

Parsimony and Christianity

Occam's Razor, Evidence-Forced Complexity, and the Assumption Stack of Christian Theism

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Central claim

Christian-specific bridge commitments bear a prima facie cost when a leaner, explicitly specified naturalistic rival matches the relevant public explanatory work and those commitments remain independently adjustable rather than evidence-forced. A short description or divine simplicity does not by itself establish the bridges from a generic creator to maximal attributes, providence, revelation, incarnation, and resurrection. If independent support, prospective discrimination, novel success, tighter constraint, or compensating unification does not pay for those bridges, parsimony lowers their comparative warrant. This does not prove Christianity false or make naturalism assumption-free.

Preview:

Comparative rule	Christian bridge stack	Evidence-forcing test	Bounded result
A commitment bears a cost only relative to a live rival and matched explanatory work.	Generic creator → omni-attributes → providence → revelation → Christian events and doctrines.	Does each addition gain independent support, risky discrimination, novel success, or tighter constraint?	Unpaid additions lower comparative warrant; they do not entail falsity or a costless naturalism.

Visual preview:

Earned vs. Protected Complexity: The Epistemic Burden of Parsimony

THE PRINCIPLE OF PARSIMONY

Parsimony as Disciplined Economy

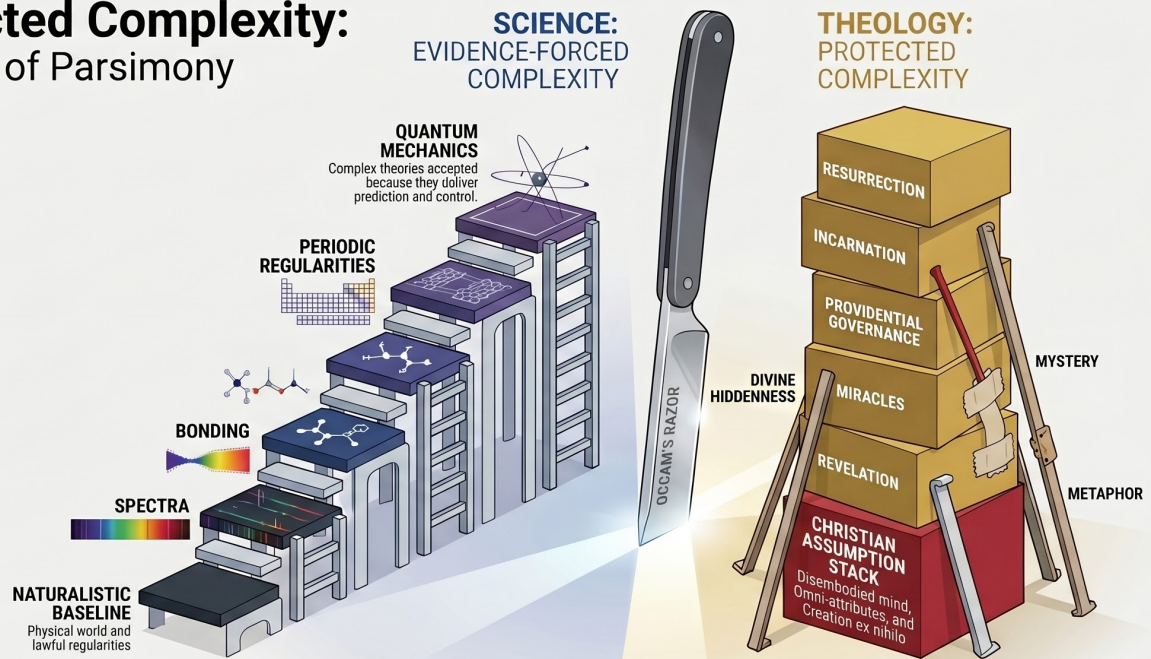
It is a defeasible epistemic norm, not a naive preference for simplicity.

Minimizing Free Commitments

Having fewer unsupported assumptions reduces the total number of ways a theory can be wrong.

The Requirement of "Earned" Complexity

Extra complexity is only rational when evidence forces the purchase.



THE BURDEN-SHIFT CONCLUSION

Until a dense metaphysical package earns its cost, empirical restraint is rationally favored.

Feature	Naturalistic Baseline	Christian Assumption Stack
Core Architecture	Physical world and lawful regularities	Disembodied mind, Omni-attributes, and Creation ex nihilo
Mechanisms	Empirical observation and open questions	Revelation, Miracles, and Providential governance
Response to Data	Models update based on evidence	Auxiliary inflation (Hiddenness, Mystery, and Metaphor)

The historical diagram illustrates one way complexity is earned: evidence forces and constrains it. Its science/theology labels are not verdicts on whole fields. The paper's broader test also credits independent support, prospective discrimination, novel success, and unification, and applies the same standard to naturalistic and theological additions.

Abstract

Occam's Razor is not a ban on complex theories. It is a comparative presumption against commitments that a live rival can omit while matching the relevant explanatory work. This paper develops that presumption as a three-part burden test: added ontology, primitive structure, and auxiliary flexibility incur a cost unless independent support, prospective discrimination, novel success, tighter constraint, or compensating unification pays for them. Applied to Christian theism, the result is conditional: where a leaner, explicitly specified naturalistic rival matches public explanatory success and Christian-specific additions remain unpaid by those gains, parsimony lowers their comparative warrant. The analysis separates a generic creator, maximal divine attributes, providential agency, special revelation, and specifically Christian claims about incarnation and resurrection. Chemistry and quantum physics show how evidence can force complexity, but do not make unrelated additions free; divine simplicity or concise description may reduce one kind of complexity while leaving contingent bridges intact. The naturalistic comparator also bears a defeasible closure claim, incompletely specified fundamental structure, and unresolved explanatory gaps. The argument therefore neither proves Christianity false nor establishes naturalism by default.

Keywords: parsimony; Occam's Razor; Christian theism; naturalism; divine simplicity; auxiliary hypotheses; worldview comparison

1. The Razor Needs a Target

Parsimony is often invoked as if it were a universal ranking device: count the entities, choose the smaller number, and stop. That is not how serious theory comparison works. Simplicity comes in different forms, its epistemic justification is contested, and its force is normally defeasible—that is, capable of being outweighed by other evidence. Syntactic elegance concerns how concisely a view can be stated; ontological parsimony concerns what kinds of things it says exist; other comparisons concern adjustable assumptions, primitive vocabulary, or the freedom with which a theory can be fitted to a record. These dimensions can point in different directions (Baker, 2022; Sober, 2015).

The relevant question is therefore not whether Christianity is “complex” in an everyday sense. A creed may be verbally brief and metaphysically rich. A rival may have fewer kinds of entities but a long specification of initial conditions. Nor is the question whether naturalism has solved every problem. The question is narrower: when two live views address the same public evidence, what additional commitments does each require, what explanatory work do those additions perform, and how tightly does the evidence constrain them?

Terminology matters. In this paper, a *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including attributed powers, knowledge, moral character, intentions, and mode of action. *Christian theism* denotes a family of God-concepts that includes more than generic causal theism: it ordinarily connects a creator to providence, revelation, and claims about Jesus. No bare occurrence of “God” should be read as a neutral proper name whose full Christian content is already granted. A conclusion about one God-concept need not apply to every theistic, deistic, pantheistic, or religious view.

The governing thesis can now be stated precisely. Added commitments count against a worldview when a leaner live rival matches its relevant public explanatory success and the additions are not paid for by independent evidence, risky discrimination, novel success, tighter constraint, or a gain in unification that reduces commitments elsewhere. Applied here, the rule places a *prima facie* burden on specifically Christian bridge commitments wherever the restricted naturalistic rival matches the work at issue. This is a burden allocation rule, not a deductive disproof. It is also symmetrical. If a naturalistic view adds an unsupported multiverse, psychophysical bridge, moral ontology, or closure principle merely to protect itself, that addition belongs in the same ledger.

Comparative Burden Principle

Relative to evidence E and live rivals R_1 and R_2 , an added commitment in R_2 carries a *prima facie* cost when R_1 can omit it while matching the explanatory work at issue. The cost is reduced or discharged when the commitment has independent support, produces a prospectively identifiable evidential advantage, tightens rather than loosens the range of acceptable outcomes, or unifies claims that would otherwise be independent.

This principle avoids two opposite errors. It rejects the slogan “simpler is always truer,” because richly structured theories can earn their complexity. It also rejects the idea that any coherent addition may be admitted at no cost. The burden lies in the relation between commitment and evidential payoff.

2. A Three-Column Complexity Ledger

No single scalar captures every theoretical cost. For present purposes, three columns are enough to expose the important differences without pretending to assign exact numbers.

2.1 Ontology, primitives, and auxiliaries

Ontological commitments concern what the view says exists: physical fields, minds, abstracta, deities, souls, angels, or other kinds. Counting individual objects is often unhelpful. A theory with one extraordinary entity can introduce more new kinds and powers than a theory with many ordinary instances of an already evidenced kind. Qualitative parsimony—how many basic kinds are admitted—can therefore matter more than a raw headcount (Baker, 2022; Sober, 2015).

Primitive structure concerns what must be taken as basic rather than derived: laws, powers, probability distributions, initial conditions, divine attributes, intentions, or bridge principles. Compression in one vocabulary does not guarantee compression in another. Writing “an unlimited personal cause” is short, but the terms *unlimited*, *personal*, and *cause* may carry substantive content. Conversely, a physical theory may require a long mathematical specification while employing few fundamental kinds.

Auxiliary flexibility concerns the number and independence of adjustments available after evidence arrives. An auxiliary hypothesis is not automatically suspect. Instruments need calibration; background conditions matter; mature theories are tested in packages. The concern arises when additions are selected retrospectively, lack independent support, and expand the set of outcomes that the view can accommodate without generating new tests. Lakatos’s distinction between progressive and degenerating problem shifts is useful here as a guarded analogy, not as a demarcation test that automatically classifies theology (Lakatos, 1978). Kuhn’s account of anomaly and theory change likewise warns against the fantasy that responsible inquiry abandons a framework at the first difficulty (Kuhn, 2012).

Table 1 records the three dimensions and the conditions under which a cost may be paid.

2.2 Why the statistical analogy has limits

Statistical model selection makes one version of the problem vivid. A model can fit observed data better merely by adding adjustable parameters; criteria such as Akaike’s penalize that freedom because in-sample fit can overstate predictive accuracy (Akaike, 1974). Forster and Sober connect this result to philosophical discussions of parsimony, unification, and ad hocness (Forster & Sober, 1994). The lesson is not that worldviews can be assigned an Akaike information criterion score. They cannot: the relevant likelihoods, parameterizations, and repeatable sampling conditions are often absent. The narrower lesson is structural. Retrospective flexibility and prospective accuracy are different achievements.

Ledger column	What is added	When cost rises	What can pay it
Ontology	New fundamental entities, kinds, or domains	A live rival omits them while matching the public work at issue	Independent detection, causal leverage, or substantial unification
Primitive structure	Basic laws, powers, attributes, intentions, or bridge principles	The description is compact only because content is packed into undefined or weakly connected terms	Derivation, independently motivated constraints, or successful novel explanation
Auxiliary flexibility	Qualifications, background assumptions, interpretive options, or rescue clauses	Adjustments are retrospective, independently unsupported, and enlarge compatibility without new risk	Prospective specification, independent evidence, novel tests, or reduced freedom elsewhere

Table 1: A non-numerical complexity ledger. The columns may conflict, so no automatic total score is implied.

That distinction will carry the argument. A theological response may be coherent after an event without having predicted or discriminated it beforehand. A naturalistic story may likewise accommodate a fact without explaining it. Parsimony does not turn accommodation into failure, but neither does accommodation alone pay the cost of whatever was added to secure it.

3. A Fair Baseline: Neither Naturalism nor Theism for Free

Worldview comparisons are easily rigged by giving one side a detailed theory and the other an empty label. “Naturalism” names a family of positions, not the absence of commitments. Oppy offers a minimal characterization spanning ontology, epistemology, mindedness, and value while emphasizing disagreement among naturalists (Oppy, 2020). Any naturalistic comparator used here must therefore be stated rather than smuggled in as neutrality.

The relevant comparator is a *restricted naturalistic rival*: it admits entities and processes independently supported by successful public inquiry, treats minded organisms as arising within the natural history so far evidenced, and withholds commitment on questions for which no public account is yet adequate. It also adopts a defeasible closure claim: causal explanations should not add a supernatural domain without evidence that improves the comparison. That closure claim is not a theorem. If it becomes an unconditional ban on possible evidence, it incurs an auxiliary cost of its own.

This restricted rival is deliberately modest. It does not claim that current physics is complete, that consciousness has been reduced, that moral truths are unreal, or that the universe explains its own existence. An acknowledged open question is not an explanation, but neither is it automatically a theoretical defect equivalent to a false answer. Sometimes epistemic restraint is the appropriate response to underdetermination.

Christian theism also comes in families. At minimum, the public comparison must separate a generic creator hypothesis from the classical-theist God-concept and from specifically Christian claims. The first says that reality depends on a purposive or personal source. The second may add necessity, aseity, maximal power and knowledge, perfect goodness, timelessness, immutability, impassibility, or radical simplicity. The third adds a providential relation to history, some route of special revelation, and claims about incarnation, atonement, and resurrection. Traditions differ over the exact package, but the logical point is stable: later claims are not all analytic consequences of the first.

Schmid’s comparison of Oppy’s naturalism with classical theism illustrates why the baseline matters. On his accounting, both views inherit the natural world’s specification, while classical theism adds a transcendent first cause and related primitive vocabulary; defenders dispute whether that is the right global accounting (McNabb

& DeVito, 2023; Schmid, 2023). The present paper does not assume Schmid's verdict. It adopts his more basic discipline: compare whole packages, not only whichever local description makes one's preferred foundation look shortest.

The resulting symmetry is important. A Christian God-concept may gain explanatory reach that repays its additions. A naturalistic rival may hide unexplained structure in "the laws" or in an ideal completed science. The ledger settles neither question in advance. It asks each view to disclose its commitments and evidential returns.

4. The Christian Bridge Stack

The term *assumption stack* can mislead if it suggests a heap of arbitrary or mutually independent propositions. Christian philosophers offer arguments for many of the relevant steps, and some doctrines constrain others. The better image is a sequence of bridges. Each bridge connects a thinner claim to a richer one. Some may be strong, some redundant, and some supported only from within a prior theological framework. Parsimony asks what licenses each crossing.

4.1 From a source to a maximally perfect agent

Suppose, for argument's sake, that some cosmological or explanatory argument establishes a necessary foundation, first cause, or ultimate source. It does not follow without further premises that this source is a mind, perfectly free, omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, or worthy of worship. Arguments from pure actuality, perfect-being theology, or explanatory simplicity may attempt to derive those properties. The derivations must be assessed on their own merits. Treating the word *creator* as already containing them obscures the work.

Defenders of simple theism emphasize that infinite degrees of power or knowledge may be more naturally describable than an arbitrary very large finite degree. Miller develops that response to parodical "mega-property" alternatives, and Swinburne argues that a maximally simple personal explanation can have high prior plausibility (Miller, 2016; Swinburne, 1997, 2007). This is a serious defense against a crude property count. If a single unrestricted principle genuinely entails a range of attributes, the primitive-structure column may shrink.

Yet two qualifications remain. First, simplicity relative to nearby personal explanations does not by itself establish simplicity relative to impersonal alternatives. Second, an economical description of maximal attributes does not entail that a maximally perfect agent produced this world, acts providentially within it, or disclosed a particular religion. The defense may pay one local cost while leaving later bridges untouched.

4.2 From maximal attributes to providence and revelation

The next bridge concerns action. A classical-theist God-concept is often taken not merely to ground existence but to know, will, and govern a contingent order. The actual distribution of goods, suffering, regularity, contingency, nonbelief, and religious diversity must then be related to those intentions. Broad claims such as "a perfectly good deity has sufficient reasons" may preserve logical consistency. Public explanatory leverage requires more: some reason to expect this pattern rather than live alternatives.

This requirement does not demand a complete psychology of an unlimited agent. Human personal explanations often succeed despite incomplete access to motives. They succeed by using independently supported character, stable goals, background knowledge, and discriminating expectations. The less independently constrained the divine motive assignment is, the more outcomes it can fit and the less comparative support any one fitted outcome supplies.

Special revelation adds another bridge. Even if a providential deity would communicate, it does not follow that the communication would take the form of a specific canon, institution, historical community, or interpretive tradition. Those details may be supported by historical testimony, religious experience, moral fruit, or cumulative-

case arguments. The point is not that such evidence is impossible. It is that generic theism cannot be counted again as if it independently established each specification.

4.3 From revelation to specifically Christian events

Incarnation and resurrection claims are still more specific. They identify a person, time, purpose, and sequence of extraordinary acts. Their specificity can be epistemically valuable: a view that risks a concrete historical claim is less insulated than one that remains purely abstract. But specificity also creates a burden. The historical evidence must favor the specifically Christian explanation over error, legend, sincere misinterpretation, rival religious explanations, and unknown ordinary causes strongly enough to justify the additional ontology and bridge principles.

The structure is summarized in Table 2. The table deliberately uses *possible warrant* rather than pronouncing each bridge unwarranted. The paper's result is conditional on how well that warrant is supplied.

Bridge	Added content	Possible warrant	Parsimony question
Foundation → agent	Mind, intention, freedom, personal explanation	Argument from agency, intelligibility, consciousness, or explanatory scope	Does agency outperform impersonal foundations rather than merely redescribe them?
Agent → perfection	Necessity, omni-attributes, perfect goodness, aseity	Perfect-being derivation, pure actuality, or compression of personal explanation	Are the attributes entailed and coherent, or independently stipulated?
Perfection → providence	Intentional governance of this contingent history	Moral order, fine-tuning, consciousness, purposive pattern, or cumulative fit	Do constrained intentions make the observed pattern more expected?
Providence → revelation	Public or personal disclosure with identifiable content	Testimony, experience, moral and explanatory fruit, convergence	Why this medium, distribution, and content rather than live alternatives?
Revelation → Christianity	Incarnation, atonement, resurrection, doctrinal authority	Historical and experiential evidence specific to Christian claims	Does the specific evidence pay for the specifically Christian additions?

Table 2: A bridge ledger, not a claim that every step is independent or unsupported.

No Double Counting

Evidence that supports a generic creator may also contribute to a cumulative Christian case, but it cannot by itself discharge every later bridge. The more specific conclusion needs evidence or entailment specific enough to distinguish it from leaner theisms, deism, non-Christian revelations, and naturalistic alternatives.

5. Why Scientific Complexity Can Be Earned

Chemistry and quantum physics supply the strongest intuitive objection to indiscriminate parsimony. Nature is not obliged to be simple. The periodic table, electron configurations, quantum states, and competing interpretations of quantum theory are conceptually demanding. A rule that rejected them merely for complexity would be irrational.

The objection succeeds against crude simplicity. It does not defeat the comparative burden principle. Scientific complexity can be *evidence-forced*: multiple independent observations resist a leaner account; the richer

structure constrains calculation; and the resulting framework yields new, precise, or cross-domain success. The periodic table was not accepted because chemists admired complication. Its organization was disciplined by recurring chemical behavior, atomic number, spectroscopy, and later quantum theory. Even then, reduction is not effortless: Scerri documents the partial autonomy of chemical models and the complications in deriving electron configurations from quantum mechanics (Scerri, 1991, 2011).

Quantum theory makes the same point at a deeper level. The formalism is not granted a license to say anything. It is extraordinarily constrained by experiment, while interpretive disputes remain because empirical adequacy does not uniquely settle ontology. Wallace emphasizes both the scientific success and the unresolved conceptual questions surrounding quantum mechanics (Wallace, 2021). Complexity in the predictive core and freedom in interpretation must therefore be distinguished.

Table 3 isolates the relevant contrast. It does not equate “science” with virtue or “theology” with vice. A scientific auxiliary can be degenerating, and a theological addition can be independently motivated and prospectively risky. The classifications apply to particular moves.

Diagnostic	Evidence-forced addition	Protection-only addition
Timing	Motivated before or independently of the target result	Introduced chiefly after the target result threatens the view
Constraint	Narrows acceptable outcomes or fixes parameters	Expands the outcomes compatible with the view
Leverage	Supports novel prediction, intervention, measurement, or cross-domain integration	Reclassifies the existing record without further empirical leverage
Independence	Supported by evidence not generated by the problem it solves	Supported mainly by the fact that the core view needs protection
Failure condition	Leaves identifiable results or patterns that would lower confidence	Makes adverse results evidence-neutral or confirmatory

Table 3: The contrast concerns evidential roles, not institutional labels.

This explains why chemistry does not furnish a blank check for theology. It demonstrates that complex commitments can be rational when they purchase constraint and success. It does not show that every coherent metaphysical layer has already paid that price. The proper analogy is demanding: if a Christian addition is said to resemble evidence-forced scientific structure, the comparison should identify the independent evidence, prospective constraints, and explanatory gains that force it.

6. Divine Simplicity and the Compression Defense

Classical divine simplicity says much more than “there is only one deity.” On traditional formulations, the classical-theist God-concept lacks physical and metaphysical parts; there is no real distinction between the deity and the divine attributes, and no composition of essence and existence, act and potency, or subject and intrinsic properties (Vallicella, 2023). The doctrine aims at radical metaphysical non-composition, not merely brevity.

That doctrine deserves separate treatment because it can alter the ledger. If omniscience, omnipotence, goodness, and necessary existence are not independent components but identical in one simple actuality, then counting them as separate ontological parts misrepresents the view. Historical and contemporary debates show, however, that the doctrine itself brings difficult commitments about predication, personhood, freedom, and divine action; critics and defenders disagree over whether the resulting account is coherent and explanatorily illuminating (McGinnis, 2022).

The key point is conditional and modest. Even if divine simplicity succeeds, it addresses the internal metaphysical composition of the classical-theist God-concept. It does not by itself derive the contingent history

of creation, the distribution of providential action, the selection of a revelation, the incarnation, or the resurrection. A simple source can have a complex relation to a contingent effect. The bridge from source to this history still requires principles about will, purpose, and disclosure.

Descriptive compression faces the same limit. A short phrase can package much content. “A perfectly rational agent” may generate expectations only after rational goals and background information are supplied. “Whatever a perfectly good deity would permit” is shorter than a list of permissions, but if no independent account constrains the permissions, the phrase has compressed wording rather than predictive freedom.

Swinburne’s program remains an important challenge because it combines simplicity with probabilistic natural theology rather than relying on word count alone (Swinburne, 1997, 2007). The appropriate reply is not that infinity must be complex. It is that global comparison must include the whole explanatory package: the personal-explanation framework, divine attributes, contingent intentions, natural order, and the evidence said to connect them. A local compression defense succeeds only to the extent that these further commitments are entailed or independently supported.

McNabb and DeVito press a related internal objection to Oppy: a classical theist already committed to act–potency metaphysics and participation may not regard the classical-theist God-concept as an extra posit grafted onto an otherwise Oppian picture (McNabb & DeVito, 2023). That is fair as a point about theory-relative cost. Public comparison, however, cannot simply inherit either side’s disputed background. It must ask why the background package itself should be preferred and what evidence it organizes better. Parsimony is always relative to an articulated total view, but it is not merely relative to what a person already believes.

7. Hiddenness, Rescue, and Predictive Openness

Divine hiddenness provides a useful stress test because many different auxiliary responses are available. Schellenberg’s argument from nonresistant nonbelief contends, roughly, that a perfectly loving personal deity would make relationship available to capable nonresistant persons, while such nonbelief occurs (Schellenberg, 1993). Responses appeal to freedom, soul-making, cognitive distance, goods of seeking, unknown reasons, human resistance, eschatological completion, or a different account of divine love.

The existence of several responses does not show that they are false or ad hoc. Some were developed independently of a particular case, connect to broader doctrines, and yield further commitments. Nor does hiddenness establish a frequency claim about how theologians reason. The point is diagnostic: each response should be assessed for independence, prospective content, symmetry, and further leverage.

Consider three possibilities. First, a freedom defense might specify why a certain degree of epistemic distance is needed, what relationship remains possible, and what patterns would exceed that need. That response adds content and risk. Second, a soul-making account might connect hiddenness to independently defended virtues and predict limits or compensating goods. It can be evaluated across cases. Third, a bare appeal to an unknown sufficient reason guarantees only logical compatibility. It may defeat a deductive contradiction, but because it does not distinguish this record from almost any other, it contributes little positive explanatory support.

The same distinction applies outside hiddenness. A miracle claim can be qualified by principled historical standards or protected by lowering those standards only when the favored event is considered. A prayer claim can be narrowed prospectively or preserved by treating every outcome as an answer. A providence claim can generate risky expectations or remain compatible with any distribution of fortune. The vice is not revision; it is one-way flexibility.

Compatibility Is Not Confirmation

An auxiliary may show that a record is logically compatible with a Christian God-concept. Positive public support requires more: the record should be more expected, better integrated, or more fruitfully constrained on that account than on live rivals. Unknown reasons can block a contradiction without supplying this comparative advantage.

This principle also protects theology from an unfair falsificationism. Personal explanations need not behave like deterministic laws, and an unlimited agent may have reasons observers do not know. The argument does not infer from our failure to identify a reason that none exists. It distinguishes that modest skeptical possibility from the stronger claim that the observed pattern publicly confirms a specific divine intention. The former may be rationally open; the latter carries a larger burden.

8. A Public Worldview Comparison

The paper's argument can now be applied without pretending to calculate a universal simplicity score. Begin with a specific explanandum: the existence of contingent reality, the order of laws, consciousness, moral experience, religious experience, hiddenness, or an alleged historical miracle. Define live rivals at comparable levels of detail. Then fill the three-column ledger for each and ask what the evidence purchases.

For the restricted naturalistic rival, the main advantages are continuity with independently successful inquiry and restraint about new causal kinds. Its costs include a substantive closure claim, an incomplete account of fundamental structure, and unresolved problems about consciousness, normativity, and why there is any law-governed reality. Invoking "brute fact" is not an explanation. It can still be a rational stopping point if the proposed deeper explanations add more unsupported structure than understanding.

For Christian theism, the possible advantages are wide explanatory scope, personal explanation, a unified moral and purposive framework, and integration of religious and historical claims. Its costs include a novel causal kind, rich divine attributes, contingent purposes, and bridges from general theism to specifically Christian revelation. Calling all these consequences of one simple being reduces cost only where the entailments and evidential connections are actually established.

The comparison should therefore proceed explanandum by explanandum before a global judgment is attempted. Fine-tuning might favor purposive agency relative to some naturalistic models while hiddenness favors impersonal or non-interventionist rivals. Consciousness might support a mind-first ontology while apparently indiscriminate suffering pressures perfect-goodness claims. A cumulative case must preserve these directions rather than counting every datum as support for the same view.

Table 4 gives a reusable audit. Its purpose is not to ensure that the leanest view always wins. It ensures that a richer view receives credit for genuine gains and pays for genuine freedom.

This procedure yields the paper's central conditional result. If the restricted naturalistic rival matches the public explanatory performance at issue while omitting the Christian bridge commitments, and if those commitments lack independent support or prospective leverage, parsimony favors the rival for that comparison. If Christian theism instead yields constrained expectations, unifies otherwise independent evidence, or receives strong event-specific support, those gains can outweigh the added commitments. Nothing in the method makes the verdict automatic.

Audit question	What responsible comparison records	Warning sign
Target	The exact God-concept, naturalism, and explanandum under comparison	Generic labels carrying undisclosed content
Live rivals	Alternatives at comparable detail that competent proponents actually defend	A caricature made needlessly elaborate or explanatorily empty
Added commitments	New kinds, primitives, intentions, bridge principles, and auxiliaries	Entity headcounts or word counts standing in for the whole ledger
Independent support	Evidence available apart from the problem the addition was introduced to solve	The need to save the view is treated as evidence for the saving device
Prospective constraint	Outcomes or patterns that become more and less expected	Every possible record receives the same verdict
Explanatory purchase	Novel success, intervention, unification, or reduction of commitments elsewhere	Mere compatibility is reported as confirmation
Scope limit	What the result leaves unresolved, including burdens on the preferred rival	Local advantage inflated into a total worldview proof

Table 4: A public audit for parsimony claims.

9. Objections and Replies

9.1 One deity is simpler than an entire universe

A one-versus-many count mixes levels. Both views in the comparison must account for the observed world. Christian theism does not replace electrons, organisms, and galaxies with one deity; it adds or grounds them through a further kind of reality. A defender may argue that grounding reduces the number of brute principles and thereby wins globally. That is a legitimate unification claim, but it must show how the grounding relation constrains or explains the world's contingent structure. Raw object counts do not settle it.

9.2 Maximal properties are simpler than arbitrary limits

Agreed, within the relevant family. A maximally powerful or knowledgeable agent may be describable by a cleaner rule than one with an arbitrary upper bound, as Miller and Swinburne argue (Miller, 2016; Swinburne, 2007). The concession matters: the paper does not count omni-properties as if they were detachable machine parts. But maximality still requires a coherent property, an agent to bear it, and a comparison class in which the rule is genuinely economical. It also does not entail the specifically Christian bridges. Local simplicity should be credited locally.

9.3 Naturalism explains less and therefore only looks leaner

Sometimes a view is lean because it refuses explanatory work. A theory that says nothing will be short but useless. The comparative principle therefore requires matched performance. Naturalism cannot claim an advantage merely by ignoring an explanandum that Christian theism explains well. Conversely, a label does not become an explanation merely by being attached to the fact. "A deity willed it" has public purchase only insofar as the relevant God-concept and intentions are independently constrained or the fact is more expected on that view.

The appropriate result may be underdetermination. If neither side supplies an adequate account, parsimony can rationally recommend withholding the richer commitment without declaring the leaner worldview fully explanatory. Restraint and explanation are different virtues.

9.4 A worldview may be assessed from inside its own metaphysics

Internal assessment is indispensable. A classical theist evaluates simplicity through act, potency, participation, aseity, and analogical predication; a naturalist evaluates it through a different background. McNabb and DeVito are right that an alleged “addition” can look derivative inside the classical-theist package (McNabb & DeVito, 2023). Public comparison nevertheless asks why one total package should be adopted rather than another. Premises that are free only after the conclusion’s worldview is assumed cannot carry the whole public argument without circularity. Internal coherence is a virtue; comparative warrant requires a bridge across frameworks.

9.5 Auxiliary hypotheses are unavoidable

They are. Measurements presuppose instruments; historical judgments use background knowledge; personal explanations use beliefs and desires. The paper does not prohibit auxiliaries. It distinguishes progressive auxiliaries, which are independently supported and open new inquiry, from protection-only moves that expand compatibility without further leverage. This distinction is fallible and case-sensitive. It is still better than classifying every revision as either fraud or costless clarification.

9.6 Unknown divine reasons may be entirely appropriate

They may be. Finite agents should expect cognitive limitations relative to an unsurpassable mind. The narrow conclusion is that an unspecified reason normally supplies possibility, not discriminating confirmation. If the observation would be accommodated by indefinitely many hidden purposes and also by impersonal rivals, the appeal preserves the Christian God-concept from a quick refutation but does not by itself make the observation evidence for that concept. A separate argument might establish a strong prior case, but then the warrant comes from that argument.

9.7 Parsimony is only one theoretical virtue

Correct. Scope, fit, coherence, causal adequacy, unification, and independent evidence can outweigh simplicity. This is built into the burden principle. The conclusion says that unpaid commitments lower comparative warrant, not that the view with the smallest ledger must be true. Indeed, the evidence-forced complexity of mature science is the model for how a richer view can win.

10. Conclusion

Occam’s Razor is most defensible when it is least theatrical. It does not slice away every invisible entity or declare that reality must fit a short sentence. It asks a disciplined comparative question: what work does each added commitment do, and why should that commitment be accepted rather than omitted?

Applied to Christianity, the question should not be directed at a single undifferentiated “theism.” The route from an ultimate source to an agent, from an agent to maximal perfection, from perfection to providence, from providence to revelation, and from revelation to incarnation and resurrection contains substantive bridges. Some may be supported, some may be derived from a common metaphysics, and some may be mutually reinforcing. None should be treated as free merely because the final package has a compact name.

Chemistry and quantum physics show exactly why complexity can be rational. Observation forces structure, mathematical and experimental practice constrains it, and the resulting theories achieve prediction, intervention, and integration. Their lesson is not that complexity carries no burden. It is that burdens can be paid. Theological additions deserve the same opportunity and the same demand.

Divine simplicity also changes the accounting without ending it. A radically non-composite deity is not a bundle of separable properties, and maximal attributes may be descriptively economical. Yet the contingent

bridges to this world and this religious history remain. Concision in the source does not automatically constrain the effects.

The central conclusion is therefore limited but consequential. Where a leaner live rival matches the relevant public explanatory success, and where Christian-specific additions lack independent support, prospective discrimination, novel success, tighter constraint, or compensating unification, parsimony lowers their comparative warrant. This is not a proof that Christianity is false. It is not a proof that naturalism is complete or assumption-free. It is a demand that richer public claims earn the extra structure they ask a reader to accept.

For constructive inquiry, that demand is an invitation rather than a veto. State the God-concept, identify the bridge, name the live alternatives, specify what the evidence favors before observing it, and show what the addition enables that the leaner rival cannot match. A commitment that survives this process has not evaded the razor. It has paid for itself.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

The central inference is comparative and conditional:

- P1.** A commitment carries a *prima facie* comparative cost when a live rival can omit it while matching the relevant public explanatory work.
- P2.** That cost may be reduced or discharged by independent support, prospective discrimination, novel success, tighter constraint, or unification that removes commitments elsewhere.
- P3.** Christian theism, relative to a restricted naturalistic rival, includes bridges from a generic foundation to agency, maximal attributes, providence, revelation, and specifically Christian historical claims.
- P4.** A compact description or a doctrine of divine simplicity does not by itself entail all contingent bridges from the divine nature to this world's history.
- P5.** Scientific complexity is evidentially licensed when observation and successful practice force and constrain it; its mere existence does not license unrelated complexity.
- P6.** Unknown-reason and other auxiliary responses can establish compatibility without supplying positive comparative support unless they are independently grounded or prospectively constraining.
- C.** Therefore, wherever a leaner rival omits the relevant Christian bridges while matching the public explanatory work, and those bridges lack the warrant described in P2, they lower Christian theism's comparative warrant for that explanandum.
- Scope.** This conclusion does not entail that Christianity is false, that every Christian bridge is unwarranted, or that naturalism has no comparable burdens.

C is a conditional instance of P1 once P3 identifies the Christian bridge commitments and the matched-performance and unpaid-cost conditions are supplied. P4–P6 show why three common replies do not automatically discharge the cost described in P2; particular evidence may still do so. The inference is deductively valid at that conditional level: if a leaner rival omits the bridges while matching the work, and if no P2 warrant pays for them, the stated comparative-warrant consequence follows. Whether those antecedents hold—whether performance is matched, the commitments are genuinely additional, and their evidence is independent—remains case-sensitive. The argument therefore supports a method and bounded verdicts, not a numerical ranking of every worldview.

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