

## C.S. Lewis' Case Against Naturalism

Mechanism, like all materialist philosophies, breaks down on the problem of knowledge. If thought is the undesigned and irrelevant product of cerebral motions, what reason have we to trust it? C.S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

The man who represents all thought as an accident of environment is simply smashing and discrediting all his own thoughts – including that one. G.K. Chesterton<sup>2</sup>

The subject to be explored in this chapter is a complex one, and one on which much more could be written than I am qualified to write. The issue is the rational value of a certain argument that Lewis presented against Naturalism. We shall refer to this argument as the argument from reason.<sup>3</sup> This argument became the centre of a fascinating debate between Lewis and another philosopher, G.E.M. Anscombe (1919-2001). Many Lewis scholars have had something to say about this debate, but the majority have taken only a biographical interest in it, and have had little to say about the debate's philosophical content. Indeed, it has been widely assumed, almost without discussion, that Anscombe conclusively refuted Lewis' argument.<sup>4</sup>

As we shall see, Lewis admitted that Anscombe had shown the argument must be either reformulated or abandoned. However, Lewis clearly held his argument to contain an important insight and subsequently rewrote the offending chapter of *Miracles*.

While I am uncertain about the cogency of the argument from reason, it is not so easily rebutted as Anscombe and others seem to have supposed. The argument comes in a variety of forms, and each one highlights the existence of philosophical issues of great complexity. In offering this argument against naturalism, Lewis revealed that he “had a nose for” genuine philosophical problems, or in the words of Victor Reppert, that he had “outstanding philosophical instincts”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Evil and God” [1941] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> G.K. Chesterton, “The Wind and the Trees” [1909] in *Stories, Essays and Poems* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1939), p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Here I follow William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999) pp. 64ff.

<sup>4</sup> The clearest example of this is Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), pp. 238-9.

<sup>5</sup> I take the phrase from the first chapter of Victor Reppert's, *C.S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea* (Intervarsity Press, 2003).

To give the reader some idea of what is coming, we begin with some historical notes on the arena of the Lewis-Anscombe encounter, the Oxford Socratic Club, and with some observations on a later “re-run” of that debate. Following this, I offer a definition of naturalism and attempt to locate the philosophical “problem” on which the argument from reason is based. Before we get to the substance of Lewis’ argument we outline a variety of forms that the argument could take and develop a few of them a little further. We then elucidate Lewis’ argument as it appeared in the first edition of *Miracles*, and consider the objections that Anscombe offered at the Socratic. The argument from reason is then further developed along lines suggested by the work of William Hasker and Victor Reppert. In the final section, the chapter considers the relevance of evolutionary theory to the issue at hand.

### Setting the Scene

Between 1942 and 1954 Lewis was the President of the Oxford Socratic Club. This club had “come into existence to apply [the Socratic] principle [“follow the argument wherever it leads,”] to one particular subject matter – the pros and cons of the Christian religion.”<sup>6</sup> Christopher W. Mitchell writes

As a University Club, the Socratic was a phenomenon. Meetings routinely had standing room only. During the years Lewis was president, the Socratic entertained some of the most influential atheists of the day, along with the weighty arguments they brought against Christianity. As the Socratic’s point man, Lewis was relied upon to represent the Christian position and to argue its case against the opposition.<sup>7,8</sup>

It was at the Socratic, on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1948, that C.S. Lewis encountered Elizabeth Anscombe. At the time, Anscombe was a research fellow at Somerville College, Oxford. She went on to become a professor at Cambridge.<sup>9</sup> Anscombe rejected the argument of *Miracles* chapter three, which Lewis had originally entitled “The Self-

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<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club” [1943] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher W. Mitchell, “University Battles: C.S. Lewis and the Oxford University Socratic Club” p. 330, in Angus J.L. Menuge (ed.), *C.S. Lewis: Lightbearer in the Shadowlands* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> The famous philosophers who spoke at the Socratic while Lewis was president included the following: G.E.M. Anscombe, J.L. Austin, A.J. Ayer, F.C. Copleston, Michael Dummett, A.G.N. Flew, Peter Geach, R.M. Hare, Gabriel Marcel, Basil Mitchell, Iris Murdoch, P.H. Nowell-Smith, Michael Polanyi, Gilbert Ryle, and Bernard Williams. For a comprehensive list see Walter Hooper, “Oxford’s Bonny Fighter” in James Como (ed.) *C.S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1992) pp. 137-85.

<sup>9</sup> Anscombe was a pupil of Ludwig Wittgenstein, many of whose works she translated and wrote commentary upon. According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, she was the founder of contemporary action theory, and an important source of the revival of interest in virtue ethics. She was also married to philosopher Peter Geach.

Contradiction of the Naturalist.” As a Roman Catholic, she was no defender of naturalism, but was convinced that it could not be refuted in the manner Lewis had proposed. Following the debate, Lewis admitted his argument contained a “really serious hitch” and that Chapter three of *Miracles* “ought to be rewritten”.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, Lewis took the opportunity to rewrite this section when a new edition of *Miracles* was published in 1960. The chapter was re-titled “The Cardinal Difficulty of Naturalism”. Although Anscombe evidently approved of these changes, her comments indicate that she still found the argument unpersuasive.<sup>11</sup>

Before we move from history to philosophy,<sup>12</sup> I should point out that on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1967, exactly nineteen years after the original debate, the Socratic was the forum of a sequel to the Lewis-Anscombe encounter. In this re-run, Anscombe defended her original position while philosopher John Lucas undertook to uphold Lewis’ side of the debate. The debate was entitled “Is Mechanism Self-Refuting?” This is of particular interest because Basil Mitchell, who succeeded Lewis as president of the Socratic (and remained president until its final meeting in 1972) records that

on that occasion, I think it would be generally agreed, Lucas succeeded in sustaining Lewis’ side of the argument. If one were to think in terms of winners or losers, I think maybe that Lucas was the winner on points ... Elizabeth and John agreed as to what the original Lewis-Anscombe debate had been about, and Lucas simply maintained that on the substantial issue Lewis was right and that, for the sort of reasons Lewis had put forward, a thoroughly naturalistic philosophy was logically incoherent. And the outcome of that debate was to make it perfectly clear that, at the very least, Lewis’ original thesis was an entirely arguable philosophical thesis and as defensible as most philosophical theses are. So there was no warrant for supposing that in the original debate Lewis had been shown to be just hopelessly wrong.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger” [1958], in *Undeceptions* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1971), p. 145.

<sup>11</sup> See the introduction to the second volume of her collected papers: *The Collected Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe II: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> For those interested in the historical side of things: this kind of argument can also be found in the works of Arthur James Balfour (a past British Prime Minister, whose writings Lewis enjoyed), Kant, and Epicurus. On the Kantian argument see Henry E. Allison, “Kant’s Refutation of Materialism” *The Monist* 1989 (72/2), pp. 190-208. On Epicurus, Christopher Hookway, “The Epicurean Argument: Determinism and Scepticism” *Inquiry* 1989 (32), pp. 79-94.

<sup>13</sup> Basil Mitchell in conversation with Andrew Walker, “Reflections on C.S. Lewis, Apologetics and the Moral Tradition” in Andrew Walker and James Patrick (eds.), *A Christian for all Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) pp. 9-10. Further to this, in a letter of March 5<sup>th</sup> 2001, Mitchell writes, “I have little recollection of the course of the discussion, although my impression for what it is worth, is that Lucas succeeded in vindicating Lewis’ original thesis.” The date of the “re-run” as well as its title were provided by the letter from Mitchell who has (or, at least when he wrote the letter, *had*) the minute book in which these details are recorded. Lucas himself reports, in a letter dated February 17<sup>th</sup> 2001, that due to a second encounter with Anscombe over the same issues, his own memories of the event are confused. However, he evidently still believes Lewis’ position to be defensible.

## What is Naturalism?<sup>14</sup>

As Lewis himself noted, Naturalism is a difficult doctrine to define. I will not attempt to give a cut and dry definition of it, but hope rather to give the reader a good intuitive feel for the kind of things to which the naturalist is committed.

First of all, naturalism, as we shall understand it, is a doctrine about what kinds of thing exist, and the basic formula is that the naturalist holds that only nature exists. This, of course, does not help us very much as we are immediately led to ask what kinds of thing nature includes. One popular way of defining naturalism is as the doctrine that the only kinds of thing that exist are the kinds of thing whose existence the sciences posit. While this may give us some help at an intuitive level, it is not, unfortunately, an entirely satisfactory definition due to the difficulty in distinguishing (at a philosophical level) science from non-science and good science from bad.

We do a little better when we simply look for a common element in those things whose reality the naturalist would deny. The naturalist will, I think, wholly deny the existence of the things in list (a), and will tend to struggle with the things in list (b).

- (a) God, gods, spirits, ghosts, the soul (when thought wholly distinct from the body)<sup>15</sup>, the occurrence of miracles.
- (b) Prophecy, ESP, answered prayer, telepathy, astrology.

There is plainly a common element to all these things, but it is terribly difficult to say quite what it is. It seems to me, however, that the problem that naturalists have with such things is that they make persons, purposes and the mental too fundamental an element of reality.<sup>16</sup> In so far as a naturalist gives any countenance to persons, purposes and the mental it is because they believe they can be explained or understood in such a way as to make it clear that non-purposeful realities are more fundamental.

There are various ways in which one kind of thing could be “more fundamental” than another. Common to each of them is the idea of dependence. The naturalist will want to say that things ultimately possess the features that distinguish the personal, the purposive, and the mental *in virtue of* possessing other features that are not of

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<sup>14</sup> The philosophically sophisticated may be able to skip this section, in which naturalism is roughly defined as the doctrine according to which there exists nothing intentional or not belonging to space and time (other than perhaps space and time themselves) which is neither reducible to, nor supervenient upon, non-intentional, spatio-temporal realities.

<sup>15</sup> What the philosopher would label “Cartesian souls,” after the work of Rene Descartes.

<sup>16</sup> These things themselves possess the common feature of intentionality, the feature of being directed at something outside themselves (commonly by being “about” it or by representing it).

these kinds. For example, in so far as the naturalist accepts the reality of mental states at all, she will think each is really just (constituted by) a certain kind of physical state. Naturalists will also tend to reject the existence of anything that occupies neither space nor time. This puts the naturalist in an odd position about mathematical and logical truths, which do not seem to be made true by anything belonging to space or time. The typical naturalist will think that such truths are either true “by convention,”<sup>17</sup> or are really truths about the kind of thinking we would ourselves endorse, or ... well, you get the idea: in so far as the naturalist accepts such non-spatio-temporal truths they think such truths are truths *in virtue of* certain other truths that are not of that variety.

In short, the naturalist thinks that what we may call the *fundamental* realities are impersonal, non-purposive, non-mental, temporal, and extended in space. In so far as naturalists will countenance anything else they believe such things are really nothing in addition to, and “exist” in virtue of, the fundamental realities.

Naturalists are committed to saying that none of the “non-fundamental” realities could exist in the absence of these “fundamental” ones. Furthermore, any changes or differences in the “non-fundamental” must be accompanied by (and in some sense *due to*) changes or differences in the “fundamental”.<sup>18</sup>

For Lewis’ argument against naturalism, the most important consequence of naturalism would be that one of the most basic relations that can exist between two things is a *causal* relation.<sup>19</sup>

## **Approaching the General Issue**

The general issue that this chapter addresses is the relationship between naturalism and our ability to think rationally. It would seem that Lewis clearly believed the relationship to be one of some kind of incompatibility, and produced various arguments to this effect. However, on examining his writings the reader will be hard pressed to find a single line of argument that encapsulates all his thinking about the

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<sup>17</sup> This, of course, need not entail that they are entirely arbitrary. Conventions may be as they are for certain reasons ... generally of a pragmatic variety.

<sup>18</sup> Philosophers will notice that my description of naturalism allows that naturalists could, but need not, be reductive materialists ... the naturalist (according to my definition) may hold that some realities are “supervenient upon” but not necessarily “reducible to” the material (= the non-intentional spatio-temporal).

<sup>19</sup> I don’t mean to deny that there are problems in giving a naturalistic account of causation, it seems to me that there are ... but any such difficulties (real or only imagined) will here be set aside for the sake of argument.

relationship, or lack thereof, between naturalism and our rational capacities. It is as if Lewis saw as a single issue what is in fact a cluster of issues, and that his writings are consequently somewhat confused on the point. After carefully reading through as much of the relevant material as I can find, I have discerned what seem to me several distinct lines of argument that Lewis uses in the attempt to demonstrate some kind of incompatibility between naturalism and (confidence in) our rational abilities. But before we come to particular arguments, it is worth taking a step back in an attempt to see the general picture that Lewis found so objectionable, and which prompted his arguments.

While and undergraduate at University College, Oxford, Lewis recorded in his diary that he was reading various books and articles by the (in)famous Bertrand Russell. He makes particular mention of Russell's essay "The Free Man's Worship".<sup>20</sup> Before we come to Lewis' comments, it will be helpful to have some of Russell's remarks before us. Russell writes,

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast heat death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins – all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.<sup>21</sup>

Russell clearly held that the right attitude in the face of such a universe is stoicism: the universe may be uncaring, without purpose, amoral and non-rational, but we need not be, indeed, we *should* not be. We should, according to this early essay from Russell, endeavour to live up to the ideals of virtue and reason.<sup>22</sup> If we place along side these statements the following quote from another of Russell's papers, the grounds for Lewis' own remarks are clearly revealed.

Man is a part of Nature, not something contrasted with Nature. His thoughts and his bodily movements follow the same laws that describe the motions of stars and atoms ... Undoubtedly we are part of nature, which has produced our desires, our hopes and fears,

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<sup>20</sup> This was the essay's original title, later altered to "A Free Man's Worship". This paper, originally written in 1902/3, can be found in many anthologies of Russell's work. My references will be to its appearance in Louis Greenspan and Stefan Andersson (eds.) *Russell on Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Bertrand Russell, "The Free Man's Worship," p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Russell later came to reject the objectivism about values that this essay implied.

in accordance with laws which the physicist is beginning to discover. In this sense we are a part of nature, we are subordinated to nature, the outcome of natural laws, and their victims in the long run.<sup>23</sup>

It is with these thoughts in mind that Lewis records the following:

In his “Worship of a Free Man” I found a very clear and noble statement of what I myself believed a few years ago. But he does not face the real difficulty – that our ideals are after all a natural product, facts with relation to all other facts, and cannot survive the condemnation of the fact as a whole. The Promethean attitude would be tenable only if we were really members of some other whole outside the real whole: [which] we’re not.<sup>24,25</sup>

Lewis’s problem with Russell’s paper is that it attempts to hold together the three thoughts that (a) the universe is fundamentally amoral and non-rational, that (b) man is a creature capable of virtue and rationality, (c) that virtue and rationality are the proper response to the world, and that (d) man is a part of the amoral and non-rational universe. These three thoughts, while perhaps not straight forwardly inconsistent, certainly do not sit well together. But, as we saw in the previous section, something like (a) and (d) are essential elements of naturalism, so it would appear that naturalism “does not sit well” with the belief that we are capable of rationality. It was, I believe, this sense of the lack of fit between such theses as (a), (b), (c) and (d) that led C.S. Lewis to formulate his various arguments against naturalism.

### **The Argument from Reason**

As with so many important arguments, the argument from reason comes in a variety of forms. It is, therefore, slightly misleading to speak of *the* argument from reason. What all of these arguments have in common is that they each begin with an assertion of the following form.

Unless  $P_x$ , no belief can be held for (good) reasons.

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<sup>23</sup> Bertrand Russell, “What I Believe” [1925] in *Why I am not a Christian* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 42 and 47.

<sup>24</sup> C.S. Lewis, *All My Road Before Me: The Diary of 1922-1927* (London: Fount, 1993), Saturday 5 January 1924, p. 281.

<sup>25</sup> The considerations that Lewis here urges against Russell and naturalism very much remind me of a remark Chesterton made on the subject of pessimism. In a letter to E. C. Bentley he wrote: “A cosmos one day being rebuked by a pessimist replied, “How can you who revile me consent to speak by my machinery? Permit me to reduce you to nothingness and then we will discuss the matter.” Moral. You should not look a gift universe in the mouth.” (Masie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1944), p. 48.) It is also worth comparing the thinking of Stephen R.L. Clark on this matter; see his reply to “indifferentism” in *From Athens to Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) pp. 9ff.

The truth of such a claim is held to yield anti-naturalist conclusions in one of two ways. It may be claimed that the truth of  $P_x$  is inconsistent with the truth of naturalism, or it may be held that the best explanation of the truth of  $P_x$  involves assumptions incompatible with naturalism. These two kinds of argument may be called *self-defeat* arguments and *best explanation* arguments. Formally, they would run as follows.

#### *Self-Defeat Arguments from Reason*

- (SD1) Unless  $P_x$ , no belief can be held for (good) reasons.
- (SD2) If naturalism is true, then  $P_x$  is false.
- (SD3) Therefore, if naturalism is true no belief can be held for (good) reasons.
- (SD4) Therefore, if naturalism is true, naturalism is not believed for (good) reasons.
- (SD5) Therefore, either naturalism is not believed for (good) reasons or naturalism is false.

#### *Best-Explanation Arguments from Reason*

- (BE1) Unless  $P_x$ , no belief can be held for (good) reasons.
- (BE2) If  $P_x$  is true, this fact requires explanation.
- (BE3) The best explanation of the truth of  $P_x$  is that some non-naturalist view is correct.
- (BE4) Therefore, either no belief is held for good reasons, or naturalism is probably false.
- (BE5) Therefore, naturalism is either (a) not believed for good reasons, or (b) probably false.

If either form of argument is a success, if either (SD5) or (BE5) can be supported, naturalism will be a prime candidate for rejection. But can either of these arguments be sustained? If we are to answer this question, we must begin with a search for possible candidates for  $P_x$ . It seems to me that if the human activity we call “drawing an inference” is to be possible and if some of those inferences are to be rational, at least the following conditions must be met.

- P<sub>1</sub>) States of mind are capable of truth and falsity, which itself requires that they are capable of being “about” things.
- P<sub>2</sub>) Logical laws exist.
- P<sub>3</sub>) We are capable of apprehending logical laws.
- P<sub>4</sub>) The apprehension of logical laws plays an explanatory role in the acceptance of the conclusion of the argument as true.
- P<sub>5</sub>) The state of accepting the truth of a proposition plays a crucial explanatory role in the production of other beliefs, and propositional content is relevant to the playing of this role.
- P<sub>6</sub>) Our reasoning processes provide us with a systematically reliable way of

understanding the world around us.<sup>26</sup>

### **Intentionality and the Apprehension of Logical Laws: First Thoughts**

Our discussion of the argument from reason will focus upon P<sub>4</sub> to P<sub>6</sub>, but it will be worth saying a little about P<sub>1</sub> to P<sub>3</sub> before we move on. We begin at the beginning, then, with P<sub>1</sub>.

Certain mental states have what philosophers call “intentionality”. That is, certain mental states are about, represent or refer to other things. In other words, certain mental states have *content*. Thoughts and beliefs are such states. Graham might have a belief (or thought) *about* how tall someone is, say the belief *that his best friend is 5'9"*. The content of Graham’s belief (as with any other) is specified in the “that clause” of this last sentence. Graham’s belief will be true if, and only if, his best friend is indeed 5'9" in height. If mental states were not capable of intentionality, not capable of being *about* anything, then no mental state would be rightly thought of as “true”. But that some mental states are true is clearly an essential part of the concept of rationality and rational inference. How does this feed into the argument from reason? C.S. Lewis clearly thought that the phenomenon of intentionality causes problems for naturalism. He writes that the admission that our thinking can be rational

rules out any materialistic account of thinking. We are compelled to admit between [our thoughts and the world] that particular relation we call truth. But this relation has no meaning at all if we try to make it hold between the matter in [our brains and that in the world]. The brain may be in all sorts of relations to [the world] no doubt: it is in a spatial relation, and a time relation, and a quantitative relation. But to talk of one bit of matter being true about another bit seems to me to be nonsense.<sup>27</sup>

No model yet devised has made a satisfactory unity between our actual experience of sensation or thought or emotion and any available account of the corporeal processes which they are held to involve. We experience, say, a chain of reason; thoughts, which are ‘about’ or ‘refer to’ something other than themselves, ... but physical events, as such, cannot in any intelligible sense be said to be ‘about’ or to ‘refer to’ anything.<sup>28</sup>

Lewis is not alone here. Today’s philosophers are no less puzzled by the phenomenon of intentionality than he was. Indeed, it is far from clear that mental states exhibiting intentionality could possibly arise in a world whose fundamental constituents are non-

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<sup>26</sup> This list is adjusted from that provided by Victor Reppert in *C.S. Lewis’s Dangerous Idea*, chapter 4. This list (and Reppert’s) could be supplemented by the idea that a certain kind of freedom is necessary if our inferences are ever to be rational. There are various ways in which this might run. For exploration of this line of thought see for example Joseph M. Boyle Jr., Germain Grisez and Olaf Tollefsen, *Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), and Christopher Hookway, “The Epicurean Argument: Determinism and Scepticism”.

<sup>27</sup> C.S. Lewis, “De Futilitate” [1967] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 267.

<sup>28</sup> C.S. Lewis *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1964) pp.165-6

intentional. The main attempts to understand intentionality within the naturalistic scheme endeavour to reduce the intentional to functional, causal, or computational interactions. But it is far from clear that such accounts can succeed. It appears that whatever functional, causal or computational interactions are present they will never be sufficient to generate intentionality, or at least not sufficient to determine the content of any mental state that may be present. I do not expect these brief comments to persuade the reader that naturalism is inconsistent with P<sub>1</sub>; after all, I have only sketched the outlines of the argument. The interested reader is encouraged to turn to better-qualified authorities.<sup>29</sup>

With that, we move to a brief consideration of P<sub>2</sub>, according to which the existence of logical laws is a pre-requisite for the existence of rational inference. Firstly, we must ask what we mean by “logical laws”. Although the standards by which our thinking is rightly evaluated include canons of inductive as well as deductive reasoning, and although both are relevant to the argument from reason, we shall be focussing on the standards by which deductive reasoning is evaluated. It is to these standards that the term “logical laws” refers. If no such standards exist, then there is no way in which we can evaluate our various inferences, and no one inferences can any better than any other. The question then arises as to what these standards are and where they come from.

One particular feature of these standards that seems to cause problems for naturalism is that the standards have a modal status. That is to say, some of these standards couldn't have been other than they are; they are necessarily true. Take the law of non-contradiction, for example. The law doesn't just say that no two contradictory beliefs actually *are* both true, but that no two contradictory beliefs *could* both be true. The law of non-contradiction could be stated thus:

(LNC) For any *p*, it is not the case that both *p* and *not-p*.

Our point then, is that (LNC) is not merely true, it is necessarily true; it could not have been false. To see how this could cause problems for naturalism consider the fact that any physical state of affairs could have failed to obtain, the fact that all physical states of affairs are contingent. Take any true statement you like, if that statement only refers to things that the naturalist allows onto the “ground floor” of reality, then that

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<sup>29</sup> A good place to start thinking about these issues would be Dallas Willard's “Knowledge and Naturalism” in William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (eds.) *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 24-48, and the works of John R. Searle.

statement could have been false. For this reason, it would appear that the naturalist cannot accommodate such necessary truths as (LNC). After all, the truth (LNC) will be ultimately dependent upon ground floor realities, and surely if those ground floor realities are contingent, then so is anything that depends upon them – including the truth of (LNC). But this is a conclusion we know to be false.

Even if this reasoning is flawed, we must ask in what way the contingent realities generate necessary truths like (LNC). The particular arrangement of the contingent realities certainly cannot *logically imply* the necessity of our logical laws, for logical implication is itself a modal notion. However, it is very hard to see how a necessary truth could be a necessary truth if generated in any other fashion. If this is right, the modal cannot be explained in non-modal terms, and since naturalism is committed to thinking otherwise, naturalism cannot accommodate  $P_2$ , which seems to imply the existence of such modal realities.

One popular line among naturalists is to say that logical laws arise out of the relations between our ideas or concepts. Our concepts *batchelor* and *unmarried* are by themselves sufficient to generate the necessity of *all batchelors are unmarried*, and something similar is supposed to go for all other necessary truths. However, once more we must ask how our concepts generate such necessary truths. To put it another way, if logical laws arise out of the relations between our concepts, we can ask: just what kind of relations does the naturalist have in mind? If the answer is “logical relations”, it is clear that he cannot have explained the existence of *all* laws of logic naturalistically. But if any other answer is given, the explanation will fail to explain.

Perhaps the naturalist could jettison the idea of necessity, and hold that none of the standards by which we evaluate our beliefs are necessarily true. This, however, will not help the naturalist to defend his position. Take one line of argument that the naturalist often uses in support of his view.

- (N1) Using fewer and less problematic assumptions, Naturalism is capable of explaining more features of the world around us than are its competitors.
- (N2) Any theory in this position ought to be accepted.
- (N3) Therefore, naturalism ought to be accepted.

The reader will have gathered by now that I question the truth of (N1), but that is not the point at issue here. The point is that someone who accepts the argument's premises only need accept its conclusion if it is impossible that the premises be true,

while the conclusion false. That is, the conclusion only need be accepted if one also accepts that (N4) is a necessary truth.

(N4) If (N1) and (N2) are true, then (N3) is true.

But if we accept this as a necessary truth, then we have not taken the naturalists advice in jettisoning necessity. In short, the naturalist only has a right to think his position supported by valid arguments if he allows the existence of necessary truths, but if he allows the existence of necessary truths, he owes us some explanation of how these can be fitted into his naturalistic scheme.

Again, I don't expect the reader to be wholly convinced. The issue is a technical one, on which I am no authority. Let it suffice to say that the existence of mind-independent logical laws is not obviously compatible with the truth of naturalism.

We now move to consider P<sub>3</sub>. According to this principle, if we are capable of making rational inferences, we must be able to apprehend the laws of logic. This is because if one is to make a rational inference one must be able to apprehend the logical law with reference to which that inference is rational. To rationally infer *q* from the conjunction of *p* with *if p then q*, one must be aware of the logical law according to which this conclusion follows from those premises.<sup>30</sup> Now, whatever account the naturalist gives of the laws of logic, it cannot turn out to be (on naturalistic assumptions) a complete mystery as to how we come to awareness of those laws. It is evident that these laws are not confirmed (as logical laws) by experience or experiment, so our knowledge of them seems to come from some other source. But unless the laws of logic are mind-dependent, I cannot see how (in a naturalistic scheme) we could possibly become aware of them. On the other hand, if these laws are mind-dependent it is far from clear that they can play the role we normally believe them to play. As Lewis says, "Unless the measuring rod is independent of the things measured we can do no measuring."<sup>31</sup> Unless the standards

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<sup>30</sup> As a general principle this seems to lead to problems. If we can never infer a conclusion from any given premises before adding a new (connecting) premise, then neither can we make the inference after the addition: for now we simply have a larger set of premises and the question once more arises as to what connects the premises and the conclusion. If we ask for another connecting premise, an infinite (and vicious) regress looms. (See Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles", *Mind*, 1895 (4), pp. 278-80.) However, the point in the main text need not be seen as endorsing such a dubious general principle. It only needs be claimed that the agent in question must be aware of the truth of at least one logical law, or even just that some inferences are irrational without the presence of this (minimal) awareness.

<sup>31</sup> C.S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism" [1943] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 250.

by which our inferences are judged is independent of those inferences, any “judging” that takes place will be a mere mockery. As with  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , I don’t expect these comments to convince the reader that  $P_3$  really is incompatible with naturalism. What does seem evident is that all three represent *prima facie* problems for the naturalistic world-view. Furthermore, these are not problems that the naturalist can avoid simply by denouncing  $P_1$ ,  $P_2$  and/or  $P_3$ , for in doing so she makes herself vulnerable to the argument from reason.

### **C.S. Lewis’ Initial Formulation of the Argument from Reason**

We will approach our consideration of  $P_4$ ,  $P_5$  and  $P_6$  through C.S. Lewis’ various expositions of the argument from reason. As explained above, Lewis offered the argument in a variety of forms. We begin our thinking with the formulation of the argument that Anscombe attacked. The following quotes should serve to give the reader a good idea of how Lewis’ argument ran.

All possible [inferred] knowledge ... depends on the validity of reason. If the feeling of certainty which we express by words like *must be* and *therefore* and *since* is a real perception of how things are outside our own minds really ‘must’ be, well and good. But if this certainty is merely a feeling in our own minds and not a genuine insight into realities beyond them – if it merely represents the way our minds happen to work – then we can have no knowledge. Unless human reason is valid no science can be true.

It follows that no account of the universe can be true unless that account leaves it possible for our thinking to be a real insight. A theory which explained everything else in the whole universe but which made it impossible to believe that our thinking was valid, would be utterly out of court. For that theory would itself have been reached by thinking, and if thinking is not valid that theory would, of course, be itself demolished. It would have destroyed its own credentials. ...

We must believe in the validity of rational thought, and we must not believe in anything inconsistent with its validity. But we can believe in the validity of thought only under certain conditions. Consider the following sentences. (1) ‘He thinks that dog dangerous because he has often seen it muzzled and he has noticed that messengers always try to avoid going to that house.’ (2) ‘He thinks that dog dangerous because it is black and ever since he was bitten by a black dog in childhood he has always been afraid of black dogs.’

Both sentences explain *why* the man thinks as he does. But the one explanation substantiates the value of his thought, the other wholly discredits it. Why is it that to discover the cause of a thought sometimes damages its credit and sometimes reinforces it? ... The real difference is that in the first instance the man’s belief is caused by something rational (by argument from observed facts) while in the other it is caused by something irrational (association of ideas).

We may state it as a rule that *no thought is valid if it can be fully explained as the result of irrational causes*. ... Obviously, then, the whole process of human thought, what we call reason is ... valueless if it is the result of irrational causes. Hence every theory of the universe which makes the human mind a result of irrational causes is inadmissible, for it would be a proof that there are no such things as proofs. Which is nonsense.

But Naturalism, as commonly held, is precisely a theory of this sort. The mind, like every other particular thing or event, is supposed to be simply a product of [physical causes]. ... And [physical causes are] not supposed to be rational. All thoughts whatever are therefore the results of irrational causes.<sup>32</sup>

It would be impossible to accept naturalism itself if we really and consistently believed naturalism. For naturalism is a system of thought. But for naturalism all thoughts are mere events with [non-rational, physical] causes. It is, to me at any rate, impossible to regard the thoughts which make up naturalism that way and, at the same time, to regard them as a real insight into external reality. ...

Every particular thought ... is always and by all men discounted the moment they believe that it can be explained, without remainder, as the result of irrational causes. Whenever you know what the other man is saying is wholly due to his complexes or to a bit of bone pressing on his brain, you cease to attach any importance to it. But if naturalism were true, then all thoughts whatever would be wholly the result of irrational causes. Therefore, all thought would be equally worthless. Therefore, naturalism is worthless.<sup>33</sup>

It seems clear that in these passages Lewis is endorsing some kind of Self-Defeat Argument from Reason. In outline, the argument appears to run like this:

- (1) Naturalism is a system of thought.
- (2) If naturalism is true all thoughts are ultimately the result of certain irrational causes.
- (3) No thought (and so no system of thought) can be reasonable if it results from irrational causes.
- (4) Therefore, if naturalism is true, the thought that it is true is unreasonable.
- (5) Therefore, naturalism is either untrue or unreasonable.
- (6) So, we ought to reject naturalism.

### **Anscombe's Criticisms**

In her "A Reply to Mr C.S. Lewis's Argument that "Naturalism" is Self-Refuting", Anscombe offers at least three different criticisms of Lewis' argument. Firstly, Anscombe contends that Lewis' argument trades on a confusion of "irrational" with "non-rational" causes. Secondly, she raises issues surrounding the scepticism (about our reasoning) that Lewis thinks the naturalist cannot evade. Thirdly, Anscombe distinguishes various senses of the word "because", and claims that when different senses of the word are in play the proffered explanations are not competitors.

#### *Irrational vs. Non-rational Causes*

According to Anscombe, Lewis' argument trades on a confusion between irrational and non-rational causes. When a person's entertaining a thought is understood as a physical event, naturalism is of course committed to saying that the event has causes

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<sup>32</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1948), pp. 26-28.

<sup>33</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Religion Without Dogma?" [1946] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 170.

like any other. He is not, however, committed to saying that those causes are “irrational”. Antony Flew, in his own response to Lewis, puts the point with characteristic clarity.

Lewis is too carefree in his talk of “rational” and “irrational.” Why must atoms, or systems of neurons, or whatever may be the terms of the scientific explanation of my mental processes, be either rational or irrational? Can they not be just non-rational – things to which the rational/irrational distinction does not apply? Lewis would surely not say that atoms were immoral. But then, must they be moral? Of course not. Lewis would say that the distinction does not apply to the sort of things in terms of which “naturalists” would give their causal explanations of mental processes. But since atoms are neither rational nor irrational, the argument breaks down, for the causes by which the “naturalist” explains his own thinking are no longer irrational and the “naturalist” thesis no longer refutes itself.<sup>34</sup>

Lewis granted the irrational/non-rational distinction, as is evident from the changes he made to the revised edition of *Miracles*. We shall return to the issue shortly, for now we simply reformulate the argument from reason as follows.

- (1) Naturalism is a system of thought.
- (2) If naturalism is true all thoughts are ultimately the result of certain non-rational causes.
- (3) No thought (and so no system of thought) can be reasonable if it results from non-rational causes.
- (4) Therefore, if naturalism is true, the thought that it is true is unreasonable.
- (5) Therefore, naturalism is either untrue or unreasonable.
- (6) So, we ought to reject naturalism.

### *The Threat of Scepticism*

The second line of response to Lewis focuses on Lewis’ claim that if naturalism is true then no human reasoning is “valid”. Anscombe suggested that this latter claim is without meaning. One can meaningfully assert that a particular piece of reasoning is valid or invalid but, Anscombe contended, one cannot meaningfully make either claim about human reasoning in general. This is because we only acquire of concepts of validity and invalidity though experience of particular instances of reasoning of both kinds.

If this is correct, we cannot have the concept of invalidity without having first encountered at least one instance of valid reasoning (and one instance of invalid reasoning). But if we have encountered one instance of valid reasoning, then it cannot be true that all human reasoning is invalid. From these considerations, Anscombe concluded that Lewis’ argument cannot succeed unless we have reason to think that

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<sup>34</sup> Antony Flew, “The Third Maxim,” *The Rationalist Annual*, 1955, p. 64.

we cannot even have the concept of validity in the naturalist's world. The defender of the argument from reason might at this point suggest that naturalism does indeed entail that we cannot have the concept of validity. But Anscombe has a ready response: all talk about "not having the concept of validity" must be incoherent, for if we did not have the concept we would not know what someone was talking about when they make that statement. Such talk is either unintelligible or simply false.

This, however, does not settle the matter. Putting this objection alongside the argument from reason, to which of the premise(s) is Anscombe objecting here? It would appear that she is objecting to an unstated entailment of (2') and (3'): if naturalism is true then none of our thinking is reasonable (or "valid"). She might, therefore, be interpreted as claiming that the conjunction of (2') and (3') is itself unintelligible. This, however, seems wildly implausible. In any case, we needn't worry too much about this criticism of Lewis' argument, for the most that Anscombe's argument shows is that complete scepticism about our reasoning abilities is incoherent. Our argument can be restated so as to avoid these problems by reformulating the argument so as to be arguing that naturalism itself cannot be meaningfully asserted, because if it could it would itself entail something that cannot: that none of our thinking is reasonable (or valid).

There is, however, another related issue that has bothered some commentators on the argument from reason. One way of presenting a "self-defeat" argument might run as follows.

(ST1) Unless we have a convincing response to philosophical scepticism, we cannot know anything.

(ST2) If naturalism is true, we have no such response to scepticism.

(ST3) Therefore, if naturalism is true, its truth can never be known.

For obvious reasons, Victor Reppert labels arguments like this "Sceptical Threat Arguments". This kind of argument would proceed by raising "sceptical doubts about the validity of reasoning, and then [go on] to argue that such doubts can be resolved only if naturalism is denied." As Reppert observes, such arguments will be objected to "by many people in contemporary philosophy on the grounds that no absolute security against such doubts is available from any quarter, and that even if it were it is not

needed.” He goes on to point out that neither Theism nor any other kinds of anti-naturalism provides any more security against these doubts than does naturalism.<sup>35</sup>

But not all arguments from reason (or even all Self-Defeat arguments from Reason) are sceptical threat arguments. On the contrary, the argument from reason may begin by “assuming that validity is an established fact” and asking “whether, in a naturalistic world, one can *account* for the fact that it *is* valid.”<sup>36</sup>

### *Non-Competing Explanations*

Anscombe nowhere clearly expresses her third objection, though it should be obvious to anyone reading her paper just what that objection is. She reconstructs Lewis’ argument in the following passage.

You argue that the naturalist hypothesis about human thinking implies that no human thinking is rational ... For if a man produces what purports to be the conclusion of an argument, in order that what he says should be rational he must say it *because* he has reasoned; but the naturalist hypothesis say that he says it *because* of certain natural causes; and if these causes *fully* explain his utterance, if the chain of causes is complete, there is no room for the operation of such a cause as the man’s own reasoning.<sup>37</sup>

What Anscombe objects to here is the idea that there being a “full” explanation of an event in causal terms entails that there is “no room” for any other kind of explanation. She argues that there are many kinds of explanation: causal, historical, logical, and psychological to name just four. According to Anscombe, if two explanations are to compete with one another (so that if one applies there is “no room” for the other), they must belong to the same kind. In particular, a causal explanation does not compete with a logical or psychological one. Flew makes the same point.

Lewis and others who produce similar arguments are snared by the chronic ambiguities of words like “cause,” “reason,” “because.” If asked “What is the reason why you think this is true?” I may reasonably answer either “It was thrashed into me at school,” or “It follows from such and such true premises.” Both these answers simultaneously may be sound, for they are answers to what are really quite different questions. I shall call the senses of “reason,” “cause,” etc., which ask for the first type of answer the *historical* senses ... , and shall call the senses which ask for the second type of answer the *logical* senses ... If the reason (historical) why I think my mental processes are determined by

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<sup>35</sup> Victor Reppert, “The Lewis-Anscombe Controversy,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 1989 (19/1), pp. 37-8. Reppert, rightly in my view, accuses Eric Mascall and Augustine Shutte of using sceptical threat versions of the argument from reason. See E.L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science* (London: Longmans, 1957), pp. 215-16 and Augustine Shutte, “The Refutation of Determinism,” *Philosophy* 1984 (59), pp. 481-9.

<sup>36</sup> Victor Reppert, “The Lewis-Anscombe Controversy,” p. 37. Reppert refers to these arguments as “best explanation” arguments. In his sense of this term, I agree that all arguments from reason ought to be best explanation arguments.

<sup>37</sup> G.E.M. Anscombe, “A Reply to Mr C.S. Lewis’s Argument that “Naturalism” is Self-Refuting,” in *The Collected Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe II: Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 228.

neurone changes is itself something to do with neurone changes, this has no necessary bearing on the questions whether there are, or whether I have, any logical reasons, any good arguments, for thinking this thought about the causation of my mental processes.<sup>38</sup>

This, I think, represents the most significant of the challenges that Anscombe (and Flew) put to Lewis' argument against naturalism. From the revisions that Lewis made to his argument, it seems obvious that he would have agreed.

## Continuing the Debate

In fact, the beginnings of a response appear in a note from C.S. Lewis that accompanied the Anscombe paper when it first appeared in *The Socratic Digest*, No. 4 (1948)<sup>39</sup>. The important part of that note runs as follows.

I admit ... that the cause and effect relation between events and the ground and consequent relations between propositions are distinct. Since English uses *because* of both, let us here use *Because CE* for the cause and effect relation ('This doll always falls on its feet *because CE* its feet are weighted'), and *Because GC* for the ground and consequent relation ('A equals C *because GC* they both equal B'). But the sharper this distinction becomes the more my difficulty increases. If an argument is to be veridical the conclusion must be related to the premises as consequent to a ground, i.e. the conclusion is there *because GC* certain other propositions are true. On the other hand, our thinking the conclusion is an event and must be related to previous events as effect to cause, i.e. this act of thinking must occur *because CE* previous events have occurred. It would seem, therefore, that we never think the conclusion *because GC* it is the consequent of its grounds but only *because CE* certain previous events have happened. If so, it does not seem that the GC sequence makes us more likely to think the true conclusion than not. And this is very much what I meant by the difficulty in Naturalism. (in *Compelling Reason* p. 108)

In the revision of *Miracles*, Lewis develops this line of thinking in two ways. Firstly, he implies that – on the assumption of naturalism – the fact that these two *because* relations are completely distinct suggests that it would be a massive coincidence if the two systems happened to reliably run together in our thinking.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that unless such a coincidence is literally incredible, this line of thinking will lead us to endorse a best-explanation form of the argument from reason. Secondly, in a passage we shall refer to as the *central passage*, the distinction in question leads Lewis to ask:

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<sup>38</sup> Antony Flew, "The Third Maxim," p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> The note also accompanies Anscombe's paper as it appears in her collected works, and many, if not all, reprints of Lewis' essay "Religion without Dogma?" a paper (read at the Socratic) along much the same lines as *Miracles* chapter three.

<sup>40</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Religion Without Dogma?" [1946] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), Note B, pp. 177-8.

But even if grounds do exist, what exactly have they got to do with the actual occurrence of the belief as a psychological event? If it is an event it must be caused. It must in fact be simply one link in a causal chain which stretches back to the beginning and forward to the end of time. How could such a trifle as lack of logical grounds prevent the belief's occurrence or how could the existence of grounds promote it?<sup>41</sup>

Lewis' own suggestion on the naturalist's behalf is to say that one belief may cause another by *being seen to be a ground for it*.<sup>42</sup> Here we are in familiar territory, for one thought can only be a logical ground for another if logical laws exist, and one thought can only be seen to be a logical ground for another if humans are capable of apprehending logical laws. In other words, this response is only open to the naturalist if they can accommodate both P<sub>2</sub> and P<sub>3</sub>. If the naturalist wishes to make use of Lewis' suggestion, it would surely be incumbent upon them to explain how this could be fitted into the naturalistic scheme.

We begin our discussion of these points from Lewis with a brief consideration of the claim that if naturalism is to accommodate the thought that our beliefs are regularly in accord with reason, he must posit an incredible coincidence. In his response to Flew, Ernest Gellner puts that problem well.

Now from the proposition that there are always causes (which is what [naturalism] amounts to) it does indeed not follow that there are no reasons or no valid causes; this makes Flew think he has established his case. But not at all, for some of those whom he is opposing are not arguing that from the presence of causes it follows that there never are reasons, but merely that if causes are present, their overlap with reasons ... is entirely fortuitous. *This* is by no means undermined by Flew's distinction and his insistence that there is no necessary connection (above all, negatively) between causes and reason; on the contrary, Flew's central premises is the firmest support of the view he is attacking. ...

The point can be put thus: if [naturalism] is true, then it is always a mere coincidence that what we believe is also true, that the reason we in fact follow also corresponds to valid modes of reason.<sup>43</sup>

The response from Flew was inevitable

[A]ll other things being equal and in the long run and with many dramatic exceptions, true beliefs about our environment tend to have some survival value. So it looks as if evolutionary biology and human history could provide some reasons for saying that it need no be a mere coincidence if a significant proportion of men's beliefs about their environment are in fact true. Simply because if that were not so they could not have survived long in that environment. As an analysis of the meaning of 'truth' the pragmatist idea that a true belief is one which is somehow advantageous to have will not do at all. Yet there is at least some contingent and non-coincidental connection between

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<sup>41</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ernest Gellner, "Determinism and Validity" *The Rationalist Annual*, 1957, p. 74. Hugo Meynell makes much the same point in his paper "An Attack on C.S. Lewis" *Faith and Philosophy* 1991 8(3): pp. 305-16.

true beliefs, on the one hand, and the advantage, if it be an advantage, of survival, on the other.<sup>44</sup>

Lewis evidently saw the possibility of such a response, but thought that it begged the question. He claimed that it amounted to the naturalist arguing for the reliability of his cognitive faculties, and that if those faculties really are in doubt such an argument should not persuade us.<sup>45</sup> But this seems like a poor response to Flew. Flew is not trying to remove doubts about our cognitive faculties, he is attempting to stop those doubts from arising in the first place.<sup>46</sup> The question, then, is whether Flew's doubt preventing strategy is successful. In this context, it will be successful if evolution can explain why a person who has good inferential habits is more likely to survive than is someone who has bad inferential habits. Although it may seem natural to suppose that evolution can explain this, I'm not wholly convinced of this. We will return to consider this issue further in the next section, on the general relationship between evolutionary theory and the argument from reason.

There is a popular illustration associated with the last objection from Anscombe and Flew. The illustration is that of the computer. The operations of computers, it is suggested, are fully explicable in naturalistic terms, and yet a computer is more than capable of performing calculations and inferences according to the rules of mathematics and logic. This, it is claimed, shows that the two systems of relation can both apply to the same series of events ... they are not incompatible. And if the two systems are not incompatible, then Lewis' argument fails.

This, however, moves far too quickly. If Anscombe and Flew have interpreted Lewis correctly, and if any argument from reason must proceed in the same fashion, then computer illustration may be sufficient to undermine those arguments. It seems to me, however, that the Lewisian argument has a little more to it than we have yet seen. One natural way of reading Anscombe and Flew is as claiming that if a person can, when asked, adduce good reasons in support of a belief that he holds, then we can

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<sup>44</sup> Antony Flew, "Determinism and Validity Again", *The Rationalist Annual*, 1958, pp. 46-7.

<sup>45</sup> Lewis writes, Our "inference itself is on trial ... We, and he, want to be reassured. And the reassurance turns out to be one more inference ... as if this inference were not ... under the same suspicion as all the rest." [M 25]

<sup>46</sup> It is interesting, at this point, to compare Alvin Plantinga's argument against naturalism, particularly his discussion of "the dreaded loop" in his unpublished but widely circulated 1994 paper "Naturalism Defeated" (available on-line).

pronounce that belief is rational no matter what its causal history. If this is how Anscombe and Flew were arguing, then I think they were mistaken.<sup>47</sup>

This is because such an account of what it means to hold a belief rationally allows for no distinction between reasons for holding a belief and rationalisations of that belief. Suppose that chancy Charlie decides what to believe on a certain subject through a game of chance (by associating the various positions that might be held on the subject with the different possible outcomes of the game). Even though Charlie, being an intelligent and creative fellow, can produce formidable arguments for the position he adopts he surely does not hold that belief rationally. The problem here is that the reasons that Charlie offers in support of his belief are not really *his* reasons. To count as *his* reasons those reasons must at least partially *explain* why Charlie believes as he does. That is to say, the reasons are to justify Charlie's belief those reasons must be part of what *brings it about* that Charlie believes as he does.<sup>48</sup> It may have been something like this concern that Lewis was voicing in the *central passage*, quoted above. What does it take for a person's reasons to be a part of what brings it about that they believe as they do? It seems to me to take, at least, the truth of both P<sub>4</sub> and P<sub>5</sub>, which to remind the reader, ran as follows.

P<sub>4</sub>) The apprehension of logical laws plays an explanatory role in the acceptance of the conclusion of the argument as true.

P<sub>5</sub>) The state of accepting the truth of a proposition plays a crucial explanatory role in the production of other beliefs, and propositional content is relevant to the playing of this role.

To help us in our thinking about the relationship between naturalism and these two maxims, it will be worth doing a little more thinking about naturalism itself. Firstly, we will distinguish between two different forms of naturalism, and secondly we shall consider the naturalistic understanding of the laws of nature.

### *Two Forms of Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind*

The naturalistic positions we want to distinguish will be referred to as *Reductive* and *Supervenient Naturalism*. Reductive naturalism holds that mental states (events), such as beliefs, are identical to certain physical states (events) – usually to states (events) that obtain in the brain of the person who enjoys that mental state. Unlike Reductive

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<sup>47</sup> As a matter of fact, I don't think that Anscombe does argue like this, for she makes much the same remark as I shall go on to make. That, however, leaves questions about just how she does argue.

<sup>48</sup> I owe this point to Victor Reppert's "The Lewis-Anscombe Controversy."

naturalism, Supervenient naturalism holds that mental and physical realities exist, as it were, on two levels. On the ground floor, we have the physical realities, on the first floor the mental. This counts as a kind of naturalism because according to supervenient naturalism there is an asymmetric dependence relation between the ground floor and the first floor. The psychological situation depends upon the physical one, and there can be no psychological differences between situations that are physically identical.<sup>49</sup> For our purposes, this distinction between two varieties of naturalism will simply mean that we will occasionally have to reword our arguments so as to apply to both positions.<sup>50</sup> While my discussion could proceed perfectly well without reference to these two positions, keeping them in view will help us to relate Lewis' argument to current philosophical concerns.

#### *Naturalism and the Laws of Nature*

According to naturalism of all stripes, the physical realm governed by the laws of nature. Such laws govern all causal interactions. Each of these laws may be expressed in something like the following form.

Under conditions C, entities (or systems) of kind K, exhibit behaviour B.<sup>51</sup>

These laws fall into two kinds: (i) basic laws and (ii) derived laws. The derived laws are as they are because the basic laws are as they are. The basic laws simply are as they are, and their being that way cannot be explained. To illustrate, there are laws that govern the refraction of light as it passes from one medium to another. From these laws (and perhaps various others besides) we could produce a law about the conditions necessary for the production of rainbows. The laws about the refraction of light are "more basic" than the laws about rainbows.

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<sup>49</sup> These definitions are not wholly in keeping with current use. It is standard to distinguish between two types of identity naturalism (or materialism) that could both come under my "reductive naturalism". These are "token state identity theory" and "type identity theory". The first holds that individual mental states are identical to individual physical states, while the latter that certain types of mental state are identical to certain types of physical state. The latter has become unpopular due to the seeming possibility of "multiple realisation", the possibility of creatures being in mental states of the same kind to ours (pains, beliefs, desires, etc.) while being in wholly different "underlying" physical states. Supervenient naturalism is normally defined so as to explicitly allow the possibility of multiple realisation.

<sup>50</sup> Indeed, there is some debate over whether (certain forms of) these two positions really are distinct or whether they are really just different ways of talking.

<sup>51</sup> Some philosophers distinguish between the laws of nature themselves and our statements of those laws. The law itself being what "in the world" makes (or would make) the statement of law true. In this terminology, any statement of a law of nature may be expressed in the form given.

In keeping with our earlier definition of naturalism, it seems to me that if naturalism is true the most basic laws will only refer to physical entities, systems and properties. That is to say, even if some physical states turn out to be identical with certain mental states, in so far as the basic laws refer to such states they will refer to them under their physical (and not their mental) descriptions. If there are any laws governing mental states *as mental states*, these must be derived laws. Returning to the schema above, in the most basic laws the placeholders C, K and B must be filled out by terms that refer to only physical realities (and refer to them under physical descriptions).

With this understanding in place, we may offer the following argument against reductive naturalism. Reductive naturalism clearly allows that one mental state can cause another. This is because physical states can cause one another, and according to reductive naturalism mental states just are physical states. No mystery there. But suppose that state  $s_1$  causes state  $s_2$ , and in fact both of these states are mental events, beliefs say. If our animadversions on the laws of nature were accurate, then the reason that  $s_1$  causes  $s_2$  has nothing to do with the fact that these states are beliefs with particular content. That  $s_1$  causes  $s_2$  is fixed by the purely physical properties of those two states. Consider the following from eminent philosopher of mind, Jaegwon Kim

[Reductive naturalism] fails to do full justice to psychophysical causation in which the mental qua mental has any real causal role to play. ... [W]hether or not a given event has a mental description (optional reading: whether it has any mental characteristic) seems entirely irrelevant to what causal relations it enters into. Its causal powers are wholly determined by the physical description or characteristic that holds for it; for it is [first and foremost] under its physical description that it may be subsumed under a causal law.<sup>52</sup>

The same argument can be deployed, *mutatis mutandis*, against supervenient naturalism. If laws that are blind to those supervening states govern the physical states on which the mental supervenes, then the existence of the mental is irrelevant to what happens on the physical level. Furthermore, it is hard to see how the mental states themselves can play any causal role at all. If one mental state,  $m_1$ , supervenes on the physical state  $s_1$  and a second,  $m_2$ , upon on  $s_2$ , the fact that  $s_1$  causes  $s_2$  does nothing to produce any further causal relation between  $m_1$  and  $m_2$ . On supervenient naturalism, then, everything that exists on the “first floor” seems to be absent any power to

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<sup>52</sup> Jaegwon Kim, “Epiphenomenal and Supervenient Causation,” in *Supervenience and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 106 (quoted in William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 66-7). The actual target of Kim’s attack here is the Anomalous Monism of Donald Davidson.

influence the actual course of events. If this is right, then neither form of naturalism can accommodate P<sub>4</sub> or P<sub>5</sub>.<sup>53</sup>

## **Evolution and the Argument from Reason**

If the argument of the last section is correct, the ramifications for Flew's response to Gellner are enormous. There we concluded that on the assumption of naturalism the existence of mental states makes no difference to the course of events. But if this is so, then evolution will be completely blind to their existence. The result will be that evolution cannot "select for" organisms because they have mental states, and more importantly, cannot select for them because their mental states accurately represent the world. In short, if the argument of the previous section is sound, evolutionary theory cannot be used to combat the argument from reason, and if evolution cannot be used in this way then the "coincidence" version of the argument from reason remains undefeated.<sup>54</sup>

While I think this defence of the argument from reason has much to be said for it, it will be interesting to see how far we can get while allowing the naturalist to assume that mental states do effect the course of events. To this end, we will investigate the relevance of evolution a little further. By way of recap, then, the "coincidence" version of the argument from reason, could be expressed like this ...

When logic says a thing must be so, Nature always agrees. No one can suppose that this can be due to a happy coincidence. A great many people think that it is due to the fact that Nature produced the mind. But on the assumption that Nature is herself mindless this provides no explanation. To be the result of a series of mindless events is one thing: to be a kind of plan or true account of the laws according to which those mindless events arose is quite another. Thus the Gulf Stream produces all sorts of results: for instance, the temperature of the Irish Sea. What it does not produce is maps of the Gulf Stream. But if logic, as we find it operative in our own minds, is really a result of mindless nature, then it is a result as improbable as that. The laws whereby logic obliges us to think turn out to be the laws according to which every event in space and time must happen. The man who thinks this an ordinary or probable result does not really

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<sup>53</sup> This argument is taken from chapter three of William Hasker's *The Emergent Self*, "Why the Physical Isn't Closed". Hasker attempts to bolster this line of thought by appeal to the "possibility" of zombies that are our physical equivalents. After a lengthy exchange with Hasker over this point, the appeal to "zombies" still seems to me to beg the question against naturalism.

<sup>54</sup> In response to an argument such as this, Michael Martin (*Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 152)) responds that it is possible for evolution to select things that are not an evolutionary advantage, since such traits may be coded for by the same genes that code for a trait that is advantageous. No doubt this is possible, but the point hardly helps the naturalist respond to this variant of the argument from reason. If anything, this possibility seems to make matters worse for naturalism. Martin makes this remark in the course of appraising a version of the argument from reason as presented by Richard Taylor in *Metaphysics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963).

understand. It is as if cabbages, in addition to resulting from the laws of botany also gave lectures in that subject: or as if, when I knocked out my pipe, the ashes arranged themselves into letters which read: 'We are the ashes of a knocked-out pipe.' But if the validity of knowledge cannot be explained that way, and if perpetual happy coincidence throughout the whole of recorded time is out of the question, then surely we must seek the real explanation elsewhere.<sup>55</sup>

The evolutionary response has it that creatures inveterately wrong in their inferences "have a pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die before reproducing their kind."<sup>56</sup> Cognitive faculties that enable us to reliably make (deductively and inductively) valid inferences, are more conducive to survival than are faculties that encourage faulty reasoning.

However, in so far as truth in beliefs and validity in reasoning are things that selection pressures will encourage, this is only because these things are instrumentally connected with other more obviously relevant features of the organisms in question. The evolutionary story is only directly concerned with features of organisms that in some way contribute to the "fitness" of that organism. To be fit in this sense, an organism must be well adapted to survive and reproduce in its environment. For evolution, then, the value of truth in belief and of validity in reasoning is entirely instrumental. This creates problems for the evolutionary response in a variety of ways. The most important of these is best approached somewhat obliquely.

Philosophers, and especially philosophers of science, have long asserted that theory is underdetermined by data. What they mean by this assertion is that given any amount of information about the way the world is, there will always be more than one way to account for that information. That is, there will always be more than one theory that will accommodate any given set of data. In fact, given that there will always be more than one such theory, it follows that there will always be an infinite number of theories that will accommodate our data.

For instance, the theory that the Earth is flat is not conclusively refuted by observations from space which seem to indicate otherwise. The "flat-earther" can always put this appearance down to, say, distortions caused by the upper atmosphere. Indeed, the "flat-earther" could find ways to accommodate any conceivable piece of

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<sup>55</sup> C.S. Lewis "De Futilitate" [1967] in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Literature, Philosophy and Short Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), pp. 267-8.

<sup>56</sup> W.V.o. Quine, "Natural Kinds" in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 126.

evidence against his theory. (This is not to say that his theory is rationally acceptable, but only that its rejection is based on something more than “the data”).<sup>57</sup>

The under-determination of theory by data has a pleasant illustration within mathematics, in which data is symbolised by points plotted on a graph and theories by equations whose respective lines run through those points. The theorem runs thus: for any finite number of points plotted on a graph, there will always be an infinite number of equations whose corresponding lines, when drawn on the graph, would run through those points.<sup>58</sup>

From the under-determination of theory by data, several important thinkers have concluded that any preference for one theory over another that accommodates all the same data must be either irrational or purely pragmatic. This, it need hardly be said, cannot be the position of the naturalist. If naturalism is to be defended by rational argument and not endorsed merely as a useful hypothesis but as true then there must be some reliable method of choosing between two competing theories each of which accommodates the data we possess. Not only this, but we must be able to account for the reliability of these methods within the naturalistic scheme. Christopher Hookway puts the issue well.

[S]ince there is no limit to the number of hypotheses that can fit a given body of data, what reason have we to suppose that *we* are capable of producing, and finding plausible, an hypothesis that is on the right lines?<sup>59</sup>

Hookway goes on to point out that if the success of our theorising is not to be attributed to mere luck, then we must suppose that “there is, in any particular case, an affinity between our sense of plausibility and the nature of reality.”<sup>60</sup> In chapter 13 of *Miracles*, “On Probability,” Lewis makes a similar assertion, stating that our judgement of the probability of a claim often hinges on “some innate sense of the

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<sup>57</sup> Along the same lines, see C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 216-23.

<sup>58</sup> To be more precise, the theorem I have in mind states that if  $x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots, x_n$  take distinct values, then for any other  $n$  numbers  $y_1, y_2, y_3, \dots, y_n$ , there exist an infinite number of polynomials  $y = f(x)$  such that for all  $i$ ,  $y_i = f(x_i)$ . This theorem is a simple consequence of Lagrange’s Interpolation Formula. As is common with such things, Joseph Louis Lagrange (a big name in Mathematics) was not the first to come upon this formula (which he published in 1795), but was actually beaten to it by E. Waring (in 1779) and L. Euler (in 1783). For references to the relevant works of these men, see Karl Pearson, *Tracts for Computers*, volume 2 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1920), p. 63 entries (9), (10), and (11).

<sup>59</sup> Chris Hookway, “Naturalism, fallibilism and evolutionary epistemology” in Chris Hookway (ed.) *Minds, Machines and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> Christopher Hookway, “Naturalism, fallibilism and evolutionary epistemology,” p. 6. To be accurate, at this point Hookway is expounding the ideas of C.S. Pierce. It isn’t clear whether Hookway would also endorse this claim. Similar remarks apply to later quotes.

fitness of things.”<sup>61</sup> To what extent will evolutionary theory reassure us that the “sense of fitness” is a reliable guide? Could evolution underwrite a real “affinity between our sense of plausibility and the nature of reality”? Hookway continues

that a faculty was necessary for the commonsense inquiries which facilitate survival and reproduction is no guarantee that it will help us to describe reality. Science has no survival value, and we have to rely upon our sense of plausibility in areas remote from the vital concerns of everyday practice.<sup>62</sup>

Supposing, contrary to our earlier argument, that evolutionary theory can assume the causal relevance of humans having certain beliefs, it would appear that at best that theory can only explain why our cognitive faculties are apt to yield reliable conclusions on subjects closely connected with our everyday concerns. It seems hard to see how accepting a true scientific or metaphysical theory could significantly affect one’s chances of survival, for the acceptance of such a theory has only a minimal impact on our behaviour. But if the acceptance of true scientific or metaphysical theories does us little evolutionary good, neither do faculties tuned to enable us to reach such conclusions.

To make the point slightly more concrete, consider our preference for simple theories over complex ones. A neat example of this is that given points plotted at  $(x,y) = (1,1), (2,2), (3,3)$  and  $(4,4)$ , the plot of either of the following formulas will run through these points.

$$y = x$$
$$y = (x-1)(x-2)(x-3)(x-4) + x$$

If we allow the plotted points to represent our “data” and the formulas our “theories”, then it is clear that our choice of theory is underdetermined the data. Nevertheless, if this data is all we have to go on, it is obvious that we ought to prefer the first of these theories. Our preference for that theory is due to its simplicity. It would seem then, that in deciding between theories we take it that, other things being equal, a simple theory is more likely to be true than a complicated one. It is, however, very difficult to see why simplicity should be an indicator of truth. On the other hand, arising from the

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<sup>61</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 108. In this passage Lewis is himself quoting the noted scientist Sir Arthur Eddington.

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Hookway, “Naturalism, fallibilism and evolutionary epistemology,” p. 6.

fact that they are easier to work with there are obvious, and evolutionarily relevant, pragmatic benefits to preferring simple theories over complex ones.<sup>63</sup>

These considerations, then, may be used to sustain a best-explanation argument from reason based upon P<sub>6</sub>. According to Alvin Plantinga, this kind of thinking can also be used to bolster a self-defeat argument. His argument is that if a hypothesis about the origins or provenance of our cognitive faculties confers a low probability on the proposition that those faculties are reliable, then adherence to that hypothesis renders belief in the reliability of our faculties irrational (and *visa versa*). Using arguments not unlike those above, Plantinga contends that evolutionary naturalism is just such a hypothesis.<sup>64</sup> Many objections to this argument have been voiced, but it is far from clear that any of these objections are successful. Whatever we think about Plantinga's argument, and I shall not be evaluating it here, we should surely be sceptical of the evolutionary response to the argument from reason.

## Conclusion

While the argument is ostensibly an argument against naturalism, if naturalism is considered the most plausible variety of atheism, the argument will – if successful – also offer support for theism. While unsure about just how to evaluate the arguments presented in this chapter, the argument from reason is not easily dismissed. Thomas Nagel neatly summarises the worry for naturalism:

[T]he idea of a natural sympathy between the deepest truths of nature and the deepest truths of the human mind, which can be exploited to allow gradual development of a truer and truer conception of reality, makes us more *at home* in the universe than is secularly comfortable.<sup>65</sup>

As a final offering, I ask you, the reader, to consider the fact that if naturalism is true, then not only are all our thoughts fully explicable by the operation of non-rational

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<sup>63</sup> It might be contended that this cannot be used as an argument against naturalism, for no other theory can account for the simplicity/truth relation either. Lewis offers a possible response: "Our repugnance to disorder [or complexity] is derived from Nature's creator and ours. The disorderly [or complex] world which we cannot endure to believe in is the disorderly [or complex] world He would not have endured to create" (*Miracles*, p. 109).

<sup>64</sup> This, of course, is something of a simplification. For the details, one cannot do better than Alvin Plantinga's own work. See *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), "Naturalism Defeated" (a widely circulated, but unpublished paper written in 1994, available on the internet). See also James Beilby (ed.) *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Plantinga notes the similarity between Lewis' argument and naturalism and his own in the final footnote of *Warrant and Proper Function*.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 130.

causes ... all *your* thoughts are explicable in that manner. Indeed, if naturalism is true, the very thoughts you've had while reading this chapter can be so explained. No doubt the shape of the marks on these pages plays an important role in this causal story, but so too does the physical constitution of your cognitive faculties and various other things besides. While in a moment of abstraction I can nearly bring myself to think the naturalists causal explanation of a person's thinking consistent with a reasons based explanation, I cannot but agree with C.S. Lewis, that "it is, to me at any rate, impossible" to regard *my own thinking* that way and at the same time, to regard it "as a real insight into external reality."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> C.S. Lewis, "Religion without Dogma?" in Lesley Walmsley (ed.), *C.S. Lewis Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p. 170.