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The Razor's Blind Spot: An Analytical Critique of the Atheistic Parsimony Argument (APA)

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Abstract

When competing hypotheses show equal explanatory strength, philosophers and scientists often prefer the simpler proposition in the process of theory selection. However, contemporary atheistic arguments, especially the APA, misappropriate parsimony by excluding the God hypothesis from the explanatory system. Here, I evaluate the legitimacy of the APA through an analytical method grounded in Thagard's coherence principles and Swinburne's explanatory model to examine whether simplicity alone can serve as a criterion for theory selection. The results show that the APA does not satisfy established coherence criteria, improperly elevating simplicity over explanatory power. Finally, the study proposes a Cross-Domain Coherence (CDC) model that emphasizes multidimensional approaches to theory choice beyond ontological minimalism, offering a framework capable of explaining reality in its full complexity.

Keywords: *Atheistic Parsimony Argument; Cross-Domain Coherence; Explanatory Coherence; God Hypothesis; Philosophy of Religion; Scientific Parsimony; Theory Choice*

INTRODUCTION

The principle of parsimony is regarded as a theoretical virtue in both philosophical and scientific inquiry and is widely accepted as a legitimate rational standard in theory choice. Philosophers and scientists usually prefer hypotheses that make fewer assumptions, are

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better supported empirically, and are more tractable. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "the simplest theory that explains the data is to be preferred over more complex rivals" (Baker, 2016).

The underlying logic for the general acceptability of parsimony lies in its exclusionary nature and its tendency to minimize assumptions. Fewer assumptions receive higher prior probability, while additional assumptions introduce greater complexity and increase the potential for error within an explanatory system. Therefore, simplicity is regarded not only as an aesthetic aspect of philosophical and scientific inquiry, but also as a bearer of epistemic justification.

Besides its crucial role in scientific and philosophical discussion, the principle of parsimony enjoys equal importance in theological reasoning. For instance, Swinburne (2004), a contemporary theologian, explicitly considers simplicity a theoretical virtue in his theological framework. In The Existence of God, he maintains: "Theism is a simpler hypothesis which explains … everything except in so far as God allows humans to make free choices." Here, Swinburne argues that the principle of simplicity renders the God hypothesis more plausible and parsimoniously elegant than naturalistic alternatives.

Unlike Swinburne, advocates of atheism within theological discourse have applied parsimonious models to redefine or even reduce the logical necessity of God. They argue that invoking a transcendent cause adds an additional complex entity to the explanatory network. Since scientific knowledge can adequately explain the same phenomena, no further entity needs to be introduced into the explanatory process. One well-known example of this position is Dawkins's "Ultimate Boeing 747" argument, in which he concludes that "a designer God cannot be used to explain organized complexity

because any God capable of designing anything would have to be complex enough to demand the same kind of explanation in his own right" (Dawkins, 2008).

It is evident that Dawkins applies parsimony in a way that renders the God hypothesis a self-defeating proposition, because treating God as an explanatory cause is taken to overburden the explanatory network with more complexity than it resolves.

The Ultimate Boeing 747 Argument is followed by SEAGA, another parsimony-based argument, which assumes the "Science Explains Away God Argument" and considers the God hypothesis redundant in light of scientific sufficiency. Under SEAGA, it is claimed that "If science can explain the phenomena without invoking God, then Ockham's razor suggests that we should not posit God in addition" (Glass, 2017).

The guiding assumption of both the Ultimate Boeing 747 Argument and SEAGA is that, if a simpler naturalistic model can explain the phenomena, then the more complex God hypothesis should be removed from the explanatory network. Building on this assumption, Glass (2017) goes a step further and rules out the possible application of parsimonious models to theological and metaphysical reasoning, as attempted by theologians such as Swinburne in The Existence of God. He argues that the conditions for applying parsimonious models to theological reasoning are rarely satisfied because SEAGA has persuasively explained away the God hypothesis, leaving no space for alternative explanations within the explanatory network beyond parsimony. In this regard, he writes: "Ockham's razor suggests that there is no need for two accounts when one will do. Essentially, this means that science has explained away … the need for God" (Glass, 2017). In simpler terms, this type of reasoning can be articulated as follows:

If the naturalistic theory (n) explains the phenomena of order, fine-tuning, and contingency (q), and the theological hypothesis (t) also explains (q) but with greater metaphysical commitments, then (n) should be endorsed and (t) should be rejected.

It is clear from the above discussion that in both the Ultimate Boeing 747 Argument and SEAGA, parsimony is applied as a tool of normative judgment to rule out the God hypothesis from the explanatory network, rather than as an approximate method of inquiry. One may observe that in both arguments, Dawkins and Glass apply parsimony as a decisive methodological principle to exclude the God hypothesis outright, even though scientists have never applied parsimony in this manner. Instead, it is used as a heuristic or mental shortcut in theory construction, as scientific methodology often prefers fewer free parameters, fewer entities, and fewer assumptions (Woodward, 2014).

This methodological minimalism on the part of atheistic arguments has relegated theological perspectives to a reactive and defensive posture. If parsimonious models are taken to be decisive, then the God hypothesis would be required to demonstrate extraordinary explanatory strength to outweigh the complexity attributed to it, or at least to show that it is not more complex than naturalistic alternatives. At this point, it becomes necessary for theology to defend its explanatory legitimacy within contemporary discourse to sustain its epistemological and explanatory role.

The present study seeks to clarify the explanatory significance of theological perspectives, especially regarding the question of God. It conducts an analytical critique of the misapplication of parsimony beyond its proper methodological scope as a heuristic tool, showing how it is used for unwarranted normative judgments. It also highlights the logical flaws in atheistic parsimony arguments that apply simplicity in a way that creates an artificial contradiction

between science and theology, thereby excluding the God hypothesis illegitimately. In addition, the substitution of metaphysical richness with minimalist explanations is criticized, affirming the indispensable role of the God hypothesis in maintaining an integrative explanatory framework and its importance for epistemic completeness.

Finally, the study proposes a Cross-Domain Coherence (CDC) model for theory selection that can integrate diverse dimensions of reality without excluding key components of the explanatory network. It suggests that acceptance criteria for any model should not rely on minimalism or entity count alone but should instead evaluate the degree of coherence among various explanatory components within a unified framework of justification.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The principle of parsimony has been valued for centuries in both philosophical and scientific domains. Philosophers have applied it as a logical tool in their inquiries, while scientists have applied it as a methodological rule in their search for reality. Second-century Greek astronomers are best known for their application of parsimony, using simple geometric models to explain celestial motions through the simplest possible hypotheses (Ptolemy & Gingerich, 1999).

Parsimony in Scientific Reasoning

In modern scientific epistemology, the principle of parsimony has shifted from being a purely philosophical virtue to a mathematical principle. Akaike (1974), who developed the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), was central to this transformation. The development of the AIC is considered a major contribution because it represents a successful attempt to embody parsimony in a quantitative form, translating the philosophical idea of simplicity into a calculable

mathematical rule and introducing a new way to determine which model best fits the data without unnecessary complexity.

Subsequent scholars have extended parsimony into a pragmatic modeling virtue that helps scientists construct efficient and empirically adequate models using no more assumptions than necessary. In this context, naturalists suggest that one should "shave away all but what is necessary" (Burnham & Anderson, 2004). This indicates that parsimony is not always about selecting the simplest hypothesis, but rather about choosing a hypothesis that is sufficiently simple while still adequately explaining the data.

Parsimony and Theory Choice in Philosophy of Religion

In philosophical theology, scholars have applied the principle of parsimony systematically as a metaphysical criterion to evaluate the plausibility of theistic propositions. They have held that parsimony can significantly enhance the probability of truth and have consistently applied it to the God hypothesis, arguing that if the God hypothesis explains the universe simply, it is more rational to believe in God than to adopt a more complex naturalistic hypothesis: "Other things being equal, the simplest hypothesis proposed as an explanation of phenomena is more likely to be true" (Swinburne, 2004).

Within contemporary theological discourse, several thinkers have attempted to incorporate parsimonious models by developing simpler accounts of the divine being under the broader theme of divine simplicity. They seek to preserve metaphysical economy in their approaches and to describe God in a way that avoids internal complexities beyond what is strictly necessary. According to many contemporary theologians, however, classical theism itself has struggled to develop a fully parsimonious model capable of supporting the God hypothesis (Dolezal, 2017).

Atheistic Deployments of Parsimony

Atheist thinkers have strategically employed parsimony to challenge the God hypothesis and other theological explanations. They have developed several arguments based on parsimony, such as the Ultimate Boeing 747 Argument and SEAGA, to rule out any role for God within the explanatory network. They maintain that if a scientific model suffices, the divine hypothesis becomes explanatorily redundant (Glass, 2017). In this regard, Oppy (2006) argues that ontological simplicity favors naturalism, concluding that "once we have a naturalistic account of the structure and development of the universe, there is no further explanatory work for theism to do." In a more eliminative manner, Rosenberg (2011) insists that "the virtue of a scientific worldview is that it dispenses with unnecessary posits and explains everything that needs explaining using fewer resources." This shows that both Oppy and Rosenberg employ parsimony to reject the theistic God hypothesis by considering it unnecessary within the explanatory domain. The key difference is that Oppy favors naturalism as a simpler hypothesis with comparable explanatory scope, while Rosenberg applies parsimony more radically, arguing that physics alone can explain reality and thus render the God hypothesis unnecessary.

It is evident from the above discussion that the principle of parsimony is applied as a theoretical virtue in scientific contexts to assess the adequacy of competing hypotheses in theory selection. At the same time, it is used as a critical tool to evaluate theological claims in both theistic and atheistic debates. Consequently, theological explanations have often been dismissed due to their perceived ontological overcommitments in light of parsimony. This approach on the part of naturalists and atheists has marginalized the God hypothesis and led it to be regarded as an unwarranted proposition in many epistemic circles. This tendency has, in turn, led some thinkers

either to reinterpret God as a merely explanatory model or to reject the God hypothesis outright on the basis of parsimony.

Toward Coherence-Based Evaluation Models

However, later scholarship in cognitive science and epistemic modeling has largely shifted the dialogue from simplicity to coherence. Scholars such as BonJour (1985), Thagard (1989), Lehrer (1990, 2000), Plantinga (2011), and others have explicitly emphasized the importance of coherence in explanatory systems and have developed coherent explanatory models for epistemic justification. These models discourage strictly minimalist approaches and propose that a hypothesis should be rationally accepted if it coheres better within a system of justification than its competitors (Thagard, 1989). Coherent explanatory frameworks emphasize multiple constraints within an explanatory system. They consider explanatory breadth, depth, analogy, non-contradiction, and other positive constraints when assessing the plausibility of a proposition. According to coherentist philosophers, parsimony should not be treated as the sole criterion; rather, it should function as one constraint among several. Consequently, parsimonious models should not play a decisive role in epistemic reasoning. Within coherent frameworks, only coherence of the appropriate kind can lead to approximate truth, where the appropriate kind is explanatory coherence (Thagard, 2007). This does not mean that coherent frameworks reject parsimony outright; instead, they endorse it only after integrating it into a broader cognitive network. Such scrutiny is necessary in light of explanatory principles, where a theory's adequacy depends on its systemic fit rather than merely on its ontological economy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, I apply established principles of explanatory coherence as critical lenses to evaluate the plausibility of the Atheistic Parsimony Argument. According to these principles, explanatory coherence involves a web of propositions with positive constraints when they cohere and negative constraints when they compete. Explanatory principles further hold that logical incompatibility between propositions generates negative coherence, thereby reducing the overall acceptability of a proposition. Coherence frameworks do not treat parsimony as a primary evaluative dimension; instead, they emphasize explanatory breadth, depth, and integrative power. A hypothesis is valued primarily for its capacity to explain as many phenomena as possible in a mechanistic and integrative manner.

In this sense, the atheistic use of parsimony stands in tension with established coherence models, which accept simplicity only insofar as it fits well with other constraints and contributes to a higher level of coherence. Otherwise, if a hypothesis fails to explain sufficiently or to integrate within the explanatory network, simplicity becomes a liability rather than a virtue. Parsimony is therefore only a partial virtue and not a decisive tool unless it contributes to explanatory breadth, depth, and integration. For example, when an atheist claims that a scientific hypothesis is simpler than the God hypothesis and therefore that God should be rejected, a coherentist may ask whether the scientific hypothesis coherently explains all relevant phenomena in an integrative way, provides mechanisms, connects adequately to evidence, avoids contradiction, and outperforms the God hypothesis. If it does not meet these conditions, its rejection of the God hypothesis is not justified. Conversely, although the God hypothesis may appear ontologically more complex, if it offers a richer web of explanations, deeper connections, and higher

overall coherence, it is justified in light of the principles of explanatory coherence.

Thesis Statement

I argue that dismissing the God hypothesis through parsimony is methodologically unsound because it fails to account for the multidimensional nature of metaphysical explanations and violates the principles of explanatory coherence, particularly those articulated by Thagard and Swinburne. Therefore, the theory selection process should give precedence to explanatory breadth over reductive minimalism. My primary aim is to critically engage with the Atheistic Parsimony Argument to assess whether parsimony can be legitimately employed as a decisive criterion for excluding the God hypothesis from the explanatory network. I do not seek to prove theism conclusively, nor do I present a comprehensive critique of all atheistic arguments. Rather, I focus narrowly on the use of parsimony as an eliminative tool and argue that this application violates established principles of explanatory coherence. In addition, I do not aim to develop the proposed CDC model exhaustively in this study; instead, I discuss it as an initial conceptual proposal.

METHOD

A qualitative philosophical methodology is employed for conceptual analysis and argumentative evaluation to assess the coherence of the Atheistic Parsimony Argument in light of Thagard's and Swinburne's coherence models. This approach also proposes a Cross-Domain Coherence (CDC) model capable of explaining reality in its full complexity.

The Atheistic Argument from Parsimony (APA)

Atheists have developed numerous arguments to deny the God hypothesis based on parsimony. This general reasoning strategy is articulated systematically, using simplicity as a criterion against theism. Thinkers such as Glass (2012), Dawkins (2016), Martin (1991), Mackie (1982), and others have employed parsimony in various formulations. Despite their differing methodological approaches, these thinkers share a common argumentative style, invoking simplicity as a core principle that counts against the rational plausibility of the God hypothesis. Their reasoning generally follows the structure:

If naturalism (n) and theism (t) both explain a phenomenon (p), and if (t) introduces additional commitments not required by (n), then, by parsimony, (n) is to be preferred and (t) is to be rejected.

Note: (a) In the following sections, this form of argument will be referred to as the Atheistic Parsimony Argument (APA). (b) In the present study, the term "atheist theory" is not meant to denote a denial of God's existence; rather, it is used at a second-order level to indicate a comprehensive explanatory framework that seeks to account for reality through physical processes, laws, and chance, without appealing to a transcendent agency. In contrast, the "God hypothesis" refers to classical theism, which posits a transcendent ground of being whose agency underwrites the existence, intelligibility, and order of the natural world. Both terms are not strictly incompatible at the level of empirical description, as both accept scientific accounts of physical processes; however, they are metaphysically incompatible because they offer fundamentally different visions of reality.

When evaluated through established principles of explanatory coherence, the APA collapses under internal contradiction, violating coherence criteria on multiple levels. In what follows, I identify three central misapplications at the heart of the APA: the illicit dismissal of

the God hypothesis, the illicit use of contradiction, and the illicit substitution of minimalism. These logical errors demonstrate that deploying parsimony against the God hypothesis fails to satisfy established principles of explanatory coherence and, in some cases, actively distorts them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Illicit Dismissal of the God Hypothesis

Atheist thinkers have often dismissed the God hypothesis assertively, without providing compelling justification for its exclusion. They reject (t) because it is more complex than (n) and requires additional metaphysical commitments. This approach treats God as an unnecessary element in the explanatory network once natural explanations are in place. Accordingly, Mackie (1982) argues that "the postulation of a god adds nothing to the explanatory power of our theories, but merely introduces a further entity whose existence itself stands in need of explanation." On this view, introducing God is unacceptable because it constitutes an avoidable increase in ontological commitment. Others contend that modern physics has explained nearly everything, so invoking God does not enhance explanatory power (Carroll, 2017). It is evident from these insights that parsimony is being used decisively, leading naturalism to be regarded as the sole explanation for all phenomena requiring explanation.

Theists, however, are concerned that this position conflates causal completeness with explanatory completeness. They argue that naturalism may describe how physical processes behave without addressing why such a rational order exists at all: "Science can tell us how the heavens go, but it does not tell us why there are heavens at all" (Plantinga, 2011). The theistic approach does not introduce God as a competitor to science, but rather as a metaphysical explanation of the conditions that make scientific explanation possible. Therefore, the

deployment of parsimony must align with explanatory adequacy, as "an explanation that leaves out what is most significant about a phenomenon is not superior simply because it is simpler" (Stump, 2010). From this perspective, atheistic simplicity may come at the cost of explanatory depth, particularly regarding meaning, normativity, rationality, and other aspects of reality that theism seeks to integrate rather than eliminate. Theists have reason to be concerned, as an overemphasis on ontological economy may undermine explanatory coherence across domains and overlook the importance of explanatory depth.

Principles of explanatory coherence affirm that the prior probability of a proposition does not depend on simplicity alone. Simplicity may be considered a criterion for prior probability only if it connects to our established background knowledge of reality. The APA ignores this essential relation, as its atheistic assumptions under parsimony are disconnected from background knowledge and the many dimensions of human experience. In this context, Swinburne (2004) emphasizes that "the prior probability of a hypothesis depends on its simplicity and fit with background knowledge." Beyond prior probability, a hypothesis must explain the evidence and cohere with other accepted hypotheses, gaining support through positive explanatory relations and losing support when it conflicts with background knowledge or relies on ad hoc assumptions (Thagard, 2000). The atheistic appeal to parsimony fails to satisfy this condition. In contrast, the theistic God hypothesis, though metaphysically more substantial, clearly meets it. It integrates coherently with our background knowledge, achieving a greater explanatory probability than the APA. Hence, the APA rests on an epistemically flawed assumption, conflating simplicity with plausibility and ignoring legitimate conditions for rational acceptance.

There is little doubt that both (t) and (n) jointly explain different levels of the same phenomenon: the former explains why there is a law-governed universe at all, while the latter describes how the universe functions. The God hypothesis should not be excluded because co-explanation is not only possible but necessary to understand the ultimate cause of natural laws. For example, a physicist may explain a falling object through the law of gravity, while a theist may explain the very existence of the law itself, attributing it to God as the ultimate cause of every natural event. Therefore, (t) and (n) provide explanations at different levels for the same reality (q). One explanation is ultimate, addressing why the law of gravity exists, and the other is proximate, describing how gravity operates. Explanatory models affirm that "a hypothesis coheres with what it explains; hypotheses that together explain a proposition cohere with each other" (Thagard, 1989). Applied to (t) and (n), this principle shows complete harmony: (n) operates at the empirical descriptive level, explaining how gravity functions, while (t) operates at the metaphysical foundational level, explaining why such a law exists. They mutually cohere without competition, yielding a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. In this sense, both hypotheses are co-explainers of the same reality, providing complementary explanations from different angles. By treating (t) and (n) as strict rivals, the APA ignores this legitimate coherence link that should be recognized.

While this may be the case, the God hypothesis, understood as a creative ground of existence, morality, and order, explains fundamental realities alongside scientific accounts and does not contradict the essential claims of science, thereby increasing overall system-wide coherence. It connects otherwise fragmented domains of human understanding, allowing for multiple, non-competing levels of explanation. Although scientific and theological accounts are distinct,

they explain reality in a complementary way: science explains how the world functions through natural laws, while theology explains why such law-governed order exists. According to Polkinghorne (1998), "Science asks how things happen; theology asks why there is something rather than nothing. The two questions are not rivals but partners in the search for truth."

Parsimonious models identify proximate biological mechanisms; however, they fail to account for moral objectivity, human identity, alterity, and consciousness. Here, the God hypothesis provides a normative foundation, as moral awareness points beyond itself to an objective good grounded in a divine reality that sustains moral order (Ward, 1982). According to Craig & Wielenberg (2020) and others, objective moral values and duties are best grounded in a morally perfect God: "If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist." Craig & Wielenberg (2020) argue that the binding nature of moral obligations is rooted in God's essentially good nature rather than in arbitrary divine commands. This notion, however, faces serious challenges. Grounding morality in God's commands risks arbitrariness; if morality exists independently of God, its authority might not require divine grounding.

Morriston (2012) highlights this concern, arguing that "appealing to God's nature does not by itself explain why moral requirements are normative for us" and that "even if God's nature is necessarily good, the question remains why facts about that nature should generate obligations for human beings." While Morriston (2012) frames this as resembling the Euthyphro dilemma, theists respond that grounding morality in God's nature means God's nature is necessarily loving, just, and truthful, and all moral commands flow from that nature. It does not imply that God arbitrarily chooses goodness; rather, God himself is the source of all goodness. For theists,

morality is more intelligible when grounded in a personal moral being.

Similarly, cognitive science explains the neural processes underlying thought but cannot account for how human reason is capable of discerning truth in a rational universe. The God hypothesis provides this explanation, conceiving human reason as a reflection of divine rationality. Human reason mirrors the intelligibility of the world, which in turn reflects the rationality of its Creator (McGrath, 2008). Above all, the exclusion of (t) is not a logical necessity but a psychological one. According to Stace (1980), "the belief that the two kinds of explanation are mutually exclusive opposites is no reason to say that the two kinds of explanation are inconsistent with one another." Therefore, parsimonious models need not treat natural and theological assumptions as competing hypotheses, as they can provide a layered, coherent account of reality.

The Illicit Use of Contradiction

According to the laws of contradiction, only (p and ¬p) can be considered contradictory propositions. However, the APA seems to treat (t) and (n) as if they were (p and ¬p), when they are not. The proposition that the universe operates according to natural laws does not contradict the proposition that God is behind those laws, as both can be true simultaneously. Theism does not deny natural laws; it offers an explanation for why those laws exist and why they are rationally ordered.

In fact, natural and theological explanations, though ontologically distinct, are not contradictory in nature. Treating them as inherently contradictory is a categorical mistake that reflects a misunderstanding of their scope and explanatory domains. They are compatible in the same way that water boils because of heat transfer while also boiling because someone turned on the stove; each explanation operates at a different explanatory level. The APA's

assumption that a contradiction exists between (t) and (n) is logically flawed, as it leads to the exclusion of an important co-explainer based on an artificial conflict. According to principles of explanatory coherence, "If p and q both explain a proposition and if p and q are not explanatorily connected, then p and q are incoherent with each other" (Thagard, 1989).

This principle clearly states that two hypotheses are considered incoherent only if they account for the same proposition and lack explanatory connection. In our case, (t) and (n) operate at different explanatory levels in a complementary way. Constructing them as contradictory is therefore a categorical error. The exclusion of the God hypothesis is methodologically unjustified in light of the established principles of explanatory coherence, which allow (t) and (n) to integrate and remain logically coherent without methodological flaw. It is important to note that no hypothesis should abandon an established truth during theory selection. Accepting this point makes theological frameworks more plausible, as they avoid artificial contradictions by situating scientific truths within a broader metaphysical order. Science affirms that physical events occur according to natural laws, while theological frameworks maintain that these laws express divine rationality. Thus, both are compatible: "the laws of nature are not rivals to God's will but expressions of his faithfulness" (Polkinghorne, 1998).

Theological flexibility can extend further. Divine action, for example, can be understood without violating natural laws in a non-interventionist way. Some theists argue that divine causation operates as top-down causation within the open system of nature (Peacocke, 1993). In this sense, divine acts generally explain the order of creation rather than suspend it, although exceptional cases such as miracles may be distinct. Classical theology also explains God's simplicity by distinguishing between divine reality and human conceptualization.

As Davies (2004) notes, "We do not ascribe separate parts to God but distinguish conceptually between what in God is one and simple." From these insights, it is clear that theological frameworks do not compete with scientific truths; rather, they complement them within a more comprehensive ontology. Therefore, no genuine contradiction exists between them.

The Illicit Substitution of Minimalism

According to the principles of coherence, the acceptability of a hypothesis should not be based solely on how few assumptions it contains; rather, it should be judged by how well it fits into a broader web of propositions. In this regard, Swinburne (2004) maintains: "A good theory will explain many and varied phenomena which otherwise would be inexplicable." However, the APA treats belief in God solely in terms of minimalism, claiming that since naturalism is simpler, the God hypothesis should be removed.

This reasoning is problematic in logical and philosophical domains because it neglects the global explanatory system. In philosophical reasoning, simplicity does not make a hypothesis rationally superior if it fails to account for other components of the same worldview. In our case, while (n) is a simpler hypothesis, it cannot explain other vital aspects of the same phenomena, such as moral objectivity, teleology, consciousness, and fine-tuning. Excluding God from the explanatory system may simplify the structure, but it also removes several fundamental connections, violating coherence criteria. Parsimony can be a useful tool in theory selection in certain situations, but it should not be treated as a substitute for explanatory adequacy. This principle aligns with the second principle of explanatory coherence: "The greater the degree to which the occurrence of the data is probable on the hypothesis, the greater the explanatory power of that hypothesis" (Swinburne, 2004). This directly challenges the APA, affirming that simplicity cannot

compensate for logical vulnerabilities. A hypothesis with minimal assumptions can lose rational superiority if it fails to make the observed data probable. Conversely, a hypothesis with more metaphysical commitments can achieve logical superiority if it successfully accounts for the data. In this sense, (t) enjoys greater explanatory power because, despite multiple assumptions, it increases the probability of the observed data. Simplicity does not provide an overriding criterion for rational preference. According to Thagard, a hypothesis loses rational superiority when it fails to establish strong explanatory connections to relevant evidence, since coherence depends on the overall pattern of explanatory integration, not merely on minimizing assumptions (Thagard, 2000). This highlights the vulnerability of the APA, which reduces explanation to minimal assumptions and conflates ontological economy with explanatory adequacy. True logical plausibility arises not from minimalism but from maximizing the probability of the data.

Excluding the God hypothesis from the explanatory network isolates the atheistic hypothesis from several fundamental dimensions of reality that still require explanation, including moral objectivity, teleological order, consciousness, and the contingency of the universe. While atheists claim that invoking God imposes an unnecessary explanatory burden, the same charge applies to them: excluding God generates its own form of explanatory burden.

Once the unifying principle of divine causality is dismissed under (n), independent hypotheses must be sought to account for moral normativity, purpose, design, and rational order. In this regard, Swinburne (2004) observes: "A simpler hypothesis which leaves many phenomena unexplained is less satisfactory than a more complex one which explains them all."

What APA describes as simplicity is, in fact, the erosion of explanatory wholeness. As a logical principle, parsimony should

preserve explanatory unity and adhere to the core principles of explanatory coherence, integrating multiple domains of experience into a mutually supportive network. However, APA breaches this fundamental principle. In the Thagardian model, E7 states: "The acceptability of a proposition depends on its coherence with other propositions in the system" (Thagard, 1989). APA, by contrast, treats simplicity as the decisive criterion of theory choice, ignoring the broader network of propositions. In doing so, it applies simplicity rigidly and fails to integrate the multiple dimensions of a worldview, leaving significant aspects unaccounted for. Under E7, therefore, APA's conclusion is incoherent. Excluding the God hypothesis may reduce speculative assumptions, but it also diminishes the network's overall acceptability, directly violating established principles of explanatory coherence. This failure stems from treating science and theology as isolated frameworks rather than as complementary explanations of the same reality and mischaracterizing their relationship as contradictory, thus prioritizing ontological minimalism over epistemic rigor.

According to the principles of explanatory coherence, "a hypothesis coheres with evidence that it explains, and incoheres with evidence that it fails to explain" (Thagard, 1989). This shows that mere avoidance of complexity does not constitute explanatory coherence. APA prioritizes simplicity over explanatory success and, in doing so, fails to demonstrate superior explanatory power regarding the intentionality and intelligibility of natural laws. Simplicity alone is insufficient if it does not account for the significant aspects of the evidence. Similarly, under E2, Thagard (1989) notes that "a hypothesis that explains more facts is more coherent than one that explains fewer." Applied to APA, it becomes clear that the argument fails this principle as well. APA often relies on scientific findings—particularly in evolutionary biology, neuroscience, physics, and cosmology—to

explain reality, but it fails to integrate these explanations into a unified account, thereby undermining global coherence.

Moreover, APA's analogy is based on a false assumption: because science explains phenomena with simple mechanisms, the same kind of explanation should be applied universally. Explanatory principles reject this form of analogical reasoning. Thagard (1989) affirms that "hypotheses that are analogous to other hypotheses that explain similar evidence are more coherent." However, the simple mechanical explanations that work in science do not necessarily extend to moral or metaphysical questions. The generalization of a simple mechanism is valid only when the analogy is genuinely relevant, which is not the case here.

Finally, under the principle of data priority, Thagard (1989) maintains: "Observational data have priority over hypotheses that explain them." Evaluated through this principle, APA selectively emphasizes certain challenges to theism—such as evil and divine hiddenness—while ignoring other relevant aspects of reality. This selective treatment violates the principle of data priority and further weakens APA's overall explanatory coherence.

Above all, the APA deploys simplicity as a decisive eliminative criterion. The earlier discussion showed that simplicity is only a defeasible virtue in theory selection. In this regard, the principle reads: "Simplicity has some weight in coherence judgments, but it is easily overridden by explanatory considerations" (Thagard, 1989). This approach by atheists directly conflicts with Thagard's framework, which treats simplicity as a defeasible virtue within explanatory integration, breadth, and conflict resolution.

This analysis suggests that explanatory models should not rely on simplicity or entity count alone; rather, they should operate within a genuinely maximizing approach, evaluating realities in an integrated and deeper explanatory system. In this light, the God

hypothesis is not dismissed simply because of its complexity—complexity is not always a problem. In fact, it can be a virtue for understanding complex realities. According to coherence criteria, "A simpler hypothesis which leaves many phenomena unexplained is less satisfactory than a more complex one which explains them all" (Swinburne, 2004). In this context, (t), though ontologically complex, avoids leaving unexplained brute facts, whereas (n) isolates explanatory domains by excluding the God hypothesis. Additionally, (t) unites moral realism with normative sources, as Lewis (1952) affirms: "If there is a moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver." It also explains the harmony between human cognition and the rational order of the universe: "Naturalism cannot by itself account for the reliability of human cognitive faculties... theism provides a natural and coherent explanation of that reliability" (Plantinga, 2011). Furthermore, (t) integrates cosmology, morality, reason, and meaning into a comprehensive interpretive framework, accommodating all aspects of reality without inconsistencies or rivalries. In this regard, Polkinghorne (1998) emphasizes: "Faith and reason are not adversaries but complementary ways of seeking understanding."

It is important to note that while atheism does not face existential problems such as the problem of evil or divine hiddenness, avoiding God because of these issues does not provide a decisive criterion for theory selection. According to Thagard (2000), a worldview should be judged by how well it explains reality, not by whether it avoids particular problems. The atheistic position avoids these problems by definition, not through explanation; it is akin to saying there is no mystery about why the king is silent because there is no king. This sidesteps the problem rather than addressing it. The problem of evil and divine hiddenness assumes that if God exists, His goals must be understandable to humans. However, theism does not claim that God's purposes must be immediately intelligible (Palmer, 2001).

Similarly, it is not rational to argue that a perfectly loving God would ensure that everyone sincerely seeking Him believes, because this assumes a narrow conception of perfect love and communication. A loving teacher, for example, may allow students to struggle and search rather than providing immediate answers (Drange, 1998). Therefore, excluding the God hypothesis based on evil or divine hiddenness is not rational; these issues reflect deeper disagreements between theism and atheism about moral objectivity, human knowledge, and ultimate reality.

The above analysis shows that while (t) introduces an additional ontological postulate, it greatly expands explanatory interconnection. This explanatory adequacy depends not merely on simplicity but on the integration of distinct truths within a unified conceptual system. Maintaining coherence among propositions justifies the complexity and compensates for the loss of simplicity.

Toward a Cross-Domain Coherence Model (CDC Model)

Taken together, the above critiques suggest the need for a more adequate epistemic model for theory choice—one that does not reduce reality to mere entity count. Such a model should value the coherence, breadth, and integrative power of any hypothesis, offering a more comprehensive evaluative structure. Reality often reveals itself through empirical, rational, moral, and purposive strata. Scientific theories typically operate as proximate mechanisms, while metaphysical hypotheses address ultimate causes. Here, the need for a Cross-Domain Coherence (CDC) Model becomes evident. The above analysis shows that we cannot exclude the God hypothesis from the explanatory network because it provides the metaphysical grounding, purposive structure, and normative framework necessary to account for the ultimate conditions of intelligibility, moral order, and existential meaning.

Likewise, we cannot exclude science, as it offers empirical descriptions, mechanistic insights, and law-governed regularities that illuminate the proximate structures and causal operations of the natural world. Science cannot explain everything; when it explains how a natural event mechanistically occurs, the validity of those conclusions often depends on deeper assumptions that science itself cannot account for (Koons, 2000). Nonetheless, science remains a crucial component of the explanatory network, providing empirical descriptions that illuminate proximate structures and causal operations. Nature itself also operates for a purpose (Aristotle, 1981, 2004).

Minimalist approaches often sideline the metaphysical dimensions of phenomena, impoverishing our understanding of reality. The proposed CDC model accommodates empirical explanations of natural laws, rational accounts of intelligibility, and metaphysical accounts of being into a unified explanatory framework, avoiding reductionist minimalism. As Plantinga (2011) notes, addressing different aspects of reality is possible under a comprehensive approach. In contrast, a purely mechanistic worldview can explain only physical matter and blind laws, without purpose. Such a worldview cannot explain why truth-directed thought arises from purely physical processes: "A purely mechanistic conception of nature cannot explain the appearance of reason" (Nagel, 2012).

The adoption of the proposed CDC model in epistemology would eliminate false dichotomies and open space for an integrative explanatory framework. Any explanatory model must cohere with our established background knowledge about consciousness, rationality, moral normativity, and purposiveness, since reality seems to point beyond the natural world for its source (Hare, 2015). Minimalist models often fail to cohere with these dimensions of

reality, emphasizing the need for a CDC model that connects the core features of human experience.

The proposed CDC model builds existing coherence theories, such as those of Thagard and Swinburne, but moves beyond them by incorporating empirical, rational, moral, existential, and metaphysical dimensions as legitimate phenomena requiring explanation. It is not a repetition of existing coherence models but an extension. It introduces the principle of cross-level explanatory resonance, which evaluates how explanations at the scientific level reinforce or meaningfully interact with explanations at the metaphysical level. Existing models largely confine coherence to interlevel relations, whereas the CDC model assesses interlevel relations, examining how explanations across multiple domains converge toward a unified whole.

The full methodological articulation of the CDC model requires systematic development beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, this conceptual sketch serves as an initial theoretical guide for integrating multiple dimensions of reality into a coherent epistemic framework.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that parsimony cannot serve as a decisive criterion for theory choice in metaphysical inquiries and that the Atheistic Parsimony Argument (APA) is methodologically inadequate. APA fails to satisfy the conditions of explanatory coherence, misclassifying compatible propositions as rivals, thereby suppressing legitimate explanatory relations and privileging ontological minimalism over system-wide integration. In contrast, the study demonstrates the superior explanatory coherence of the God hypothesis, which provides grounding for rationality, moral normativity, intelligibility, and other dimensions of human experience. In response to reductionist models, the study proposes a

Cross-Domain Coherence (CDC) model that extends existing coherence frameworks. This model integrates empirical, rational, moral, and metaphysical dimensions of reality and introduces the concept of cross-level explanatory resonance. Future research should focus on developing the detailed architecture of the CDC model and applying it to metaphysical phenomena, providing a comprehensive criterion for theory choice that accounts for reality in its full complexity.

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The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT and PaperPal to improve the clarity of the language and readability of the article. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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