Theistic arguments from the reliability of our cognitive faculties

Argumentos teístas a partir da
confiabilidade das nossas faculdades cognitivas

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Abstract

Alvin Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism (henceforth EAAN) is an argument for the conclusion that the conjunction of naturalism and evolutionary theory is self-defeating and cannot be rationally believed. Although the EAAN is not a straightforward argument in favor of theism, it doesn't seem difficult to derive from the material used to defend its premises an argument in defense of the existence of God. The goal of this paper is to explore how theistic arguments from the reliability of our cognitive faculties can be formulated from the material presented by Plantinga in his defenses of the EAAN. I begin by presenting the most recent formulation of the EAAN. I then explore the possibility of formulating arguments based on inference to the best explanation, deductive arguments, and inductive ones.

Keywords: Theistic arguments. Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism. Reliability. Cognitive faculties.

Resumo

O Argumento Evolutivo contra o Naturalismo de Alvin Plantinga (de agora em diante AECN) é um argumento para a conclusão de que a conjunção do naturalismo e da teoria evolutiva se auto-refuta e não pode ser racionalmente crida. Embora o AECN não seja um argumento estritamente em favor do teísmo, não parece difícil derivar, a partir do material utilizado para defender suas premissas, um argumento em defesa da existência de Deus. O objetivo deste artigo é explorar como argumentos teístas a partir da confiabilidade de nossas faculdades cognitivas podem ser formulados a partir do material apresentado por Plantinga em suas defesas do AECN. Inicialmente é apresentada a formulação mais recente do AECN. Em seguida, exploro a possibilidade de formular argumentos baseados em inferência à melhor explicação, argumentos dedutivos e argumentos indutivos.

Palavras-chave: Argumentos teístas. Argumento Evolutivo contra o Naturalismo. Confiabilidade. Faculdades cognitivas.

1 INTRODUCTION

Alvin Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism (henceforth the EAAN) is an argument for the conclusion that the conjunction of naturalism and evolutionary theory is self-defeating and cannot be rationally believed. Although the EAAN is not a straightforward argument in favor of theism, it doesn't seem difficult to derive from the material used to defend its premises an argument in defense of the existence of God. In fact, in his lecture notes, "Two-Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments," Plantinga includes, as argument K, an "argument from the confluence of proper function and reliability." The argument says that theism is a better explanation to the reliability of our cognitive faculties than naturalism. All Plantinga offered in those lecture notes, however, was a brief sketch of the argument. In *Warrant and Proper Function*, he offered a Preliminary Argument to his Main Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism which sought to show that the reliability of our cognitive faculties is evidence against naturalism, and, therefore, evidence for the only significant alternative: theism. This Preliminary Argument was shown to be deficient by Branden Fitelson and Elliott Sober. And in *Warranted Christian Belief*, in the course of responding to their criticisms of the Preliminary Argument, Plantinga formulates, as we shall see, a probabilistic version of a theistic argument from the reliability of our cognitive faculties. Richard Swinburne agrees that a probabilistic theistic argument can be defended from the material presented by Plantinga in his EAAN. He says that,

> If we regard E [i.e., evolution] as established, there is a correct P-inductive argument from E and R [i.e., our cognitive faculties are reliable] to the falsity of N [i.e., naturalism], and so to the existence of God (or at least some lesser god), who created our cognitive faculties and made them reliable. [1]

The goal of my paper is to explore how theistic arguments from the reliability of our cognitive faculties can be formulated from the material presented by Plantinga in his defenses of the EAAN. I begin by presenting the most recent formulation of the EAAN. I then explore the possibility of formulating arguments based on inference to the best explanation, deductive arguments, and inductive ones.

2 THE EVOLUTIONARY ARGUMENT AGAINST NATURALISM

According to orthodox Darwinian evolutionary theory, we human beings are the product of a biological evolutionary process driven mainly by two mechanisms: natural

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[1] See SWINBURNE, Richard (2004) *The Existence of God*, Additional Note 3, p. 351.

selection and random genetic mutation. As a result of the first mechanism, the genetic mutations that are maladaptive and don't enhance fitness are discarded and those that have adaptive value and enhance fitness are preserved as part of the genome. Our cognitive faculties, then, are the product of this process. But if naturalism, the thesis – as Plantinga defines it – according to which there is no God or anything like God, is true, this evolutionary process was unguided, i.e., there was no supernatural guidance of this process with the aim of producing a certain kind of creature. But if this is so why should we think that this process would have produced beings with reliable cognitive faculties? After all, natural selection will favor cognitive faculties and processes that result in adaptive behavior, but whether true beliefs will be formed is irrelevant for this process. Our behavior could be adaptive but our beliefs false as frequently as true. Thus, unguided evolutionary process would not give us reason to believe that our belief-producing processes are for the most part reliable. The naturalist, then, by believing that the evolutionary process was unguided, is not in a position to affirm that it is probable that this process would result in creatures with for the most part reliable cognitive faculties that would produce a preponderance of true beliefs.

With this picture of the evolutionary origins of our cognitive faculties in place, it is easy to see, argues Plantinga, that the probability of our cognitive faculties being reliable, given naturalism and evolution, is low, and that, if I believe in naturalism and evolution and come to see that this probability is low, I have a defeater for my belief that my cognitive faculties are reliable, a Humean defeater, i.e., a defeater that leads to the strongest possible version of skepticism.

In *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, Plantinga presents schematically his latest version of the argument as follows [R being reliability of our cognitive faculties; N being naturalism; and E being evolution]:

(1) P(R/N&E) is low;

(2) anyone who accepts (believes) N&E and sees that P(R/N&E) is low has a defeater for R;

(3) anyone who has a defeater for R has a defeater for any other belief she thinks she has, including N&E itself;

(4) if one who accepts N&E thereby acquires a defeater for N&E, N&E is self-defeating and can't rationally be accepted – conclusion: N&E can't rationally be accepted. (PLANTINGA, 2012a, p. 345).

There are two theses in this argument: a *Probability Thesis* and a *Defeater Thesis*.[2] Let's take a closer look at each of them.

The *Probability Thesis* is the thesis that $P(R/N\&E)$ is low. This thesis was initially defended by Plantinga (1994, *Naturalism Defeated)* by arguing that there are four "mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustively"[3] ways in which belief and behavior can be related.[4] $P(R/N\&E)$ would be the weighted average of $P(R/N\&E\&P_i)$ for each of these possibilities.[5] But in the most recent formulations he has simplified the argument. He now defends that since most naturalists are materialists with respect to human beings, we should include materialism in the naturalist thesis or, for those unconvinced by this move, that $P(R/N\&E\&M)$ is low, i.e., adding M, materialism, to the conjunction of N and E.

From a materialist perspective, beliefs will have to be neuronal events or structures with two different sorts of properties: neuro-physiological or physical properties and content or mental properties. A belief is true or false in virtue of its content. My belief that *interest in natural theology is growing* is true because the proposition which constitutes its content is true. How are these two kinds of properties related?

This question can be answered by the materialist in two different ways. According to reductive materialism, content properties are reducible to neuro-physiological properties; in other words, content properties *are* neuro-physiological properties. According to

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[2] See Plantinga, Alvin (2002b) Reply to Beilby's Cohorts, p. 205ff; Mirza, Omar (2008) A User's Guide to the Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism; Mirza, Omar (2011) The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism.

[3] See Plantinga, Alvin (2002a) *Introduction*, p. 9.

[4] (1) epiphenomenalism simpliciter, (2) semantic epiphenomenalism, (3) the possibility that their beliefs are causally efficacious with respect to their behavior but maladaptive, and (4) the possibility that their beliefs are both causally efficacious with respect to behavior and also adaptive.
(See, for example, Plantinga, Alvin (1994). *Naturalism Defeated*, Plantinga, Alvin (2002a) *Introduction*).

[5] $P(R/N\&E) = (P(R/N\&E\&P_1) \times P(P_1/N\&E)) + (P(R/N\&E\&P_2) \times P(P_2/N\&E)) + (P(R/N\&E\&P_3) \times P(P_3/N\&E)) + (P(R/N\&E\&P_4) \times P(P_4/N\&E))$.
But since, in Plantinga's estimate, (3) [see note above] is very unlikely, and the probability of (1) and (2) is low or inscrutable, and the probability of (4) is inscrutable or at best moderately high, he later proposed a simplified formula [where (1) and (2) are represented by –C and (4) is represented by C]:
$P(R/N\&E) = P(R/N\&E\&C) \times P(C/N\&E) + P(R/N\&E\&{-}C) \times P({-}C/N\&E)$
The value of the left-hand term of the first product is inscrutable or moderately high and the value of the left-hand term of the second product is either low or inscrutable. And what about the value of the weights, the right-hand terms of the two products? According to Plantinga, "it is exceedingly hard to see, given N&E, how the content of a belief can have causal efficacy […], that is, how epiphenomenalism – semantic or simpliciter, can be avoided, given N&E [. . .] So it looks as if $P({-}C/N\&E)$ will have to be estimated as relatively high; let's say (for definiteness) .7, in which case $P(C/N\&E)$ will be .3. Let's also estimate that $P(R/N\&E\&{-}C)$ is, say, .2. Then $P(R/N\&E)$ will be at most .45, less than ½."
(In PLANTINGA, Alvin (2002a) *Introduction*, p. 10).

nonreductive materialism, there isn't a relation of reduction of one kind of property into another. Instead, the relation here is one of determination or supervenience, with content or mental properties being determined by or supervening on neuro-physiological properties. In both kinds of materialism, the capacity to form beliefs is something that arises in the process of biological evolution. At a certain point in the evolutionary process neural structures start to display belief content. The question then is: What is the probability, given E&N(which includes M), that the content is true? What is the probability, given E&N, that our cognitive faculties produce mostly true beliefs? More specifically, what is the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable given each of the types of materialism that we have just seen?

On nonreductive materialism, the neuronal structure is responsible for causing adaptive behavior and for generating belief content. But what reason do we have to suppose that the belief content thus determined is true? No reason. Natural selection selects for structures that cause adaptive behavior. And it is this same physical process that generates belief content. Natural selection discards structures that are maladaptive, but it cannot discard false beliefs. What matters for adaptivity is the properties by which the belief enters the causal process, and on nonreductive materialism these properties are the neuro-physiological ones. There is no problem in terms of adaptivity if the content is false. As long as the physical properties are adaptive, it doesn't matter for survival what content is determined by the physical properties. But, then, what is the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable given this picture of belief formation? We should suppose that the probability that the content of a given belief is true is roughly 0.5. Given that the probability of a certain belief being true is 0.5, what is the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable? According to Plantinga's estimate, if we have a thousand independent beliefs, the probability that, given nonreductive materialism, at least three-quarters of these beliefs (the threshold stipulated by Plantinga for reliability) are true will be less than 10^{-58}. And if we postulate only 100 beliefs, P(R/N&E&nonreductive materialism) is .000001.[6]

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[6] "This means that the probability that their faculties produce the preponderance of true beliefs over false required by reliability is very small indeed. If I have 1000 independent beliefs, for example, the probability (under these conditions) that three quarters or more of these beliefs are true (certainly a modest enough requirement for reliability) will be less than 10^{-58}. And even if I am running a modest epistemic establishment of only 100 beliefs, the probability that ¾ of them are true, given that the probability of any one's being true is 1/2, is very low, something like .000001. So the chances that this creature's true beliefs substantially outnumber its false beliefs (even in a particular area) are small. The conclusion to be drawn is that it is very unlikely that the cognitive faculties of those creatures are reliable."
(In PLANTINGA, Alvin (2008) *Knowledge of God*, p. 41-2; see also PLANTINGA, Alvin (2012) *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, p. 332).

On reductive materialism what is required for a belief to be fitness-enhancing is not its truth-value but that the physical properties will produce behavior that will contribute to survival. In other words, it doesn't matter, in terms of fitness, whether the belief is true or not, but only that the neuronal structure produce the right kind of behavior. It is adaptive behavior, not the truth of the belief itself, that will matter in the evolutionary process. The result here is thus the same as the one for nonreductive materialism. P(R/N&E&M) will, as a result, be low in both accounts of materialism.[7]

The *Defeater Thesis* comprises the second and third premises of the argument. A rationality defeater for belief A I have is another belief B I acquire which is such that, given that I hold B, I can no longer rationally hold A. (Plantinga, 2012a, p. 339). Suppose I read a study that shows that interest in natural theology has actually been in decline, and I come to believe that the data and the methodology used in the study really support this conclusion. This would give me a defeater for my belief that interest in natural theology is growing.

The defeater in question in the EAAN is what Plantinga calls a Humean defeater. To illustrate how such defeaters work in the case of the naturalist who sees that P(R/N&E) is low, suppose

> there is a drug – call it XX – that destroys cognitive reliability. I know that 95 percent of those who ingest XX become cognitive unreliable within two hours of ingesting it; they then believe more false propositions than true. Suppose further that I come to believe both that I've ingested XX a couple of hours ago and that P(R/I've ingested XX a couple of hours ago) is low; taken together, these two beliefs give me a defeater for my initial belief that my cognitive faculties are reliable. (Plantinga, 2012a, p. 342).

And if I have a defeater for R, I have a defeater for any other belief I have. And the same goes for the naturalist who recognizes that P(R/N&E) is low: he acquires a Humean defeater, a defeater for all his beliefs, including naturalism itself. The naturalist can't appeal to another belief to argue that his cognitive faculties are reliable. Any other belief

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[7] Sosa reformulates the argument for the *Probability Thesis* as follows: "(A) Our cognitive faculties are reliable iff they produce a preponderance of true beliefs in this and nearby possible worlds; (B) Our cognitive faculties will produce a preponderance of true beliefs in this and nearby possible worlds only if the truth and also the content of our beliefs can enter the causal order (that is, the dispositions that constitute our cognitive faculties must favor truth over falsity in their belief production so that they must be sensitive to the contents and indeed to the truth-value of the belief produced); (C) Given materialism, beliefs enter the causal order only in virtue of their physiological properties and not at all in virtue of their contents; (D) Therefore, for the materialist, our cognitive faculties are in fact not reliable. And hence for the materialist our cognitive faculties are not reliable."
(In SOSA, Ernest (2013) *Theism, Naturalism, and Rationality*. Comments on Plantinga's EAAN. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypDXH9dhUBQ)

would be a product of his cognitive faculties and would be subject to defeat once he recognizes again that he has a defeater for R.

The EAAN could also take a narrower form that would suffice to show that naturalism is self-defeating. Suppose belief and behavior would in some way end up being related in a way such that adaptive behavior would yield mostly true beliefs, so that our beliefs that have survival value would tend to be true. This would exclude, of course, beliefs that don't have survival value, and that would include metaphysical beliefs. The belief that naturalism is true is, of course, a metaphysical belief that doesn't seem relevant to survival and reproduction (except, of course, as Plantinga quips, "to the occasional member of the Young Atheist's Club whose reproductive prospects are enhanced by holding the belief that naturalism is true." (PLANTINGA, 2012a, p. 346). P(MR/N&E), where MR stands for metaphysical beliefs reliably formed and mostly true, is low.

In any form, then, narrow or broad, the argument would lead to the conclusion that naturalism is self-defeating and cannot be rationally affirmed. But what about the theist? For the theist, if we are the product of a biological evolutionary process, this process was guided by God with the aim of producing creatures in His image. God could have orchestrated the evolutionary process in order to obtain the creatures he wanted to obtain. For the theist, then, the question of the reliability of our cognitive faculties seems unproblematic. This seems to leave us in a very good position to formulate arguments for the existence of God from the reliability of our cognitive faculties.

3 Theistic Arguments from the Reliability of Our Cognitive Faculties

3.1 Inference to the Best Explanation

In his lecture notes, "Two-Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments," Plantinga includes, as argument K, an "argument from the confluence of proper function and reliability." There he merely sketches a theistic argument based on inference to the best explanation. Perhaps, then, our first task should be to consider the possibility of formulating an argument of this sort, an argument for the conclusion that theism is the best explanation for the reliability of our cognitive faculties. The first step here seems to be the identification of the main contenders. Are theism and naturalism the only live options?

In *Mind and Cosmos*, Thomas Nagel rejects both theism and what he calls "materialist naturalism." He defends that "materialist naturalism" has great difficulty accounting

for consciousness and for the reliability of our cognitive faculties. He praises proponents of intelligent design for identifying problems in evolutionary theory, but he doesn't go as far as to endorse the theory and theism. And although he offers some objections to theism, he has acknowledged that his rejection of it is "more emotional than philosophical or rational."[8] Nagel sketches an alternative to both theism and naturalism constituted by two main elements: panpsychism and natural teleology. According to panpsychism, mind or something like mind is fundamental to the universe, present from the start and in everything, even in elementary particles. Natural teleology says that things are on a path that leads to certain outcomes, that things tend to change in the direction of certain outcomes. And there is, says Nagel, a certain teleological bias in the universe toward the existence of human minds. All Nagel offers is a sketch of how panpsychism and natural teleology would work. And he himself acknowledges that he has no teleological theory of his own to offer, and that it may take a long time for these suggestions to be developed into viable alternatives to theism and naturalism. As Elliot Sober points out in his review of Nagel's book, "His job, as he sees it, is to point to a need; creative scientists, he hopes, will do the heavy lifting."[9] Cashing this promissory note will not be an easy task. As Plantinga noted in his own review of the book, it's exceedingly difficult to see how saying that elementary particles in some sense have minds can help make intelligible "that there should be creatures capable of physics[,] philosophy […] poetry, art, and music." (PLANTINGA, 2012b). And the idea that in the absence of God things could be aiming at some state of affairs rather than others "doesn't seems to make any sense". "A world without God," writes Plantinga, "does not aim at states of affairs or anything else." (PLANTINGA, 2012b). John Leslie has proposed an alternative to theism and naturalism in terms of an axiarchic principle, an impersonal principle, similar to the platonic Form of the Good, that brings into existence things because they are good. But as Richard Swinburne writes,

> The trouble with this suggestion is that, while there are innumerable instances of mundane phenomena rightly explained by a personal or scientific explanation […], there are no mundane examples of anything coming into existence because it is good that it should. Food never appears on the tables of the hungry because it is good that it should, but only because some person puts it there because he believes it to be good that it should be there. […] [I]n the absence of criteria for judging the worth of an axiarchic explanation of the existence of the universe, we can have no grounds for supposing that such an explanation is probably true. (2004, p.47, note 16).

[8] In *The Last Word*, cited in (2012) Why Darwinist Materialism is Wrong, *The New Republic*, online version: http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/magazine/110189/why-darwinist-materialism-wrong.

[9] SOBER, Elliot (2012) Remarkable Facts, *Boston Review of Books*, online version: http://www.bostonreview.net/books-ideas/remarkable-facts.

Much more could be said about these proposals. Suffice to say, however, that, as they stand, it seems hard to take them seriously as viable alternatives to theism and naturalism. Is there any other possible contender? I confess I can't see any on the horizon.

How could we, then, formulate an argument for the conclusion that theism is the best explanation for the reliability of our cognitive faculties? Here is one proposal:

(P1) theism and naturalism are the only viable options we can conceive of as explanations for the reliability of our cognitive faculties;

(P2) naturalism cannot adequately explain the reliability of our cognitive faculties;

(P3) theism offers an adequate explanation for the reliability of our cognitive faculties;

(C) therefore, (probably) theism is the best explanation for the reliability of our cognitive faculties.

What exactly is meant here by reliability of our cognitive faculties? Cognitive faculties are, as Plantinga put it, "powers and processes that produce beliefs or knowledge in us." (Plantinga, 2012a, p. 311). They include memory, perception, a priori intuition, introspection, testimony, induction, moral sense, what Thomas Reid called sympathy ("which enables us to know the thoughts and feelings of other people" Plantinga, 2012a, p. 312), and what Calvin called the *sensus divinitatis* and Aquinas "our natural but confused knowledge of God." (Plantinga, 2012a, p. 312). A faculty is reliable if it produces mostly true beliefs, presumably more than two-thirds of the beliefs formed. We ordinarily think our faculties are reliable unless there is cognitive disorder or malfunction. Clearly, there are circumstances in which our cognitive faculties do not function as they should, such as when one drinks too much or is under the effect of some medication that interferes with the proper functioning of certain faculties. Moreover, reliability also varies with circumstances. Visual perception of a certain object close at hand is more reliable than perception of the same object at some distance.

As we have seen, theism and naturalism seem to be the only viable options here. As Plantinga's defense of the *Probability Thesis* seems to show, P(R/N&E) is low. Naturalism, therefore, doesn't seem to be able to account for the reliability of our cognitive faculties. Theism, on the other hand, seems to offers a perfectly good account of the reliability of our cognitive faculties. Clearly, then, theism seems to be the best explanation for the reliability of our cognitive faculties.

3.2 A Deductive Argument

According to Richard Swinburne (2004, p. 6), "There are plenty of valid arguments to the existence of God that are quite *useless*, because although their premises may be true, they are not known to be true by those who argue about religion" (my emphasis). Now this seems to be an excessively strong claim. Even Alvin Plantinga, who doesn't think arguments are required for rational or warranted theistic or Christian belief, thinks deductive arguments, even when the truth of their premises is merely probabilistic, can be very useful. They can, for instance, "serve to bolster and confirm [. . .] perhaps to convince."[10] [11] And as Stephen T. Davis defends in his *God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs*, the usefulness of an argument for the existence of God should be evaluated according to its purpose, and he goes on to list five possible purposes for a theistic argument:

1. to show that theists are rational in their belief in the existence of God;

2. to show that it is more rational to believe that God exists than it is to deny that God exists;

3. to show that it is more rational to believe that God exists than to be agnostic on the existence of God;

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[10] Plantinga has the following to say about theistic arguments in his lecture notes (p.1):

> What are these arguments like, and what role do they play? They are probabilistic, either with respect to the premises, or with respect to the connection between the premises and conclusion, or both. They can serve to bolster and confirm ('helps' a la John Calvin); perhaps to convince.

> Distinguish two considerations here: (1) you or someone else might just find yourself with these beliefs; so using them as premises get an effective theistic arg. for the person in question. (2) The other question has to do with warrant, with conditional probability in epistemic sense: perhaps in at least some of these cases if our faculties are functioning properly and we consider the premises we are inclined to accept them; and (under those conditions) the conclusion has considerable epistemic probability (in the explained sense) on the premises.

[11] In a recent interview to Trent Dougherty during the celebration of his "Two Dozen (or So) Theistic Arguments" at Baylor University, Plantinga defended that theistic arguments

Are useful in several different lines. They are useful for helping people who don't believe in God to come to belief in God [. . .] They are also useful to help believers shore up one's own belief. Believers in God are often subject to doubt. One's spiritual life goes up and down and so on. I think these arguments, in particular the moral argument, seem to be useful in that regard.

[Interview available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxtyY2bp78E (5min. 20sec.—)].

And in an interview to Gary Gutting, Plantinga had this to say about theistic arguments:

I should make clear first that I don't think arguments are needed for rational belief in God. In this regard belief in God is like belief in other minds, or belief in the past. Belief in God is grounded in experience, or in the sensus divinitatis, John Calvin's term for an inborn inclination to form beliefs about God in a wide variety of circumstances.

Nevertheless, I think there are a large number — maybe a couple of dozen — of pretty good theistic arguments. None is conclusive, but each, or at any rate the whole bunch taken together, is about as strong as philosophical arguments ordinarily get.

[Is Atheism Irrational? *New York Times*, February 9, 2014, Interview available online:

ʰttp://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/09/is-atheism-irrational/?_r=1]

4. to show that it is as rational to believe in God as it is to believe in many of the things that atheist philosophers often believe in (for example, the existence of 'other minds' or the objectivity of moral right and wrong); or

5. to show that it is irrational not to believe that God exists (that is, it is irrational to be either an atheist or an agnostic).[12]

Timothy McGrew and John DePoe propose, in *Natural Theology and the Uses of Argument*, that, if we represent reasonableness of a belief in terms of probabilities, then an argument would fulfill the first purpose when P(B/E&K) ≥ r for some fairly high value of r, such as 0.9.[13] An argument would satisfy the second purpose if P(B/E&K) > 0.5. The third purpose would be satisfied when P(B/E&K) is closer to 1 than it is to 0.5, so P(B/E&K) > 0.75. They represent the fourth criterion in comparative terms: "P(B/E&K) ≥ P(X/E&K) for some specified, widely accepted proposition X." (McGrew ; Depoe, 2013, p. 3). And the fifth purpose would be satisfied in conditions similar to those of purpose one, i. e., P(B/E&K) > 0.9. They also add that "for deductive arguments, modest conclusions that set any positive lower bound for the conclusion without also setting an upper bound are an acceptable way to move the discussion forward."(McGrew; DePoe, 2013, p. 6).

With all that in mind, a deductive version of a theistic argument from the reliability of our cognitive faculties could be then formulated as:

(P1) if God does not exist, our cognitive faculties are not reliable,

(P2) our cognitive faculties are reliable,

(C) God exists.

It seems the crucial premise here is P1, but, in fact, there are non-theists who have responded to Plantinga's EAAN by denying that our cognitive faculties are reliable! Geoff Childers, for instance, claims[14] just that and adds that this is more consistent with naturalism than with theism. He cites some studies showing circumstances under which the individuals tested formed beliefs influenced by confirmation bias and "motivated reasoning", that is, in which they favored information that confirmed their beliefs or hypotheses. I won´t have the time to discuss his claims and the data he uses to support them

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[12] Cited in McGREW, Timothy and DePOE, John (2013) Natural Theology and the Uses of Argument, p. 3. Stephen T. Davis (1997) *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs*, p. 189-90.

[13] But they add that "for those who do not share the same background, the probability of B may be quite different and in some cases much lower." In MCGREW, Timothy and DEPOE, John (2013), p. 3.

[14] See CHILDERS, Geoff (2011) What's Wrong with the Evolutionary Argument against Naturalism?

here. Let me just say that all the studies he presents seem to have shown is that we have an incredible ability to deceive ourselves. That's certainly no news and certainly consistent with – and even entailed by – Abrahamic theism.

The fact is, the claim that our cognitive faculties are not reliable is internally incoherent and self-defeating. What seems to lie behind this rejection of P2 is naturalized epistemology at its worst. Childers claims that "the unreliability of our cognition helps explain the usefulness of science".[15] Here he seems to mean something similar to what Paul Churchland defends in his response to the EAAN.[16] Churchland accepts that P(R/N&E) is low but claims that this is not the case when our cognitive faculties are operating in "laboratory circumstances," i.e., under the procedures and institutions of modern science. What Churchland seems to be defending here is that the unreliability of our cognitive faculties would disappear or be corrected during the practice of science. But as Plantinga pointed out,[17] there are essentially three problems with Churchland's attempt to salvage naturalism. Let me briefly mention two of them. First, the instruments used in science are designed by us, and if our cognitive faculties aren't reliable, then, why think that the instruments themselves would be reliable? And even if the instruments were reliable, we would be operating them with the same unreliable cognitive faculties. Second, even when we are in laboratory circumstances we avail ourselves of, and depend on a number of beliefs that are not formed in laboratory circumstances. Churchland's belief that the probability that our cognitive faculties are reliable when our beliefs are formed in the laboratory, for example, is a belief that is formed using rational intuition, without the help of any artificial mechanisms.

So P2 is as strong as a premise can get. What about P1? It seems clear from the foregoing discussion that naturalism cannot account for the reliability of our cognitive faculties. And if naturalism and theism are the only live options, as it seems to be the case, we have no choice but to say that P1 is true.

How good, then, is this argument? Does it meet Swinburne´s criterion for a good argument? If not, which of the criteria proposed by McGrew and DePoe for satisfying Davis's purposes would be fulfilled by this or alternative formulations of a deductive argument from the reliability of our cognitive faculties? I'll leave that to you.

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[15] See CHILDERS, Geoff (2011, p. 193).

[16] CHURCHLAND, Paul (2009) Is Evolutionary Naturalism Epistemologically Self-Defeating?

[17] PLANTINGA, Alvin; SEGAL, Aaron (2010) Response to Churchland.

3.3 AN INDUCTIVE ARGUMENT

In *Warrant and Proper Function*, Alvin Plantinga presented two arguments against naturalism, the Main Argument, which included the Defeater Thesis, seeking to show that naturalism is irrational; and a Preliminary Argument that sought to show that, if you believe that your cognitive faculties are reliable, you have evidence against naturalism and, thus, for the truth of theism, if you think those are the only live options.[18] Criticisms by Branden Fitelson and Elliott Sober[19] led Plantinga to reformulate the Preliminary Argument in *Warranted Christian Belief*. According to the new version of the argument:

> We are comparing theism (T) and N. So the relevant applications of Bayes's will be
>
> $$P(N/R) = \frac{P(N) \times P(R/N)}{P(R)}$$
>
> and
>
> $$P(T/R) = \frac{P(T) \times P(R/T)}{P(R)}$$
>
> where we are thinking of absolute or logical probabilities. P(R) will have the same value in each expression; so the question is, how do
>
> (a) P(N) x P(R/N)
>
> and
>
> (b) P(T) x P(R/T)
>
> compare in value? Well, P(R/N) is low, as I had argued. However, P(R/T) is not; R is just what we'd expect given T (At any rate we've got no reason for thinking P(R/T) low). So (given that we don't assign N a considerably higher absolute probability than T) we should take the probability of T on R to be greater than that of N on R. But we do, in fact, believe R. So we have a reason to prefer T to N. Not perhaps a very strong reason (this doesn't tell us a whole lot about the probabilities of T and N on our total evidence) but a reason nonetheless. (It's the same sort of reason the atheologian has for preferring atheism to theism, given that he thinks it unlikely that a world created by God would display all the evil the world does, in fact, display). (PLANTINGA, 2000, pp. 230-1).

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[18] The Preliminary Argument, as stated in *Warrant and Proper Function*, contained an error: it confused the unconditional objective or logical probability of R with its probability conditional on our background knowledge.

[19] FITELSON, Branden; SOBER, Elliott (1998). Plantinga's Probability Arguments against Evolutionary Naturalism.

Conclusion

We have seen that the advantage the theist has over the naturalist when it comes to explaining the reliability of our cognitive faculties can furnish us with material not only for a negative case against naturalism but also for a more clearly positive case in favor of theism.

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