

Reason Off-Balance?  
Naturalism v. Theism  
on  
the Cosmos, Life, Mind and Morals

Veritas Forum  
Reply to Phillip Johnson  
by  
Neil Tennant

## 1 How could Theism possibly help us Understand the World?

‘World’ here is meant in the philosophical sense, as all-inclusive. A good synonym would be ‘Reality’. Following Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, we might say that the World is all that is the case. If God exists, then the fact of His existence to be included in the make-up of the World. Theism would then enjoy a *prima facie* edge in truth-content over atheism. But there would still be the problem that the particular brand of theism in question might be mistaken about enough attributes of God to lose the advantage it had, over atheism, of at least asserting God’s existence rather than denying it.

In his book *Reason in the Balance* Phillip Johnson argues for a particular brand of monotheism, that of the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. Johnson does not pause to consider any other main religious tradition, be it monotheistic, polytheistic or pantheistic. He thereby runs the risk of giving offence to theists of different stripe. He thereby loses also that corrective to evangelical dogmatism that is afforded by seeking a cross-cultural and historical perspective on one’s own set of metaphysical beliefs and moral norms.

A broader perspective is also missing from Johnson’s dire diagnosis of contemporary society’s ills and moral failings. He talks only of contemporary North American society, except for brief remarks, in passing, on the failure of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. His message is one of moral doom. He has a profound sense of foreboding about the

spread of libertarian moral thinking. Now the exercise of reason by an autonomous individual is essential to libertarian moral thinking. Johnson is very worried that such thinking has already led to a rejection of traditional moral precepts and principles. He thinks that nurturing in the young the exercise of their critical faculties on moral matters will have already led to a debilitating relativism and subjectivism in morals. This view is pessimistic in the extreme. Johnson does not pause to consider the great strides that some might claim, with good reason, to have made in the moral sphere. It appears not to be any source of comfort to him that women, workers, people of colour, gays and lesbians have, in many parts of the globe, begun to break the yoke of oppression. He expresses his doom and gloom without any regard for exciting and heartening developments in other countries besides his own, even at the time of writing his book.<sup>1</sup>

A sensitive reading of Johnson's book would reveal, I think, a preoccupation on the part of the author with two sets of quite distinct issues: those having to do with the empirical adequacy of a range of scientific theories; and those having to do with current social ills and the alleged erosion of traditional morals. But unfortunately:

1. He tends to conflate these issues instead of distinguishing them.
2. He sees logical and/or causal connections and implications where another thinker might deny they exist.
3. He fails to make various standard conceptual distinctions that are the philosopher's stock-in-trade. Among these are the fact/value dis-

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<sup>1</sup>As one born and raised in South Africa, I would point immediately to the momentous passage of relatively peaceful political reform in that formerly troubled land. It is a process of reform that has produced, happily, a constitution and justiciable bill of rights enshrining much of what Johnson appears to find odious (in its current judicial consequences) in the American constitution: the separation of Church and State, protection of free speech, and safeguarding of individual liberties without regard to colour, gender, age, sexual *orientation*, and religious persuasion. As one who is also a citizen of Australia, and has spent a good deal of his life downunder, I would point likewise to the socio-political advantages of a multicultural society based on the dynamism and mutual tolerance of its diverse immigrant peoples. It is a society where established religion is non-existent but where freedom of religious expression is observed. It is a society with a healthy, no-nonsense attitude to sex education and health education, especially for the young, on the subject of sexually transmitted diseases. It is also an egalitarian society where the distribution of wealth is not so extreme and obscene as it is here in the USA; and which achieves this measure of social justice with a regime of progressive taxation and inheritance taxes that would make the average sympathetizer with Johnson's fulminations against the welfare state foam at the mouth.

inction, and the distinction between metaphysical supervenience and theoretical reductionism

4. He displays a deficient understanding of the logic of scientific explanation: of the relationship between evidence and theory, and of the methodology of scientific investigation. He does not distinguish (a) giving an apodeictic proof based on fundamental first principles (axioms) from (b) inferring from observational evidence to the best explanatory hypotheses
5. He paints too broad a canvas, taking on deep and difficult scientific topics and pressing what are now regarded as very unorthodox *scientific* views.

In stretching his intellectual resources so far, however, he has run the risk, and indeed encountered the pitfalls, that threaten the intellectual jack-of-all-trades who is master of none. Tendentious sermonizing against fellow academics for their allegedly deficient ways of understanding the world (especially as trained scientists) will invite only concerted and informed criticism from experts within the various fields in which Johnson has sallied forth. I believe I can safely leave the detailed responses he will have invited to academics more expert than I in these different fields. I have been asked by the organizers of this forum to respond to the whole book; so I have undertaken, myself, to behave likewise as a jack-of-all-trades. In anticipating the shape of various responses to Johnson from these different fields, however, I hope not to fall victim to the same sort of intellectual hubris that is involved in telling the world's best experts in a variety of scientific fields that they must have it all wrong.

## 2 How can moral failings tell against scientific success?

Johnson's great bogey is *naturalism*. According to him, it is naturalism that is at the root of all of the USA's current moral, political, legal, educational and fiscal ills. How so? Because naturalism, if we are to believe Johnson, has given us a scientific understanding of the world that is now eating away at the traditional moral order. So his argument has the following broad structure in outline:

Scientific theories are based on naturalism  
Scientific theories have undermined our morals etc.  
That is a bad thing  
*ergo*, Naturalism is false

It was David Hume, the great common-sense philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, who first alerted us to the fallaciousness of arguments whose premisses stated matters of fact but whose conclusions stated moral norms. Such arguments commit the *naturalistic fallacy*. They try (mistakenly) to infer values from facts. I am not saying, however, that Johnson's style of argument here commits the naturalistic fallacy. Rather, it does something *even worse*. One of its *premisses* is a moral evaluation — indeed, a *meta*-moral evaluation, to the effect that *it is a bad thing* that a particular, traditional moral code of precepts and principles is on the wane. But the argument's *conclusion* is about a great (and purported) metaphysical fact of the matter: *Naturalism is false!*

My audience will understand now, I trust, why I said earlier that Johnson has run together certain issues that ought to be kept apart. Having a naturalistic outlook may, as a matter of empirical fact, change one's moral code. *So what? Even if* that change in one's moral code is, objectively, for the worse, *so what?* Having adopted a deficient moral code, why should that reflect any discredit on the *truth* of one's scientific theories and/or — if one can speak of truth and falsity here — of one's naturalistic metaphysical outlook? In ignoring the history of the fact/value distinction, Johnson has succeeded only in entering what the Oxford philosopher Sir Peter Strawson once called a “non-sequitur of numbing grossness”. But of course Johnson will complain that I have not attended closely enough to his text in thus characterizing his overall argument. He will point to those passages where, in effect, he argues thus:

*Suppose that* God indeed exists.

God is a moral Being with a concern for our moral welfare, and with intentions as to how we *should* be living our earthly lives.

So, it behooves us to live according to His moral law.

But naturalism, and/or the scientific theorizing based on it, induces us to cease observing His moral law.

*ergo*, Naturalism is false

The conclusion, note, is that naturalism is *false*, not just that naturalism is — *tsk, tsk* — a *morally* bad or unfortunate metaphysical outlook. I want to ask: why shouldn't a theist accept that naturalism is the correct metaphysical outlook to adopt for the understanding of nature, but that one should not thereby allow oneself to lose one's basic *moral* norms? Why can't we have the new recipe for our metaphysical cake and still eat its old-fashioned moral frosting? *Nothing in the logic of human thought and experience prevents us from having both.* Whatever our moral failings, they do not show that naturalism is false.

### 3 What comes first: naturalism or successful scientific theories?

There is another major flaw in Johnson's way of seeing things. He expresses himself repeatedly in a way that shows that he thinks that naturalism (as a metaphysical view) *gives rise to*, or *entails* our scientific theories. But it does not! The metaphysical outlook of naturalism is, rather, one that arises, upon intelligent reflection, from the explanatory and predictive successes of the various natural sciences. Naturalism starts as a *methodology* for the discovery of good scientific theories.

This methodology enjoins us to look for efficient causes of the regularities that we detect in observed phenomena. We should try, when framing our explanations of these regularities, to eschew any appeal to spirits, or God's will, or predestination, or the work of the Devil. Instead, we should seek out those laws of cause and effect, those patterns of statistical distribution and correlation, that the phenomena might disclose. Then we should try to put forward logically unifying conjectural theories that explain those regularities. These theories will explain those regularities by appeal to mediating mechanisms and internal constitutions, microscopic or macroscopic, which constitute in some sense the ultimate nature of physical reality. When our theories are spectacularly successful — much more successful than prayer or imprecation, than divination or animal sacrifice, than reading tea-leaves or Tarot cards, than burning incense or twirling rosary beads — we get comforting support for a naturalist metaphysical outlook. When our theories give us technological and therapeutic benefits galore, we know we're onto something deep and important concerning how the natural world works. It's the success of theories obtained on a naturalistic *methodology* that gives rise to naturalism as a *metaphysical* outlook; not the other way round! The rea-

son why Johnson, like many a theist, finds it so hard to live with the success of modern science is this: if adequate *theories* render God superfluous for our scientific understanding of the world and of our place in it, what rational reason remains for belief in God? *That* is why Johnson has to sally forth into the fields of big-bang cosmology, macroevolution and the fossil record, and neurobiology, to lodge his shaky criticisms. He tries to open up what he thinks are wide enough hermeneutic cracks, into which he will then press the smoothing putty of a Judaeo-Christian God. Unfortunately, Johnson does not come into these theories like a sword, but rather like a plastic putty knife. Instead of carving Nature at the joints, he merely polyfills imagined gaps in our scientific understanding.

Most important among the naturalistic theories that, on a proper understanding, would be unsettling to a theist would be:

1. General relativity, quantum gravity and big-bang cosmology (Einstein, Penrose and Hawking)
2. The molecular biological theory of the origins of the genetic code (e.g. the Eigen-Schuster theory of the hypercycle) and of unicellular life forms
3. The theory of the evolution of species by natural selection (Darwin), by virtue of particulate inheritance (Mendel, Schrödinger), whose biochemical mechanism is DNA (Crick and Watson), with the focus of selective forces ultimately being the gene or allele (Williams, Dawkins), and with sporadic patterns of dramatic phase transitions followed by periods of relative stasis (Prigogine's theory of systems far from thermodynamic equilibrium; Gould and Eldredge's macro-evolutionary theory of punctuated equilibria)
4. The theory of the evolution of the hominid brain: emergence of perceptual categories, causal thinking, tool use, language, sociality, self-consciousness (Darwin, Lorenz, Piaget, Riedl, Premack)
5. The theory of the evolution of forms of social, co-operative behaviour (Hamilton and Axelrod) and the moral codes that re-inforce it (Campbell, Cattell)
6. The theory of the evolution of consciousness and rationality (Dennett, Searle, Jaynes, Sober)

7. The theory of the evolution of scientific concepts and theories themselves (Toulmin, Popper, Holland)
8. The theory of cultural evolution (Boyd and Richardson; Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman)
9. The theory of complexity at the edge between order and chaos, of dissipative structures and phase transitions

Johnson fails to give even cursory coverage to several of the above theories. Yet they are theories that can claim to fill important lacunae that he alleges in the naturalistic account of our earthly life in this universe. These theories render toothless Johnson's main criticisms of naturalistic science with regard to its *explanatoriness*. Note that even if there are some explanatory gaps in the naturalistic theories so far available, the best response to this would be "more of the same". That is, one should seek *naturalistic* extensions of those theories, so as to plug those gaps. If, instead, we throw our hands up and invoke the words or works of God, we do not thereby obtain *any* predictive power or *any* genuine improvement in our state of understanding. Indeed, such an intellectually defeatist theistic attitude makes for very bad science. It makes one give up too soon in one's efforts to apply the scientific method. Science is *hard work*. We should not provide too many excuses in advance for intellectual malingering. If creationists were honest, they would concede that if God moves, then He perforce moves *only* in mysterious ways. Absent the mysteries, and we have naturalistic explanations. It would follow, then, that we should be more willing to tolerate a temporary explanatory gap than to fall back on useless stop-gaps.

## 4 A litany of moral woes

I move on now to list Johnson's main issues of *moral, social, political, legal and fiscal* concern. At times he is explicit about where he stands on these issues; at other times one has to heed his own advice and look for the traditionalist sub-text to his ostensibly blander pronouncements. These are the issues that fuel his fallacious fulminations against naturalism:

1. Endorsement of sexual orientations other than straight heterosexuality

2. Permitting sexual relations outside the confines of traditional marriage, be it pre-marital or extra-marital
3. Enacting legislative protection for gay rights
4. Countenancing the socially reformist aims of feminism
5. Legalization of abortion on mother's demand
6. Spending, individually and collectively, more than we earn
7. Legal suppression of theistic teaching in state-funded educational institutions
8. Encouragement, in our educational system, of independent, autonomous, rational reflection on moral choices, leading (so Johnson alleges) to a debilitating moral relativism
9. Libertarian socialism's alleged conduciveness to drugs, promiscuity, street crime, the Savings and Loan scandal, wealth re-distribution (via progressive tax regimes and welfare programs), single mothers, divorce, a morally bankrupt and overly positivistic interpretation of the law, and secularization of the nation's universities (*even* the private ones!)

This rag-bag of social ills is presented as a major premiss in an argument for the falsity of naturalism itself as a metaphysical hypothesis! In Johnson's book there is much agonized hand-waving, and little in the way of convincing diagnosis of the genuine causes for these ills. Regardless even of whether his causal diagnosis is correct, one can still assert that there is *no* nomic connection whatsoever between any moral 'take' on these issues, singly or collectively, and the supposedly lamentable fact that the prevailing world-view in this scientific age is that of naturalism.

## 5 A litany of alleged scientific shortcomings

Johnson attacks certain scientific theories, claiming that they are vitiated by available evidence, or explanatorily deficient. His attacks are ill-informed and spurious. He misunderstands the theories he attacks, and wholly ignores whole theories that would plug his alleged gaps. He is itching to get his God

in, not just as a God of the Gaps, but really as a God of the Last Gasp, and to find enough gaps in the picture provided by science to be able to join the dots and form a figure in the shape of his Judaeo-Christian God. This figure will emerge, rooted in the interstices of our alleged theoretical failings, as the Be-all and End-all, the force that sustains the universe, who brought it into existence and even now keeps it in existence. Thus Johnson crows over or cavils at what he thinks is

1. relativistic cosmology's admission of a singularity in spacetime (the so-called Big Bang) that can be thought of as the event of creation, and that can be construed only as the work of God
2. modern science's inability to account for the *origin* of life
3. evolutionary theory's inability to account for macroevolution: the emergence of new phyla and species, with new body plans and with too little in the fossil record to fill in all the transitional stages that one would expect on a gradualist Darwinian account
4. reductionist neuroscience's inability to account, within the scheme of its own categories and principles, for rationality, consciousness, intentionality and other aspects of our mental life

Johnson's allegations above of theoretical Achilles heels or shortcomings blithely disregard the resources of certain of the theories that I listed earlier. His complaints can be countered, respectively, as follows:

1. The Big Bang cannot be regarded as having been *caused* by any agency, not even a supernatural one. For it is not an event *in time*. Rather, it is a singularity that *bounds* space-time. It marks the beginning of time without being at an instant *of* time. Thus it violates no conservation laws of physics: for these laws speak only of certain magnitudes being constant *at all instants of time*. There was (or, timelessly if one wishes: is) no moment of creation, hence no event of creation, hence no act of creation. Therefore God could not have *caused* the universe to come into existence.
2. Johnson totally neglects to mention or to examine the molecular theory of the hypercycle. This theory accounts in great detail for the pre-biotic origin of RNA and DNA. It is due to the Nobel Laureate Manfred Eigen.

3. In the modern synthesis of evolutionary biology, there is an abundance of plausible suggestions as to the genetic and environmental factors that would turn microevolution into macroevolution. Catastrophic events such as flaring sun-spots, impacts of comets and meteorites, melting of polar ice-caps, and volcanic eruptions can both increase the rates of mutation in different gene-pools and give rise to tremendous forces of directed selection. Mutations at single loci (of so-called ‘control’ genes) can result in catastrophic changes in body plans, such as the production of whole new pairs of arms or legs. The first phyla were established in a planet-wide phase transition for life forms known as the Cambrian era — beginning roughly 500 million years ago. We know enough about epigenetic phenomena already to appreciate that there are myriads of potentialities for body-plan innovation within a reasonably large genome. We can acknowledge also that, once various phyla’s broad body plans had been established, those phyla would have enjoyed a competitive edge that severely impeded the emergence of yet more radically distinct phyla. Moreover, the relative proportions of lethal and benign mutations is absolutely beside the point: the whole point about natural selection is that it does indeed winnow genotypes ferociously. Hence the survivors are highly adapted; that is, they *appear* to have been designed for the niches that they occupy. Johnson also commits the fundamental error of thinking that adaptation by natural selection can occur only by dint of highly improbable sequences of benign point mutations. He neglects altogether the theory of genetic variability and of heritability in the population geneticist’s sense. He does not see variability within a gene pool as always providing an as yet untapped source of potential responsiveness to future environmental challenges, which could thereby induce rapid evolutionary change, including speciation and the emergence of new body plans.
4. On the topic of reductionism, Johnson pays scant attention to the fact that many a naturalistically minded philosopher of science has already made intellectual room for the determination of higher-level phenomena (such as mental phenomena) by lower-level physical processes, while yet retaining descriptive and explanatory autonomy for the ‘higher level’ theories such as psychology. In fact, it would be fair to say that the orthodox view among philosophers of science is that at all neighbouring levels one has “supervenience without re-

ductionism”. This includes the pairs physics-chemistry, molecular biology-organismic biology, neuroscience-psychology, and individual psychology-sociology. Emergent properties of complex wholes are as much a part of nature as are the properties of their constituents. But the latter need not provide us with any explanatory or descriptive purchase on the former. The fact of ‘emergence’, nevertheless, does not speak for divine or creative intervention.

We do not need God to get the universe going. The universe just *is*. We do not need God to get life going. Life simply arose from large molecules. We do not need God to get life to diversify. Life simply diversified through evolution by natural selection. We do not need God to get creatures to feel and think. They became feeling and thinking creatures because suitably complicated brains and nervous systems enhanced their inclusive genetic fitness. Nor do we need God to get them caring about each other. Perfectly good explanations of sociality and prevalent forms of altruism are to be had from sociobiological theories based on the genetic theory of kin-selection.

## 6 Christianity’s record of intellectual and political enlightenment

The tired junctures of theistic demurrals listed above, of which Johnson has made such a meal, remind one, in their futility, of the Church’s earlier opposition to scientific hypotheses that are now commonplace. Johnson surely cannot be unaware of the Church’s official views in the past on the notion that the Earth was a sphere, and not flat; that the Sun, and not the Earth, was the centre of the solar system; that bodies would continue in constant motion unless acted on by external forces; and that human beings share some phylogenetic ancestor with the apes. Fortunately Johnson does not oppose *these* points of our widely accepted scientific world-view. He seeks instead to enter the scientific edifice, instead of refusing to cross its threshold; and to creep around the attic skirting boards with a hand lens, complaining of the odd cobweb or patch of peeling paint. Yet it’s nothing that a feather duster or bristle brush won’t fix.

Johnson’s theoretical cavils are the desperate last gasps of an apologist for an unenlightened and unenlightening monotheistic tradition. Its historical credentials, in trying to impede the growth of both scientific and political enlightenment, are dismal. I do not need to rehearse in any detail

the grisly record of the theistic frame of mind. I would prefer not to dwell on the Crusades and jihads, the Inquisition, religious persecutions, religious civil wars, and colonizations. All these were in the name of the Christian faith against the heathen, or in the name of one variant of the Christian faith against another. The Christian faith is unique in its complicity with colonialism. Zealous missionaries have destroyed many beautiful and fragile human ecologies within which they have sought, arrogantly, to save souls. Forced conversions have led to the loss of exotic cultures, and paved the way for extinctions of whole races of men and women, their languages and their ways of life. We have branches of the Christian religion to thank for atrocities large and small: for Holocausts and pogroms, for the ideological nurturing of systematic racial oppression, as manifested in the doctrine of apartheid in South Africa and (more locally and even more recently) the burning of crosses in the front gardens of those whose colour or creed we happen not to like.

In saying all this, I am not blind either to the fact that it has often been Christians who have inspired, led and joined movements of social and political reform. A case could be made for the Christian impetus behind the abolition of child labour during the Industrial Revolution; the abolition of slavery; welfare programs for the poor; the enfranchisement of women; the genuine recognition, for minority racial groups, of the civil rights supposedly vouchsafed to them by an earlier Constitution; and the revolutionary establishment of various people's democracies in place of tyrannical or despotic regimes. The purpose, however, behind a balanced historical list of what Christianity has done both for good and for bad is to provide some prophylactic against the naive germ of the idea that, if only we were all to turn to the Christian religion again, we'd all be better off. The lesson of history is that Christianity comes into our social and political lives as a very double-edged sword.<sup>2</sup>

As I said, I would prefer not to dwell on these matters. Instead, I would like to look more closely at the rich set of attributes with which a monotheist like Johnson invests his God, when he is anxious to mix science and religion; to mix objective facts with moral values; and to mix properly disciplined, ev-

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<sup>2</sup>Lest my audience think I have it in solely for Christianity, however, let me quickly add that I think the worst religious obscenity *right now* is the Iranian *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*. It is almost matched by the obscenity of Western governments' mealy-mouthed kowtowing to Teheran, in the name of so-called political correctness, but really out of the West's vested interests in the oil reserves of a politically volatile region of the globe.

identially constrained, theoretical understanding with the premature adoption of an overawed refusal to investigate the supposed mysteries of nature with our (God-given?) intellects.

## 7 Axiomatizing God-talk

According to the Judaeo-Christian tradition,

1. God exists. But he is not disembodied; rather, He is pure Spirit. Despite His not being physically embodied, however, He is a Person. As such, He is possessed of intentional states of mind (desires, preferences, beliefs<sup>3</sup>) and a system of moral values<sup>4</sup>.
2. He is sempiternal and immortal (that is, He exists at all times);
3. He is omnipresent (that is, He is everywhere);
4. He is omnipotent (that is, He is able to do anything that is logically possible);
5. He is omniscient (that is, He knows every true proposition<sup>5</sup>);
6. He is omnibenevolent (that is, He loves and cares for all his creatures, especially the human ones, and presumably — concerning the latter — in equal measure)
7. He created the Cosmos (that is, He brought into being matter and energy and the laws that govern them; He is the ultimate source of all physical things, from fundamental particles and wave phenomena through to the large-scale distribution of galaxies of stars and the planets that orbit around them);

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<sup>3</sup>Note the interesting fact, however, that, unlike any other person who has the disadvantage of being physically embodied and therefore of limited experience, God would have no false beliefs.

<sup>4</sup>It is an interesting question whether these moral values place God in a relationship of equality with all other persons, or whether He reserves special consideration for Himself, while nonetheless treating all other persons as equal among themselves.

<sup>5</sup>Whether this entails that God has also *decided* every proposition — in the sense that He has ensured that, for every proposition  $p$ , either  $p$  is true or its contradictory *not- $p$*  is true — would be moot for a modern philosopher of logic.

8. He created Life, at least on Earth, and possibly also (?) on other planets<sup>6</sup> (that is, He created mortal biological creatures that reproduce their own kind, in all their species diversity, according to His own plan);
9. He created Mind (that is, He has bestowed on certain earthly life forms a mental existence; He has equipped them with sentience, self-consciousness and reason, gregariousness and the capacity for suffering and happiness);
10. He created Morality (that is, He has ordained for these feeling, self-conscious and reasoning beings — let us call them *persons* — a moral order which they ought to observe when interacting with each other and with other living creatures; he has endowed them with a sense of justice in their dealings with each other, by exercising their sympathies and their reason)
11. He created Human Freedom of Choice (which Adam immediately exercised in sin, causing humankind's Fall from Grace, and leaving us with our constant constitutional inner conflicts between what we'd *like* to do and what we *ought* to do)
12. He guarantees Immortality of the Soul (that is, He secures us an Afterlife, through resurrection of persons' souls after their bodily death)
13. He dispenses Ultimate Justice (that is, He rewards and punishes us in the Afterlife in an infinitely just way, with regard for how we have lived our lives in accordance with His ordained moral order)
14. He Makes Himself Known to us, or Reveals Himself to us (for some, *all the time* through the manifest wondrousness of His creations, for others through Miracles such as self-igniting bushes and sudden partings of great bodies of water)
15. (optional, to be adopted if one is a Christian rather than Jewish) He has Sent His Son As Saviour for us all<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>If there are intelligent extraterrestrials, one imagines a theist would wish to claim God's monopoly of authorship, and maintain that He made them too. But one could equally imagine more conservative theists wanting to maintain a privileged status for *earthly, human* beings, and being prepared, accordingly, to wage interplanetary jihads to prove how special we are. History is an inadequate guide to prognostication here.

<sup>7</sup>God allegedly sent His son in human form, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, an illiterate self-employed carpenter of lowly social status, who was born in temporary quar-

Note that monotheism as such need not be so richly axiomatized. Besides the mere existential claim that God exists, one could rightly inquire whether *all* or even *much* of what appears on the list above need be claimed by the theist. The list contains two distinct sets of claims. The claims in the first set concern God and His essential attributes — omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence — such as figure in Anselm’s famous but fallacious Ontological Argument for God’s existence. The claims in the second set concern rather the nature of God’s relationship with his Creation and its creatures. Among the latter, most importantly, are *human* beings.

It is quite consistent to be a theist without making *any* of the claims in the second set. Indeed, I shall now give a perfectly consistent metaphysically realist and theist account that has some rather uncomfortable implications for traditional Christian theism of the kind espoused by Johnson.

God works in a framework of sufficiently many dimensions to make different four-dimensional space-time manifolds mutually disjoint within it. Our four-dimensional space-time manifold is but one among a myriad alternatives, all of them created by God. God is all-powerful only in being able to fix precise values for all the fundamental physical constants that are to be plugged into the equations of the Unified Theory that God has (arbitrarily)

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ters around 1995 years ago. He was a social reformer and political activist who became tiresome to the Roman occupation authorities under Pontius Pilate. They crucified him when he was about 33 years old . Jesus lived an ascetic life and advocated a moral code of doing unto others what you would have them do unto you. But he appears not to have been sexually active, never married, and sired no offspring (perhaps because the laws of meiosis and mitosis make it difficult for a hybrid of a human mother and a Godly father to procreate with another human being, albeit of the opposite sex). Jesus also urged people to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s, but to render unto God that which is God’s. So, interestingly, Jesus gave us the idea of separation of Church and State. Jesus too, according to some contemporary eye-witnesses, performed some miracles, so he would appear to have been a chip off the old block. He made blind men see by spitting into dirt and rubbing the paste onto their eyes; he turned water into wine; he turned a few loaves and fishes into many, many more; he resuscitated a dead leper; then he rose from the dead himself, after being taken down from the cross and entombed. The stories of the escapades of Jesus of Nazareth are owed to a group of contemporary journalists whose original news reports on perishable parchment have been copied in different languages down through the centuries, and now form what is called the New Testament of the Bible. Despite the well-known problems of translation between different languages (ancient Hebrew and Greek, medieval Latin, modern English), and in defiance of common-sense standards of plausibility (fish don’t undergo fission), there are people today who believe that the current English edition of the Bible contains only literal truth.

chosen as the template to deploy for his metaphysical amusement. These universes burst into being randomly, like bubbles in the higher dimension. God ordains only the values, in each, of the fundamental constants. Unknowable by us is the fact that God is just watching His handiwork, this spectrum of disjoint four-dimensional space-times, to see what happens when creatures evolve within them possessed of free will. He knows that He has set things up so that *everything* that happens within a world such as ours can be explained, in principle, without recourse to any God-hypothesis. Just the Unified Theory, plus the particular values of the constants therein, should suffice. Indeed, God has in store for us some special moral retribution if we are so stupid or lazy or superstitious as to invoke His name as a God of the Gaps when the explanatory work within our world gets a little tough. Elsewhere in His seven- or eight-dimensional cosmic workshop he has a cauldron called Hell. It is for the likes of those such as creationists. For these creatures of His refuse to shoulder the responsibility that comes with the 'God-given' gift of an evolved intellect within a world whose every happening can be explained by entirely naturalistic theorizing. The amazing thing is that, in this theistic super-universe, it is the naturalistic atheists who get to go to Heaven. This is because they have been intellectually honest and economical, and have kept their theories lean and simple. They have worked hard to arrive at a proper understanding, and, *quite rightly*, in God's view, have refused, in the name of methodological naturalism, to appeal to God in any way in explaining what goes on, and why, in the Universe they inhabit.

As we know, Bertrand Russell said that if, when he died, he found himself at the Pearly Gates, looking at God, he (Russell) would say "I'm sorry, but all the evidence pointed the other way!" The theistic account just offered explains why God, smiling, said "Just so!", and let the unrepentant atheist in.