Resurrecting Reason: A Rejoinder to Raphael Lataster on Miracles and the Rationality of Theism

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Abstract: This rejoinder responds to Raphael Lataster's critique, "Warranted Scepticism: If We Are to Be Consistent and Fair, Extraordinary Claims Do Indeed Require Extraordinary Evidence" (2020), of my article "Warranted Skepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test" (2015). In his response, Lataster defends a Humean skepticism, one that presupposes metaphysical naturalism. I challenge his application of Bayesian reasoning while defending the rationality of theistic belief. I also address his misunderstandings of the Kalam Cosmological Argument and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. This rejoinder argues that genuine inquiry must be open to theism and miracles, rather than dismissing them through methodological naturalism and selective skepticism.

Introduction: Clarifying the Task

This rejoinder responds to Raphael Lataster's 2020 critique, "Warranted Scepticism: If We Are to Be Consistent and Fair, Extraordinary Claims Do Indeed Require Extraordinary Evidence,"[1] of my 2015 article, "Warranted Skepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test."[2] Although

[1] Raphael Lataster, "Warranted Scepticism: If we are to be consistent and fair, extraordinary claims do indeed require extraordinary evidence," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* 21: 22 (May 24, 2020): 1-10, https://biblicaltheology.com/Research/LatasterR01.pdf.

[2] Scott Ventureyra, "Warranted Scepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test," *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* 16:36

intended as a defense of reasonable skepticism, Lataster's critique frequently reflects a reliance on naturalistic assumptions that are not fully justified. Lataster's own agnosticism aligns with methodological naturalism, one that does not receive the same level of scrutiny as he directs toward the claims of theism.

Commendably, Lataster has demonstrated the opposite when it comes to challenging dominant narratives in public discourse. For example, in his article "When Covid-19 Vaccine Benefits are Rarer Than Rare Adverse Effects,"[3] he rightly questions the establishment narrative revolving around the safety and efficacy of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, offering a needed critique of governmental and pharmaceutical claims. In this, we find common ground. I have likewise offered a critical appraisal of the mainstream COVID-19 narrative in my book *COVID-19: A Dystopian Delusion: Examining the Machinations of Governments, Health Organizations, the Globalist Elites, Big Pharma, Big Tech, and the Legacy Media*.[4] Both Lataster and I share a willingness to question institutional orthodoxy when it comes to science and public policy. However, what distinguishes my approach is a consistent application of critical

(September 6, 2015): 1-26, https://biblicaltheology.com/Research/VentureyraS04.pdf. See also the print version: Scott Ventureyra, "Warranted Skepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test," *The Journal of Biblical Theology* 3:3 (July–September 2020): 122-148. See also Scott D. G. Ventureyra, "Warranted Skepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test" in *Making Sense of Nonsense: Navigating through the West's Current Quagmire*, ed. Scott D. G. Ventureyra (Ottawa, Canada: True Freedom Press, 2022), 105-121.

[3] Raphael Lataster, "When Covid-19 Vaccine Benefits are Rarer Than Rare Adverse Effects," *International Clinical Research and Clinical Trials*, 1:1 (2024); DOI: 10.61148/ICRCT/001. Due to a range of concurrent academic projects, editorial obligations, and wider global disruptions (including the COVID-19 fiasco), my response was delayed. However, the epistemological and philosophical concerns discussed in this article remain highly relevant.

[4] Ed. Scott D. G. Ventureyra, COVID-*19: A Dystopian Delusion: Examining the Machinations of Governments, Health Organizations, the Globalist Elites, Big Pharma, Big Tech, and the Legacy Media* (Ottawa, Canada: True Freedom Press, 2022).

examination—one that extends to metaphysical presuppositions as well. Unfortunately, Lataster exempts his own naturalistic framework from the same level of critical evaluation he applies elsewhere.

Nonetheless, his article provides an opportunity to advance the discourse surrounding the epistemic foundations of theism and also to correct common misunderstandings regarding miracles, the resurrection, and the philosophical use of Bayesian analysis. This article continues a critical exchange that began with my 2015 response to the Center for Inquiry's use of Carl Sagan's dictum, where I challenged the selective application of skepticism to theistic claims and questioned the epistemological neutrality of naturalism. Lataster's 2020 critique reinforces many of those same problems, now framed in Bayesian terms. In what follows, I aim to clarify the underlying assumptions in Lataster's critique and highlight the need for intellectual integrity in evaluating miraculous claims, especially those concerning theism. I argue that his defense of "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" is epistemically circular and rests on metaphysical assumptions that go unexamined. Moreover, his application of Bayesian reasoning raises methodological concerns, particularly in its assignment of extremely low prior probabilities to miracles and its limited engagement with the broader plausibility of theism.

This response supports the reasonableness of believing in God, clarifies how Lataster misrepresented the Kalam Cosmological Argument, and responds to his rejection of the historical evidence for Jesus's resurrection. I also scrutinize his dependence on David Hume, whose argument against miracles has faced significant challenges from both logical and probabilistic perspectives. Ultimately, I argue that Lataster's position illustrates an inconsistent and "one-way" type of skepticism. He excludes theistic conclusions not due to a lack of evidence, but by discounting certain explanations in advance. I reason that open inquiry, in order to be consistent and open, must remain reasonably open to the possibility of

theism and miracles rather than disqualifying them in advance through arbitrary methodological restrictions.

It is worth mentioning that when I note that in my original article that "science in and of itself remains neutral on the question of God,"[5] I am referring to science as defined by methodological naturalism, i.e., the investigation of causes within the material world that presuppose natural regularities. This definition, by its own constraints, excludes supernatural causation from consideration, not because such causes are incoherent, but because they are beyond the scope of empirical investigation. This is not to say that scientific discoveries are irrelevant to metaphysical questions; rather, it means that adjudicating theism requires a broader philosophical framework that can integrate empirical data with metaphysical reasoning.

On "Extraordinary Claims" and the Illusion of Neutrality

Lataster seeks to defend the Centre for Inquiry's famed saying: "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," which he aligns with a Bayesian interpretation of David Hume's skepticism. He writes, "Hume's maxim, expressed mathematically, simply says that for claims that involve a smaller prior probability, the more relevant evidence must be more impressive to compensate." Although it may seem plausible initially, the principle contains unexamined assumptions, primarily a naturalistic bias that prejudges miracle claims. Lataster presents this maxim as though it were a neutral tool of probabilistic reasoning when, in fact, it embeds a series of unexamined metaphysical assumptions, chief among them, the naturalistic presumption that miracle claims inherently carry near-zero prior probability. As I previously argued: "The evaluation of certain claims as either ordinary or extraordinary can be, to a degree, subjective… What counts as

[5] Ventureyra "Warranted Skepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test," 14.

evidence? Can Sagan's quote be applied objectively?" [6] When a worldview that already excludes the supernatural sets the criteria for extraordinariness, the maxim turns into an epistemically circular argument. In this way, Lataster's formulation does not offer an open framework for evaluating miraculous claims; it simply reaffirms the very metaphysical naturalism under dispute.

Lataster does not adequately engage the deeper epistemological issues surrounding what constitutes an "extraordinary" claim. Rather, he depends on analogies and assertions that implicitly presuppose a common comprehension of extraordinariness. i.e., an understanding shaped by naturalistic assumptions. However, categorizing something as "extraordinary" or not is not a metaphysically neutral decision. One's prior commitments, particularly Lataster's naturalistic worldview that precludes supernatural agency, profoundly influence it. As I have previously observed: "At the very heart of the application of Sagan's quote... is the belief in materialism that is held a priori before even examining the evidence contrary to it."[7] In doing so, Lataster effectively embeds the very worldview under dispute into his evidential framework. This reflects a form of skepticism that insufficiently examines its own presuppositions while presenting itself as scientifically neutral.

The philosophical limitations of this approach become clearer when we examine the foundations on which it rests: David Hume's well-known argument against miracles.[8] Lataster, like many skeptics, appeals to Hume's authority as though it remains unscathed by centuries of philosophical scrutiny. Yet John Earman's definitive monograph *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* in painstaking detail explains the deep flaws in Hume's reasoning. Earman demonstrates that

[6] Ventureyra "Warranted Skepticism? Putting the Center for Inquiry's Rationale to the Test," 6.

[7] Ibid., 13.

[8] See David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X ("Of Miracles").

Hume's argument is riddled with ambiguity, tautological thinking, and methodological confusion. As Earman writes: "The thunderbolts are supposed to issue from general principles about inductive inference and the credibility of eyewitness testimony. But when these principles are made explicit and examined under the lens of Bayesianism, they are found to be either vapid, specious, or at variance with actual scientific practice."[9] He goes further: "Most of Hume's considerations are unoriginal… The essay reveals the weakness and the poverty of Hume's own account of induction and probabilistic reasoning."[10]

What's more is that Earman's analysis shows that if Hume's principles were taken seriously, they would be "stultifying to scientific inquiry," preventing the investigation of anomalies that fall outside present expectations—precisely the kind of inquiry that has often led to scientific revolutions.[11] He also identifies a core incoherence in Hume's argumentative structure. As John Earman argues, "There is a weak version of [Hume's] thesis that is surely correct but it amounts to no more than a collection of platitudes… There is a very strong version… that is patently false." This distinction highlights the incoherence in Hume's stronger claim: it assumes in advance that uniform experience rules out miracles, thereby disqualifying testimony without fair examination. As Earman explains, such reasoning collapses under probabilistic scrutiny and ultimately undermines scientific inquiry itself, which depends on the willingness to revise prior expectations in light of evidence.[12]

These issues go to the heart of Hume's credibility and the epistemological framework Lataster inherits. If Hume's

[9] John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 70.

[10] Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, 3.

[11] Ibid., 31.

[12] Ibid., 44.

reasoning fails and Earman convincingly shows that it does, then the entire evidentiary posture that Lataster assumes collapses under its own weight. Thus, to invoke Hume without reassessing the philosophical basis of his argument, as Lataster does, is to risk overlooking critical scholarly challenges. Far from being a tool for impartial inquiry, the principle of "extraordinary evidence" becomes, in his hands, an instrument of epistemic exclusion, used not to test claims fairly, but to shield naturalism from significant challenges.

Misunderstanding Prior Probability and Bayesian Reasoning

Lataster's critique glosses over the crucial role that prior probabilities play within Bayesian epistemology. These priors reflect both empirical data and fundamental metaphysical assumptions. Assigning a prior to an event such as a miracle is dependent upon a broader worldview framework. As I noted in my original article: "The presumption of atheism… contains the assumption that anything dealing with God or the supernatural does not have any evidence or at least any good evidence in its favour."[13]

This recurring assumption distorts his application of Bayesian analysis, especially when contrasted with approaches that weigh prior probabilities according to coherence and simplicity rather than mere frequency.[14] Ignoring the theological and historical context betrays the principle of epistemic humility. This results in a question-begging methodology that dismisses divine action a priori. Richard Swinburne exemplifies epistemic humility through his recognition of both the probabilistic nature of theological argumentation and the limits of human understanding regarding divine purposes. His work encourages

[13] Ventureyra, "Warranted Skepticism?," 15.

[14] See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 93-109; Tim McGrew and Lydia McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles," in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 617–620.

a humble approach to theological inquiry, acknowledging that reason can guide us toward belief in God without claiming absolute certainty. As he writes: "An argument from all the evidence considered in this book to the existence of God is a good P-inductive argument."[15] In *The Existence of God*, Swinburne emphasizes that prior probability depends not on frequency or intuition but on simplicity, explanatory power, and fit with background knowledge: "We saw in Chapter 3 that prior probability depends on simplicity, fit with contingent background knowledge, and scope… the intrinsic probability of theism seems to depend mainly on just how simple a theory theism is."[16] He argues that theism, as a hypothesis, is intrinsically simple and therefore enjoys a high prior probability. It posits a single, maximally powerful agent: "the simplest kind of person that there could be… [who] is infinitely powerful," and avoids arbitrary limitations that would demand further explanation.[17] Indeed, Swinburne notes that "given that there does exist something, the simple is more likely to exist than the complex," and thus "the intrinsic probability of theism is, relative to other hypotheses about what there is, very high."[18]

Lataster's claim to apply Bayesian reasoning impartially does not hold upon closer inspection. In *The Case Against Theism*, he assigns low prior probabilities to theistic claims not because of comparative simplicity or coherence, but based on assumptions that implicitly privilege naturalism. For instance, he asserts that "supernatural claims tend to be inherently implausible; that is, the prior probabilities of such hypotheses, based on current knowledge, are very low."[19] He further concludes that "naturalism… wins on the prior side and the

[15] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 342. A "p-inductive argument" is an argument that through its premises points to a probable conclusion.

[16] Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 333-334.

[17] Ibid, 334.

[18] Ibid, 109.

[19] Raphael Lataster, *The Case Against Theism: Why the Evidence Disproves God's Existence* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2018), 18.

likelihood side of the equation, so that the posterior probabilities undoubtedly favour naturalism."[20] While appealing to Bayesianism, Lataster undermines its principled structure by discarding simplicity as truth-conducive by quoting philosopher Peter Koso: "Simplicity is clearly a pragmatic virtue… But we have yet to see the connection between being simple and being true."[21] And yet, in Bayesian epistemology, simplicity is not merely pragmatic—it directly affects prior probability and coherence. By rejecting its relevance while still assigning near-zero priors to theism, Lataster's method arguably reflects a selective application of probabilistic reasoning shaped more by metaphysical presuppositions than by objective analysis. Lataster's treatment of priors reveals a metaphysical bias that fails to evaluate theistic explanations with the same analytic rigor applied to naturalistic ones. His approach, while couched in probabilistic language, ultimately insulates naturalism rather than testing it. Given this, we can confirm that his methodology overlooks what Swinburne calls the "all-important and unavoidable criterion" of simplicity in assessing a hypothesis's initial plausibility.[22] This leads to a skewed probabilistic framework that effectively excludes theism before the evidence is considered.

Swinburne's Bayesian approach holds that the credibility of a hypothesis depends on two main factors: how plausible it is before considering the evidence (its prior probability) and how well it explains the evidence compared to alternative explanations (its explanatory power). A hypothesis is more likely to be true if it is simple, fits well with background knowledge, and makes the observed evidence more likely than competing views. Lataster, however, neglects this balance. By assigning very low plausibility to miracle claims from the outset, without adequate justification, and by downplaying theism's

[20] Lataster, *The Case Against Theism*, 153.

[21] Ibid, 75n241.

[22] Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 60.

explanatory reach, he distorts the structure of Bayesian reasoning and fails to treat theistic hypotheses fairly.

William Lane Craig emphasizes that what is crucial in assessing miracle claims is not the sheer amount of evidence, but whether the evidence is far more probable given that the miraculous event occurred than if it did not: "Bayes' Theorem shows that rationally believing in a highly improbable event doesn't require an enormous amount of evidence. What is crucial is that the evidence be far more probable given that the event did occur than given that it did not."[23] Though Craig does not typically use numeric Bayesian modeling, his qualitative approach aligns with its central principles, particularly the comparative likelihood of evidence under competing hypotheses.

Lataster maintains that he avoids the presumption of naturalism and applies Bayesian reasoning impartially to both theism and naturalism. While this intention is commendable in principle, his actual methodology falls short. Despite referencing probabilistic tools, Lataster still assigns low priors to miracles without serious consideration of simplicity, coherence, or fit with background knowledge: the very criteria Swinburne deems essential. His citation of Swinburne and Craig is also revealing. Swinburne's model explicitly grants theism a high intrinsic probability based on its theoretical elegance and scope, while Craig emphasizes that even improbable events may be justified if the evidence is far more probable on the hypothesis than without it. Lataster does not appear to engage these insights meaningfully. Furthermore, though he claims to explore alternatives beyond theism and naturalism, such options are merely gestured at rather than developed or subjected to comparable scrutiny. Thus, despite his stated neutrality, the structure of his reasoning remains epistemically asymmetrical.

[23] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 273.

Lataster does not appear to engage in such comparatives, which renders his Bayesianism metaphysically biased. John Earman's critique in *Hume's Abject Failure* further illuminates this issue. Earman argues that Hume's dismissal of miracles is not grounded in a rigorous application of probability theory but rather in a prejudiced assumption against the supernatural. He states: "Hume's argument is largely derivative, almost wholly without merit where it is original, and worst of all, reveals the impoverishment of his treatment of inductive reasoning."[24]

Earman argues that Hume's reasoning overlooks the possibility that multiple independent reports of the same miracle could actually increase the likelihood of it happening. Using Bayesian analysis, he shows that even though miracles are highly improbable, the combined weight of reliable testimonies can still make them more likely.[25] Earman points out that Hume's approach is too strict and doesn't fully consider the complexities of probability theory, especially when it comes to adding up independent testimonies. [26] This critique highlights the need for a more refined application of Bayesian reasoning when evaluating miracle claims.

In summary, Lataster's approach fails to engage the full depth of Bayesian reasoning. By assigning low prior probabilities to theistic claims without due consideration for simplicity, coherence, or background context, he embeds a metaphysical bias into his framework. A more balanced methodology, as demonstrated by Swinburne, Craig, and Earman, would assess both naturalistic and theistic hypotheses with equal philosophical rigor.

Though Lataster rightly affirms that Bayesian reasoning invites us to consider what we would expect if theism were true, his selective treatment of topics like consciousness, moral realism,

[24] Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, vii.

[25] McGrew and McGrew, "The Argument from Miracles," 637-644.

[26] See Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, chapter 18: Multiple Witnessing.

and fine-tuning undercuts that claim. Furthermore, long-standing theistic responses to objections such as divine hiddenness drawing on soul-making and the value of free response to grace are largely ignored. Our disagreement, therefore, lies not in the probabilistic method itself, but in the assumptions and interpretive frameworks applied to it.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument and Scientific Misunderstanding

There seems to be a misunderstanding concerning the scope and function of the Kalam Cosmological Argument (KCA) as presented by Lataster. He claims that "the truth of the first premise is unknown" and that the second premise, that the universe began to exist, is not justified by Big Bang cosmology. But this conflates distinct lines of evidence and misunderstands the structure of the argument. As I explicitly note in my article: "Some atheists will have the unreasonable assumption that the argument, such as the KCA, is meant to establish the existence of the Christian God, but of course that is not the purpose of such an argument."[27]

Let us briefly sketch out the argument:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The first premise is supported by everyday experience and the metaphysical intuition that *ex nihilo nihil fit*, from nothing, nothing comes, and is affirmed universally in both scientific and philosophical reasoning. If Lataster questions this principle, it is reasonable to ask what alternative account could explain how a physical universe might arise without a cause or to provide a coherent argument for the eternality of matter.

[27] Ventureyra, "Warranted Skepticism?," 15.

Regarding the second premise, Lataster claims that Big Bang cosmology "only makes it reasonable to think that the universe… underwent a period of expansion" but "says nothing of a proper beginning."[28] This is misleading. While Big Bang cosmology indeed describes the expansion of space-time from a hot, dense state, its implications, when taken with the *Borde-Guth-Vilenkin* (BGV) theorem, strongly suggest a beginning to that expansion. The BGV theorem applies to *any* universe that has, on average, been in a state of cosmic expansion, including inflationary and multiverse scenarios. As Vilenkin emphatically states in his book *Many Worlds in One*: "It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape, they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning."[29]

Beyond the scientific evidence, strong philosophical arguments also support the second premise, that the universe began to exist, by ruling out the possibility of an actual infinite regress of past events.[30] These fall into two broad categories. First, arguments from the impossibility of an actual infinite existing as illustrated by Hilbert's Hotel. This thought experiment demonstrates that an actually infinite number of entities leads to logical absurdities, such as accommodating new guests in a hotel that is already full, thereby showing that an actual infinite cannot exist in the physical universe. Second, arguments from the impossibility of forming an actual infinite by successive addition as represented by the Tristram Shandy paradox. This paradox shows that if a man writes one day of his life story every year and has been doing so from eternity past, he should have completed an infinite autobiography by now. Yet this is

[28] Lataster, "Warranted Skepticism," 4.

[29] Alex Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes* (New York: Hill and Wange, 2006), 176.

[30] See Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), 200-217.

incoherent, for no infinite temporal sequence can be traversed or completed by successive causal steps. These arguments show that the universe must have had a beginning, not merely as a scientific inference, but as a metaphysical necessity. Thus, contrary to Lataster's suggestion, the scientific evidence *does* justify the second premise, especially when coupled with philosophical considerations that rule out an actual infinite regress of past events.

Lataster then argues that even if the argument succeeds, it does not point to *theism* per se, since there are a "number of alternative supernaturalisms."[31] This objection overlooks the cumulative force of natural theology. The KCA does not pretend to identify the cause in all its specificity, but it leads to a cause that is timeless, spaceless, immaterial, powerful, and personal, since the cause must transcend time and space and exercise agency in initiating the universe. These are attributes traditionally associated with theism, and while other "supernatural" hypotheses might be *logically possible*, not all are *metaphysically plausible*. Deism, for instance, while logically compatible with a timeless cause, offers little explanatory power regarding the moral, personal, and rational features of the universe—features that are more coherently accounted for by classical theism. Appeals to multiple creators or impersonal forces do not enjoy the same explanatory power or coherence. While logical possibilities abound, rational inquiry must distinguish between theoretical alternatives and those with greater explanatory coherence and metaphysical simplicity

Lataster further claims that because theism cannot be demonstrated "by scientific means" whereas other "isms" purportedly can, this is "a problem for theism." This objection conflates scientific and metaphysical reasoning and warrants clarification. Science, as I explicitly note, is methodologically

[31] Lataster, "Warranted Skepticism," 4.

naturalistic; it brackets the question of God rather than adjudicating it.

Lataster's assertion that alternatives to theism, such as deism, pantheism, panentheism (an understanding that is compatible and not necessarily opposed to theism), or even certain forms of atheistic cosmology, are more amenable to scientific validation presumes that metaphysical claims must conform to the criteria of empirical science. However, the claim glosses over an important distinction that metaphysical worldviews are not scientific hypotheses. They interpret, rather than arise directly from, empirical data. Even though it is true that primitive, anthropomorphic conceptions of gods may be more easily disconfirmed (e.g., gods like Zeus dwelling on specific mountaintops), transcendent theism, by its very nature, posits a cause beyond the empirical order, and as such, it would represent a category error to assert science is able to directly address such understandings. Science may inform our metaphysical conclusions, but it cannot by itself arbitrate between them. The claim that theism is at a disadvantage for not being "scientifically demonstrable" misunderstands the role of philosophy in interpreting what science itself cannot, by definition, address.

To emphasize, insisting on scientific proof of theism constitutes a category error. Theism, like most metaphysical worldviews, is not a scientific theory but a philosophical framework that interprets the data of science. Lataster's insistence on scientific demonstrability confuses methodological boundaries. If science must remain agnostic about non-empirical causes, then neither naturalism nor theism can be "scientifically proven," but both can be evaluated philosophically. This conflation between methodological and metaphysical categories invites closer scrutiny, as it may reflect a reliance on implicit assumptions rather than a fully articulated argument.

To be fair, Lataster's engagement with philosophical questions surrounding cosmology and the commentary on scientific

explanation reflects a sincere effort to bring clarity to difficult issues. His attempt to apply Bayesian reasoning to theological topics is also a valuable contribution to contemporary discussions. These efforts, even where one disagrees with the conclusions, help move the debate into more precise and formal territory, and for that reason, they deserve recognition.

Jesus's Resurrection: Historical Evidence, Probability, and Theological Significance

Lataster's critique of the resurrection of Jesus is deeply indebted to the Humean presupposition that dead men do not rise, and therefore any such claim will inevitably carry a low probability. But this reasoning is transparently question-begging, since it assumes, without argument, a naturalistic framework in which miracles are not merely improbable but virtually impossible by definition. If theism is even plausibly true, however, then miracles cannot be ruled out a priori. Indeed, if God exists, then the resurrection becomes not only possible but contextually fitting, especially given its theological, moral, and historical significance. This is not merely an appeal to possibility, but an argument grounded in a broader metaphysical framework, one Lataster appears to discount despite its relevance to miracle claims.

Lataster criticizes my appeal to evidence for the resurrection, namely, the empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and the sudden emergence of the disciples' belief in the resurrection, as if these facts are either fabricated or too weak to support any inference to a supernatural event. He argues that these phenomena are "easily explained on naturalism," suggesting that the witnesses "could simply have been mistaken, about the tomb, post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and so forth."[32] However, this response is far too dismissive. Offering mere possibilities is not equivalent to offering plausible, evidence-based explanations. It is important to point

[32] Lataster, "Warranted Skepticism," 9.

out that explanatory power requires more than mere ad hoc speculation. What it requires is that alternative hypotheses can account for the totality of the data better than the hypothesis in question.

The minimal facts approach, defended by scholars such as Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, does not depend on affirming the inerrancy of the Gospels or assuming that their authors had exhaustive knowledge of every event they describe. Instead, it focuses on historical facts that most critical scholars, regardless of their theological views, agree on: (1) Jesus was crucified by the Romans, (2) his tomb was found empty shortly afterward, (3) many individuals and groups claimed to have seen the risen Jesus, and (4) this belief led to the rapid and lasting growth of the Christian movement despite persecution and death.[33] Lataster's suggestion that the witnesses were simply "mistaken" doesn't address the strength and consistency of the evidence in its totality.

Being "mistaken" is not, in and of itself, a meaningful explanation. It functions as a general label that defers a series of distinct explanatory tasks, none of which Lataster seriously undertakes. What exactly were the disciples mistaken about? How do errors account for group appearances? For the empty tomb? For the radical transformation of figures like James and Paul, who were initially skeptical or hostile? Simply asserting that people are often mistaken is a truism, not a theory, it lacks the specificity required to account for historically grounded and theologically charged developments. Moreover, if the disciples were fundamentally mistaken, one must still explain how such a complex and enduring belief system could emerge, rooted in concrete claims, and flourish so rapidly in the hostile environment of first-century Judaism. As New Testament scholar N. T. Wright has argued, only the reality of a bodily resurrection makes adequate sense of the combination of the

[33] See Gary R. Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004).

empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances, and the redefinition of Jewish messianic expectations.[34]

Lataster objects that the Gospel accounts are anonymous and written decades after the events, but this line of criticism proves too much. If anonymity and temporal distance alone disqualify ancient sources, then virtually all of ancient history becomes suspect. We do not know the specific names of the Roman soldiers at Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, nor do we have multiple first-person accounts of Socrates's trial. (Our primary sources are Plato and Xenophon, both students of Socrates, who offer retrospective philosophical portrayals rather than independent legal transcripts.) Yet we consider such events historically reliable based on coherence, attestation, and the lack of plausible counter-explanations. If applied consistently, Lataster's standards would cast doubt on much of what we accept about ancient history. This demonstrates a selective and ideologically motivated skepticism.

He also raises a tu quoque objection, stating that I would not accept Hindu or other religious miracle claims based on their "superior" evidence. It is important to distinguish between openness to evaluating miracle claims and the quality of historical evidence available for each. The resurrection of Jesus is uniquely supported by early, independent sources that are not paralleled in most religious traditions. Theistic philosophers are not committed to rejecting all non-Christian miracle claims a priori; many are open to evaluating them on a case-by-case basis. But the comparison fails on historical grounds. We do not have for other religious figures the kind of early, multi-source, and convergent attestation we find for Jesus's resurrection. Vague miracle stories, often centuries removed from the claimed event, do not bear the same historical weight. Nor is skepticism toward non-Christian miracle claims necessarily analogous to the kind of closed, naturalistic

[34] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 682–696.

framework Lataster employs one that disallows miracles even if the evidence is compelling.

Lataster further critiques my use of Bayesian reasoning, alleging that I conflate prior probabilities with consequent probabilities. Specifically, he contends that I wrongly classify elements such as the empty tomb and the disciples' belief as part of the prior rather than the likelihood. If anything, this demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of how priors, background knowledge, and likelihoods function within Bayesian analysis. While these components are analytically distinct, they often interact in complex ways, particularly when worldview-level assumptions are in play. For instance, background beliefs about the reliability of ancient sources, the existence of God, or the plausibility of miracles do not merely inform the prior probability of a miraculous event; they also shape how one assesses the likelihood of the evidence under different hypotheses. Lataster's assignment of near-zero priors to miracles appears driven not by neutral probability theory, but by a metaphysical commitment to naturalism treated as a given. To say that "people typically do not come back to life" is a statistical observation, not a metaphysical refutation. Of course, miracles are rare; their very definition entails that. But rarity is not equivalent to impossibility, and Bayesian reasoning requires that rare events not be ruled out merely because they are unfamiliar.

Finally, his argument that the Gospels were "tampered with" over the centuries simply restates standard textual criticism without establishing that the relevant resurrection passages are inauthentic. Most variants in the New Testament are minor and do not affect key doctrines. Moreover, the core resurrection claims appear not just in the Gospels but also in Paul's undisputed epistles, written earlier and universally accepted as genuine, which include references to the resurrection in

passages such as 1 Corinthians 15:3–8, Romans 1:4-5, Romans 10:9, Galatians 1:1, and Galatians 1:11–16.[35]

In summary, Lataster's treatment of the resurrection does not reflect a rigorous application of historical methodology or probability theory but rather a framework that limits explanatory scope. The resurrection of Jesus remains a powerful historical and theological claim, supported by a convergence of early, multiply attested, and well-explained facts, none of which are satisfactorily addressed by the alternative explanations Lataster proposes.

Shook, "More Nature," and Conceptual Insulation

In my original article, I criticized John Shook's evasive response to William Lane Craig's question about what might exist beyond nature. Shook's reply, "more nature," is not merely unsatisfying; it is conceptually incoherent. As I previously observed: "If nature is all there is, there is not more nature since it would already embody the totality of reality." [36] To invoke "more nature" as an explanation of what lies beyond nature is to retreat into a circular tautology that shields naturalism from serious metaphysical scrutiny. It is not a genuine extension of inquiry, but a redrawing of definitional boundaries to preserve a favored framework.

Lataster responds that this is uncharitable to Shook and insists that he himself does not always presuppose naturalism in his own work. He cites Herman Philipse and Graham Oppy as examples of naturalists who employ probabilistic reasoning without a strict a priori commitment to metaphysical naturalism. This clarification is noted.[37] However, in his critique of my original article, Lataster consistently defaults to naturalistic explanations while declining to engage seriously

[35] See also Philippians 3:10–11 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10 for further Pauline references to the resurrection and its eschatological significance.

[36] Ventureyra, "Warranted Skepticism?," 17.

[37] Lataster, "Warranted Skepticism," 6n13.

with the metaphysical plausibility of theism as a worldview. His appeals to "alternative supernaturalisms" are presented in passing and are never developed or defended as coherent explanatory systems. In that context, they appear more rhetorical than substantive.

This reveals a deeper philosophical tension. Despite Lataster's agnosticism and stated openness to supernatural alternatives, his operational method remains tightly naturalistic: miracles are treated as inherently improbable, divine agency as conceptually suspect, and science, defined in methodologically naturalistic terms, as the only valid adjudicator of knowledge claims. In short, while Lataster critiques theistic arguments for allegedly begging the question, he does not acknowledge the extent to which his own methodology relies on unexamined naturalistic presuppositions.

This form of conceptual insulation is not unique to Lataster but characterizes much of contemporary atheist apologetics. It avoids rigorous metaphysical engagement not by refuting alternative worldviews, but by narrowing the scope of admissible explanations in advance. Such a strategy may serve rhetorical aims, but it undermines the openness required for genuine philosophical inquiry.

Hume Reconsidered: Logical and Probabilistic Collapse

Lataster invokes Hume as though his argument against miracles remains unquestionable. Yet Hume's reasoning falters on both logical and probabilistic grounds. First, there is the problem of circular reasoning: Hume defines a miracle as a violation of the laws of nature confirmed by uniform experience and then asserts that such violations do not occur. This amounts to excluding miracles by definition rather than by an impartial assessment of evidence It is not a neutral starting point but a premise-laden definition that forecloses alternative interpretations.

Second, Both Hume and Lataster assign small prior probabilities to miracle claims, but they do so without considering the broader theistic context in which such events would not only be possible but, in certain cases, expected. By presupposing a naturalistic methodology, they discount the possibility of divine action and any evidence that can demonstrate its plausibility. Essentially, the risk is that they are presupposing precisely what they are attempting to prove, i.e., that miracles are too improbable to be reliable, despite the any testimonial or historical evidence.

John Earman, as explored earlier, in his rigorous critique of Hume's argument, demonstrates these flaws with precision. He shows that when Hume's principles are formalized and subjected to probabilistic scrutiny, they fail to offer a consistent or objective standard for evaluating miracle claims.[38] Instead, Hume's approach reflects a philosophical posture that closes off certain explanatory possibilities not because the evidence is insufficient, but because the framework used to evaluate it is itself too restrictive.[39]

Conclusion: The Real Extraordinary Claim

Lataster concludes that agnosticism or naturalism is the most rational intellectual framework. However, this conclusion relies on a selective form of skepticism that claims to be neutral but actually protects naturalism from serious questioning. His constant references to probability, scientific caution, and epistemic humility hide a deeper bias—the unspoken belief that natural explanations are always the better choice, no matter how strong or wide-ranging the evidence against them might be. But as I noted in my original article: "Naturalistic conclusions are the extraordinary claims lacking extraordinary evidence."[40]

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[38] Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, 70. Earman's analysis remains one of the most respected contemporary critiques of Hume's essay on miracles.

[39] Ibid, 3.

[40] Ventureyra, "Warranted Skepticism?," 23.

The assertion that the universe came from nothing, that consciousness arose from non-conscious matter, that moral facts are reducible to evolutionary pressures, and that life developed through a wholly unguided process are all claims of staggering metaphysical breadth. They are not conclusions compelled by empirical data alone, but by prior commitments to naturalism. These are not epistemically modest positions; they are sweeping, broad metaphysical claims with far-reaching implications, made with limited explanatory grounding.

What Lataster derides as "extraordinary claims," such as the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, and the reality of miracles, are, within the theistic framework, not only reasonable but philosophically coherent and evidentially grounded. They fit with the idea that a rational, personal Creator might interact with His creation in meaningful moral and theological ways. On the other hand, insisting that all such phenomena must be rejected as improbable or illusory, no matter the evidence, reflects a strong commitment to metaphysical naturalism, one that often is incapable of recognizing its own naturalistic presuppositions.

This rejoinder not only responds to Lataster's specific arguments, but also extends the concerns raised in my 2015 critique of the Center for Inquiry's philosophical stance. Both Lataster's article and the CFI's defense of Sagan's dictum reflect a similar epistemological pattern: insulating naturalism from challenge while applying asymmetrical skepticism to theistic claims. The issues of the presumption of naturalism, selective evidential standards, and resistance to explanatory alternatives remain central. This exchange underscores the continuing need for philosophical clarity, fair application of probability, and genuine intellectual openness.

Lataster's critique is constrained by a way of thinking that prevents him from considering theistic explanations before looking at the evidence, which runs against the spirit of true skepticism. His framework does not allow evidence to challenge

his assumptions; it categorically excludes certain conclusions from the outset. This is not skepticism in any meaningful sense. It reflects a framework that discourages engagement with theistic explanation, regardless of evidential support. Lataster's critique could be strengthened by applying his skepticism more consistently to naturalism, considering rival metaphysical explanations more seriously, and avoiding the exclusion of theism by definition. In fact, the truly extraordinary claim in this debate is not theism nor the resurrection, but Lataster's implicit metaphysical naturalism. It posits that all of reality can be explained solely by physical processes and impersonal causes, yet this grandiose commitment to naturalism remains unargued and unproven in his response.

If "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence," then it is worth acknowledging that naturalism itself, when broadly applied, also makes sweeping metaphysical commitments that invite scrutiny. In my estimation, a more fruitful approach would not arbitrarily increase skepticism for one position over another, but rather, would evaluate competing worldviews on equal terms. Genuine philosophical inquiry follows the evidence wherever it may lead, even if it leads to theism and to the possibility of miracles. My sincere hope is that this rejoinder, in spite of multiple points of disagreement with Lataster's response to my original article, precipitates more rigorous and open conversations on the nature of reality, reason, and belief.

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