

Inscrutability and the Collapse of Coherence — 45

Mystery Appeals, Sacred Texts, and the Epistemology of Contradiction

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Revised August 2026

Central claim

Coherence cannot legitimately raise public support for a clear and truthful divine-source claim if every relevant apparent incoherence is barred from lowering it. Evidence must be two-sided: favorable textual patterns can confirm the claim over ordinary human mediation only if some contrary patterns can count against it. This does not rule out bounded mystery, specific harmonization, private trust, theism, or a divine source supported independently.

Preview:

Target claim

Expected difference

Evidential pressure

Bounded conclusion

Textual coherence supports a clear and truthful divine source.

If coherence raises support over human mediation, some contrary pattern must be able to lower it.

Unrestricted inscrutability assigns every relevant apparent incoherence zero adverse force and is available to rival traditions.

Specific resolutions can defeat concerns; a universal mystery rule cannot both immunize the claim and confirm it.

The issue is not whether finite readers should expect mystery. It is whether one evidential rule may reward coherence while forbidding every relevant incoherence from counting in the opposite direction.

Visual preview:

Beyond Inscrutability: The Epistemology of Sacred Texts



The preserved visual separates mystery from contradiction, shows the symmetry and one-sided evidence problem created by unrestricted inscrutability, and summarizes four constraints on a legitimate mystery appeal. It maps the argument's standards; it does not decide that every apparent contradiction is real or that no sacred text has a divine source.

Abstract

Textual coherence cannot legitimately raise public support for a clear and truthful divine-source claim while every relevant apparent incoherence is categorically denied negative force. The governing principle is two-sided evidence: within a specified range of textual outcomes, a favorable pattern can confirm a claim over ordinary human mediation only if at least one contrary pattern is permitted to count against it. An unrestricted inscrutability rule violates that principle by assigning every relevant apparent incoherence to inaccessible reasons while coherence remains creditable as evidence. Cross-tradition symmetry reinforces the problem because rival traditions can use the same rule. The result is a dilemma: constrain the appeal and admit that unresolved incoherence may retain defeater force, or make the appeal universal and relinquish coherence as discriminating public evidence. Skeptical-theist warnings about human cognitive limits justify local caution when a specific account of our ignorance exists; they do not justify one-sided evidence. Genre-sensitive interpretation and successful harmonization genuinely resolve difficulties because they supply assessable reasons and risk failure. The conclusion is limited. It does not establish that any particular contradiction is genuine, disprove theism, or exclude bounded trust supported independently. It requires proportional confidence and symmetrical public standards.

Keywords: inscrutability; sacred texts; coherence; contradiction; skeptical theism; inerrancy; defeaters; public reason

1. The Evidential Bargain

Religious inquiry is entitled to mystery. Finite readers should expect not to possess a complete account of a reality described as transcendent, and no serious worldview becomes irrational merely because some of its claims remain difficult. The problem begins when a limited counsel of humility becomes an unrestricted rule of evidence: whatever relevant apparent incoherence a sacred text presents, inaccessible divine reasons are said to guarantee a resolution, and the difficulty is categorically assigned no negative force.

That move makes an attractive bargain. It protects trust from a potentially destabilizing pattern while coherence remains available as a favorable sign. But the price is usually hidden. The problem is not mere logical compatibility: many well-supported claims remain compatible with adverse evidence. The problem is one-sided updating. The rule gives the divine-source claim credit for coherence while forbidding every relevant incoherence from lowering its support.

The target should be exact. A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including the attributes and revelatory purposes assigned to it. The target claim in this paper joins a God-concept described as clear and truthful with the claim that a particular sacred text has that deity as its decisive source. The live comparator is a humanly mediated text: one shaped by such ordinary processes as memory variation, editing, literary convention, institutional conflict, historical limitation, and theological development. Human mediation need not imply fraud, worthlessness, or the absence of religious insight. It predicts only that the familiar marks of human composition may remain.

The argument concerns *public confirmation*: reasons offered to an audience that need not already accept the text's privileged status. It relies on a *two-sided evidence principle*: within a specified range of relevant outcomes, allowing one outcome to raise public support requires allowing at least one contrary outcome to lower it. Otherwise the positive update has no balanced comparative basis. This principle does not declare all personal trust irrational or infer from one unresolved difficulty that a divine-source claim is false. It says that a defender cannot block every adverse update on a textual dimension while still advertising favorable results on that dimension as public evidence.

This matters in debates over inerrancy. The Chicago Statement affirms scriptural truthfulness and unity while denying that every currently unresolved discrepancy overturns inerrancy (International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978). That modest point is not itself the target. A present lack of resolution can rationally coexist with confidence. The target is the further rule that no accumulation or kind of unresolved incoherence is ever

allowed to lower confidence, even while harmony is counted in favor. That rule creates an evidential double standard.

The governing constraint

If textual coherence is allowed to raise public support for a clear and truthful divine source over human mediation, at least one relevant contrary textual pattern must be allowed to lower it. A rule that rewards favorable outcomes while neutralizing every unfavorable outcome is not a legitimate public test.

2. Mystery, Contradiction, and Resolution

2.1 Three categories, not two

A mystery is not simply whatever has resisted explanation. It is a proposition or subject whose full account is not possessed, even though the available claims need not be mutually inconsistent. Consciousness, quantum theory, personal identity, and the foundations of mathematics contain mysteries in this ordinary sense. Lack of full explanation does not entail falsehood.

An apparent contradiction is different. Under a settled interpretation, two claims appear unable to be true together in the same respect and at the same time. The qualifier *apparent* matters. One claim may concern a different time, speaker, genre, or sense of a term. A manuscript may contain a copying error. An author may compress chronology or arrange material topically. Once relevant evidence establishes such a difference, the contradiction can dissolve.

A genuine contradiction, by contrast, cannot be made true by adding depth. At least one of the inconsistent claims, interpretations, or framing assumptions must be revised. The difference between mystery and contradiction is therefore practical as well as logical. Mystery invites patient inquiry. Apparent contradiction creates a burden of diagnosis. Genuine contradiction requires revision.

This three-part distinction prevents two opposite errors. A critic should not declare contradiction before interpretation has stabilized. A defender should not rename a persistent apparent contradiction “mystery” and treat the relabeling as a resolution. What matters is the evidence that changes the relation among the claims.

2.2 Specific resolution carries evidence

Genre-sensitive scholarship supplies constructive examples. Walton and Sandy argue that ancient oral and literary cultures used conventions unlike modern documentary practice, while Licona examines compositional devices in ancient biography that can explain differences among Gospel narratives (Licona, 2017; Walton & Sandy, 2013). Enns and Sparks likewise develop evangelical accounts in which human mediation is not an embarrassing residue but part of how scripture came to be (Enns, 2005; Sparks, 2008). These approaches are not blank appeals to inaccessible reasons. They advance historical, literary, and comparative evidence that readers can assess.

Specific harmonizations can work for the same reason. If linguistic evidence shows that two expressions have different senses, if genre licenses a nonliteral reading, or if independent chronology shows that two reports concern different events, the apparent conflict loses force. The resolution succeeds by identifying what readers were missing. It risks failure if the proposed evidence does not fit.

An unrestricted inscrutability appeal behaves differently. It does not identify the missing distinction. It declares in advance that some inaccessible distinction must exist, whatever the textual pattern. The possibility of a resolution is substituted for evidence of one. That substitution may rationalize patience when independent grounds for trust are strong, but it does not erase the text’s contribution to the evidence. Unlike a specific resolution, it does not risk failure; that is why it triggers the paper’s two-sided evidence objection.

3. The Cumulative Evidential Pressure

No alleged contradiction carries the whole argument. The pressure comes from how several features of the evidential rule interact: differential expectation, the unrestricted treatment of unresolved patterns, symmetry across traditions, preservation of defeaters, and the semantic or moral cost of repeated reinterpretation. Table 1 displays the cumulative structure and its limits.

Table 1: Evidence ledger for the unrestricted-inscrutability critique. Each strand contributes pressure while leaving specific resolutions and independently supported trust open.

Strand	Observed pressure	Argumentative role	What it does not establish
Differential expectation	Human mediation readily predicts ordinary textual tension, redaction, and development	Grounds positive and negative updates in a comparison rather than an intuition	That every tension is a contradiction or has equal weight
Symmetry	Rival traditions can protect incompatible claims with the same inaccessible-reasons defense	Requires a noncircular reason for treating the favored appeal differently	That all traditions have identical total evidence
Defeater preservation	A universal auxiliary prevents any relevant apparent incoherence from lowering confidence	Exposes the difference between defeating a concern and disabling it by rule	That a single defeater must be decisive
Semantic and moral cost	Repeated reinterpretation can empty clarity, goodness, or truthfulness of public content	Tests whether a rescue preserves the original claim or silently replaces it	That finite moral understanding is complete or infallible

These strands do different work. Differential expectation supplies the central evidential bridge. Symmetry shows that the unrestricted rule cannot select the favored tradition. Defeater preservation distinguishes answering a problem from disabling it, while semantic and moral costs test whether repeated rescue leaves the original predicates intact. Together they expose one governing defect: favorable and unfavorable textual outcomes are being assigned different rules of relevance.

3.1 Differential expectation

Evidence supports one account over another when it is more expected under the first. This comparative principle is elementary even when no precise numbers are available (Sober, 2008). A clear and truthful divine-source claim need not predict modern technical prose, chronological precision, or the absence of every puzzle. Its expectations should be fixed by the actual theology and genre. Still, if the claim is invoked to explain and confirm a text's deep unity, truthfulness, or clarity, it cannot assign zero adverse force to every pattern opposed to those features.

The two-sided principle follows from this comparison. On ordinary probabilistic updating, divide the relevant textual possibilities into a specified evidence partition: coherence-bearing outcomes and contrary outcomes. If an outcome in the first group raises the target claim's support over human mediation, at least one nonzero-probability outcome elsewhere in the partition must lower it. This does not mean that every difficulty disconfirms, that every difficulty has equal weight, or that one anomaly decides the total case. It means that positive evidence on a dimension cannot be licensed while the entire contrary side is immunized by rule.

The human-mediation comparator already expects many kinds of friction: divergent memories, editorial seams, changing institutions, competing theological emphases, inherited cosmologies, and uneven moral horizons. A defender may explain why a divine source would permit each feature. But explanation after observation is not automatically prediction before observation. Unless the divine-source claim excludes or makes less likely some pattern that human mediation expects, the observed text cannot discriminate between them on that dimension.

The conclusion is graduated. A modest difficulty should produce modest pressure. A strong, specific solution can remove it. Multiple independent lines of support may outweigh it. The principle requires only that the direction and amount of updating not be fixed at zero in advance for every relevant contrary pattern.

3.2 Symmetry across rival traditions

Unrestricted inscrutability is religiously portable. Adherents of incompatible revelations can say that apparently conflicting teachings, histories, or moral portrayals cohere from an inaccessible divine perspective. If the possibility of such a perspective neutralizes the evidence in one case, it appears able to do so in the others.

Symmetry does not imply that every tradition has the same total case. One may possess stronger historical evidence, a more coherent theology, or a better account of genre. Those differences are exactly what public evaluation should examine. The point is narrower: inaccessible reasons alone cannot supply the difference because every side can invoke them with equal ease.

Barr's criticism of fundamentalist interpretation and later evangelical approaches to human mediation illustrate that the dispute is not simply between hostile criticism and faith (Barr, 1977; Enns, 2005; Sparks, 2008). Readers who share a religious commitment can disagree over whether tensions should be harmonized, attributed to ordinary literary culture, or allowed to revise a doctrine of scripture. Prior loyalty therefore cannot substitute for a public selector among the options.

Symmetry does not itself refute any tradition. It shows why the unrestricted rule cannot perform the selecting work assigned to public evidence: the same one-sided permission protects incompatible claims with equal ease.

3.3 Defeaters must be defeated, not prohibited

A defeater is a reason that reduces or removes the rational support a belief otherwise has. Plantinga's account of warranted Christian belief allows that religious belief may possess warrant without being inferred from propositional evidence, yet it also gives defeaters an important role (Plantinga, 2000). This combination helps locate the present claim. An apparent incoherence need not destroy belief, but it can still create a burden that requires response.

There is a difference between defeating a defeater and prohibiting it. Evidence of genre, textual transmission, translation, or distinct events can defeat an apparent-contradiction concern. Independent evidence for a source can sometimes justify withholding judgment while inquiry continues. An unrestricted auxiliary instead rules that the concern can never count, regardless of its character or accumulation. It does not win an evidential contest; it prevents one from taking place.

Ordinary source criticism makes the contrast clear. If a witness gives apparently incompatible reports, confidence may fall unless context reconciles them. A witness with a strong independent record may receive more patience than an unknown witness. But a rule declaring every conflict only apparent because the witness must be reliable would reverse the order of justification. Reliability would no longer be tested by the record; the record would be reconstructed from presumed reliability.

The central distinction is therefore between *defeating* a negative update with evidence and *forbidding* every negative update in advance. Only the second creates the unrestricted rule under criticism.

3.4 Semantic and moral costs

The rescue can also change the meaning of the claim being rescued. If "clear" remains true under any degree of persistent interpretive fragmentation, or "truthful" remains true under any unresolved conflict, these predicates may cease to impose recognizable constraints. A protected sentence survives, but its public content thins.

The cost is especially serious when apparent tensions concern divine goodness rather than chronology. A defender may reasonably insist that finite moral agents do not see every relevant consequence or reason. Yet

if every moral judgment is suspended whenever it conflicts with the favored text, goodness risks becoming indistinguishable from whatever the text attributes to supreme power. The belief has not been explained; the standard of assessment has been withdrawn.

This argument does not assume complete or infallible moral perception. Moral understanding can be corrected. But correction must remain intelligible as correction. It should appeal to reasons—facts about harm, agency, justice, intention, context, or moral principle—that show why the initial judgment failed. A universal declaration of cognitive incapacity cannot perform that work while preserving a publicly recognizable claim of goodness.

4. The Coherence–Inscrutability Dilemma

The cumulative case can be stated without numerical probabilities. Suppose coherence is legitimately counted as raising public support for the divine-source claim over human mediation. The two-sided evidence principle then requires at least one relevant contrary textual pattern to retain possible negative force. Now add an unrestricted inscrutability auxiliary: every relevant apparent incoherence is assigned zero negative force because inaccessible reasons guarantee resolution. The auxiliary forbids the very adverse update that makes the favorable update evidentially accountable.

The coherence–inscrutability dilemma

Either the mystery appeal is constrained or it is unrestricted. If constrained, some unresolved textual patterns retain possible defeater force. If unrestricted, every relevant apparent incoherence is barred from lowering support, so coherence cannot legitimately raise support on that same evidential dimension. The defender may preserve insulation or two-sided confirmation, but not both.

This is not Popperian falsificationism smuggled into theology. The argument does not require a single observation that mechanically falsifies a worldview. A hypothesis can remain meaningful and independently supported even when no one textual difficulty defeats it. The narrower point is that coherence cannot do positive work on a textual dimension whose entire contrary side has been barred from negative work.

The dilemma exposes a recurrent asymmetry. Coherence is treated as evidence of a guiding intelligence; incoherence is treated as evidence only of reader limitation. Successful harmonization confirms; failed harmonization merely postpones confirmation. The claim receives credit for favorable outcomes without risk from unfavorable ones. Once the accounting rule is made explicit, its evidential imbalance is difficult to defend.

Compatibility and confirmation must therefore remain distinct. A hidden resolution may keep a divine-source claim logically possible. It does not follow that the observed text supports the claim. The present argument does not infer evidential idleness from compatibility alone; it targets the stronger rule that every relevant contrary outcome is evidentially inert while favorable outcomes still receive credit.

5. Skeptical Theism: The Strongest Analogy

The most sophisticated reply comes from skeptical theism. In debates over evil, Wykstra argues that a finite observer may lack the cognitive position needed to infer from “no justifying reason is apparent” to “probably no justifying reason exists” (Wykstra, 1984). Bergmann and Rea defend related skeptical constraints against critics who allege excessive skepticism (Bergmann & Rea, 2005). More recent work argues that the position need not produce skepticism about divine commands (Hendricks, 2020). The lesson is serious: absence of an observed resolution is not always strong evidence of absence.

That warning improves the present argument by blocking a crude inference. A reader should not reason: “I cannot see a reconciliation; therefore none is probable.” Cognitive position varies by subject. If the relevant

reasons involve distant consequences, unfamiliar cultural conventions, lost context, or a mind radically greater than ours, failure to see them may be unsurprising.

But the analogy has limits. First, the present target is not a direct inference from unperceived reasons to nonexistent reasons. It is a claim about using textual coherence as *public confirmation*. Cognitive limitation may weaken a particular negative inference; it does not justify a standing rule under which every relevant negative update is forbidden while positive updates remain available.

Second, skepticism should be local and proportioned to an account of why the reason would be beyond reach. Lost historical context is one such account. Genre unfamiliarity is another. A general assertion that some inaccessible reason exists is weaker because it predicts no distinctive pattern and can be repeated without limit.

Third, extensive skepticism can spread. Critics of skeptical theism have argued that strong restrictions on our ability to judge divine reasons threaten ordinary moral deliberation or other inferences (Almeida & Oppy, 2003; Sehon, 2010). Defenders dispute that consequence, and the dispute need not be settled here. It reveals the relevant price: the wider the skeptical principle, the more work is needed to show why it disables only the adverse inference while leaving claims of truthfulness, clarity, and goodness publicly usable.

Fourth, skeptical theism ordinarily operates alongside independent reasons for belief. That structure can justify patience: strong evidence in one domain may rationally reduce the impact of an anomaly elsewhere. But independent support changes the *total* case; it does not turn the anomaly itself into supporting evidence. The text's apparent coherence and the independent grounds must be kept in separate evidential columns.

Skeptical theism therefore supports bounded humility, not the unrestricted auxiliary criticized here. It can reduce the weight of a difficulty when readers have reason to doubt their cognitive reach. It cannot license counting coherence as confirmation while stipulating that every relevant apparent incoherence has zero negative force.

6. Replies That Genuinely Change the Evidence

The following replies matter because they do not ask for one-sided evidence. Each either supplies assessable information, identifies independent support, or withdraws the public coherence argument. In that respect, they show how a defender can avoid rather than merely restate the dilemma.

6.1 Ancient genre and compositional practice

A defender may argue that modern readers impose documentary standards alien to ancient literature. This reply can succeed. Ancient biography permitted paraphrase, compression, transfer, and topical arrangement. Oral cultures preserved and performed material through conventions unlike modern quotation (Licona, 2017; Walton & Sandy, 2013). When those conventions explain a specific difference and are supported independently by comparable texts, the evidence changes.

The success is instructive. Genre does not function as a magic word. The interpreter identifies a convention, shows that it was available to the author, and demonstrates its fit with the passage. The proposal can be compared with alternatives and rejected if it fails. This is disciplined interpretation, not insulation.

The same point protects critics from overreach. A surface discrepancy should not be labeled contradiction before translation, textual variants, genre, perspective, and chronology have been examined. The present argument asks that the investigation remain genuinely open in both directions.

6.2 Specific harmonization

Some harmonizations are better than others. A good harmonization arises from textual or historical evidence, uses independently plausible distinctions, resolves more than it complicates, and does not change standards when

applied to a rival source. A merely possible story designed after the fact carries little weight, especially when many unconstrained stories could save any text.

This is not hostility to charitable interpretation. Readers routinely seek the strongest coherent reading of a difficult author. Charity is a starting presumption, not a guarantee of success. Its purpose is to avoid attributing error too quickly, not to make error impossible by definition.

6.3 Independent grounds for trust

A defender may possess historical, experiential, communal, or philosophical reasons for accepting a revelation. Such reasons can alter the rational response to apparent incoherence. Strong prior support may justify patient inquiry, just as a well-confirmed scientific theory may survive a temporary anomaly.

Two qualifications remain. The support must be genuinely independent rather than another conclusion drawn from the presumed authority of the same text. And the defender should state what the independent support warrants: perhaps continued participation, suspended judgment, or a reduced but still substantial confidence. It does not automatically warrant the claim that the textual difficulty has zero evidential force.

6.4 Properly basic or private trust

Plantinga's model allows Christian belief to be warranted in a properly functioning cognitive environment without resting on an argument from textual coherence (Plantinga, 2000). If a believer adopts that model, the present public-confirmation dilemma may not address the foundation of the belief. That is a genuine limit.

It also marks a change in dialectical position. A private or noninferential warrant claim is not a public argument from coherence. The believer may say, "I remain committed while I investigate this tension." That report differs from, "The tension should lower no rational observer's confidence." Only the latter imposes the unrestricted public rule criticized here.

6.5 A perfectly good source may outrun our categories

Finite moral categories may be incomplete. Yet saying that divine goodness exceeds current understanding is consistent with demanding continuity: what is called good should retain enough connection with care, justice, honesty, and reasons against needless harm for the word to guide judgment. Otherwise a term of moral praise becomes a label for unassessable authority.

The appropriate response is neither instant condemnation nor unconditional suspension. It is calibrated inquiry. Ask whether context changes the act described, whether the moral portrayal is endorsed or merely reported, whether the text records development or dispute, and whether a proposed interpretation preserves recognizable moral content. These questions allow revision on both sides.

7. Four Constraints on Legitimate Mystery

The critique is constructive because it identifies when mystery remains epistemically responsible. Each constraint limits the one-sided rule: the appeal must have a defined scope, an evidential basis, a symmetrical application, and some exposure to correction.

1. **Bounded.** The appeal addresses a specified difficulty and a specified cognitive limitation. It does not automatically cover every historical, logical, or moral problem.
2. **Independently motivated.** There is evidence for trusting the source or for expecting the missing information that does not simply assume the conclusion under challenge.

3. **Symmetrical by argument.** The standard could be applied to a rival tradition without changing merely because the conclusion is unfamiliar. Any asymmetry is supported by independent differences in evidence.
4. **Open to possible defeat.** The defender can describe at least some conceivable pattern that would lower confidence, force revision, or show that the mystery appeal has been overextended.

These constraints resemble rational responses to anomalies elsewhere. An established account may be retained while a local problem is investigated, but retention remains conditional on its other successes, the problem's scope, and the possibility of future correction. The standard is not hostility to trust. It is trust that remains answerable to evidence.

The constraints also clarify the burden of proof. A critic who alleges contradiction must specify the claims, interpretations, and logical conflict. A defender who alleges resolution must provide the relevant distinction or evidence. When neither side can complete its case, confidence should remain proportioned to what is known. Suspended judgment is available; forced certainty is not.

8. Graduated Confidence and Public Reason

A sacred text need not be classified as wholly coherent or wholly worthless. Readers can assign different confidence to passages, genres, historical claims, moral portrayals, and theological constructions. Some tensions may be resolved; others may remain; still others may lead to revision of an inerrancy doctrine, a particular interpretation, or the scope of claimed revelation.

Graduated confidence has two virtues. It preserves intellectual honesty by letting evidence have direction and weight. It also improves interpretation by replacing reflexive harmonization with questions about textual history, genre, perspective, and theological development. The text becomes an object of serious inquiry rather than an artifact protected from inquiry.

This approach may weaken a claim of perfect clarity or comprehensive inerrancy. It need not erase religious value. Enns and Sparks, for example, present human mediation as compatible with substantial evangelical commitments (Enns, 2005; Sparks, 2008). Readers may reject their proposals, but the proposals demonstrate that the choice is not simply total insulation or total abandonment.

Public argument requires one further discipline: distinguish reasons for remaining within a tradition from reasons offered to outsiders. Communal identity, spiritual experience, and trusted practice may rationally matter to an individual. An outsider cannot be required to treat inaccessible reconciliation as public evidence. Shared assessment begins where the claims, distinctions, and reasons can be examined without first granting the authority in dispute.

The reader implication is concrete. When an apparent incoherence arises, state it precisely. Examine textual, historical, literary, and moral evidence. Accept a specific resolution when it earns acceptance. If the difficulty remains, allow it proportionate weight alongside independent reasons for trust. Apply one rule in both directions: do not let coherence raise support while every contrary result is reassigned to human limitation.

9. Conclusion

An unrestricted appeal to inscrutability cannot preserve both immunity and confirmation. If textual coherence raises public support for a clear and truthful divine-source claim over human mediation, at least one relevant contrary pattern must be permitted to lower it. A universal inaccessible-reasons rule forbids that adverse update while retaining the favorable one. The resulting evidence standard is one-sided.

The strongest replies refine rather than defeat this result. Skeptical theism warns against overconfident inferences from unperceived reasons, but it supports local caution most naturally when cognitive limits and independent trust are specified. Genre-sensitive interpretation and successful harmonization genuinely resolve

difficulties because they introduce assessable evidence. Properly basic or private trust may remain outside an argument from coherence, but it cannot be converted without further support into a public demand that difficulties count for nothing.

The conclusion is deliberately limited. No particular apparent contradiction is declared genuine merely because it is unresolved. Theism, bounded mystery, private trust, and divine-source claims with independent support remain open. What closes is the double standard under which coherence raises confidence and every relevant apparent incoherence is forbidden to lower it. If apparent incoherence never matters, then coherence never matters either.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

A.1 Plain-language reconstruction

- P1.** If textual coherence is legitimately counted as raising public support for a clear and truthful divine-source claim over human mediation, at least one relevant contrary textual outcome must be permitted to lower that support.
- P2.** An unrestricted inscrutability rule permits no relevant apparent incoherence to lower that support.
- P3.** Therefore textual coherence cannot legitimately be counted as raising public support while the unrestricted rule is retained.
- P4.** Accordingly, a defender must either constrain the mystery appeal and allow some possible textual defeat, or relinquish coherence as public confirmation on that dimension.

Scope condition. The conclusion concerns the joint use of unrestricted inscrutability and public confirmation from coherence. It does not entail that a particular apparent contradiction is genuine, that the divine-source claim is false, or that independent evidence and private trust carry no weight.

A.2 Symbols

- C : textual coherence is legitimately counted as raising public support for the divine-source claim over human mediation;
- U : an unrestricted inscrutability rule assigns every relevant apparent incoherence zero negative force;
- D : at least one relevant contrary textual outcome is permitted to lower public support for the divine-source claim.

A.3 Symbolic reconstruction

$$C \rightarrow D \quad U \rightarrow \neg D \quad \therefore \neg(C \wedge U).$$

The inference is deductively valid. Assume for reductio that $C \wedge U$. From C and the first premise, derive D . From U and the second premise, derive $\neg D$. The assumption yields a contradiction, so $\neg(C \wedge U)$ follows.

Validity does not establish the premises. The support for $C \rightarrow D$ is conceptual and evidential. Within an exhaustive partition of relevant textual outcomes, a nonzero-probability outcome that raises support must be balanced by at least one outcome that lowers it; this is not the claim that every apparent incoherence lowers support or that one difficulty decides the total case. The support for $U \rightarrow \neg D$ follows from the stipulated evidential scope of *unrestricted*: every relevant apparent incoherence is assigned zero negative force on this dimension. A defender can reject the result by declining to use coherence as public confirmation, by constraining U , or by identifying a different evidential contrast. The formalization therefore preserves the paper's bounded conclusion.

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