undermines any claim that anyone might make on its behalf to be a thesis that any person can rationally believe. To see why this is so, let us consider Phoebe, a philosopher who is contemplating becoming an anti-rationalist. If Phoebe does accept anti-rationalism, and if she wishes her allegiance to anti-rationalism to be rational, she must engage in at some piece of reasoning whose conclusion is the truth of anti-rationalism. That is to say, her acceptance of anti-rationalism will be rational only if reference to a piece of reasoning that she has gone through plays some sort of role in the (right) answer to the question, “Why does Phoebe accept anti-rationalism?” And, if anti-rationalism is true, it is never the case that reasoning figures in the explanation of why anyone accepts any thesis. And Phoebe will see that. She will see that if she becomes an anti-rationalist, she will thereby be committed to the belief that her allegiance to anti-rationalism is not based on any piece of reasoning she may have engaged in and is thus not rational. And she will see that it is irrational for one to accept a thesis if one believes that one's acceptance of that thesis has no rational ground. Phoebe will

therefore see that anti-rationalism is a thesis that neither she nor anyone else can rationally accept.<sup>9</sup>

Now if anti-rationalism has this untoward feature, so does any proposition or thesis or position that can be shown logically to imply anti-rationalism. And *Naturalism* can be shown logically to imply anti-rationalism. That Naturalism implies anti-rationalism may be demonstrated as follows.

If a person has a certain belief, let us call the fact that that person has that belief a “belief fact.” For example, the fact that I believe that Lewis was a Cambridge professor is a belief fact. I will say that I am the *subject* of this belief fact, and the proposition or thesis that Lewis was a Cambridge professor is its *object*. If you also have this belief, the fact that you do is another belief fact—a belief fact that has the same object as the previously mentioned belief fact (the proposition that Lewis was a Cambridge professor) but a different subject (you, not me). If Naturalism is true, then every belief fact has causes of a kind that preclude any piece of reasoning that its subject may have engaged in from being even a part of its explanation. This is so because Naturalism implies that that every belief fact is caused (determined to occur) by a set of facts none of which involves or pertains to its subject’s engaging in any piece of reasoning—is caused, indeed, by a set of facts that do not pertain to its subject in any way whatever—, for Naturalism implies that every belief fact has been determined to occur by the state of the physical universe long before there had been any episodes of reasoning.

This is my statement of the argument. I will say something to connect it with the way Lewis presents the argument. Lewis’s statement of the argument turns on his distinction (22–24) between “the Cause-Effect ‘because’” and the “the Ground-Consequent ‘because’.” This distinction is best explained by example. Suppose you believe that the earth is round (a ball, that is) and that you are asked why you believe this. Suppose you answer, “Because I was taught that as a child—my parents and teachers just drilled it into me.” The first word of your answer is “the Cause-Effect ‘because’.” You have explained your belief by giving its *cause*: your having that belief (you have said) is the *effect* of certain actions of your parents and teachers. But we can imagine a different kind of ‘because’ answer: “Because the edge of the shadow of the earth on the moon during a partial lunar eclipse is always an arc of a circle—no matter where the moon is in the sky. And only a ball casts a circular shadow from every angle.” The first word of this second answer is “the Ground-Consequent ‘because’.” In giving this answer, you have explained your belief by giving not its *cause* but its *ground*—its rational basis. By presenting a chain of reasoning, you have

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<sup>9</sup>If no beliefs are based on reasoning, some beliefs may still be held rationally. For some beliefs (“I exist,” “Everything is identical with itself,” “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ”) may be self-evident—*self-evident*—and may thus be held rationally even if they are not based on reasoning. If this is so, it is not to the point, since anti-rationalism is obviously not self-evident.

represented your belief as *consequent* on the premises of that reasoning and its logical validity.

The central premise of Lewis's argument is that an explanation of a belief fact in terms of the Cause-Effect 'because' precludes any explanation of that fact in terms of the Ground-Consequent 'because'.<sup>10</sup> If, for example, "Because I was taught that as a child," is a correct answer to the question, "Why do you think that the earth is round?", the statement "Because the edge of the shadow of the earth (etc.)," *cannot* also be a correct answer to that question.

And if Naturalism is true, then *every* belief fact has (as we have seen) an explanation in terms of the Cause-Effect 'because'—an explanation that appeals only to the way Nature was long before you (or any human being) had ever engaged in any reasoning about anything. Naturalism therefore implies anti-rationalism and it is thus impossible for there to be anyone who believes rationally that Naturalism is true. Any Naturalist who is aware of this argument must therefore concede that his or her belief in Naturalism is not held on rational grounds. (This is "the cardinal difficulty of Naturalism.")

#### 4 Is Lewis's Reasoning Correct?

Let us begin our attempt to answer this question by considering three possible answers to the question, "Why do you think the earth is round?"

*Answer A.* Because the edge of the shadow of the earth (etc.).

*Answer B.* Because I was taught that as a child. My parents and teachers just drilled it into me.

*Answer C.* Because the way the universe was in the remote past and the laws of physics made it inevitable that I should now have that belief.

Let us ask first whether Answer B precludes Answer A. It seems plausible to suppose that it does. But even if this plausible supposition is true, it applies only in one very special case—a particular person's belief that the earth is round. Other beliefs that person has—and beliefs that other people have—might well be rational.<sup>11</sup>

But, as we have seen, if Naturalism is true, then *all* belief facts have "Cause-effect 'because'" explanations. Even those belief facts that do not

<sup>10</sup>I will use the word 'explanation' only in its "strong" sense: "correct explanation." (The "weak" sense of the word—"candidate for a strong-sense explanation"—is illustrated by "The coroner's explanation of her death later turned out to be wrong.")

<sup>11</sup>A belief might have a "Ground-consequent 'because'" explanation and nevertheless not be rational. It might be, for example, that the reasoning that figured in the explanation was invalid.

have ordinary, everyday “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanations like the one given in Answer B have “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanations like the one given in Answer C. (Of course, Answer C is not really an answer to the question, ‘Why do you think the earth is round?’ It is rather a sketch of an answer, or a schema that presents the general form of an answer. No human being could possibly *give* or *state* an explanation of any present fact in terms of a past state of the universe and the laws of physics. Nevertheless, if Naturalism is true, and if Naturalism implies determinism, such explanations *exist*.) Let us therefore ask, Does Answer C preclude Answer A?

Lewis certainly supposes so, and not for any reason that has to do with the content of Answer C—not because the answer involves a description of the state of the physical universe in remote times or an appeal to the laws of physics. He supposes this only because Answer C is a “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanation. In Lewis’s view, a “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanation of a belief fact implies that the proposition that is the object of the belief fact is not accepted rationally by its subject *simply in virtue of* its being a “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanation.

And is this right? Does the existence of a “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanation of a belief fact *in every case* preclude there being a “Ground-consequent ‘because’” explanation of that belief fact? Granted, it is at least very plausible to suppose that *in certain cases* “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanations of a belief fact preclude “Ground-consequent ‘because’” explanations of that fact. But do they always? Suppose that “type B explanations” (explanations like those given in Answer B) invariably preclude “type A explanations.” We must nevertheless ask whether “type C explanations” invariably preclude “type A explanations.” This is the question on which an evaluation of Lewis’s argument must turn—for, while Naturalism implies that every belief fact has a “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanation in terms of past states of the physical universe and the laws of physics, it does not guarantee (or even suggest) that every belief fact has a “Cause-effect ‘because’” explanation of any other sort.

## 5 The Cause-Effect ‘Because’ and the Ground-Consequent ‘Because’

Let us call anything that is composed—without residue—of elementary particles (electrons and quarks and so on) a “physical thing.” If Naturalism is true, then every human being is a physical thing.

But is it possible for a physical thing to have beliefs? Is it possible for a human being to have beliefs if all human beings are physical things? I will assume that the answer to this question is Yes. In making this assumption, I follow Lewis: Lewis in effect grants (perhaps only for the sake of argument) that Naturalism is consistent with the thesis that human beings *have* beliefs—although not with the thesis that human beings have *rational* beliefs.



If a human being, a certain enormously complex physical thing, can have beliefs, there seems to be no reason to deny that that human being's believing certain things might be the *cause* of his or her believing certain other things. Suppose, for example, that Phoebe (who is both a human being and a physical thing) believes that Lewis fought in the First World War; might the following not be a correct answer to the question "Why does Phoebe believe that Lewis fought in the First World War?":

She believes that because (Cause-effect) she believes that it says so in *Surprised by Joy*, and she also believes that no one includes easily detectable falsehoods in an autobiography.

After all, if Naturalism is true, then the following three facts:

- the fact that Phoebe believes that Lewis fought in the First World War
- the fact that Phoebe believes that Lewis stated in *Surprised by Joy* that he had fought in the First World War
- the fact that Phoebe believes that that no one includes easily detectable falsehoods in an autobiography

must in some sense be facts about the physical world. (They are facts about Phoebe, and Phoebe is a physical thing, a part of the physical world.) And why shouldn't these three facts about the physical world be related in such a way that two of them cause the third? If these three facts are indeed causally related in this way, does their being so related rule out a "type A explanation" of the fact that Phoebe believes that Lewis fought in the First World War? If someone asked Phoebe, "Why do you believe that Lewis fought in the First World War?", would the fact that her having that belief was caused by her having those other two beliefs imply that

I believe that because [Ground-consequent] Lewis states in *Surprised by Joy* that he fought in the First World War, and no one includes easily detectable falsehoods in an autobiography

was not a correct answer to that question?—was not a true statement of the ground of her belief? I do not, in asking this, mean to suggest that the third-person Cause-effect 'because' answer to the third-person question 'Why does *Phoebe* believe that Lewis fought in the First World War?' and Phoebe's first-person Ground-consequent 'because' answer to the second-person question, 'Why do *you* believe that Lewis fought in the First World War?' are in any sense "the same" or that the correctness of the latter follows logically from the correctness of the former. I am asking only whether the correctness of the former rules out or precludes or is inconsistent with the correctness of the latter.

It seems evident to me that even if the third-person answer does preclude the first-person answer (in the eyes of God, as it were), we don't know that

it does—or even have any good reason to suppose that it does. And, more generally, I would say that we have no reason to suppose that if a certain belief fact is caused by various other belief facts (with the same subject), its being so caused precludes its having a “type A explanation.”<sup>12</sup>

Now if a belief fact whose subject is Phoebe (or you or I or anyone) can have a “type A explanation” even if it is caused by other belief facts with the same subject, it would seem that its having a “type C explanation”—its being caused by the state of the physical universe in the remote past—is also no barrier to its having a “type A explanation.” For it might be that the state of the universe in the remote past has caused a present-day belief fact *X* by causing various present-day belief facts that have, in their turn, caused *X*.

Suppose, for example, that Phoebe’s having the belief that Lewis fought in the First World War was caused by the universe’s having been in such-and-such a state many millions of years ago—and that it was *also* caused by the two belief facts I have already imagined (her having the belief that it says so in *Surprised by Joy*; her having the belief that autobiographies are trustworthy in respect of statements whose falsity is easily detectable). In such a case, the “remote” cause of this belief fact (the fact about the state of the universe long ago) will cause the fact that Phoebe believes that Lewis fought in the First World War by—and *only* by—“working through” those two other present-day belief facts: a cause produces a remote effect by producing the less remote or “proximate” causes of that effect. (The victim’s death was caused remotely by her husband’s murderous jealousy, less remotely by his sprinkling the sugar on the tea-table with arsenic, proximately by her ingesting arsenic with her tea, and more proximately still by multi-system organ failure.)

It seems therefore that Lewis has not shown that a belief fact that has a “type C explanation” cannot also have a “type A explanation.” For all Lewis has shown, Phoebe’s answer to the question, “Why do you believe that Lewis fought in the First World War?” may be correct even if the fact that she has that belief is an inevitable consequence of facts about the state of the physical universe billions of years ago.

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<sup>12</sup>If this is correct, it calls into question Lewis’s statement, “Unfortunately, the two systems [that is, the two kinds of ‘because’ explanation] are wholly distinct” (24). The two “systems” are certainly *distinct*—they are *two* systems. But they may not be *wholly* distinct: it *may* be that if *X* has inferred the proposition *B* from the proposition *A*, that state of affairs in some way involves causation—in some way involves one belief fact (the fact that *X* accepts *B*) having been caused by another (the fact that *X* accepts *A*). But note that, if this is true, its truth does *not* imply that logical or rational inference *is* or *is reducible to* the holding of some causal relation among belief facts.

## 6 Where Does the Burden of Proof Lie?

I anticipate a sceptical response to this statement from those who have found Lewis's argument convincing—something along these lines:

But you have simply *assumed* that if Phoebe's having the belief that that Lewis fought in the First World War was caused by her having certain other beliefs, that fact about how her belief was caused does not preclude a "type A explanation" of her belief. You have given us no reason to suppose that that assumption is true. It may be that, as you say, it's not evident that the assumption is false. But why should we suppose that it's true?

This response would have a point if I were trying to show that Naturalism was consistent with the thesis that some of our beliefs are based on or grounded in reasoning. But I am not trying to establish that thesis. I am trying to show only that Lewis has *not* shown that—has not even given us any reason to believe that—Naturalism is *inconsistent* with that thesis. My purpose is comparable to that of a counsel for the defense in a court of law. Naturalism is in the dock. Lewis is the counsel for the prosecution. The burden of proof, therefore, is on him; he, after all, is the one who is trying to prove something. I am not trying to prove anything (or only this: that Lewis's argument fails to establish its conclusion). The counsel for the defense is not required to show that the accused is innocent, but only that the prosecution has not *shown* that the accused is guilty as charged.

This criticism of the "sceptical response" may elicit its own sceptical response:

You say that you are not trying to prove that Naturalism is consistent with (some of) our beliefs being grounded in reasoning. But *can* you? Can anyone? If no one can prove this thesis, then—granting for the sake of argument that Lewis has not *disproved* it—shouldn't we be *agnostics* with respect to the question whether Naturalism is consistent with our beliefs being grounded in reasoning? And wouldn't that constitute a "cardinal difficulty of Naturalism"?

This response assumes that if a person cannot prove that Naturalism is consistent with some of our beliefs being grounded in reasoning, that person should not believe that it is. But why should one assume *that*? One would not be well advised to affirm, as a perfectly general principle, that if one cannot prove a proposition one should not accept that proposition<sup>13</sup>—the Prove All Things Principle, so to call it. For one thing, many, perhaps

<sup>13</sup>A more cautious statement of the principle would be, "If one cannot prove a proposition *that is not self-evident* one should not accept that proposition." (See note 9.) This qualification has no implications for the cogency of the argument that follows in the text.

most, philosophers would say that the Prove All Things Principle leads to a general scepticism—to agnosticism on every question whatever.<sup>14</sup> But let us not consider that issue. Let us consider only philosophical propositions. (“Naturalism is consistent with some of our beliefs being grounded in reasoning” is certainly a philosophical proposition.) For example:

- Human beings have/do not have free will
- There are/are not objectively correct moral principles
- A world of material things external to the mind exists/does not exist.

As far as I am aware—and I think I should have heard of it if it had happened—, no one has proved any of these propositions. And yet all the propositions in this list are accepted by various people. I accept some of them; I expect you do; I know that Lewis did.

I close with a simple question. If it is permissible for someone to believe, in the absence of a proof, that human beings have free will or that there is an external world, why is it not permissible for someone to believe, in the absence of a proof, that Naturalism is consistent with some of our beliefs being grounded in reasoning?

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<sup>14</sup>And there is this point to be considered. Can the Prove all Things Principle be proved? If it cannot, then it says of itself that it should not be accepted.