

Verificational Apologetics

Question: How would a verificationist reason with a person enamored of a naturalistic (secular humanist or liberal) worldview and establish a case for Christian theism with a supernatural God, the supernatural Jesus and the supernatural truthfulness of Scripture?

In the above scenario, the verificationist must treat Christian theism with its three aspects—supernatural God, Jesus, and Bible—as a hypothesis to be tested. Yet, he cannot merely argue for a supernatural Bible and then reason that such supernatural character is impossible without a supernatural God, as a “one-step”/evidentialist may do. For perhaps the unity, fulfilled prophecy, and popularity of the Bible is better accounted for by body-snatching clairvoyant aliens bent on literary domination. Therefore, acknowledging that any number of theories may be offered to explain what is really real, the verificationist must test various claims to see which one provides the best explanatory scope. This must be done without presupposing that one hypothesis is correct before testing it. Also, the verificationist must not rely only on sense data as does the pure empiricist. Instead, the test must also incorporate logical and existential criteria. In order for an entire world view to be accepted as reasonable, it must satisfy both internal and external demands. It must be able to be lived, and that which is lived must correspond to other converging facts. It must be comprehensive and logically cohesive.

Turning now to the apologetic task at hand, the naturalistic worldview will be examined using a verificational approach. First, does naturalism fit the facts of external experience? Does it make sense of the physical world? For the sake of streamlining the argument, the Christian can safely concede to the naturalist the 4 billion years (give or take a few hundred thousand years) age of the earth. Even if the earth could be proven to be much younger (which is no easy task), such evidence still would not necessarily lead to the conclusion of Biblical theism. But does naturalism satisfactorily account for the existence of all the varieties of life on earth? Natural selection and genetic alterations may explain to some degree evolution within a specie—but it would appear powerless to induce change so drastic (4 billion years granted) as to mark an entirely different specie. Natural science has never produced evidence that macroevolution has ever taken place. Fossil evidence does not lend credence to the theory, nor have laboratory mutations proven beneficial to any organism. In short, unassisted, unintelligent evolutionary processes do not explain the complexity and variety of life. Evolution is an insufficient cause for the effect.

What then of the internal experience? Does the naturalist’s humanism satisfy the existential needs of mankind? When one exalts human power over all else, does it bring peace to the mind? Even if the humanist reminds himself each day that he is the loftiest animal evolution has yet produced, would that furnish ideals of individual worth, respect, and a hope for lasting significance? Naturalism seems powerless to bestow such gifts. Why should one become a “good” person if naturalism reflects ultimate reality? Why not be a terrible person? Why not lie, steal, rape, and murder? All are reserved as food for the worms—and worms can’t tell the difference between good guys and bad. In the end, each person contributes the same to the material (i.e., the dirt) of life. Naturalistic humanism does not fit the facts of internal experience, which intrinsically yearns for self-worth (not self worship), lasting significance, and to love and be loved.

Does Christian theism provide cohesive paradigm in which to fit the facts? Does it account for the external facts? The intricate design of even the smallest organisms suggests a designer. The lack of intermediate fossils suggests rapid formation of various species. And the vastness of the cosmos demands a sufficient causal agent. These converging lines of evidence prod one to consider the existence of a unimaginably powerful and intelligent

being(s). But as intimated above, this kind of “proof” does not lead inexorably to a theistic worldview—even less so to a Christian theistic view.

To achieve the precision and detail of a Christian theism, more tests must be run. Building on the foundation that an intelligent and powerful creative being(s) or force(s) is a hypothesis worth pursuing, the case will proceed along another line. What of Jesus’ claims to be the one true ambassador of the only real God? If it can be shown that Jesus is a superior human that can be trusted to speak authoritatively on the issue, then the case for Christian theism will earn further consideration. First, the naturalist must concede that Jesus of Nazareth is the most influential person who has ever lived. This hardly needs any support, for the evidence of the claim is all about: our calendar, the existence of the world’s largest religion, and his name being a favorite among explicative language. Next, if it is true that he is influential, and that that influence has been (in general) for the good of society, then he himself most likely was good also. Yet, in the Bible, Jesus claims to have come from God. He claims to be, and uniquely so, the “Son of God.” If these claims are not true, and yet are authentic statements of Jesus, then he was not a good person. Instead, he was a liar and a deceiver of many. This line of reasoning is sufficient to justify further study. The authenticity of the statements attributed to Jesus must be pondered.

Is the Bible a reliable source for understanding the historical Jesus? This topic actually requires volumes to handle comprehensively, but a decent overview can be made here. The Bible has proven itself to be transmitted in a responsible manner through scribal efforts of the most meticulous kind. Manuscript evidence shows the Bible to be the most preserved ancient writing in the world. It has been said that less than five percent of the Bible’s text can be called into linguistic and/or textual question. Furthermore, these vague words or alternate readings do not nullify any major dogmatic of the Christian faith. This preservation is a sharp contrast to other scriptures, such as the Hindu Vedas, which display far more textual variation (See Josh McDowell’s, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* for more related details.).

But what of authenticity? Just because something was passed down accurately does not mean that it was true in the first place. The veracity of Jesus’ claims, as attributed to him in the New Testament, is best attested to by the resulting ministry of his apostles. The apostles carried on a message of a risen Messiah that eventually dropped the civilized world to its knees. If their message was not true, it makes little sense that they would be willing to die to see it spread. True, many people have died for religious beliefs different from those propagated by the apostles. But such examples are usually not eye witnesses of the founder’s life. Thus, they are steeped in tradition of which they find worthy of dying (which is not necessarily a bad thing; it is just a different thing than the apostles’ experience). Those that have been eye witnesses of the founder’s life and word typically have also been instructed in martyrdom—and to face it with honor. Christ may have instructed his disciples in this (“Take up your cross and follow me”), but, evidently, they refused to do so. When Jesus was met with guards and the threat of arrest, the apostles all fled. Obviously, they were not heavily instructed to embrace martyrdom. But something changed. The gospel has internal cohesion as well as external. The apostles could not have lived the lives they did if they merely felt the Bible was accurately preserved. They also believed that it foreshadowed the greatest event of all—the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This fulfillment imbued them with hope for eternal life and a love for others. History and tradition tell us that the apostles were tortured for their faith, and even executed. Yet they faced it gladly. What changes men from cowards to saints? The best explanation for the transformation is the resurrection of Christ. This is also what the disciples themselves attribute as the primary cause of their courage, power, and love. It was a kind of worldview that changed forever the fabric of society, government, ethics, and religion. And it was

carried on by men who learned from a Man that claimed to be the Son of the only God who is both creator and sustainer of all that exists.

Though the treatment is admittedly brief, the basic verificational system is still in place: Examine naturalism to ascertain its explanatory scope. It seems to fail the tests of external and internal cohesiveness. Examine Christian theism to ascertain its explanatory scope. It seems to be cohesive, reasonable, and both internally and externally logical.

Of course, it should be noted that there is a risk to the verificational method of apologetics. Because everything is to be treated as a hypothesis, the Christian thinker must be willing to lose what he thought he might win. If this maxim is not truly grasped, then the verificationalist has died and a presuppositionalist has risen in his place. This is mentioned specifically in regard to the extent of the "supernatural truthfulness of the Scripture" which has been proposed for defense at the beginning of the paper. It would seem an impossible task to *verify* the truthfulness of the Bible in total. One simply cannot do it. There is not enough data, nor time, nor spades of archaeology to judge each detail of the Bible. The best we can do is argue for the truth we have and conclude that the Bible can be trusted for the rest—unless some details thereof are disproved. It seems then that the verificationalist must endorse a propositionally inerrant view of the Scriptures rather than a verbally inerrant view.

Question: Similarly, how would a verificationalist reason with a person enamored of a pantheistic (Hindu or New Age) worldview and establish a case for Christian theism with a supernatural God, the supernatural Jesus Christ and the supernatural truthfulness of Scripture?

Much of the preliminary mechanics of the verificational approach to apologetics has already been covered. Therefore, this question can be handled in a concise manner. First, as always, the pantheistic worldview cannot be denounced simply because it is Eastern or strange to the Western mind. It must be examined. It must be judged by the same criteria as other truth claims

Does pantheism fit the external facts? Is the world and all its physicality an illusion? Is it merely a projection of ignorance? If the observer were to suddenly realize the interconnectedness of all, would such particulars cease to exist? It is a sobering fact that the Hindu Gurus advise complete separation and extreme asceticism to achieve enlightenment. One simply cannot experience the bliss of oneness and carry on a normal life of commerce and family. Buddha also demanded that his followers commit to a monastic lifestyle. Over time, however, others wanted the spirituality of the sages—but wanted to drive cars as well. Thus enters the ancient disciplines repackaged as "Zen and Motorcycle Maintenance," "The Tao According to Winnie the Pooh," and New Age in general. Does this suggest that pantheistic spirituality is internally unattainable? For thousands of years, the only way to be truly a spiritual Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist was to enter a monastery and learn from others that lived seemingly grievous lives. Those who practice meditation today lack the hearty devotion of their ancient predecessors. It's simply not like the good ol' days. It is externally inconsistent. The world is an illusion, but the Buddhist puts on his illusionary suit, gets in his illusionary car, and goes to his illusionary job. And yet all of this illusion is the result of a non-enlightened mind. The devotee of such religious worldviews is forced to live a lie. He is forced to be a hypocrite. Even the monk must put on his cloak and live in a cloister—these too are illusionary. In short, what pantheism teaches is not only unattainable (internally) but denies the reality of all things perceived from the senses. How then does the enlightened one know when he is enlightened? One

can only know with the mind (which entails a physical brain). Therefore, pantheism is also at odds with itself externally.

Does Christian theism make sense externally? Can a person be a Christian and still have a family, hold a job, or hold a sandwich (a real one). Yes, this can be done. The God of Christianity made matter and made it for good. Material bodies give souls expression. Good can only be done to another if it is done physically. Good cannot be done to another by thinking it upon them. Jesus, the Bible claims, did good to all by dying (a real physical death) and rising again (a real physical life).

Does Christian theism make sense internally? Can a person live as a Christian with distinct moral and spiritual convictions? Yes, this can be done. The Christian worldview does not suffer from metaphysical parasites. There is nothing inherent to its philosophical makeup that is violent to another part of its philosophical makeup. Such is not the case in pantheism. For pantheism teaches that the world and everything in it is an illusion; yet the would-be enlightened must live in this illusion and somehow transcend it, though the only tools at his disposal are of that illusory world.

As for the case for the Bible, its textual superiority over the Vedas and other pantheistic writings has been touched on above. It should also be noted that the supernatural nature of Jesus is already recognized by Hindus, for they revere him as the tenth incarnation of Vishnu. The Christian, then, might find it a wise move to mention that Jesus taught that salvation was as easy as being "born again." This is the very phenomenon the Hindu and Buddhist is trying to avoid, and thus it would make for interesting conversation and may provide a segway for the biblical concept of grace.

I must admit that I find the question concerning the naturalist translates over to the pantheist (Hindu especially) all too easily. There is little apologetic work to be done in this case, because the Hindu (and most pantheists) would be very willing to acknowledge the supernatural character of God (Brahma in their religion), Jesus, and the Bible. They revere the divine in all things!