

The Outsourced Rationality Argument

C. S. Lewis, Materialism, and the Apologetic Management of Ordinary Believers

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Central claim

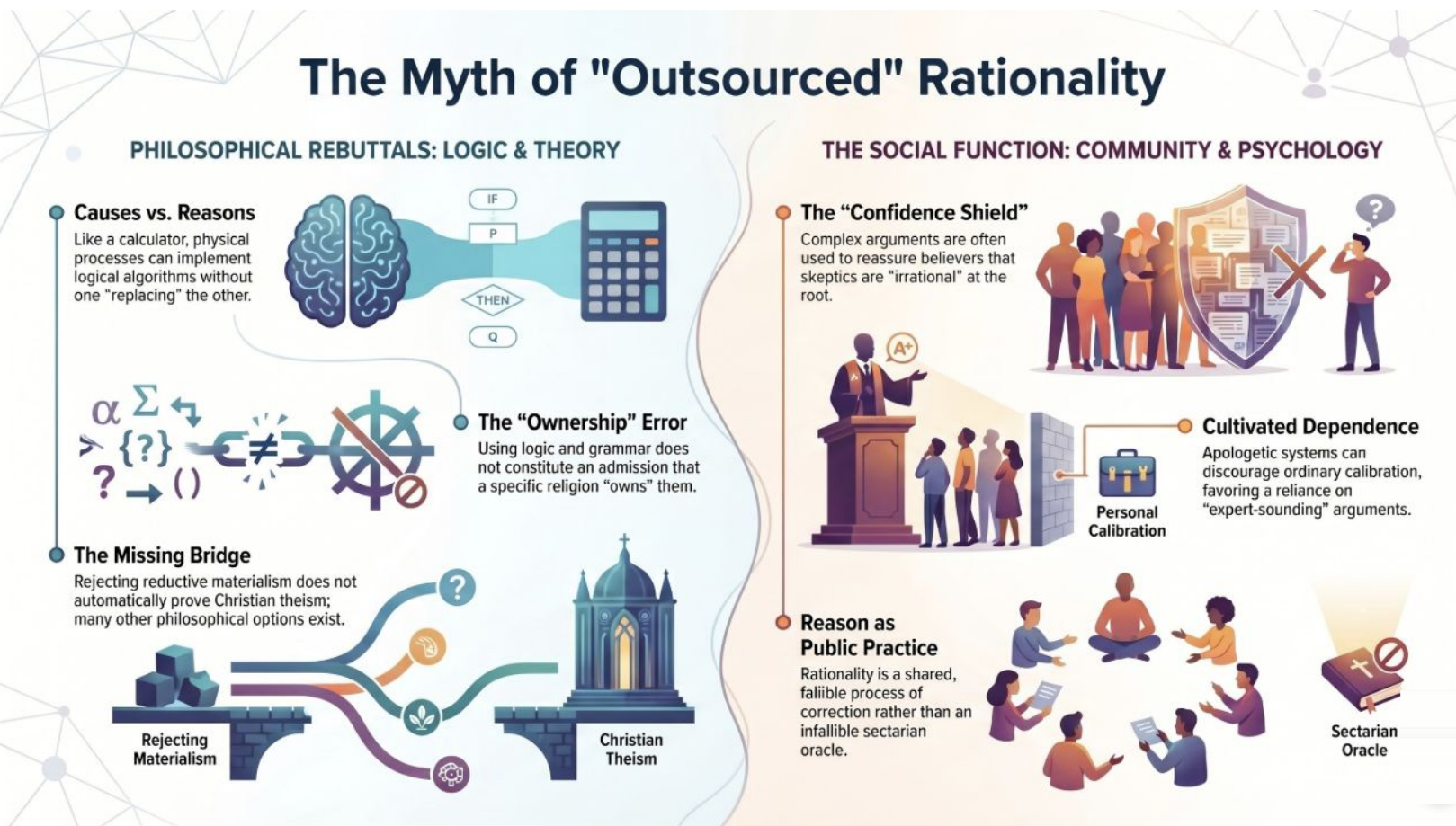
An argument from reason may expose a problem for crude reductionism, but it does not show that physical realization excludes rational grounds, that rejecting naturalism entails Christian theism, or that Christians therefore own the norms of thought. Until those bridges are argued, calling nonbelievers' reasoning "borrowed" is not an explanation; it is a sectarian verdict issued before their reasons are heard.

Preview:

Apologetic claim	Required bridge	Unfinished proof	Rational verdict
Naturalism turns inference into blind physical causation, so rationality must come from Christian theism.	Physical realization must exclude reason-giving relations; rejecting naturalism must then select Christianity over every rival.	Naturalistic accounts of content and mental causation remain live, while anti-naturalism alone neither identifies Christianity nor grants it ownership of reason.	Treat the argument as an explanatory challenge. Do not use it as a license to dismiss critics before examining their reasons.

This paper neither proves naturalism nor denies the rational value of expert testimony. It denies that a disputed metaphysics can convert ordinary epistemic dependence into sectarian ownership of the standards by which that metaphysics must itself be judged.

Visual preview:



The diagram separates three questions that the ownership argument compresses: whether causes erase reasons, whether rejecting one materialist theory establishes Christianity, and whether reliance on trusted teachers permits a believer to ignore public criticism. The missing bridge in each case is an argument, not an entitlement.

Abstract

Arguments from reason claim that naturalism cannot accommodate rational inference because physical causes track causal history rather than logical grounds. Their strongest versions identify a serious explanatory burden: a theory of mind must explain how beliefs possess content, respond to reasons, and produce conclusions because those reasons support them. This paper argues that apologetic uses of that burden routinely outrun what it establishes.

Two bridges are missing. First, physical realization does not by itself exclude rational explanation. A belief may be causally implemented and still be explained at the personal level by the evidence an agent recognized; naturalistic proposals concerning content, function, and mental causation are contested, not nonexistent. Second, even a successful refutation of naturalism would not entail Christian theism, still less Christian ownership of rational norms. The conclusion would leave multiple non-naturalist views open and would impose positive explanatory debts on any Christian account.

The social consequence matters. Human inquiry necessarily depends on testimony and expertise, but rational dependence remains answerable to public criteria: track record, relevant competence, independence, responsiveness to objections, and the comparative quality of reasons. It becomes *outsourced rationality* when deference is used to pre-authorize a conclusion or disqualify a critic before the critic's argument is considered. The paper therefore offers a bounded verdict. The argument from reason may challenge some forms of reductionism; it does not supply a Christian monopoly on thought. Using it as such is not a defense of reason but an evasion of reason's reciprocal burdens.

Keywords: argument from reason; C. S. Lewis; naturalism; materialism; mental causation; epistemic dependence; testimony; apologetics; public reason

1 What the Ownership Charge Claims

The argument from reason begins with a genuine philosophical problem. Human conclusions occur in physical organisms. Neurons fire, memories are retrieved, attention shifts, words are produced. Yet reasoning is not merely one event following another. A conclusion is rational when it follows *because* its premises support it. If a physical description leaves that support entirely idle, then the description appears to omit what makes the episode an inference rather than a sequence of events.

C. S. Lewis pressed this concern against naturalism in *Miracles*. If every belief is fully explained as the result of nonrational causes, he argued, then the belief in naturalism is explained in the same way and loses its claim to rational credibility (Lewis 1960). Victor Reppert develops a contemporary family of related arguments involving mental causation, propositional content, truth, and the laws of logic (Reppert 2003; Reppert 2007). These arguments should not be dismissed as the childish thought that brains are physical and therefore cannot think. At their best, they ask whether a naturalistic theory can preserve the difference between being caused to accept a conclusion and accepting it because one sees that it follows.

The trouble begins when an explanatory challenge is converted into an ownership claim. In popular apologetic form, the reasoning often runs like this: materialism makes rational inference impossible; nonbelievers are materialists, or their worldview gives them no rational resources; therefore, whenever they reason, they borrow from the Christian worldview. A Christian teacher is then positioned not merely as a participant in debate but as the custodian of the conditions under which debate is possible.

That conclusion is rhetorically powerful because it rearranges the burden of proof. The nonbeliever's objection need not be answered on its merits. Her competence to object is made dependent on a theology she rejects. If she reasons badly, her worldview is blamed. If she reasons well, her success is claimed as evidence that she is tacitly using Christian resources. The position becomes difficult to test because every performance is redescribed as confirmation.

This paper calls that maneuver the *outsourced rationality argument*. The label does not deny that people rationally depend on teachers, communities, instruments, or inherited intellectual practices. No person verifies everything alone. It names a narrower structure: an authority supplies both the favored conclusion and the rule according to which dissent from that conclusion counts as evidence of defective reasoning. Rational agency has then been outsourced in a troubling sense because the believer is encouraged to treat confidence in the authority as prior to the public evaluation of reasons.

The ownership error

An account that purports to ground rational norms does not thereby own those norms. Before a Christian apologist may classify non-Christian reasoning as borrowed, two independent claims must be established: that naturalistic accounts cannot accommodate rational inference, and that Christian theism uniquely can. Neither claim follows from the failure of one reductive materialism.

Three distinctions will keep the criticism exact. *Naturalism* is the broad view that reality contains no supernatural beings or processes; it includes several theories of mind. *Materialism* or *physicalism* is the more specific view that everything is physical or wholly dependent on the physical, but physicalists disagree sharply about reduction, realization, content, and higher-level explanation. *Christian theism* adds far more than anti-naturalism: a purposive creator, a particular account of revelation and humanity, and historically specific doctrinal commitments. An argument against one version of physicalism is not yet an argument for that whole package.

2 The Strongest Argument from Reason

A charitable reconstruction should begin with the strongest case rather than its least careful slogans. The central concern can be stated without assuming at the outset that natural causes are irrational:

1. Rational inference exists. At least some beliefs are justified because an agent grasps evidential or logical relations.
2. If naturalism makes every belief causally inevitable while excluding the causal relevance of propositional content and logical support, then no belief is held because its grounds support it.
3. A theory that eliminates all ground-sensitive belief undermines the warrant of the reasoning used to affirm that theory.
4. Therefore, a naturalism with that exclusionary consequence is self-defeating.

The conditional form matters. The second premise does not follow from the mere fact that beliefs have physical causes. It adds a further claim: physical causation is *exclusionary*, so the agent's recognition of a reason does no explanatory work. Jaegwon Kim's influential discussion of mental causation shows why exclusion is a real problem for nonreductive physicalism: if a physical effect already has a sufficient physical cause, what causal work remains for a mental property? (Kim 1998). The problem cannot be solved by simply repeating that reasons matter.

But neither may the critic treat the problem as a proof that they do not matter. A philosophical research question is not the same thing as a demonstrated impossibility. Naturalists have proposed several ways to connect representation and rational sensitivity to the natural world. Teleological accounts relate content to biological function and histories of selection (Millikan 1984). Computational and representational theories try to explain how syntactically organized states carry content and interact in thought (Fodor 1987). Intentional explanation treats belief and desire as patterns that support

prediction and interpretation at a level not displaced by a microphysical description (Dennett 1987). These projects disagree, face objections, and may fail. Their existence nevertheless blocks the claim that naturalism has no conceptual resources beyond “atoms bumping blindly.”

Graham Oppy argues more specifically that familiar anti-naturalistic arguments from reason do not present a serious challenge to identity-theoretic naturalists (Oppy 2022). One need not accept his verdict to recognize its dialectical importance. A defender of the argument must engage the strongest naturalistic identity, realization, or functional account, not define naturalism as a theory that has already erased content and then announce that content is absent.

The strongest modest conclusion is therefore conditional: *any worldview that excludes the efficacy of rational grounds cannot vindicate rational inference*. That conclusion is not trivial; it constrains both naturalist and theist accounts. It also contains no Christian premise. To move from it to Christian theism, the apologist needs additional argument.

3 Causes Are Not Yet Reasons—but Neither Are They Their Negation

The phrase “causes are not reasons” is true if it marks a distinction between explanatory questions. A cause answers how an event came about. A reason can answer why an agent took a consideration to support a conclusion. Confusing the two can reduce justification to biography: “you believe that only because of your upbringing” does not show that the belief is false or poorly supported.

The distinction does not establish that one event cannot be explained in both ways. Suppose Maya accepts that the road is wet because she sees rain falling. At one level, light strikes her retina, neural systems classify the scene, and motor systems produce speech. At another, the observed rain is evidence for a wet road, and Maya recognizes that relation. The personal-level explanation is not refuted by adding biochemical detail. Nor does the personal explanation show that no biochemical realization occurred.

Donald Davidson’s account of action famously treats reasons as causes while preserving the intentional descriptions under which they explain action (Davidson 1963). Later debates have made every component of that picture controversial, but the basic possibility is enough for the present burden of proof: causal and rational explanations need not be competitors for one descriptive slot. An argument from reason must show why physical realization *excludes* ground-sensitive explanation; it cannot merely notice that the descriptions differ.

There are at least four relations an adequate theory must distinguish:

Table 1: Four questions hidden inside the phrase “because of a reason”.

Relation	Question	What success requires	What it does not by itself show
Causal production	What events produced the belief?	A reliable account of the mechanisms and history.	Whether the conclusion is justified.
Content	What proposition does the belief represent?	Conditions under which the belief is true or false.	That the content caused acceptance because it was supported.
Rational support	Do the premises make the conclusion more credible?	A valid, inductively strong, or otherwise defensible relation.	That the agent noticed or followed that relation.
Ground-sensitive uptake	Did the agent accept the conclusion because she recognized its support?	A connection among content, competence, attention, and causal control.	That one metaphysical system uniquely owns the connection.

An eliminativist theory that denies content may struggle with the second row. An epiphenomenalist theory that gives content no causal role may struggle with the fourth. A crude evolutionary story that selects only adaptive behavior may not yet explain truth-sensitive belief. Those are real points of pressure. The mistake is inferring from “this account owes an explanation” to “no naturalistic account can provide one.”

The same discipline applies to theology. Saying that human reason reflects a rational creator may supply a metaphysical picture, but a picture is not yet a mechanism or a theory of reliability. Why do finite minds misrepresent, rationalize, contradict one another, and confidently infer incompatible doctrines? How does divine creation connect the truth of a proposition to an individual’s ability to recognize its support? Invoking a rational source does not automatically explain the reliability of each product any more than invoking an intelligent engineer guarantees that every damaged instrument reads correctly.

4 The Two Missing Bridges

The ownership conclusion crosses two bridges. Each can be stated plainly, and each requires independent support.

4.1 Bridge one: from natural realization to rational impossibility

The first bridge says that if an inference is physically realized, its rational grounds cannot be causally relevant. That is stronger than physicalism. Many physicalists hold that one event can be described neurologically and rationally, just as one movement can be described as muscle contraction and as signing a contract. Whether such higher-level properties are genuinely causal remains disputed, but the argument cannot win by treating the disputed exclusion thesis as the definition of naturalism.

The bridge also risks a standard ambiguity. “Nonrational cause” may mean a cause that is not itself an agent who reasons, or it may mean a cause that disrupts sensitivity to reasons. Gravity is nonrational in the first sense; a hallucination-inducing drug may be nonrational in the second. The fact that neurons do not themselves evaluate syllogisms no more shows that a neural system cannot do so than the fact that transistors do not play chess shows that a computer cannot implement a chess program. This analogy is not a complete theory of mind. It merely exposes the missing inference from properties of components to capacities of organized systems.

Evolutionary accounts face a related but distinct challenge. Selection directly favors reproductive success, not truth as an abstract good. Yet agents who systematically misrepresent nearby threats, resources, and social partners will often fare worse than agents whose representations guide successful action. The connection between fitness and truth is neither perfect nor absent. A serious reliability argument must examine domains, error costs, feedback, cultural correction, and the difference between adaptive behavior and justified belief. It cannot move from “selection is not logically aimed at truth” to “natural minds cannot track truth.”

4.2 Bridge two: from anti-naturalism to Christianity

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that bridge one succeeds and naturalism is false. Christian theism still does not follow. Substance dualism, idealism, panpsychism, non-Christian theisms, deisms, and other views remain logically open. Some may be unattractive; none is eliminated merely by denying naturalism. The inference “not naturalism, therefore Christianity” is a false dilemma unless every relevant rival is independently excluded.

Even Christian theism would not automatically yield Christian *ownership* of rationality. A metaphysical explanation of why rational norms exist differs from an epistemic account of who may apply

them well. Arithmetic would not become the private property of the best philosophy of mathematics. A Christian and an atheist can both identify an invalid inference; the quality of their diagnosis depends on the inferential relation, not on which person possesses the correct ultimate ontology.

Table 2: The argumentative distance hidden by the ownership conclusion.

Proposed step	What would support it	Why the step remains open	Maximum warranted conclusion
Physical realization ⇒ no rational inference	A successful causal-exclusion argument against every relevant naturalistic account.	Realization, identity, function, representation, and levels of explanation are contested alternatives.	Some reductionist accounts face a serious explanatory burden.
Not naturalism ⇒ Christian theism	Evidence excluding rival non-naturalist ontologies and positively supporting Christian commitments.	The negation of one broad view leaves many incompatible alternatives.	If the anti-naturalist case succeeds, metaphysical inquiry remains open.
Christian grounding ⇒ Christian ownership	An argument that correct ontology is required for competent use of rational norms.	People routinely reason within practices whose ultimate basis they misunderstand.	Christian theism may offer an account of reason; it gains no exemption from reason.
Ownership ⇒ dismissive authority	Evidence that affiliation reliably identifies sound reasoning and that outsider criticism lacks evidential force.	Affiliation does not guarantee competence, and source identity does not settle an argument's validity.	Evaluate testimony and arguments by publicly available indicators.

The point is not that no bridge can ever be built. It is that bridge work is the argument. When those steps are omitted, the conclusion does not become bold; it becomes unsupported.

5 Reason Is Public Practice, Not Sectarian Property

Reasoning is both individual and social. Individuals notice implications, weigh evidence, and revise beliefs. They also learn languages they did not invent, use instruments they cannot rebuild, inherit methods refined across generations, and rely on testimony for almost everything beyond immediate experience. This dependence does not make rationality fictitious. It makes standards of responsible dependence central.

Some rational norms are public in a minimal sense: their application can be challenged with considerations available to interlocutors who do not already share a sectarian authority. If a conclusion contradicts its premises, a critic can display the contradiction. If evidence is selectively reported, another person can request the excluded data. If a prediction repeatedly fails, the failure can be observed. Public does not mean easy, unanimous, or free from background assumptions. It means that an argument cannot defend itself solely by declaring dissenters incapable of the norm at issue.

This reciprocity is especially important in worldview debates. Christian theism is offered as the explanation of rationality, but the case for that explanation is itself assessed by induction, deduction, testimony, historical evidence, and judgments of coherence. If those standards are intelligible only after Christian theism is accepted, the argument becomes circular as persuasion: it asks the hearer to use a contested conclusion as the credential for evaluating the premises that allegedly establish it.

Reason also has corrective institutions because individual cognition is unreliable. Peer criticism, replication, cross-examination, source comparison, and explicit inference expose errors that confidence alone conceals. Mercier and Sperber emphasize the social and argumentative functions of reasoning,

including both its power in group evaluation and its vulnerability to confirmation bias in solitary advocacy (Mercier and Sperber 2011). Sperber and colleagues describe *epistemic vigilance*: hearers monitor both the plausibility of communicated content and the trustworthiness of communicators (Sperber et al. 2010). Whatever one thinks of these broader theories, the practical lesson is firm. Trust and criticism are complementary, not enemies.

A community that treats external criticism as evidence of spiritual or metaphysical incapacity disables one half of that correction. It may preserve internal coherence, but only by lowering exposure to potential defeaters. The result can feel like rational confidence because members receive fluent answers from recognized authorities. Yet confidence produced by restricted challenge is not the same achievement as reliability produced by surviving challenge.

This is why “you are borrowing from my worldview whenever you reason” is such an efficient apologetic move. It assimilates every successful criticism to the truth of the view criticized. The better the outsider reasons, the more thoroughly the success is appropriated. A claim that predicts both failure and success as confirmation has little power to discriminate among worldviews.

6 Dependence, Testimony, and Outsourcing

No adequate critique should romanticize intellectual self-sufficiency. John Hardwig argues that modern knowledge often requires epistemic dependence: nonexperts may know only because they rationally trust experts whose evidence they cannot personally master (Hardwig 1985). A patient cannot reproduce a drug trial; a citizen cannot inspect every bridge; a philosopher cannot rerun every scientific experiment cited in an argument. Delegation is unavoidable.

The rational question is therefore not whether a person depends on authority but how that dependence is governed. Alvin Goldman identifies useful indicators for choosing among putative experts: argumentative performance, agreement from other experts, interests and biases, past track record, and evidence of relevant competence (Goldman 2001). None is infallible. Together they make trust answerable to facts beyond the expert’s own declaration of authority.

Table 3: Legitimate epistemic dependence versus outsourced rationality.

Feature	Responsible dependence	Outsourced rationality	Diagnostic question
Scope of authority	Trust is limited to demonstrated expertise.	Authority expands from one specialty to a whole worldview.	What exactly has this source shown competence in?
Access to reasons	Reasons and sources are available at an appropriate level.	Conclusions are protected by inaccessible insight or status.	Can a qualified critic inspect the inferential bridge?
Response to challenge	Objections can lower confidence or prompt revision.	Objections are redescribed as proof of outsider defect.	What possible evidence would count against the claim?
Symmetry	Similar standards govern allies and opponents.	In-group testimony receives default charity; outsiders bear unlimited suspicion.	Would this source test a rival tradition the same way?
Final responsibility	The believer retains responsibility for proportioning confidence.	The authority’s confidence substitutes for the believer’s assessment.	Is the believer allowed to say “the experts disagree, so I am uncertain”?

Religious dependence can be equally legitimate. A believer may rationally trust a historian on manuscript transmission, a linguist on Greek syntax, a philosopher on modal logic, or a pastor on the history of a tradition. The problem begins when the authority is permitted to settle both the object-level claim and every challenge to the authority's credentials. Then the ordinary believer is placed in an asymmetric position: trust is praised when directed inward, while comparable trust by an outsider is dismissed as worldview captivity.

The last question is decisive. Rational deference can justify belief without direct mastery of every premise, but it should often reduce certainty when qualified experts disagree. Outsourcing does the opposite: it transfers an authority's confidence while insulating the transfer from the very disagreement that should affect it.

The label therefore identifies a governance failure, not the presence of teachers. A person has outsourced rationality when the accepted authority controls the conclusion, the admission of counterevidence, and the classification of critics. The system may contain arguments, citations, and technical vocabulary. Its defect lies in who is allowed to decide when those resources have failed.

7 The Equal-Burden Test for Christian Theism

Arguments from reason are often presented asymmetrically. Naturalism must explain every step from physical processes to semantic content, logical normativity, reliable cognition, and conscious insight. Christian theism is then credited with explaining reason because a rational creator is said to have made rational agents. The first side receives a research program; the second receives a promissory sentence.

An equal-burden test does not require both views to use the same ontology. It requires comparable explanatory specificity. If a naturalist must explain why causal processes produce mostly reliable inference, the Christian account must explain how divine creation does so despite pervasive error. If naturalistic evolution is challenged for favoring survival over truth, a Christian account must address why a truth-oriented creator permits cognitive systems so vulnerable to motivated reasoning, doctrinal fragmentation, superstition, and confident contradiction. If mental causation is a problem for physicalism, interaction and guidance are problems for views positing nonphysical minds.

Plantinga's theory of warrant connects proper function, an appropriate cognitive environment, and a design plan aimed at truth (Plantinga 1993). It is a sophisticated model, not the slogan "a rational creator made us rational." Yet its theological application raises further questions: which design account is true, how its reliability is established without circular dependence on the faculties being vindicated, and how malfunction, sin, disagreement, and hiddenness alter the expected reliability of specific religious beliefs. Naming design does not discharge those questions.

Nor does a Christian explanation gain evidential credit merely because it can tell a purpose-shaped story. Explanatory fit must be compared with flexibility. A view that interprets agreement as divine illumination and disagreement as sin, mystery, freedom, or corruption can accommodate nearly any pattern after the fact. The same adaptability that protects it from contradiction can weaken its ability to predict what rational creatures should actually believe.

The equal-burden test has five parts:

1. **Specify the target.** Is the theory explaining propositional content, logical necessity, reliable belief, conscious grasp, or mental causation? These are related but not identical.
2. **State the mechanism or dependency.** How does the proposed foundation connect to an individual's successful inference?
3. **Predict error as well as success.** What should the theory lead us to expect about bias, disagreement, and correction?

4. **Compare live alternatives.** Why is this account better than naturalistic, dualist, idealist, or rival theistic explanations?
5. **Apply the same tolerance for gaps.** Do not treat an unsolved naturalistic problem as disproof while treating a theological mystery as depth.

Christian theism may perform well under that test. The point is that it must take the test. A worldview cannot establish its rational privilege by exempting its own explanatory gaps from the standards applied to its rivals.

8 Strong Objections and Replies

8.1 Objection: every worldview begins with unproved rational commitments

No agent can justify every norm without using some norm. Deduction cannot be vindicated without reasoning; perception cannot be globally tested without further perception. The naturalist therefore relies on rational capacities before explaining them. Why call Christian reliance circular but naturalist reliance legitimate?

Reply. The unavoidable circularity of using reason to assess reason is shared. It does not select a theology. The relevant distinction is between a common practical starting point and a sectarian ownership conclusion. Both parties must reason before possessing a complete metaphysics of reason. That shared condition supports modesty and reciprocal criticism, not the claim that one party's use secretly belongs to the other.

8.2 Objection: normativity cannot be reduced to physical description

Facts about what neurons do do not by themselves state what a thinker *ought* to infer. Logical and epistemic norms therefore exceed natural description. The argument from reason succeeds because naturalism cannot derive an ought from an is.

Reply. This objection identifies a genuine problem of normativity, but it moves too quickly from nonreduction to supernaturalism. A naturalist may treat norms as higher-level truths, constitutive standards of inquiry, functions of representational systems, or objective relations not reducible to a vocabulary of particles. Each proposal needs defense. The failure of reduction would establish at most that reduction is inadequate; it would not identify Christian doctrine as the unique alternative.

8.3 Objection: the argument needs only an anti-naturalist conclusion

Sophisticated defenders may deny that the argument from reason directly proves Christianity. They can use it as one part of a cumulative case. The present criticism therefore attacks an overstatement rather than the argument itself.

Reply. Correct—and that limitation is part of this paper's thesis. A carefully bounded anti-naturalist argument is not the outsourced rationality argument. The target is the apologetic use that moves from a contested premise to Christian ownership and then to a social license to discount nonbelievers. A cumulative case must supply the missing bridges from other evidence; it cannot quietly credit them to the argument from reason.

8.4 Objection: social criticism commits the genetic fallacy

Even if an argument is used to protect authority, its social function does not show its premises false. Criticizing apologetic management may substitute sociology for philosophy.

Reply. The truth of the metaphysical premises and the rationality of a social use are separate questions. This paper does not infer that the argument is false because of who uses it or what effects it has. It first analyzes the missing inferences. The social criticism then asks what happens when those

gaps are used to pre-classify dissent. That is not a genetic argument against the premises; it is an evaluation of an epistemic practice.

8.5 Objection: a Christian may know the foundation without explaining every mechanism

Explanatory knowledge is not required for ordinary knowledge. A person can see that a calculator works without understanding its circuitry. Likewise, a believer might rationally know that human reason is created without solving mental causation.

Reply. That may be true of the believer's own warrant, but it does not establish a comparative argument against naturalism. When explanatory gaps are offered as evidence against one worldview, parallel gaps become relevant to the rival explanation. A person may rationally trust a calculator; she may not infer that every competing device is impossible merely because she cannot describe its circuitry.

8.6 Objection: Christianity predicts both reason and its corruption

Creation explains rational capacities; fallenness explains bias and error. The combination can therefore accommodate the mixed record of human cognition better than naturalism.

Reply. Accommodation is not yet predictive success. The account must specify which patterns of reliability and failure should be expected, how the prediction differs from evolutionary and social explanations, and why rival religions do not explain the same pattern equally well. If every success is credited to creation and every failure to fallenness, the theory risks becoming too flexible to discriminate.

9 A Practical Audit for Apologetic Reasoning

The argument can be tested without first settling the metaphysics of mind. When an appeal to the argument from reason occurs in discussion, ask the following questions in order.

1. **Which naturalism is under criticism?** A named theory can be examined; "blind matter" is usually too vague.
2. **Which capacity is allegedly impossible?** Content, truth, validity, conscious insight, reliable belief, and mental causation require different arguments.
3. **Where is exclusion established?** Show why physical realization prevents rather than implements sensitivity to rational grounds.
4. **What follows if the argument succeeds?** State whether the conclusion is anti-reductionist, anti-physicalist, anti-naturalist, theistic, or specifically Christian.
5. **Which alternatives have been excluded?** Do not let a binary framing hide rival naturalistic and non-naturalistic accounts.
6. **What positive work does Christian theism perform?** Identify the connection from a rational creator to content, reliability, and individual ground-sensitive inference.
7. **Are errors predicted or merely absorbed?** Ask what pattern would count against the explanation.
8. **Are insiders and outsiders evaluated symmetrically?** Apply comparable standards to testimony, expertise, bias, and unresolved questions.
9. **Can a critic's argument be assessed independently of identity?** If not, the worldview claim is functioning as a gatekeeping device.
10. **What would rationally lower confidence?** A claim with no possible defeater is insulated, not confirmed.

This audit does not privilege atheism. A naturalist who dismisses every religious argument as a neurological accident commits the same cause-for-ground substitution. Explaining why someone believes a proposition does not settle whether the proposition is supported. The norm is reciprocal: answer reasons with reasons, and use causal diagnosis only when evidence shows that the causal process actually undermines reliability.

The constructive alternative to outsourced rationality is not isolated rationalism but accountable dependence. People may rely on experts while checking scope, track record, disagreement, and responsiveness. Communities may teach settled conclusions while disclosing where specialists disagree. Believers may regard Christian theism as the best explanation while admitting that the argument from reason alone does not establish it. These practices do not weaken conviction. They distinguish conviction earned within a public burden of proof from confidence protected by an ownership claim.

10 Conclusion

The argument from reason deserves a serious answer because it identifies a real demand on any theory of mind: explain how content-bearing states can produce conclusions because their grounds support them. Crude stories in which blind causes simply push beliefs around do not meet that demand. Naturalists should not pretend otherwise.

But an unmet demand is not a Christian victory by default. Physical realization does not obviously exclude rational explanation. The falsity of naturalism would not entail Christian theism. A Christian account of rationality would still owe an explanation of reliability, error, disagreement, and the link between metaphysical source and individual inference. And even a successful grounding account would not make rational norms the property of its adherents.

The outsourced rationality argument hides those debts by turning a philosophical question into an authority structure. The believer is invited to trust that Christian theism supplies reason; the nonbeliever's reasoning is then counted as either failure or borrowing. That maneuver is intrinsically weak because it makes the conclusion judge the credentials of every objection raised against it.

Reason cannot be defended by suspending its reciprocal demands. Testimony is necessary, expertise is real, and metaphysical explanations matter. None licenses a community to issue itself a monopoly certificate. The honest conclusion is narrower and stronger: arguments from reason may pressure some naturalisms, but every proposed solution—including Christian theism—must still show its work in public.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

This appendix separates four claims that are often compressed into one: the strongest anti-naturalist inference, the disputed premise inside it, the bridge to Christian theism, and the move from rational deference to dismissive authority. The point of the symbols is not to make the argument look more certain. It is to make each logical step visible.

A.1 Ordinary-language reconstruction

Before introducing symbols, the paper's central reasoning can be stated as a short sequence:

1. Any worldview that makes rational grounds entirely irrelevant to the production of conclusions cannot vindicate rationally justified inference.
2. If naturalism necessarily made rational grounds irrelevant in that way, the existence of justified inference would count against naturalism.

3. Physical realization alone does not establish that exclusion. The defender must show that a natural process cannot implement an agent's sensitivity to rational support.
4. Even if that anti-naturalist case succeeded, Christian theism, Christian ownership of rational norms, and permission to dismiss outsider reasoning would each require another independent premise.

Therefore, the argument from reason may create an explanatory burden for some naturalist theories, but it does not by itself establish the stronger Christian, ownership, or dismissive-authority conclusions.

A.2 Symbols

Let the following capital letters stand for whole propositions:

- N : naturalism is true.
- P : physical realization excludes the causal relevance of rational grounds.
- J : at least one rationally justified inference occurs.
- C : Christian theism is true.
- O : Christian theism uniquely owns or authorizes the norms of rational inference.
- D_x : person x rationally defers to an authority about a claim.
- S_x : person x is entitled to dismiss an outsider's reasoning without examining it.
- AFR: the premises of the strongest argument from reason presented below.

The signs have their usual meanings: $\neg$ means “not”; $\wedge$ means “and”; $\rightarrow$ means “if ... then”; $\therefore$ marks a conclusion; $\perp$ marks a contradiction; $\vdash$ means “logically entails”; and $\not\vdash$ means “does not logically entail.” The subscript x lets the final claims apply to any person without implying that every person actually defers or dismisses.

A.3 The strongest anti-naturalist inference

A1.

$$(N \wedge P) \rightarrow \neg J$$

Plain-English annotation. If naturalism is true *and* physical realization prevents reasons from affecting thought, then no inference is rationally justified. This is a conditional premise. It does not yet say that P is true.

A2.

$$J$$

Plain-English annotation. At least one justified inference occurs. Anyone presenting an argument normally relies on this assumption, because presenting an argument treats some reasoning as capable of justification.

A3.

$$\therefore \neg(N \wedge P)$$

Plain-English annotation. From A1 and A2, it follows that naturalism and the exclusion claim cannot both be true. This is a valid use of modus tollens: if the pair would eliminate justified inference, and justified inference exists, reject the pair.

A4.

$$\neg(N \wedge P) \equiv (\neg N \vee \neg P)$$

Plain-English annotation. A3 means that either naturalism is false or the exclusion claim is false. The sign $\vee$ means “or.” Logic alone does not tell us which part to reject. This is the first major limit on the conclusion.

A5.

$$P$$

Plain-English annotation. To infer that naturalism itself is false, the defender must add P : the claim that physical realization blocks the causal role of reasons. This is not a rule of logic. It is a disputed philosophical premise that needs evidence.

A6.

$$\therefore \neg N$$

Plain-English annotation. A4 and A5 validly yield the falsity of naturalism. The inference is valid once P is supplied. The dispute concerns whether P is well supported, not whether the last logical move is allowed.

Let AFR name A1, A2, and A5 together. Then:

$$\text{AFR} \vdash \neg N$$

Plain-English annotation. The strongest argument from reason can entail anti-naturalism only when it includes the exclusion premise P . Naturalistic theories of content, function, realization, and mental causation matter because they directly challenge that premise.

A.4 The missing bridge to Christian theism

B1.

$$\neg N \rightarrow C$$

Plain-English annotation. This is the bridge needed to move from “naturalism is false” to “Christian theism is true.” It says that every non-naturalist possibility relevant to the debate leads to Christianity.

B2.

$$\neg N$$

Plain-English annotation. Grant the anti-naturalist conclusion for the sake of argument. Granting it lets us test whether Christianity follows without reopening the dispute over P .

B3.

$$\therefore C$$

Plain-English annotation. B1 and B2 would validly imply Christian theism. The problem is support for B1. Dualism, idealism, rival theisms, and other non-naturalist views show that “not naturalism” is not identical to “Christianity.”

Without the added bridge B1, the correct relation is:

$$\text{AFR} \not\vdash C$$

Plain-English annotation. Even the strongest argument from reason does not logically entail Christian theism by itself. Other arguments might support Christianity, but their premises and evidence must be supplied separately.

A.5 The missing ownership inference

C1.

$$C \rightarrow O$$

Plain-English annotation. This bridge says that if Christian theism is true, then Christians uniquely own or authorize rational norms. It moves from a claim about the source of reason to a claim about who may use reason competently.

C2.

$$C$$

Plain-English annotation. Again, grant the theological claim for the sake of argument. The issue is what follows from it.

C3.

$$\therefore O$$

Plain-English annotation. The conclusion follows only if C1 is true. Yet a person can competently follow a norm without holding the correct metaphysics of that norm. Correct use of logic is shown by the inference, not by the user's religious identity.

The argument from reason contains no premise establishing C1. Therefore:

$$\text{AFR} \not\vdash O$$

Plain-English annotation. A proposed Christian explanation of rationality is not automatically a Christian property right over rationality. The explanatory claim and the ownership claim are different propositions.

A.6 Deference does not entail dismissal

D1.

$$D_x$$

Plain-English annotation. Person x rationally relies on an expert or trusted authority. This can be justified when the source has relevant competence, a good track record, suitable independence, and responsiveness to criticism.

D2.

$$D_x \rightarrow S_x$$

Plain-English annotation. This added bridge says that rational deference entitles the person to dismiss an outsider without examining the outsider's reasons. Responsible testimony does not contain that entitlement. In fact, credible disagreement may require closer examination or lower confidence.

D3.

$$\therefore S_x$$

Plain-English annotation. D1 and D2 would validly yield dismissive authority, but D2 is the unsupported step. The social conclusion is not licensed merely because deference itself can be rational.

Thus the proper relation is:

$$D_x \not\vdash S_x$$

Plain-English annotation. Trusting a teacher does not logically imply permission to ignore a critic. The quality of the critic's argument remains a separate question.

A.7 Combined result and its limit

The paper’s central symbolic result can now be stated compactly:

$$\boxed{\text{AFR} \not\vdash C, \quad \text{AFR} \not\vdash O, \quad D_x \not\vdash S_x}$$

Plain-English annotation. The argument from reason does not by itself prove Christian theism or ownership, and rational deference does not permit pre-emptive dismissal. Each stronger conclusion needs a publicly defended bridge. This bounded result neither proves naturalism nor denies Christian explanation or testimony; it denies an automatic sectarian credential.

A.8 Worked example: auditing a borrowed-reason charge

Consider a compressed apologetic claim: “If naturalism is true, your thoughts are only chemical events. Chemicals do not reason, so naturalism makes rational inference impossible. Christianity explains reason; therefore, when an atheist argues, the atheist borrows from Christianity.”

The reconstruction shows how to answer without pretending that every concern is foolish.

1. **Grant the valid conditional shape.** If N together with P eliminated J , and J occurs, then N and P cannot both be true. The reply should not dispute this simple logical point.
2. **Ask for the exclusion premise.** The phrase “only chemical events” does not yet establish P . A system may have capacities its components lack, and one event may receive both a physical and a reason-giving explanation. The defender must show why physical realization prevents ground-sensitive thought rather than implementing it.
3. **Grant anti-naturalism temporarily.** Even if $\neg N$ is accepted, the hearer should ask for the bridge $\neg N \rightarrow C$. Naming a Christian explanation does not exclude dualist, idealist, rival-theist, or other non-naturalist explanations.
4. **Separate explanation from ownership.** Even if C is granted, $C \rightarrow O$ still requires defense. A person can follow a valid inference without holding the correct ultimate theory of why logical norms exist. Competence is displayed in the reasoning, not certified by affiliation.
5. **Keep testimony within its proper scope.** A believer may reasonably accept D_x by trusting a qualified teacher. That trust does not yield S_x . If an outsider identifies a false premise or invalid step, the objection remains relevant until it is answered.

This audit also shows what a stronger argument would need to do. It would identify a specific naturalistic theory, demonstrate rather than assume exclusion, compare Christian theism with live alternatives, explain how the Christian account produces reliable ground-sensitive inference, and state what evidence could lower confidence in that account. Completing those tasks would not guarantee success, but it would turn an ownership charge into a publicly assessable argument. The formal reconstruction therefore serves a practical purpose: it prevents confidence in a conclusion from hiding the independent work required to reach it.

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