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**Chronicles of Nonsense**

**by Francis J. Beckwith**

***Supporters of the current dominant understanding of the origin of the universe and life assert that all existing things are ultimately material, which includes you, me, the mountains, the streams, the cell, and your pet.***

**Not a good start Francis. You replaced the word "scientists" with "supporters" in an attempt to minimize their position. Next mistake was using the word "assert." Scientists don't assert a material Universe; they have evidence only for ... a material Universe.**

**Let's hope you're just warming up.**

***They also claim that undirected material processes unencumbered by an intelligent agent account for everything.***

**Francis, you must still be warming up. Those processes are directed by the laws of physics and chemistry. There is no evidence to support your belief that those processes are directed by an invisible ghost.**

***The intricacies of the human eye, for example, can be explained by natural selection: the eye is the result of random mutation working on a primitive light patch possessed by a less-developed nonhuman ancestor with far fewer cells and far less information content in its DNA than we, its legacy, possess today.***

**Francis, wrong again. Humans have fewer genes than a grape. Had you not skipped out on biology class to attend Bible Study, you might have learned some things that are not only very interesting ... but true.**

***In order to defend this point of view, the materialists must draw inferences derived from reasoning;***

**Francis, you're batting zero: you haven't gotten one right yet. Materialists defend their conclusions with evidence not inferences derived from reasoning.**

***that is, they must have the ability to think, exercising the powers of a rational agent. According to the materialists, however, reasoning is an activity of the brain, a wholly material entity, like the kidney or large intestine that is subject to the forces of natural selection and random mutation, not to mention the laws of physics and chemistry.***

**Francis, what an odd coincidence; that just happens to be ... what the evidence indicates.**

***If reasoning is the result of "nonrational" causes, however, such "reasoning," including the reasoning on which materialism is based as a philosophical theory, cannot be trusted.***

**Francis, reasoning should never be trusted. All reasoning is subject to challenge. It should be examined; and then reexamined. The best conclusion is the one that has the most convincing, supporting evidence. Here on Earth, that conclusion is Materialism.**

**No evidence has ever been produced to contradict it.**

***Consider this illustration: if while playing Scrabble, the letters randomly spell "materialism is true," should I change my belief and embrace materialism? Of course not, for this collection of letters is the result of nonrational forces; but if the brain's "reasoning" is like the random string of Scrabble letters, then its apparent contentions - including the claim that materialism is true - are arrived at in no more rational a fashion than the phrase "materialism is true" on a Scrabble board.***

**Francis, it was easy to spot the false premise in your statement. You need to prove that reasoning is equivalent to a random string of Scrabble letters before you can derive a conclusion from it.**

***In response to this conundrum,***

**Francis, the only conundrum is the one that you think you have created. All you've really created is a false premise.**

***suppose one were to show that reasoning is not reducible to brain function and that a being whose thinking is not exhaustively accounted for by material processes has the power of reason.***

**Francis, so your argument is nothing more than a supposition?"**

**Well, in the absence of any evidence whatsoever, I guess suppositions are about the only thing you've got. Unfortunately for you ... suppositions aren't evidence.**

***This argument would support, and be consistent with, an understanding of reality such as the Christian worldview,***

**Francis, that doesn't surprise me. Your entire Christian worldview relies on suppositions to replace the evidence ... it does not have.**

***and which has room for all sorts of nonmaterial entities such as souls, moral properties, God, and minds.***

**Francis, minds and morals are emergent properties of the brain, and therefore, are very much a part of the material world. As for the other two: there is no evidence for the existence of any gods nor for souls.**

***Christians should applaud this response even though it is inconsistent with the materialism that dominates today's academic world. In the words of Harvard geneticist Richard Lewontin, it may "allow a Divine Foot in the door."***

**Francis, even if it did, you would still have to prove that the bunion wasn't on the foot of Allah.**

***"Materialism," according to Lewontin, "is absolute.'" This means, of course, that it is not a conclusion inferred from premises.***

**Francis, Materialism is the conclusion based on the evidence. Therefore, inference from premises is unnecessary.**

***It is instead a first principle about which its devotees are apparently unwilling to harbor doubts or entertain the possibility that if one finds divine footprints, perhaps a Divine Foot made them.***

**Francis, what you failed to realize by quoting Lewontin is that you axed your own argument because Lewontin *is* one of those evolutionary biologists, and he *did* harbor doubts and entertain possibilities that the majority of biologists may have erred in certain aspects of evolutionary theory.**

**And scientists have not been unwilling to harbor doubts about divine footprints because there haven't been any divine footprints. If you can produce divine footprints, the world's scientists would be more than happy to check them out for you.**

***A version of this "argument from reason" gained a wide reading when it appeared in 1947 in C. S. Lewis's book, Miracles.***

**Francis, how can a book about miracles be an argument from reason? It could only be an argument from fantasy.**

***Victor Reppert, in C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea: A Defense of the Argument from Reason, reacquaints us with this argument and offers a robust and highly readable defense of it. Reppert is a serious scholar whose 1989 dissertation in philosophy ("Physical Causes and Rational Belief: A Problem for Materialism?"), wrestled with the problems Lewis raised. Reppert begins C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea with a brief presentation of Lewis as a thinker.***

**Francis, Lewis was a Ghost Worshipper not a thinker; no thinking is required for religious belief. Only belief based on evidence requires thinking.**

***He weaves together pivotal events in Lewis's life, both personal and intellectual, with his own assessment of Lewis's critics and why Lewis should be considered a significant thinker whose work has lasting importance in Christian apologetics. Reppert rightly says it is unfair to judge Lewis's work according to an unreasonable standard that requires that it be critically pristine in order to carry any philosophical weight. He argues, rather, that Lewis, like any historically important thinker, should be assessed by the quality of the intellectual conversation his arguments put in play. The question, therefore, is not whether Lewis's arguments are without flaws; the question, rather, is whether the arguments Lewis offered can be honed, improved on, and more carefully wrought by Lewis's admirers, who see in his writings a special wisdom worth advancing.***

**Francis, you can hone, improve on, and more carefully wrought, Lewis's arguments all you want and it still won't add an ounce of validity to his bullshit. What you need is evidence, something Lewis did not provide; and all the honing in the world can't change that.**

***Reppert shores up Lewis's argument, and in the process he offers persuasive rebuttals to the argument's critics. In his second chapter Reppert offers a lesson on how to evaluate and categorize different Christian assessments of the apologetic enterprise.***

**Francis, there is only one major tactic employed by all Christian apologists: lie your ass off.**

***Dividing these assessments into three categories - fideism, strong rationalism, and critical rationalism - Reppert makes the case for placing Lewis in the latter camp.***

**Francis, there is no possible way to categorize any Ghost Worshipper as a completely rational person. That doesn't mean they can't be rational on issues other than religion, it only means that because of their belief in invisible ghosts that they can't be considered as "Rationalists."**

***Reppert defines this view as holding that the best arguments for Christian truth are plausible and reasonable, but they are not conclusive proof.***

**Francis, what is plausible about the sun going backwards? Or freezing in place in the sky for 24 hours?**

**What is reasonable about a man living in the belly of a fish for 3 days or fire-breathing dragons that live ... underwater?**

**I would say those stories *are* conclusive proof ... that LSD is much older than modern people imagine.**

***The strong rationalist, in contrast, contends that there is "proof that ought to be accepted by all rational persons."***

**Francis, reality tells us a different story. Rational people often disagree on various issues. That is why they are referred to as "freethinkers."**

***Chapter 3 focuses on an evaluation of the historical account of Lewis's argument and the legendary encounter over its plausibility, which actually took place at Oxford between Lewis and Elizabeth Anscombe, the late Christian philosopher.***

**Francis, assuming Elizabeth is a woman, that was pretty unbiblical of her to challenge Lewis. According to your Bible, she is only worth about half what a man is worth. I wonder if that means that Lewis got to speak twice as long as she did?**

***Reppert separates fact from fiction, offering a historically balanced treatment that reveals - contrary to atheist legend – that Anscombe's public critique did not trounce Lewis out of the apologetic enterprise.***

**Francis, Ghost Worshippers cannot separate fact from fiction: that's why they are Ghost Worshippers.**

***In fact, Reppert concludes that with a few conceptual clarifications, some of which Lewis included in the revised edition of Miracles, the argument not only survives but also continues to pose a potent challenge to philosophers who contend that materialism can adequately account for the power of reason. In the remaining chapters, Reppert first offers six formulations for reasoning (chap. 4).***

**Thanks Francis, now we know not to waste any time reading ... chapter 4.**

***He then argues that because rationality cannot be reduced to matter, some form of mind-body dualism is likely true.***

**Francis, great example of a God of the Gaps argument: because A is false, B is likely true.**

**Not only that, but it also fails because of the false premise which you have yet to prove.**

***He concludes with a response to the objection that nonmaterialist explanations are inadequate.***

**Francis, the reason that they are inadequate is because there is no evidence to support them.**

**Bring us something, anything, then we can talk.**

***This book is truly a gem.***

**Francis, only for the religiously infected. The only value it would have for rational people, is as training material to debunk Ghost Worshippers.**

**Well okay, I guess it could have some value ... as birdcage filler.**

***It is philosophically rigorous, and it is must reading for any Christian professor who teaches apologetics or any student who wants to be equipped to defend his or her faith in the public square;***

**Francis, faith can't be defended in any square. If it could, you wouldn't be in the position of denying evidence from every field of science; nor would you be in the position of trying to explain how you can, not only believe in, but actually worship a bloodthirsty killing machine who promises to torture billions of humans.**

***yet, it is also accessible to the serious nonacademic Christian. It is written, fittingly, with a clarity and workmanship like unto that for which Lewis himself is well known.***

**Francis, thanks for the warning. You have saved me time that I can put to good use elsewhere.**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**Proximity of New Planets Stuns Even Astronomers**

**One is a rocky planet 1.5 times the size of Earth. The other is a gaseous world nearly four times Earth's size. Together they form a spectacular system in which two planets orbit closer to each other than any yet discovered.**

**Researchers have never before seen planets like this. If you were on the smaller planet looking up, the larger planet would seem more than twice the size of Earth's full moon.**

**Their research focused on determining the properties of the planets' host star -- work that was essential for discerning the characteristics of the orbiting planets.**

**Located about 1,200 light years away, the two-planet system -- now called Kepler-36 -- orbits a star similar to Earth's sun, but bigger and older.**

**The larger outer planet, Kepler-36c, is a hot, gaseous, Neptune-like planet. The smaller inner planet, Kepler-36b, is rocky and subject to quakes and volcanic eruptions caused by the interplay of the planets' gravitational forces on each other.**

**Like our sun, Kepler-36 pulsates constantly. Data on its quakes enabled researchers to determine its size, weight, and age (which were all greater than those of our sun). Knowing the star's radius and mass enabled the calculation of the sizes and masses of the planets. From this information, astronomers could determine the planets' densities and characteristics: the smaller planet is denser than Earth and hence must be rocky; the larger planet is much less dense, in fact less dense than water, suggesting it is gaseous.**

**The precise determination of the planets' properties was possible because the star around which they revolve could be characterized precisely.**

**The planets' proximity to each other is astonishing. The rocky inner planet orbits its star every 14 days, at an average distance of 11 million miles. The outer gaseous planet orbits every 16 days, at an average distance of 12 million miles.**

**Every 97 days they move into perfect alignment, a position known as conjunction. At that point they are separated by only about a million miles. By contrast, Venus, Earth's nearest neighbor, never comes closer than 26 million miles.**

**Researchers identified the planets by analyzing data from NASA's Kepler satellite. Kepler detects planets by measuring variations in the brightness of stars; dips in brightness may indicate a planet passing in front the star.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**JOHN FUGELSANG (BORN 1969) IS AN AMERICAN ACTOR, TELEVISION PERSONALITY AND STAND-UP COMEDIAN.**

**"Only in America can you be Pro-Death Penalty, Pro-War, Pro-Land Mines,**

**Pro-Unmanned Drone Bombs, Pro-Nuclear Weapons, Pro-Guns, Pro-Torture,**

**AND still call yourself ‘Pro-Life.’ "**