

ABSTRACT

A Reply to Paul Draper's Argument from Evil

Daniel Lewis

Director: Trent Dougherty, Ph.D.

If God is so great, then why is this world full of evil, pain, and suffering? Throughout the ages, philosophers, theologians, and everyday people from all walks of life have tried to make sense of the apparent injustice, suffering, and arbitrariness of life. The conclusions that people have drawn are as various as the different methods they have employed to formulate the problem of evil. My thesis responds to a particular formulation of this problem: Paul Draper's evidential argument from evil. I begin my outlining the historical development of the problem of evil and then refute Draper. Chapters two through four are each a rebuttal to the three premises of Draper's argument. I aim to show that we have good reason not to accept Draper's premises and hence, not to accept Draper's conclusion, that theism is quite probably false.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

Dr. Trent Dougherty, Department of Philosophy

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

Dr. Andrew Wisely, Director

DATE: _____

A REPLY TO PAUL DRAPER'S ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

By
Daniel Lewis

Waco, Texas

May 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter One: An Introduction to the Problem of Evil	1
Chapter Two: Why Naturalism is not much Simpler than Theism	17
Chapter Three: O Felix Culpa.	36
Chapter Four: The <i>Kalam</i> Cosmological Argument	52
Bibliography	69

PREFACE

The problem of evil is quite possibly the most formidable of all problems that the philosophy of religion deals with. This problem comes in all kinds of shapes and forms, and a thorough examination of each formulation of the problem is far beyond the scope of this thesis. The type of argument from evil that I examine in this paper can be traced back to the skeptical Scottish philosopher from the eighteenth century, David Hume. In Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* the interlocutor, Philo, discusses why belief in the God of theism is not reasonable in light of the evidence of evil. Philo's is an evidential form of the problem of evil that does not deny that it is possible that the God of theism exists; rather, he asserts that it is quite unlikely and were he to exist we would not be able to understand how his existence can be reconciled with the existence of evil. Recently, Paul Draper, a professor of philosophy at Purdue University, has revitalized Hume's argument from evil. And it is his formulation of the argument that I address in this thesis.

The problem of evil is admittedly a dreary, or gloomy topic. So why would I write about it? There are plenty of other interesting questions to investigate in philosophy of religion. Yet, I find myself drawn to the problem of evil because of it impresses itself on each of our lives in a way that cannot be ignored. There is an existential urgency this problem carries with it that cannot be ignored. Is there any hope in the midst of our pain and suffering? Could there still be a God, even if our world is so broken? And if there is, could that God redeem our world and bring peace and healing?

These are the most fundamental questions facing any seriously thoughtful Christian. And a Christian's life is, more or less, an answer to these questions.

I hope that in reading this thesis your mind is stirred to investigate these pressing, important questions.

Sincerely,

Daniel Lewis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my family for supporting me as I wrote throughout the school year and summer break. I want to thank Trent Dougherty for his feedback and ideas as I wrote and for late night snacks, jokes, and Wikipedia races. Additionally, I want to thank all of my philosophy professors I have had at Baylor University: without your support and philosophical prodding I would still be contentedly in chains in the cave. Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to God for giving me the requisite good health and sound mind to write a thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Problem of Evil

Something, somewhere has gone dreadfully wrong. Terrorists fly airplanes into the Twin Towers of New York City; an earthquake in the Indian Ocean causes a massive tsunami that kills over 200,000 people and destroys cities and villages; a deranged man walks into an Amish community and proceeds to massacre innocent schoolchildren; KKK members hang an African American man because of the color of his skin; millions starve to death and languish in North Korea under the tyranny of heartless despots; a puppy wanders into the street where a car runs it over; a little girl watches in horror as her mother slowly succumbs to cancer.

Our world is full of all kinds of evil and this causes us to ask, “why?” Why is it that these things happen? Moreover, why is it that we human beings seem utterly incapable of defeating, or at least mitigating the evil in our world? Such questions have vexed us from the dawn of humanity. Each major religion and worldview attempts to come to grips with evil and provide answers. For Hindus, evil is part of the world of illusion (*maya*) from which we must seek to escape. For Buddhists, evil is inherently part of human existence; thus, nonexistence (*nirvana*) is desirable to escape suffering.

While evil poses a challenge to all major religions, it poses a particularly formidable challenge to Christianity. There is a great deal of tension between the Christian claim that God is completely loving, sovereign, and wise, and yet perplexing amounts and kinds of evil exist. This *prima facie* problem clamors for an explanation. Is

God loving, but impotent? Or is He almighty, but cold and indifferent to the suffering of His creatures?

This problem is so powerful that it has caused many philosophers to maintain that unless Christians can generate a viable solution, Christian faith is unwarranted and Christians have no right to hold their faith or proselytize others (Peterson, 18). T. W. Settle claims that wrestling with the problem of evil is a “prolegomenon to intellectually honest theology” (Peterson, 19). According to Thor Hall the ability or inability to respond cogently to the problem of evil is the litmus test of the “reasonableness of theology.” Hall adds that Christian theologians must “be capable of handling honestly the actualities of human existence (realities which we all know) while at the same time providing a framework for explicating responsibly the essential affirmations of the faith (affirmations which are given within the historical tradition)” (Peterson, 20).

The problem of evil certainly puts pressure on Christians, but more broadly it puts pressure on theism. Let theism be the belief that

(T): There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect being called God. William Rowe calls the position (T) describes “restricted theism” (Peterson, 21). While theism—restricted or unrestricted—is not itself a religion, all three of the major monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) affirm theism. Hence, if the problem of evil presents a challenge to theism, then it presents a challenge to all three of these major world religions.

The existence or non-existence of God has always been of great interest to philosophers of religion. Natural theologians have given impressive arguments for the existence of God: cosmological arguments, ontological arguments, fine-tuning

arguments, and teleological arguments. Likewise, many arguments have been advanced to show that God does not exist, and the problem of evil is the most prominent of such arguments. Hans Kung calls the problem of evil “the rock of atheism” because so many people believe it to be a knock-down argument for atheism (Peterson, 24).

Types of evil

Before going any further in our overview of the problem of evil, it would be helpful for us to define clearly what exactly evil is. There are basically two types of evil: moral and natural. Moral evil is the result of a person or persons’ actions. Homicide, sexual abuse, and slavery are all moral evils. Natural evil (or non-moral evil) is evil that is not—or at least appears not to be—caused by any morally responsible agents. Examples of such evil include: earthquakes, tsunamis, and diseases. Generally it is moral evil that perturbs most thoughtful people, yet that does not mean that natural evil should not also receive attention. Natural evil and moral evil both seem to be out of place in a world that is created and governed by an all-powerful, all-loving God. Although the line between moral and non-moral evil can be blurry, in general it is a helpful way to classify evil. Not only does it serve to clarify our thinking regarding instances of evil, but it also helps us allocate specific arguments from evil into their corresponding category for further investigation.

The logical problem of evil

The logical problem of evil—sometimes referred to as the deductive argument from evil or the a priori problem of evil—is based on the seeming inconsistency of

certain claims about God and evil. One of the most famous statements made regarding the logical problem of evil comes from J. L. Mackie who claims that “it is positively irrational” to claim that God exists and is perfectly good and omnipotent yet evil exists (Evans, 2). In order to demonstrate more clearly how this claim “is positively irrational,” Mackie gives a more precise formulation of the problem that defines what goodness, omnipotence, and evil are:

“good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and . . . there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists and that evil exists are incompatible.” (Evans, 3).

Mackie’s claim is that the proposition, “God exists,” when goodness, omnipotence, and evil are understood as Mackie defines them, is logically contradictory with the (obviously true) proposition, “evil exists.”

In response, a theist may wish to challenge Mackie’s premise, that a good being always eliminates evil as far as it can. What reasons do we have to accept such a premise? It seems that there are many situations where a good being does not eliminate a particular evil he or she has the power to eliminate because eliminating that evil would preclude a particular good that outweighs the evil. For example, a woman walking down Central Avenue might notice that a pair of small children has wandered into the street and that a bus is headed right for them. In a great act of courage, the woman rushes into the street and pushes the children out of the way and the bus hits her instead. Surely this woman’s death is an evil: it does not seem right that a kind and courageous woman like herself should die. So, this woman knowingly brings about an evil—her death—even though she herself is a woman of noble character. The woman could choose to keep walking and ignore the plight of the small children, thus preserving her own life and

preventing the evil of her own death, but to do so would result in the even greater evil of these two small children dying. So, one could argue that the good this woman's action brings about outweighs the evil it causes.

This counterexample serves to show that it is not apparently true that a good being always eliminates evil as far as it can. There are some instances where a certain evil was necessary to prevent an even greater evil or the loss of an even greater good. In fact, nearly every contemporary theodicy employs this greater-good principle. The reason God permits certain evils to happen, claim such theodicies, is that were He to prevent them He would thereby allow greater evils to occur or prevent even greater goods. Thus, God is justified in allowing certain evils to occur.

But we must exercise caution in our use of the greater-good response when dealing with the problem of evil. A critic could object that, unlike our heroic child-saving woman, God is omnipotent and so He is able to eliminate all evil without the loss of a greater good or increase of evil. After all, can't God do anything He pleases? We frail human beings find ourselves in circumstances where we must weigh potential good and evil outcomes of our actions, but why should this apply to God? It seems that God could never be in a position like the heroic woman's because He could always bring about a good result directly. For example, He could cause the brakes on the bus to engage before the driver even sees that there is someone in the road, He could miraculously levitate the children back onto the sidewalk, or He could miraculously cause the woman to be unharmed by the bus.

Typically, the theist response to this has been to clarify what exactly it is we mean when we claim that God is omnipotent. Perhaps it is misleading to say that God can do

absolutely *anything*. After all, He cannot make a square circle or cause a green, colorless dream to sleep furiously. This is because these “contradictory states of affairs are not genuine possibilities” (Evans, 161). What we should say, then, is that God’s omnipotence means that He can do anything that is logically possible. God is not any less powerful or mighty because He cannot make a square circle because such a thing is nonsense.

Whether or not this point is relevant to the problem of evil hinges on whether or not there are certain evils that are *logically necessary* for certain goods to be achieved, a claim that at least seems plausible. The display and exercise of human virtue certainly seems to be a great good. But there are many virtues that require some sort of evil. For instance, can the virtue of mercy be exercised if there is no suffering or pain? Or can there be any genuine courage without the real threat of harm or danger? It may be the case that much evil in the world—even natural evil—is in some way necessary for human beings to exercise virtue. It is further possible that human virtue is so precious and is of such great worth that it outweighs the evils necessary to produce it. If this is so, then God could be justified in allowing evils that are logically necessary to create an environment where virtue can flourish. This is the sort of reasoning many theists, such as John Hick and St. Irenaeus, employ in their *soul-making* theodicies. A soul-making theodicy claims that God’s purpose in creating free, sentient, rational creatures is that they might grow and develop until they are one day capable of joyful, worshipful communion with their Creator.

Soul-making theodicies face some serious difficulties. One such difficulty is that not all natural evils seem to contribute to the development of human virtue. The slow

and painful death of an animal by starvation in the desert does not seem to contribute to human virtue in any way. Another difficulty facing soul-making theodicies is that while evil may lead to human virtues—courage, compassion, etc.—evil may also lead to human vice—avarice, cowardice, and so on.

In light of this last difficulty, many theists advocate a *free-will* theodicy. On this view, moral evil is the result of human beings willfully rebelling against God and misusing their freedom. But then this raises the question of why God would even create human beings with free will in the first place? Theists might reply by claiming that if human beings had no freedom but were determined by God to do only good, then their good actions and virtue are not *really* good or virtuous. When God created human beings, He created them that they might freely love and serve Him and one another. The love and service of “robots” who are “programmed” to love and serve seems meaningless and trivial.

But critics, such as Mackie, are not satisfied with this answer. Couldn't God have created human beings who always freely choose to do good? While this objection may initially seem strange, it deserves a second look. Mackie objects:

“I should ask this: if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good” (Evans, 7).

Basically, Mackie argues that if it is logically possible for God to create human beings such that they choose the good at least once, then it is logically possible for God to create

human beings such that they choose the good on every occasion. But God did not do this, and so He must not exist, or if He does He must not be wholly good and omnipotent.

In his famous free-will defense Alvin Plantinga argues that Mackie's argument is unsound. Plantinga's strategy is to concede Mackie's assumption that there is a logically possible world where free beings exist, but never do evil. However, Plantinga claims, we do not have any reason to think that such a world is within God's power to create. This is because God's ability to create a particular world depends at least partly on the choices made by the free creatures in that particular world. To elucidate how this is possible, Plantinga asks us to suppose there is some person faced with a moral decision to do good or evil. Suppose this person (Curley) is faced with a genuinely free choice. Then what Curley decides to do is solely up to Curley and not up to God or anyone else. In this hypothetical world Plantinga describes Curley is a mayor who is faced with the decision whether or not to accept a bribe. Curley, sadly, has gone the way of many politicians before him and accepted a \$35,000 bribe. But what if Curley had been offered a smaller bribe of, say, \$20,000? Would Curley have accepted the bribe then? It seems obviously true that one, but not both, of the following propositions is true:

- (1) If Curley had been offered \$20,000, he would have accepted the bribe.
- (2) If Curley had been offered \$20,000, he would have rejected the bribe.

Both propositions seem logically possible. It may very well be the case that Curley would have accepted the bribe and, conversely, it seems just as logically feasible that Curley would have rejected the bribe. So, there is a possible world W where Curley accepts the bribe and a possible world W^* where Curley rejects the bribe. Let us suppose that (1) is true and that Curley would have accepted the \$20,000 bribe. If this is true, then there is a logically possible world that God cannot actualize: the possible world

where (2) is true and Curley rejects the bribe of \$20,000—world W*. Likewise, if (2) is the true proposition and Curley would indeed have rejected the bribe, then God is unable to actualize the logically possible world W where Curley accepts the \$20,000 bribe.

Many philosophers have found Plantinga's free-will defense to be rather compelling. Not a few, however, have challenged Plantinga's defense. These philosophers argue that the "middle knowledge" God possesses regarding what decisions free creatures would make in various situations could have been used to actualize free creatures who never choose to do evil. But assuming that God does in fact have such middle knowledge (which is a great subject of debate in philosophy of religion) how could we know that there are any possible free creatures God could create who would never misuse their free will? It appears to be at least possible that any free being God could create would misuse his or her freedom at some time (Plantinga dubs this condition "transworld depravity").

At any rate, most philosophers agree that Plantinga's free-will defense shows that God and evil are not logically incompatible. Logically, it may have been the case that when God was deciding what world to actualize that all the free creatures He could have created have "transworld depravity". If so, then any world with free creatures would be a world with evil. If we assume that a world with free creatures and evil is better than no world at all, then God was perfectly justified to create our world even though He knew that human beings would lapse into sin and fall.

Notice that Plantinga does not claim that this *is in fact* the scenario that God faced, only that it is logically *possible* that God was faced with this scenario. Plantinga's purpose in giving his free-will defense is to refute Mackie, who claims that God's

existence and evil are logically incompatible. Thus, all Plantinga must do to have a successful defense is to show that it could logically be the case that there is no possible way God could have created the world where evil never occurs. If Plantinga were to give a *theodicy* instead of a *defense*, then he would need to argue that this was in fact the scenario God was faced with when choosing which world to actualize.

A free-will theodicy would face a few difficulties. If a theist decided to take this route, she would have to explain natural evil, which seems difficult considering the fact that free will is generally only thought to explain moral evil. However, a theist could argue that natural evil is the result of non-human moral agents. Many Christians believe that Satan and his cohorts are the force behind destructive earthquakes, tsunamis, and so on. In fact, the book of Job in the Bible might support such a claim. According to Scripture, Satan must come before God and ask His permission to strike Job (Job 1:6-11). After receiving God's consent, Satan causes a great wind to strike Job's home, thereby crushing Job's family and killing them (Job 1:19). Alternatively, another route a free will theodicy could take in explaining natural evil would be to claim that natural evil is a means God uses to judge a fallen, depraved human race.

The evidential form

In more recent decades philosophical discussion regarding the problem of evil has shifted away from the logical form to the evidential form. In other words, atheist philosophers have shifted from arguing that God and evil are logically incompatible to arguing that in light of particular instances of actual evil in our world, God probably does not exist. The main reason for the failure of the logical form of the argument from evil is

that in order to be successful it requires atheists to prove that God and evil are incompatible. Conversely, the evidential form of the argument from evil makes a much less ambitious claim: in light of our evidence regarding evil God (as theists describe Him) *probably* does not exist.

While the evidential form of the argument from evil is certainly makes a much weaker claim than the logical form does, it is nevertheless a presents a formidable challenge to skeptics regarding theistic religion and to religious believers alike. The former find the evidential problem of evil to be a roadblock to faith. Perhaps these people used to believe in God or want to believe in God, but find that such belief seems like irrational wish fulfillment in a world full of seemingly gratuitous evil. The latter believe in God, but may find their faith shaken by the horrors of the world or they may find themselves doubting not that God exists, but doubting that He is good and worthy of love and devotion. Hence, the evidential form is worthy of consideration by skeptics and believers alike.

Unlike the logical form, the evidential form of the argument from evil purports to show that, based on the kinds and quantity of evil we actually find in our world, the God of theism probably does not exist. The evidential form concedes that God may allow certain evils for the sake of certain greater goods or in order to prevent certain even greater evils. But the evidential argument aims to show that there are certain evils that are not logically necessary to achieve some greater good or to prevent some even worse evil. In other words, there are some evils that are gratuitous, or that serve no greater-good. William Rowe—whose formulation of the evidential argument has become very well known since he published it in 1979—gives an example of what such an evil might

be. He asks us to imagine the plight of some helpless fawn that is caught in a forest fire. This poor fawn sustains serious burns, and lies there suffering for days before finally dying. This particular evil does not seem to serve any purpose: the fawn is not developing virtue while it lies there in pain for several days. Nor does it appear that God had to cause this fawn to suffer in order to prevent some even greater evil (such as even more fawns suffering). Thus, it appears that this helpless fawn suffered gratuitously. Obviously, Rowe's example is fictitious, but it seems very reasonable to believe that throughout the history of animal life on earth countless animals have suffered a similar fate.

What Rowe and other atheists who employ the evidential form are attempting to do is give an argument based on appearances. While one may be tempted to think that an argument based on *mere appearance* is flimsy at best, consider: a great deal of our beliefs—even our very important beliefs—are based on how things appear to be. For instance, it appears to me that I am typing on a laptop in my local public library. It appears that I remember eating oatmeal for breakfast. It appears that my sister is annoyed that I am “hogging” the computer to write this thesis. Likewise, it appears that there is no reason that justifies God in allowing instances of suffering like that of Rowe's fawn's.

We could formulate the evidential argument as follows:

1. If God exists, then He would not allow any pointless evil.
2. Probably, there is some pointless evil in the world.
3. So, probably God does not exist.

The term “probably” is crucial here. The proponent of the evidential form is not claiming that she is able to prove there are pointless evils in the world. She admits that it is possible that God has some inscrutable reason for allowing apparently pointless evil that

we do not know of; however, she believes that it is unlikely He does because it appears so clearly that there are indeed genuinely pointless evils. Given that there appear to be gratuitous evils, the critic argues, it is irrational to believe in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God.

How should the believer respond to such an argument? There are at least two strategies the believer can employ. The first strategy is known as the cognitive limitation defense (Evans, 170) and “skeptical theists” employ it. A skeptical theist is someone who believes in God and is thus a theist, but is skeptical that we can understand God’s reasons for governing the world as He does or for creating the sort of world He has created. The basis for the evidential form of the problem of evil is that it *appears* there is no God-justifying reason for some evil in our world. The cognitive limitation defense seeks to challenge this claim. Stephen Wykstra argues that the critic’s claim violates an epistemic principle known as the *Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access*, or CORNEA (Evans 14). Basically, what CORNEA aims to show is that one is justified in making a claim like “it appears there are no Xs” only if one is justified in believing that, if there were any Xs, one would be in a position to perceive them (Evans, 170).

To clarify this concept let us consider an illustration. Let us suppose I walk into my dorm room, turn on the light, glance around for a moment and conclude that there appear to be no brown bears in my room. This is reasonable because were there any brown bears in my room then I would easily detect them. However, let us suppose I walk into my dorm room and after glancing around very briefly I conclude that there appear to be no fleas. I am not rationally justified in making this claim because fleas are small and I would not be able to detect them with only a casual glance into my dorm room.

Similarly, this applies to the critic's claim that it appears there are no God-justifying reasons for at least some of the instances of evil in our world. But isn't this analogous to concluding by one cursory look into my dorm room that there are no fleas? After all, God is omniscient and thus able to perceive some reason for permitting evil that is beyond my capacity to know and understand (that is, God's reasons are beyond my ken as a mere human being). If it is true that the God of theism exists, then it seems entirely reasonable to expect Him to have a whole wealth of knowledge regarding good and evil of which we are ignorant. Therefore, we are not justified in making the claim that there appear to be pointless evils in the world because if there are in fact any, we would not be able to detect them (to return to our earlier Biblical example, it seems that one could make the case that Job is the original skeptical theist).

The second strategy a believer can utilize in response to the evidential problem of evil is what is known as a G. E. Moore shift, after the early twentieth century philosopher who made it famous. Compared to the first strategy, the G. E. Moore shift is not very technical. In a nutshell, what the G. E. Moore shift strategy does is flip the evidential argument on its head. The theist claims that her reasons for believing in God are very strong, so strong that apparently pointless, gratuitous evil cannot be a defeater for her faith. Consider the following formulation of such an argument:

1. If God exists, He does not allow any pointless evil.
2. Probably, God exists.
3. So, probably, there is no pointless evil.

Now we are confronted with two valid arguments. Which is to be preferred? That will depend very greatly on what evidence one has, or what one's total evidence situation is. Does one have more reason to believe that God exists, or that pointless evil exists?

Most people would agree it seems that evil is “evidence” against the existence of God: it presents a prima facie challenge to theism (although Wykstra’s CORNEA argument could be employed to challenge this claim). Nevertheless, let us grant this claim, that evil is prima facie evidence against the existence of God. The question still remains: is the evidence of evil sufficient to count decisively against God’s existence? If one has very strong reason to believe in God and His goodness, then one will find that the problem of evil is a difficulty confronting his faith, but it is not a defeater. Furthermore, one could even justifiably claim to *know* that God exists. If one has had a religious experience or revelation of some sort, that particular individual’s epistemic situation could be such that he knows God exists the same way he knows that he sees a tree or he went to high school or his mother-in-law is happy. If this is one’s epistemic situation, then one has powerful evidence to support the claim that God exists, even if one has no idea why God might allow evil.

Conclusion

The problem of evil is one of the most pervasive problems facing human beings and it has received a great deal of philosophical attention throughout the ages. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I have restricted this introductory chapter to an examination only of contemporary philosophical treatment of the problem of evil. While evil poses a certain difficulty for adherents of most religions, the problem of evil poses a particular difficulty for theists: if there is such a person as God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, then why is there so much pain, evil, and suffering in our world? We began with an examination of the two basic types of evil—moral and

natural. Next, we considered the two main formulations of the argument from evil: the logical and evidential forms. The logical form is a deductive argument and its greatest advocate in the last century was J. L. Mackie. Theist responses to the logical problem of evil have included: a) the greater good argument, b) a clarification of what omnipotence actually entails, and c) soul-making theodicies. But the most potent response has been Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense, which changed the course of philosophical debate regarding evil. Shortly after Plantinga's defense William Rowe steered the conversation towards the evidential form of the argument from evil. This argument has elicited various theistic responses, the two most common being the cognitive limitation defense and the G. E. Moore shift.

CHAPTER TWO

Why Naturalism is not much Simpler than Theism

Now that we have a grasp of the broader, philosophical context in which arguments from evil are made, let us examine the particular argument Paul Draper makes in his debate with Trent Dougherty in the recently published *Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*. Draper makes an evidential argument from evil that draws heavily from eighteenth century Scottish philosopher David Hume. According to Draper, Humean arguments from evil pose a much more serious threat to theists because they: “employ an evidence statement about both good and evil instead of . . . evil alone,” “appeal directly to known facts about evil . . . instead of to facts about our inability to explain why a God might allow such facts to obtain,” “do not depend . . . on noseum inferences,” compare “theism to at least one alternative hypothesis,” and are abductive (Draper, 71-72).

Formally, Paul Draper’s Humean argument from evil goes as follows:

1. Naturalism is much simpler than theism.
2. Naturalism has much more predictive power than theism does with respect to “the data of good and evil”—that is, with respect to what we *know* about the distribution and relative quantities of (physical) pain and pleasure, flourishing and floundering, virtue and vice, and triumph and tragedy.
3. Any epistemic advantages that theism has over naturalism (that is, any factors that raise the ratio of the probability of theism to the probability of naturalism) do not, even when combined, suffice to offset the epistemic advantages that naturalism

has over theism if premises 1 and 2 are true.

4. So, theism is probably false.

Each remaining chapter of this thesis, including this one, will address and reply to a premise of Draper's argument (this chapter responds to Draper's first premise, the next chapter replies to his second premise, and the final chapter responds to his final premise). If I can show that we have good reason to reject each premise then I will have shown that there is good reason to reject Draper's conclusion, that "theism is probably false" (Draper, 73).

As previously mentioned, this chapter will deal with the first premise of Draper's argument: "Naturalism is much simpler than theism" (Draper, 72). In this chapter I will argue that it is not the case that naturalism is much simpler than theism. I will begin this argument by briefly discussing Draper's argument in support of his claim as well as analyzing how Draper defines theoretical simplicity. Having done this, I will argue that what Draper dubs the three extra claims of theism—that there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent—have formidable explanatory power and thus do not add superfluous commitments or complexity to theism. Next, I will offer a different way to understand simplicity in forming our beliefs about God: simplicity not as ontological parsimony, but as "naturalness". Lastly, I will challenge Draper's alethical assumption that theism is true or false contingently rather than necessarily.

Before sketching Draper's argument in support of his first premise, that naturalism is much simpler than theism, a brief overview of the key terms in his argument is in order. Naturalism and theism are two key terms in Draper's argument. Draper understands the term naturalism to refer "to a particular metaphysical theory, contrasting

it with another metaphysical theory [he] calls ‘supernaturalism’” (Draper, 73).

According to Draper, concrete reality at least appears to subsist of a mental world of imagination, sensation, experience, feeling, etc. and a physical world of kangaroos, photosynthesis, synapses, and solar systems.

Naturalism is the claim that “either the mental world doesn’t exist or it does exist but is asymmetrically dependent on the existence of the physical world” (Draper, 73). In other words, if there were no physical world, then there would be no mental world. However, naturalism claims that, even if there were no mental world there would still be a physical world. Supernaturalism makes the opposite claim that either the physical world doesn’t exist or it does exist but is asymmetrically dependent on the existence of the mental world. If there were no physical world, there could still be a mental world, but if there were no mental world there would also be no physical world.

Along with naturalism and supernaturalism, theism is a key term in Draper’s argument. Draper takes theism to be “a form of supernaturalism and in particular a form of personal supernaturalism” (Draper, 74). Theism identifies a personal God who is responsible for the existence of the physical world; additionally, theism claims that this personal God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent.

Draper’s argument in support of premise one

Draper claims that naturalism is much simpler than theism (and thus much more probable). Let N represent naturalism, and let T represent theism, and let “>>” represent “much greater than.” Draper’s claim can then be expressed:

$$P(N) \gg P(T).$$

Simplicity, as Draper understands it, is an epistemic theoretical virtue. In other words, when we are trying to determine which of two contingent theories is more likely to be true, we should choose the simpler one. There is a great deal of debate among analytic philosophers about what exactly simplicity is. The two most generally used and accepted conceptions of simplicity in contemporary analytic philosophy are: 1) ontological parsimony and 2) elegance. Ontological parsimony measures the number of kinds of entities a particular theory postulates; elegance measures the number and conciseness of a particular theory's basic principles (Baker). Draper claims that if simplicity is understood as ontological parsimony or as elegance then naturalism and supernaturalism are equally simple: both are committed to the (at least apparent) existence of a mental and physical world, and both metaphysical systems state this in equally concise ways.

But, according to Draper, simplicity could also have another facet: coherence. By coherence, Draper means how well the parts of a theory fit together (Draper, 74). Many philosophers would contend that naturalism and supernaturalism are not equally coherent: the parts of one theory obviously fit together better than the other's. However, many other philosophers—including Draper—would follow David Hume and deny that “we can, simply by examining the non-causal properties of an entity, know unaided by any experience what that entity's effect or causes are likely to be” (Draper, 75). If this is true, then naturalism and supernaturalism are equally coherent and thus equally simple. Let N represent naturalism and SN represent supernaturalism. Draper's assumption can be formulated:

$$P(N) = P(SN).$$

Draper asks that, for argument's sake, we assume not only that naturalism and supernaturalism are equally simple, but also that they are simple in every alethically significant sense (Draper, 75). This means Draper asks us to assume that naturalism and supernaturalism are both contingent (later in this chapter I will explain why this assumption should be rejected). This assumption can be formulated

$$1 > P(N) > 0$$

and

$$1 > P(SN) > 0.$$

If we grant Draper's assumption, he believes it will be extremely clear that naturalism is much simpler than theism (and thus more probable). This is because theism is a specific kind of supernaturalism: theism posits everything that supernaturalism does, except that it also includes the three claims that a personal God exists who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. Since theism makes at least three more claims than supernaturalism does, it is less simple. More precisely, this means

$$P(SN) > P(T)$$

because supernaturalism necessarily obtains if theism does, but theism does not necessarily obtain if supernaturalism does. And because supernaturalism and naturalism are equally simple, if theism is more complex than one of them (which Draper claims it is) then it is more complex than the other. That is, if

$$P(SN) = P(N)$$

and

$$P(SN) > P(T)$$

then

$$P(N) > P(T).$$

Before concluding his argument for his first premise, Draper makes one more point. A classical theist might object that God exists necessarily and so theism says nothing contingent about the world. That is, the classical theist might contend that

$$P(T) = 0$$

or

$$P(T) = 1$$

Draper does not think that this is helpful, but actually makes theism even more complex. While theism makes at least three additional claims above and beyond what supernaturalism claims, classical theism makes at least four: this all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful, personal God also exists *necessarily*. Draper contends that adding a fourth claim to theism does not improve theism's chances of being true: this only increases the theory's complexity and thus gives us even more reason to reject theism and embrace naturalism or non-theistic supernaturalism.

The three additional claims of theism

Now that I have briefly sketched Draper's argument in support of his first premise—that naturalism is much simpler than theism—and defined Draper's key terms, I will begin my reply. This first portion of my reply aims to show that the three additional claims of theism (God is omnipotent, God is omniscient, and God is omnibenevolent) do not make theism much more complex than supernaturalism: on the contrary, they make theism a very elegant theory; so elegant that theism and supernaturalism are basically equally likely. That is

$$P(T) \approx P(SN).$$

And since Draper claims that supernaturalism and naturalism are equally simple, if I succeed in showing that theism is approximately as likely as supernaturalism then I will also have succeeded in showing that theism is approximately as likely as naturalism; thus, I will have shown that we have good reason to doubt that naturalism is much simpler than theism.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, there are many different ways of understanding what exactly simplicity is. Also, recall that one very common definition of simplicity in analytic philosophy is elegance. Moreover, as Alan Baker notes: “Postulating extra entities may allow a theory to be formulated more simply, while reducing the ontology of a theory may only be possible at the price of making it syntactically more complex” (Baker). To better illustrate this trade-off between elegance (or syntactic simplicity) and ontological parsimony, consider this example. Before the discovery of Neptune, the orbits of the other known planets perplexed astronomers. It seemed to them that there ought to be another celestial body whose gravitational pull affected the orbits of other, already-discovered planets. Thus, two competing hypotheses confronted these astronomers: either there was another planet or the laws of celestial mechanics were wrong and needed to be changed. While adding the claim, “there is such a planet as Neptune,” would add ontological complexity, it would be a more elegant theory because the newly postulated entity would help explain the astronomers’ set of data (the perturbations of other known planets).

I contend that, just as the claim, “there is such a planet as Neptune,” is simpler and thus more likely to be true, the three claims of theism, although they posit more than

supernaturalism, have significant explanatory force. Let us begin our investigation of the three claims of theism by examining the claim that God is omnipotent.

The claim that there is an omnipotent God helps explain the very existence of the natural world. When I ask myself, “where did the universe (or any other universes that may exist) come from?” I am confronted with two competing hypotheses:

(1) There is nothing beyond the natural world (or if there is, it is asymmetrically dependent on the natural world for its existence), but the natural world always has existed with no cause outside of itself.

(2) There is something beyond the natural world that caused/causes it.

Of these two options, naturalism seems far less probable: that the physical world is self-caused or popped into existence from nothing for no reason, that matter is eternal, and that the natural world alone can give birth to moral laws, conscious thought, etc. seems absurd.

So, I am left with the theory of supernaturalism. I then ask myself: “what sort of thing/person would be able to create an entire universe?” I read the latest literature in astrophysics on the Big Bang and discover how incredibly dense the universe first was, and how rapidly it expanded and decide that this entity that caused the universe must be extraordinarily powerful. In fact, to bring about the natural world (something) from an incredibly small point (nothing) seems to require infinite power. Furthermore, the universe seems so fine-tuned for life, particularly conscious life, that I am inclined to think this entity that caused the physical world is a person with purposes, intentions, and goals. Thus, I am led to postulate that there is a personal God who is omnipotent and created the universe.

Does the claim, “there is an omnipotent God who created the universe,” make theism more or less elegant—more or less *simple*—than supernaturalism? The claim, “there is a personal, omnipotent God,” is not arbitrary; rather, it serves *to explain* the data of the natural world. Therefore, although this particular claim of theism is more specific than any claim supernaturalism postulates and would thereby seem epistemically “riskier”, its explanatory force is such that it makes theism significantly more elegant than any other form of supernaturalism and thereby significantly simpler than any other form of supernaturalism. Let OSN represent, “other forms of supernaturalism”. This means that

$$P(T) \gg P(OSN).$$

We have already established that it makes sense to posit an omnipotent God who is responsible for creating the universe. It makes sense to think that this personal God must not only be infinitely powerful to create our world with all of its beauty and order: this God must also be infinitely wise or intelligent. That is, He must be omniscient. Moreover, the evidence of a natural world with moral laws as well as conscious human beings who are capable of obeying these moral laws and doing good inclines me to believe that this God, in addition to being omnipotent and omniscient, must also be infinitely good, or omnibenevolent.

So it seems that the three additional claims of theism are not arbitrary or lacking in explanatory power. Indeed, these three claims actually serve wonderfully to explain not only the sheer existence of the natural world, but also why the natural world exists in the way it does in fact exist. Hence, just as postulating the existence of Neptune is more elegant than postulating that the laws of celestial motion are flawed, postulating the three

claims of theism is significantly more elegant (and thus syntactically simpler) than postulating any other kind of supernaturalism. This means that

$$P(\text{SN}) \approx P(\text{T}).$$

And if

$$P(\text{SN}) = P(\text{N})$$

then it follows that

$$P(\text{N}) \approx P(\text{T}).$$

This gives us good reason to doubt that

$$P(\text{N}) \gg P(\text{T}).$$

Is it true that naturalism is more ontologically parsimonious than theism?

One might concede that, if simplicity is understood as elegance then it is not the case that naturalism is much simpler than theism; but, one might say, it still seems that naturalism is far more ontologically parsimonious than theism. After all, the only thing naturalism is really ontologically committed to is the natural world; theism, however, is ontologically committed to both the natural world and a God with a particular set of attributes who made the natural world. Since naturalism only posits one fundamental kind of thing, it is obviously simpler than theism, which posits the God of theism in addition to the same thing.

A very common response from theists is to concede this point, but to assert that theism's explanatory power is far greater than naturalism's, thereby making theism the more probable theory. I think this is a very promising response—indeed, the entire previous section was a response of this type. But if we understand ontological parsimony

to mean how complex or simple the explanatorily *fundamental* posits of a theory are instead of how many things or kinds of things a theory entails, then it is by no means clear that naturalism is simpler than theism.

To further elucidate this point, I will borrow an illustration from Alexander Pruss. Imagine that some distant, alien race is trying to create a Zeta particle. This particle cannot be found in nature and only artificial processes can create a Zeta particle. The alien race has created a Zeta particle-producing machine that has a 0.5 probability of successfully creating a Zeta particle.

Let (S) represent the theory that the aliens will successfully produce a Zeta particle and let (F) represent the theory that the aliens will fail to produce a Zeta particle. Theory (S) entails the creation of a new kind of thing, thus making it more ontologically complex. Moreover, if simplicity is conceived as the number of phenomena a theory explains then (S) is more complex. But it seems obviously wrong to say that (S) is less simple than (F). Indeed, each theory clearly has a 0.5 chance of being true.

Now let us apply this principle to our two competing theories: naturalism and theism. On the one hand, naturalism seems much simpler: naturalism only posits the natural world whereas theism posits the natural world and the God of theism. Yet, when we take simplicity to mean how many explanatorily fundamental posits a theory entails, then naturalism does not have the advantage over theism. On this view of ontological simplicity, naturalism's explanatorily fundamental posits are some brute physical facts, such as the Big Bang. Theism's fundamental explanatory posit is God, a perfect being who, out of the goodness of His heart, causes the physical world to exist. The fundamental explanatory posit of theism certainly seems simpler. Naturalism's

explanatorily fundamental posits must include at least sixteen types of quantum particles, as well as natural laws and parameters for those laws. Theism's most basic entity is simply one perfect being. That is, the basic brute fact of theism is a being with three properties—knowledge, power, and goodness—held in the simplest way possible: without limitation. As Trent Dougherty observes: “The explanation of every contingent truth (other than his own existence, if that is taken to be contingent) is a function of the goodness of the corresponding state of affairs” (Dougherty, 85). Conversely, naturalism has many brute facts. It is difficult to say exactly how the brute facts of naturalism should be tallied up, but it is inescapably clear that naturalism “postulates more than one brute existent with only [three] properties held in the simplest way” (Dougherty, 85). Thus, it is not the case that naturalism is simpler than theism when simplicity is understood as the number of explanatorily fundamental posits in a theory.

Simplicity or naturalness?

It is widely agreed that the simpler of two competing hypotheses has a higher probability of being true. But what exactly does this mean? In *Rhetoric* Aristotle maintains that probability is Janus-faced: on the one hand, “a probability is that which happens for the most part,” and on the other “a probability is a proposition that is approvable, worthy of belief” (Aristotle, 1991). So, according to Aristotle, there is objective probability—logical, statistical, and so on—and there is epistemic probability—a proposition's being reasonable to believe in a certain context. Draper not only believes that simplicity has to do with epistemic probability, but he also holds that simplicity is crucial for objective probability (Draper, *infidels*). According to Draper, the simple is a

sign not only of what is rational to believe but also of the truth itself, how reality actually is. This is because “our reliance on inductive reasoning is clearly justified, and this is possible only if objective uniformity [simplicity] either over time or at a single time, is *intrinsically* more probable than change or variety” (Draper, *infidels*).

But is simplicity what is actually at issue for epistemic probability? Or could “naturalness” be what truly counts here? That is, could it be that what actually counts when trying to decide between two competing hypotheses is determining what a properly functioning human being would believe in the relevant circumstance? (Plantinga, 2012). Draper believes uniformity is crucial in determining epistemic probability. For the sake of argument, let us assume that some thing or situation *X* is uniform just in case it does not have some property *P* at time *t* but fails to have *P* at some later time. But, as Alvin Plantinga notes, “things always change in *some* respects—e.g., with respect to how long they have been in existence” (Plantinga, *infidels*). So which respects are relevant?

To help elucidate our answer, consider the *grue* and *bleen* problem. An object is *grue* just in case it is green before time *t* and blue after time *t*. An object is *bleen* just in case it is blue before *t* and green after *t*. Returning to our question, what respects are relevant when assessing uniformity—and thus epistemic probability? According to Draper, *grueness* is not a relevant respect. When *X* changes from green to blue an objective change is involved, but when *X* changes from *grue* to *bleen* there is actually objective uniformity. But we would not naturally conceive of *X*'s changing from *grue* to *bleen* as uniformity. What is so different about the change from blue to green and *grue* to *bleen*? The difference is that the former predicates are epistemically *natural* whereas the latter predicates are epistemically *unnatural*. As human beings, we naturally project blue

and green (or *azul* and *verde*, or 蓝色 and 绿色), but not grue and bleen. This projection is a feature of *our* cognitive faculties as human beings, but this projection is not cognitively inevitable (Plantinga, infidels). Some other rational creatures might naturally project grue and bleen instead of green and blue. If this were true, then what is epistemically probable for such creatures would not be what is epistemically probable for us. But then epistemic probability does not necessarily have to do with simplicity as uniformity so much as simplicity as what is epistemically natural.

For argument's sake, let us grant that epistemic probability does depend partly on naturalness. Studies by Justin Barrett, Pascal Boyer, and Deborah Kelemen all suggest that belief in God—or at least some supernatural beings—is natural for human beings.¹ Moreover, these findings reinforce what we have already known for a very long time: that almost all human beings on the planet believe in some sort of deity. The ubiquity of religious/spiritual beliefs shows that naturalism is not at all natural. And if simplicity is actually an issue of naturalness and not uniformity, then such data shows that it is not the case that naturalism is much more epistemically probable than theism (or at least supernaturalism).

As previously mentioned, Draper believes that simplicity is a mark not only of epistemic probability but also of objective probability. What exactly does it mean for a proposition to be objectively probable? I assume Draper means something like this: a proposition P has a higher objective probability than some other proposition P* just in case P obtains in more possible worlds than P*. On this model, simpler propositions have a higher objective probability because they obtain in more possible worlds than highly specific propositions. For instance, the proposition

(D) there is a dog outside my door

is more objectively probable than the proposition

(TP) there is a tap-dancing poodle outside my door.

The reason (D) has a higher objective probability than (TP) is because (D) necessarily obtains in any possible world where (TP) obtains since tap-dancing poodles are dogs.

And since there are many other kinds of dogs besides poodles, any world in which a drooling Dalmatian, snoozing Schnauzer, or mad Maltese is outside my door is a world where (D) obtains, but (TP) does not.

Recall that Draper thinks uniformity is a sign both of epistemic as well as objective probability: “our reliance on inductive reasoning is clearly justified, and this is possible only if objective uniformity, either over time or at a single time, is *intrinsically* more probable than change or variety” (Draper, infidels). But why think that the two—epistemic and objective probability—must be intertwined? It could be the case that complex propositions were more objectively probable than simple ones and that “nonetheless our ways of thinking, which involve preferring simple to complex propositions, are justified, rational, warranted and reliable” (Plantinga, infidels). It is possible that God has created us such that we prefer simple to complex propositions, and that He has created *our* world such that simplicity is a mark of truth even though it is not in possible worlds generally.

The classical theist's objection

When arguing for his first premise, Draper asks that we “suppose, at least for the sake of argument, that naturalism and supernaturalism are equally simple in every

alethically significant sense of ‘simple’” (Draper, 8). This means, Draper wants us to assume for argument’s sake that theism and naturalism are both *contingent* hypotheses. This means that they could be true or could not be true, but that neither theory *must* be true. Moreover, Draper thinks that if we object to his argument, pointing out that God—at least God as theism describes Him—must exist necessarily, then we are simply adding more content to theism, and thus making it less simple and so less likely to be true. Hitherto this point in this chapter, I have granted Draper this assumption and attempted to show that, even when treating theism as having no alethic advantage over naturalism, it is not the case that naturalism is much simpler and thus much more likely to be true. Now, I will argue that Draper’s assumption should be rejected.

Assuming, as most types of theism do, that God exists necessarily, then theism must be necessarily true or false; that is, the God of theism must exist either in all possible worlds or in no possible worlds. It cannot be the case that He exists only in some possible worlds while failing to exist in others. So, if theism is not contingent and is false, then it is necessarily false and so has an objective logical probability of 0. Conversely, if theism is not contingent and is true, then it is necessarily true and so has an objective logical probability of 1.

Furthermore, on most models of theism the three claims about God (that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent) are *essential* to God’s nature. This means that there is no possible world where God fails to have these three attributes: they are His essence. And since we have already established that either the God of theism exists in all possible worlds or in no possible worlds, we can go on to say:

(OG): an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God exists in all possible worlds or in no possible worlds.

One might object that the theist has complicated her claim and that (OG) has more content and a greater scope than the previous claim, but this objection would miss the mark. According to (OG), God, is a necessary being, and has all three attributes necessarily: there is no possible world where God exists but fails to be all-powerful or all-knowing or all-loving. So, (OG) actually has minimal scope and content and is thus minimally simple.

Most strands of theism also hold that God creates every contingent being: there is no contingent being or thing that God did not create (either directly or indirectly). This means that according to (virtually every kind of) theism things cannot simply pop into existence uncaused. According to such types of theism, any possible world with natural beings or things, as Draper understands natural, is a possible world that must necessarily contain the God of classical theism. After all, if a possible world had diamonds, daffodils, dogs, etc. but did not have God, then these diamonds, daffodils, dogs, etc. would have popped into existence with no cause. Or, these contingent, natural beings and things were caused by another contingent being or thing. But this cannot go on forever or we face the problem of an infinite regress of causes. This means that (on classical theism) naturalism is necessarily false in any possible world that includes natural things and/or beings. Therefore, naturalism is maximally unlikely to be true with an objective probability of 0 in all worlds (such as ours) where natural beings or things exist.

Draper's claim that naturalism is much simpler than theism is only possibly true if the most common varieties of theism—those that assume God necessarily exists and that He is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent—are false. But then this means that Draper's argument assumes from the beginning that theism—in its most common forms—is false. But then isn't Draper begging the question against theism? Moreover, Draper's argument is not really against theism as most theists understand it, and is thus not even relevant to most theists.

Conclusion

Paul Draper's first premise states that naturalism is much simpler than theism. He argues that this is clear because neither supernaturalism nor naturalism seems any more complex or simple than the other, and theism is obviously a more complex form of supernaturalism that makes at least three additional claims (God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent). I have argued that these additional claims of theism do not complicate theism, but actually enhance its explanatory power; thus, naturalism is by no means much simpler than theism. Furthermore, I have argued that Draper's first premise is not true even if simplicity is taken to mean ontological parsimony because theism only includes two theoretically fundamental posits, God and God's creation, whereas naturalism includes at least sixteen theoretically fundamental posits. We then considered simplicity as naturalness. If we understand simplicity as an epistemic virtue then perhaps simplicity should be conceived of thus: the simpler of two competing hypotheses is the hypothesis that a properly functioning human being would believe in the relevant circumstance. There is good reason to believe that theism is much more

natural for human beings to believe than naturalism is. Lastly, I have challenged Draper's alethical assumption that theism is true or false contingently. Classical theists have maintained that theism is true necessarily; if this is the case then theism obtains in all possible worlds and thus has minimal content and maximal probability and naturalism has maximal content and minimal probability.

Notes

¹ See, e.g., Justin Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4, no.1 (2000): 29-34; Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2004); Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Boyer, *Religion Explained: Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); and Deborah Kelemen, "Are Children 'Intuitive Theists'? Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature," *Psychological Science* 15, no. 5 (2004): 295-301.

CHAPTER THREE

O Felix Culpa

Why we have good reason to expect evil on theism

The second premise in Draper's argument states: "Naturalism has much more predictive power than theism does with respect to "the data of good and evil"—that is, with respect to what we *know* about the distribution and relative quantities of (physical) pain and pleasure, flourishing and floundering, virtue and vice, and triumph and tragedy" (Draper, 72-73). Another way of putting this is that, according to Draper, given the data of good and evil, theism is much more surprising than the competing hypothesis of naturalism. In this chapter I will attempt to demonstrate that it is by no means clear that naturalism has much more predictive power than theism does with respect to the data of good and evil. Draper's second premise seems to be the key premise of his argument; thus, if I can successfully demonstrate that we do not have a good reason to accept this premise (that is, that the data of good and evil is not significantly more surprising on theism than on naturalism) then Draper's argument is in trouble.

In his essay "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'" Alvin Plantinga gives a type of Augustinian theodicy. In this paper, I argue that his Felix Culpa theodicy successfully shows that the evidence of evil is not surprising on theism. I will begin by very briefly sketching an overview of Plantinga's Felix Culpa theodicy. Then I will reply to what I think are some of the most potent objections to Plantinga's model. These potent objections include: 1) there could be incarnation without atonement, and 2) the Felix

Culpa model wrongly reverses means and ends. This latter objection—the wrong reversal of means and ends—can be formulated in two ways: a) The Fall has wrongly become the means by which the end of atonement is achieved instead of the atonement being the means by which the restoration and redemption of creation is achieved and b) God does not love human beings or respect human beings as ends, but He treats them merely as means to create a world of extremely great value.

Dialectical context of this chapter

In a shift from his previous work of predominately defensive apologetics, Plantinga offers a theodicy in his essay, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa’”. According to Plantinga, if it can be shown that we have good reason to believe God could not have created an extremely good feasible world without permitting evil, then we will have a successful theodicy (Plantinga, 6). Recall that the logic behind Draper’s argument is

$$P(N|E) \gg P(T|E).$$

By Bayes’ law we know that

$$P(N|E) = P(E|N) \times P(N)$$

and

$$P(T|E) = P(E|T) \times P(T).$$

Draper’s claim, then is that

$$[P(E|N) \times P(N)] \gg [P(E|T) \times P(T)].$$

The *kalam* cosmological argument and simplicity chapters of this thesis discuss our assessment of $P(T)$ and $P(N)$ and show that it is not clear that

$$P(N) \gg P(T).$$

So my aim in this chapter is to show that it is not the case that

$$P(E|T) \gg P(E|N).$$

If the Felix Culpa model gives us reason to expect evil on theism—or, to phrase it in another way, if evil is not significantly surprising on the Felix Culpa model—then I will have successfully replied to Draper. That is I will have successfully shown that naturalism has much more predictive power than theism does with respect to the data of good and evil.

Plantinga's O Felix Culpa Model

Plantinga argues that when choosing which world to create God would want to create one of the best possible worlds. Unlike Leibniz, Plantinga does not think that there is such a thing as “the best of all possible worlds”: thus, God weakly actualizes a highly eligible world, or one of the best worlds that is possible. When God considers all the possible worlds He could create, two great-making qualities stand out: 1) the infinite good of God’s existence and 2) the infinite good of incarnation and atonement. These two goods are considered “towering goods” because they are of infinite worth and outweigh all other goods and evils.

It is traditionally accepted in Christian theology and philosophy that God is a logically necessary being: that is, it is impossible for God not to exist. Unlike created things that are contingent and whose existence must be continually sustained, God *must* exist. So, because God is a necessary being, all the worlds He can weakly actualize will necessarily have the first great-making characteristic (God’s existence). Hence, any

world God creates will be a very good world merely by virtue of His existence. Moreover, it is impossible for God to weakly actualize a world that is not good.

But to be one of the *best* possible worlds the second great-making quality, incarnation and atonement, must also obtain. Any world W that includes incarnation and atonement is infinitely valuable because the good of Christ's incarnation and atonement is of infinite worth. Plantinga writes: "Under this assumption, there will be a certain level L of excellence or goodness, among possible worlds, such that all the worlds at that level or above contain incarnation and atonement" (Plantinga, 10). This means that any world W that contains incarnation and atonement (making it greater than or equal to L) is better than any world that does not contain incarnation and atonement since such a world would be below level L of goodness. So, because God would only create a highly eligible world, any world worthy of God weakly actualizing it must include the great-making quality of incarnation and atonement. In other words, God would only create worlds such that

$$L_w \geq L$$

where L_w represents W's level of goodness.

This yields the astonishing conclusion that all of the best possible worlds that achieve level L of goodness contain sin and evil. As Plantinga observes: "For atonement is among other things a matter of creatures' being saved from the consequences of their sin; therefore if there were no evil, there would be no sin, no consequences of sin to be saved from, and hence no atonement" (Plantinga, 12). So why does God permit sin and evil? He permits it because He wants to create a world that achieves at least level L of goodness, a world that is one of the best possible worlds. And because all the worlds that

achieve level L—and for all we know there could be an infinite number of such worlds—contain sin and evil, it follows that in order to realize one of the best possible worlds God must allow sin and evil.

Thus far, Plantinga's theodicy has only covered sin and evil. But what about suffering? Couldn't there be a world that contains sin and evil, but no suffering? While some people may think this is logically possible, Plantinga thinks that sin and evil necessarily entail suffering. This is because suffering is caused by the willful rebellion of free creatures against God. I am quite strongly inclined to agree with Plantinga on this point (and I think that Genesis 3 and Romans 8 lend extremely strong Biblical evidence to this claim).

Yet, in addition to being a consequence of sin, suffering can actually be a means to achieve more joyful and intimate communion with God. A believer's suffering gives her the opportunity to identify with Christ, fill what is lacking in Christ's body (Colossians 1:24), and better reflect God's glory and goodness. This deeper communion redounds to God's glory and increases the believer's joy in a way that would not have been possible without suffering. So it is not the case that God is unloving for creating a world where suffering occurs.

That it is all very well, one might say, but what about natural evil and the suffering that causes? I reply that it is possible that natural evil (hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, etc.) is a result of mankind's sin and rebellion against God or that it is the result of the work of Satan and his cohorts. These may seem absurd explanations to someone who is not a Christian, but there is Biblical evidence to support both of these possibilities.

Doesn't the Felix Culpa Model reverse means and ends?

Now that I have provided a very brief sketch of Plantinga's theodicy, I will reply to what I consider two formulations of a powerful objection that many philosophers have raised against Plantinga's model: 1) The Fall becomes the means by which the ends of atonement is achieved instead of the atonement being the means by which the restoration and redemption of creation is achieved and 2) God is guilty of manipulating, disrespecting, and abusing His creatures. Let us begin with the first formulation.

Has atonement replaced redemption?

Kevin Diller objects to Plantinga's theodical model on the grounds that it does not appropriately value Christ's redemptive work. According to Diller, most strands of orthodox Christianity hold that the atonement is the means by which God achieves His end of restoration and redemption, but Plantinga has mistakenly argued that The Fall is the means by which God accomplishes the end of atonement. Diller writes: "The Felix Culpa approach swaps cost and value in the equation such that the value of the sacrifice of atonement is considered to be worth the cost of breaking relationship with creation" (Diller, 93). Essentially, the point Diller is making is that

F. "The Fall has become the means to bring about the ends found in the atoning work of Christ instead of the atoning work of Christ being the means to bring about the ends found in the reconciliation of man to God" (Turner, 57).

I believe F is correct and that this is a shortcoming in Plantinga's theodicy. Plantinga certainly seems to ascribe more value to the atonement than restoration when he argues that only a world containing atonement can achieve level L. On Plantinga's view incarnation and atonement are of infinite value when considering possible worlds to

weakly actualize. While I agree with Plantinga, that incarnation and atonement certainly constitute a great-making quality of infinite worth, I believe he ignores what orthodox Christianity has always held to be another great-making quality: the towering good of redemption and restoration. Christianity holds that redemption is the *purpose* of Christ's incarnation and atonement. Thus, the good of redemption and restoration is a great-making quality that is just as valuable as incarnation and atonement. Indeed, since the purpose of Christ's incarnation and atonement is to reconcile human beings to God and to one another, it is quite difficult to imagine what atonement would be without this purpose.

In light of F, I propose we modify Plantinga's theodicy to include a third great-making quality: the free offer of redemption and reconciliation that God offers human beings through Christ's atonement. With this modification we can still maintain that sin and evil are necessary if God is to create one of the best possible worlds because atonement and restoration both require sin and evil. Let L^* be the level of goodness that any world containing all three great-making characteristics—1) God's existence, 2) incarnation and atonement, and 3) restoration and redemption—achieves. Because God wanted to create a world that achieves at least level L^* of goodness, He had to create a world that contains sin and evil. Diller's objection exposes an important oversight in the Felix Culpa theodicy, but this objection need not prove fatal to the Felix Culpa model: by modifying the Felix Culpa theodicy to include the great-making quality of redemption and restoration we can strengthen the Felix Culpa model.

Divine Child Abuse?

Now that I have provided a very brief sketch of Plantinga's theodicy, I will reply to what I consider to be the most powerful objection to Plantinga's model: that God is guilty of manipulating, disrespecting, and abusing His creatures. Marilyn McCord Adams, among others, objects to Plantinga's theodicy on grounds that it is manipulative and it is wrong of God to use His creatures as pawns in His cosmic scheme. Adams and others think the Felix Culpa model portrays God as a parent with Munchausen Syndrome, intentionally putting His children in danger so that He can rush in and heroically save the day. We might formulate this objection as

M. God treats human beings as means rather than ends for the sake of creating a world that achieves a level of goodness greater than or equal to L^* (Turner, 57).

My response to this objection consists of two parts: 1) it is perfectly consistent to say that God's decision to permit creaturely suffering is compatible with His love for His creatures and 2) God's reason for permitting some person S to suffer does not have to be that S might achieve a greater personal good: God is completely within His divine rights to allow suffering for the sake of achieving a best possible world with the towering good of Christ's incarnation and atonement. I will now proceed to defend these two claims, beginning with the first.

The compatibility of God's love and His decree that evil be

Plantinga devotes a considerable portion of his theodicy to explaining how it can be that some—but not all—of the suffering person S experiences directly contributes to S' own good. Whenever S freely chooses to embrace some instance of suffering in a Christ-like way (like Paul freely embracing his imprisonment for the Gospel in order to

fill what is “lacking” in Christ’s body), this directly contributes to S’ own good.

Moreover, the claim that this sort of suffering is compatible with God’s love towards His creatures is acceptable to most Christians.

But this point is hardly impressive because a vast amount of suffering (indeed, quite possibly almost all of the suffering in our world) is *not* freely chosen and willingly endured in a Christ-like way. So what are we to say about involuntary suffering?

Perhaps, for some reason, person S is not capable of deciding whether or not to accept a particular instance of suffering (perhaps S is a small child). Isn’t God’s love incompatible with such suffering? Not necessarily. After all, if someone you know is not in a position to freely choose for herself (perhaps she is in a vegetative state or is unconscious) then you would act on her behalf, choosing what you think she would choose for herself were she in a state to make a decision (Plantinga, 24). So, God may very well know that if S were capable of making the decision to suffer, that S would freely choose to suffer.

What if S *is* in a state to freely choose for her self whether or not to suffer but is not willing? It is possible that God knows that this is due to S’ ignorance. Were S aware of all the relevant facts, then S might freely choose to suffer. Thus, God, being omniscient, is not necessarily manipulative and unloving to S by ordaining that S suffer even though S does not have all the relevant facts, because S might embrace her suffering if she knew what God knows.

Finally, a person’s unwillingness to suffer may not be due to ignorance, but due to disordered affections. God might know, however, that were such a person’s affections correctly ordered he would freely embrace suffering. In this case too, God’s love for

such a person would not be incompatible with His allowing him to suffer. It is possible that the temporal suffering God allows this person to undergo is for the sake of re-ordering his affections and turning his heart back to God and finding salvation. For instance, God might cause a greedy and covetous investment banker to lose everything on a bad investment so that the banker would turn from his lust for money and instead delight himself in loving God and others. In such a case God is not being unloving to financially ruin the banker. On the contrary, this would be an act of grace and mercy. Indeed, in such a case we may liken God to a loving mother who “insists that her . . . child take piano lessons or go to church or school” (Plantinga, 24).

God's reason for allowing evil

While God's love and creaturely suffering may not necessarily be incompatible, the question remains: how could a loving God's reason for allowing human beings to suffer be for the sake of achieving a level L* world? Here, Plantinga makes a distinction between “a constraint on God's reasons (induced . . . by His being perfectly loving)” and “a constraint on the conditions under which he would permit involuntary and innocent suffering” (Plantinga, 24-25). God's reason for permitting some person S to suffer may not be not S' greater good, but in order to achieve a best possible world overall that includes the three towering goods mentioned earlier in this chapter. It is possible that God's ultimate aim is not to reduce the suffering of each individual creature and that He has no duty or obligation to alleviate the suffering of sinful person S. Nevertheless, it is possible that God's love and grace are such that He would not permit S to suffer unless He brings good out of S' suffering (Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28).

This point certainly seems to have a Biblical foundation. Consider Nebuchednezzar's epiphany in Daniel 4:34-35 after God has humbled him through suffering:

I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever;
For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

While one might think that God's love makes Him accountable or obligated to human beings, this passage asserts just the opposite. God is not in any way required to take human beings into account in His plans because "all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing," and "He does according to His will" (Daniel 4:35). Indeed, consider Paul's words in Romans 9:20-21:

"Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

As the potter, God has a *right* over us. That is, God is completely within His divine rights to make whatever sort of world He sees fit to create and to treat human beings, the clay, however He pleases. Thus, Adams is mistaken for thinking that God is constrained by or obligated to human beings to make each individual human's life worthwhile in his/her own eyes.

One might find such biblical passages horrifying, tyrannical, and gloomy. However, I contend that once we see clearly that God is not in any way obligated to make our lives better or on the whole more pleasant than painful, His gracious Providence will be all the more astounding and amazing to us. Although God's reason for allowing evil

and suffering does not have to be to make each human being satisfied with her own life, God still Providentially works things together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Indeed, the more one contemplates this, the more one wishes to sing with the Psalmist: “What is man that thou art mindful of him? / The son of man that thou carest for him?” (Psalm 8:4).

The careful reader will notice that Romans 8:28 implies the following: all things do not work together for the good of those who do not love God. So, if someone’s life does not seem to be on the whole a great good to him, then that is not God’s fault, but that person’s; for were he to decide to love God, then God’s promise to work all things together for good would apply to him as well. The only people who will find the pain, suffering, and evil in their lives is not defeated and engulfed by the great good of communion with God are those who choose to reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ and cut themselves off from God’s love.

To return to Plantinga’s earlier point, perhaps this great world for the sake of which S suffers, includes “the unthinkably great good of divine incarnation and atonement” (Plantinga, 25). In such a world, all of God’s creatures are offered the free gift of salvation, the chance for the unbelievably great personal good of increasingly deeper and more joyful communion with God through Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Hence, all human beings are offered the opportunity to enjoy a final condition that is much better than it could have possibly been without a fall into sin and evil. God’s creation of this world, therefore, necessarily entails a great deal of suffering for many human beings as well as the possibility that free creatures could ultimately turn their back on Him and choose damnation rather than God’s free gift of salvation through Jesus

Christ. And God's reason for this is not that thereby the suffering individuals will be benefited but that He wants to create an extremely good world with the great-making qualities of incarnation, atonement, and restoration. Still, God's love and grace are so marvelous that He brings good from evil and He creates a world where humans may freely choose a final condition that is far greater than it could ever be in a world where they do not suffer.

Couldn't there be incarnation without atonement?

This final objection is certainly an intriguing one. Adams and Diller alike ask whether or not Christ's incarnation and atonement must necessarily be connected. Diller agrees with Plantinga that the good of incarnation is a towering good, but he questions why there must be atonement (Diller, 91). Indeed, Diller understands Scripture to mean that we are grafted into Christ's body (the Church) because Christ took on flesh and dwelt among us (Diller, 91). Intimacy and loving communion with God the Father, as Diller sees it, does not require sacrifice and forgiveness: God can achieve profound communion with us simply by becoming incarnate. Diller argues: "the body of Christ may have been given to us without needing to be broken for us" (Diller, 92). Hence, Diller objects to combining the goods of incarnation and atonement into one good because he thinks that only incarnation is necessary or at least that only incarnation is a towering good.

My response to this objection is that Diller and Adams are misunderstanding the nature and purpose of atonement, as well as failing to see the weightiness and severity of our sin. It is true that Christ achieved a heightened level of intimacy with His creatures

simply by taking on flesh and dwelling among them. But He became incarnate in order to achieve the purpose of atonement and redemption. By becoming incarnate, Christ became our high priest who is not unable to sympathize with our suffering (Hebrews 4:15). But His whole purpose in becoming incarnate was not merely to sympathize with us, but to pay for our sins and impute His righteousness to us. Indeed, as He died (accomplishing the good of atonement) Christ said “it is finished” (John 19:30). But if incarnation alone were His aim, then why didn’t Christ say “it is finished” as soon as He was old enough to speak? He would have achieved His purpose were this the case.

Adams and Diller fail to recognize that, even if Christ takes on human flesh, the sin of humanity still separates us from God. Christ’s heightened intimacy and sympathy with us would be futile; He would merely be commiserating with us during our brief earthly lives before we perish and face judgment before an absolutely holy God. But this is clearly not fitting for a loving God to let His creatures waste away in sin and evil, even if He is able to sympathize with our suffering. In order for the deepest communion (and hence greatest joy) possible between God and His people to be achieved, Jesus’ sacrificial death is necessary. Thus, Peter’s words to a group of early Christians:

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

- 1 Peter 2:24-25

Scripture also says:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

- Ephesians 1:7-8

Clearly in his letter to the Ephesians Paul believes that Christ's blood purchases our redemption and grants us forgiveness for our sins. Christ's atoning sacrifice was necessary for us to experience true union with God. Adams and Diller fail to recognize the ultimate purpose in Christ's life and death and resurrection; thus, they fail to recognize why incarnation is inextricably tied to atonement.

Conclusion

Although there are many other objections to the Felix Culpa theodical model that are worth considering, I have responded to what I consider to be the strongest objections: namely, that the Felix Culpa model wrongly reverses means and ends and that incarnation and atonement do not necessarily have to be connected. I have argued that Diller's objection F—the Fall, atonement, and restoration are wrongly valued in Felix Culpa—exposes an important oversight in Plantinga's theodicy; accordingly, I propose modifying the Felix Culpa model to include the towering good of restoration and reconciliation. Finally, in response to Adams I have tried to show that God's behavior in Plantinga's model does not amount to divine child abuse. God has no obligation to human beings and His reason for allowing suffering could legitimately be that He wants to actualize an extremely good world, one of the very best. Nevertheless, even though God has no duty or obligation to treat us graciously and mercifully, God's love and grace are so wonderfully great that He providentially brings good from evil and offers the free gift of salvation to all people. Finally, although it may seem as though Christ could achieve deep communion and intimacy with His creatures through incarnation alone (incarnation

without atonement), this objection relies on a faulty understanding of what Christ's atonement and the purpose of Christ's incarnation is.

Now let us ask if we have good reason to reject Draper's claim—that naturalism explains the data of good and evil better than theism (or at least is less surprising on the evidence of good and evil in our world). From the perspective of theism in general, it is difficult to say; however, from the Augustinian Christian perspective (the perspective Felix Culpa articulates) we have very good reason to expect God to create a world that entails sin, evil, and suffering. Thus, we have very good reason to reject Draper's second premise.

CHAPTER FOUR

The *kalam* Cosmological Argument and our Background Knowledge

In this chapter I will give a rebuttal to Draper's third premise: "Any epistemic advantages that theism has over naturalism . . . do not, even when combined, suffice to offset the epistemic advantages that naturalism has over theism if premises 1 and 2 are true" (Draper, 5). I will reply to Draper by showing that there is at least one natural theological argument for theism—specifically, William Lane Craig's *kalam* cosmological argument—that gives a significant epistemic advantage to theism over naturalism such that it is not the case that naturalism is significantly more likely than theism. Or, to word this negatively, given our background knowledge—the world is complex without being chaotic, very beautiful, includes a variety of objective deontic moral facts, has conscious beings, etc.—theism is not more surprising than naturalism. Thus, we have good reason to reject Draper's third premise.

I will begin this chapter by explaining how a natural theological argument for theism can raise the probability of theism by showing that our background knowledge renders naturalism extremely surprising but is expected on theism. Then I will give a brief version of such a natural theological argument—William Lane Craig's *kalam* cosmological argument—and reply to objections that J. L. Mackie raises against this argument.

When assessing the data of good and evil, Draper assumes something like a *ceteris paribus* clause: that all other things being equal, the data of good and evil are

much more surprising on theism than on naturalism. But is this a reasonable assumption to make? That is, are all other things equal? The remainder of this chapter seeks to answer precisely this question. If I am successful, my answer will demonstrate that we have good reason to reject Draper's assumption.

By employing the *kalam* argument to explain our background information I hope to show that it is not the case that

$$P(N) \gg P(T).$$

Draper asserts: "any epistemic advantages that theism has over naturalism ... do not, even when combined, suffice to offset the epistemic advantages that naturalism has over theism" regarding E, the data of good and evil. So, if I can succeed in showing that at least one epistemic advantage of theism can offset the epistemic advantages of naturalism, then it follows that when combined, the epistemic advantages of theism offset the epistemic advantages of naturalism.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

Now let us examine the *kalam* cosmological argument and see whether or not this argument can suffice to offset the epistemic advantages that naturalism has over theism regarding E. The *kalam* argument can be formulated simply:

- (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.
- (2) The universe began to exist.
- (3) So, the universe has a cause of its existence.

According to Craig, the purpose "of the [*kalam*] argument is to demonstrate the existence of a first cause which transcends and creates the entire realm of finite reality" (Craig, 2008). In other words, the universe—finite reality—did not, indeed *could* not, cause

itself; rather, the universe has a cause that goes beyond it. Moreover, once the conclusion, the universe has a cause of its existence, is established, we may then investigate what this first cause is like and whether or not it bears any similitude to the God of theism.

Whatever begins to exist has a cause of its existence

The first premise is intuitively obvious and so my treatment of it will be brief. The first premise of the kalam argument is quite obvious, a sort of metaphysical first principle that hardly anyone would sincerely deny. Indeed, the idea has been ingrained in western thought at least since classical western civilization where we get the expression *ex nihilo nil fit*, or from nothing comes nothing. Something cannot come into being uncaused from nothing. To illustrate, denying the first premise would be like claiming that a kangaroo could pop into existence uncaused in the middle of my living room. Surely it would be absurd to say that someone who genuinely believes such an event is possible is being rational or is warranted in holding this belief.

Some critics of the *kalam* argument, such as Victor Stenger, have objected to the first premise, not on the basis of any metaphysical belief, but on the grounds that empirical scientific evidence demonstrates that the first premise is false. Stenger maintains that, while it may seem intuitively obvious that whatever begins to exist has a cause, research in quantum mechanics shows that it is possible for something to “pop” into existence uncaused (Stenger, 124). But Stenger misunderstands the claim the *kalam* argument makes. As Craig argues, particles that appear due to the Casimir effect or radioactive decay are not appearing uncaused *ex nihilo* (Craig, 2007).

Since, as Aristotle observed, we should not attempt to demonstrate the obvious by the less obvious, I will not elaborate on the first premise any further here. Later in this chapter, I will deal with J. I. Mackie's objection to the first premise, but for now let us move on to the second premise.

The universe began to exist

The second premise is the crucial premise of the *kalam* argument. I will give three main points in defense of the second premise, two *a priori* and one *a posteriori*: 1) the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things, 2) the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection of things by successive addition, and 3) the isotropic expansion of the universe (Craig, 2008).

Argument from the impossibility of an actually infinite number of things

This argument can be formulated:

1. An actually infinite number of things cannot exist.
2. A beginningless series of events in time entails an actually infinite number of things.
3. Therefore, a beginningless series of events in time cannot exist.

Because the universe is not distinct from the temporal succession of events that comprise it, to say that the universe has always existed would be to deny premise one, an actually infinite number of things cannot exist.

This argument rests on the distinction between actual and potential infinity. An actual infinite set of things is complete and is not "going" to infinity whereas a potential infinite set is perpetually moving towards infinity. According to the Principle of Correspondence, "a collection is actually infinite just in case a proper part of the

collection can be put into a one-to-one correspondence with the whole collection, so that the proper part has the same number of members as the whole” (Craig, 2008).

Conversely, a potential infinite is “incomplete”, traveling towards infinity but never arriving (like counting 1, 2, 3, ... ∞). There is a potential infinite space over any finite distance. For example, to go from 1 to 2 we have to travel to 1.5. But to get to 1.5 we need to get to 1.25, and so on. We can keep dividing in half forever, but we will never finally arrive at an infinitely small increment. Now that we’ve clarified the difference between potential and actual infinities, we can see why it is plausible that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist.

Premise one is best demonstrated by way of example. Perhaps the most famous way of illustrating the absurdity of an actually infinite number of things is Hilbert’s Hotel, named after the German mathematician David Hilbert. Hilbert’s Hotel is a hotel with an infinite number of rooms. Now, let’s imagine that you want to check out a room at Hilbert’s for the night, but there are no vacancies. This is no problem: all we need to do is shift the guest in room one to room two, the guest in room two to room three, and so on down the line. So, even though there were no vacancies when you showed up in the lobby to ask for a room, it turns out there was space for you. This is certainly strange.

But the absurdities don’t end there. Let’s suppose you and an infinite number of friends want to stay at Hilbert’s for the night but, like last time, there are no vacancies. The manager can still find room for you and your infinitely large party of friends by moving the guest in room one to room two, the guest in room two to room four, the guest in room three to room six, and so on for all the rooms, moving every occupant to the room with the number twice as large as their previous room number. Now all the rooms

that were previously occupied are vacant and you and your infinite friends can stay the night.

Hilbert's Hotel gets even stranger still. Let's suppose that the guest in room number one wishes to check out of the hotel. Both before and after she checks out there are an infinite number of guests. Even stranger, if all the guests in the odd number rooms (rooms 1, 3, 5, ...) check out, then this means that an actually infinite number of guests leave. Yet, there are still an infinite number of guests remaining in the hotel. Obviously, an actually infinite number of things cannot obtain in reality or all kinds of absurdities ensue.

Argument from the impossibility of forming an actually infinite collection of things by successive addition

Unlike the previous *a priori* argument for premise two of the *kalam* argument, this argument does not assert that an actually infinite number of things cannot exist; instead, it purports to show how an actually infinite collection cannot be formed by successive addition (Craig, 2008). It can be formulated:

1. The series of events in time is a collection formed by successive addition.
2. A collection formed by successive addition cannot be actually infinite.
3. Therefore, the series of events in time cannot be actually infinite.

Premise one of this argument is rather obvious: a series of events must take place in time, and thus would have to proceed one event after another in succession. Premise two, however, is not as intuitively obvious and merits more analysis.

Premise two refers to the classical problem of traversing the infinite. No matter how far I've gone, I can always go just a little further. Hence, I can never arrive at

infinity, but can only approach it. To see the absurdities that forming an infinite set by successive addition raises, consider the illustration of Tristram Shandy. Tristram Shandy is writing an autobiography, but he is writing so slowly that it takes him an entire year to record one day of his life. Let's suppose that Tristram Shandy writes forever into eternity future, always taking one year to write about one day. Does Tristram Shandy ever finish his autobiography? Bertrand Russell argued that he would, because once the number of years and days that correspond to each other are stretched out to infinity, then by the Principle of Correspondence there corresponds one year to each day (Russell, 358-9). Russell, however, is mistaken because "the future is in reality a potential infinite only" (Craig, Meister 203). Even if Shandy writes forever, he will never reach an *actual* infinite number of years and days. So, the further into the future Shandy goes, the further and further behind he falls in his writing since the days of his life are always finite in number. Since the idea of taking one year to write about one day of one's life is coherent, the absurdity in the Tristram Shandy example must lie in attempting to create an infinite collection via successive addition.

Argument based on the isotropic expansion of the universe

Before Albert Einstein published his General Theory of Relativity, secular science conceived of the universe as static and without a beginning: the universe always was, is, and will be. But once Einstein's theory of relativity became prevalent, secular scientists and philosophers were astonished at the implication Einstein's theory had: the universe had a beginning. Commenting on the enormity of this discovery, Gregory Naber notes that idea of an expanding universe "was absolutely beyond comprehension. Throughout

all of human history the universe was regarded as fixed and immutable and the idea that it might actually be changing was inconceivable” (Naber, 126-7).

If it is true that the universe is expanding, then as time elapses galaxies are spreading further and further away from one another. This also means that if we reverse the expansion and extrapolate back in time, that the distance between galaxies becomes smaller and smaller until we reach a state of maximum density that “constitutes an edge or boundary to space-time itself” (Craig, 2008). This is, roughly speaking, the gist of the Big Bang model.

What is more, the Big Bang model posits not only a universe that is not eternal and immutable, but that also has its origin in nothing. That is, the Big Bang occurred, basically, *ex nihilo* since we cannot logically say that something existed before the Big Bang or that there is an earlier point in time. This raises all sorts of metaphysical difficulties for scientists who are determined to hold to a strict naturalist worldview. But for the exponent of the *kalam* argument, this implication of the Big Bang theory (the universe had a beginning) is a welcome implication and underscores the second premise of the argument.

So, the universe has a cause of its existence

Now that we have analyzed the first two premises of the *kalam* argument, we can ask what this cause of the universe is like. William Craig observes: “As the cause of space and time, this entity [the cause of the universe] must transcend space and time and therefore exist atemporally and non-spatially, at least *sans* the universe” (Craig, 2008). Moreover, this entity must be itself beginningless and uncaused, otherwise it would exist

with an infinite past created via infinite successive addition. Finally, this entity must be extraordinarily powerful to cause the universe *ex nihilo*.

Indeed, the *kalam* argument leads us to the conclusion that “an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe exists, who *sans* the universe is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful. And this, as Thomas Aquinas notes is what everyone means by ‘God’” (Craig, 2008).

Mackie’s objections to the kalam argument

J. L. Mackie’s “A Critique of Cosmological Arguments” targets various cosmological arguments for the existence of God, including Craig’s *kalam* argument. I will reply to Mackie’s critique of the *kalam* argument and show how it fails to give us a good reason to reject the *kalam* argument. My reply begins by showing how Mackie’s objection to premise two of the *kalam* argument fails because he does not give any good reason to reject Craig’s claims that an actual infinite set cannot obtain in reality and that it is impossible to traverse an infinite past. I then refute Mackie’s objection to the first premise of the *kalam* argument and show how he is unable to give any good a priori reason not to accept it. I will then show how, by rejecting the *kalam* argument, the naturalist is left with very poor alternative theories of the origin of the universe.

Premise Two

The second premise of the *kalam* argument can be supported by a priori arguments against an infinite created via successive addition, by a priori arguments against the existence of an actual infinite, and by empirical evidence from physics. Since

Mackie does not focus on empirical evidence for the second premise in his paper, I will address the other two arguments for premise two in this paper. Now, let us analyze Mackie's critique of the argument against an infinite created by successive addition. I will refer to this argument as (2.1) and formulate it thus:

(2.11) A collection formed by successive addition cannot be actually infinite.

(2.12) The temporal series of past events is a collection formed by successive addition.

(2.13) So, the temporal series of past events cannot be actually infinite.

Think of argument (2.1) as the problem of traversing the infinite. Since an infinite distance cannot be traversed, if the past were infinite then the present would never arrive. But we are obviously in the present, so the past must be finite.

Mackie objects to (2.1), arguing that it does not take the idea of an infinite past seriously. "To take the hypothesis of infinity seriously," according to Mackie, "would be to suppose that there was no starting-point, not even an infinitely remote one" (Mackie, 2008). Mackie takes it that there is an infinite distance between the beginning point of time and the present. But, he notes, there is no beginning point of time if the past is infinite. Mackie's proposed solution to the problem of traversing the past is "that from any specific point in past time there is only a finite stretch that needs to be traversed to reach the present" (Mackie, 2008). So, the proponent of the *kalam* argument is mistaken for thinking that the infinite past cannot be traversed.

Mackie's criticism of (2.1) is misguided, though, because he misunderstands the claim the theist is making about an infinite past. What (2.1) claims is that traversing an actual infinite past cannot be done because it is like counting all the negative integers beginning with negative one. It is impossible to finally count -1, -2, -3, ... $-\infty$. Yet, this is precisely what we would have to do in order to go all the way from the beginning of a

past formed by infinite temporal succession to the present. And there is yet more difficulty, because traversing such a past would actually be the same as counting from negative infinity to negative one. When counting $-1, -2, -3, \dots -\infty$, we are at least able to have a definite starting point. But how could we ever hope to start counting $-\infty, \dots -3, -2, -1$? The fact that we cannot count $-\infty, \dots -3, -2, -1$ shows that the past cannot be actually infinite because we would travel through time the same way we would count all the negative integers: $t_{-\infty}, \dots t_{-3}, t_{-2}, t_{-1}$. Simply put, it is impossible to reach the present if the past is actually infinite, which means it is impossible for the past to be actually infinite.

Finally, Mackie's point about only needing to traverse a finite distance between one definite point in the past up to the present is irrelevant. The issue is not how to traverse the *potentially* infinite space between one point and another: the issue is whether or not it is possible to traverse an *actually* infinite temporal series of past events, an infinite created via successive addition. It seems that Mackie is committing the fallacy of composition and assuming that, because every segment of the past can be traversed, the entire past can be.

Now let us examine Mackie's critique of the a priori argument against the existence of an actual infinite set of things. This argument, which I will refer to as (2.2) goes as follows:

- (2.21) An actual infinite set cannot exist.
- (2.22) An infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite set.
- (2.23) Therefore, an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist.

Mackie targets (2.21) on the grounds that this premise also reflects a misunderstanding of the nature of infinite sets. He thinks that if we really understand how actual infinities

work, then we will easily see that what appear to be contradictions created by an actual infinite are no contradictions at all, but simply part of the bizarre nature of infinity.

Mackie mentions al Ghazali's planet paradox in order to illustrate this. Al Ghazali argues: it takes Jupiter twelve years to complete its orbit, and Saturn takes thirty years to complete its orbit. So, over any span of past time, Jupiter must have completed more than twice as many orbits as Saturn. But if there is an infinite past, then both planets have made an infinite amount of orbits and have thus completed an equal number of orbits. Mackie, much like Russell, thinks that this shows that, as bizarre as it may seem, the past actually can be infinite and that this simply entails odd things. Al Ghazali, on the other hand, thinks that such an absurdity demonstrates why an actual infinite past cannot obtain in the real world.

Mackie also cites one of Cantor's paradoxes: "in an infinite class a part can indeed be equal to the whole" (Mackie, 2008). The set of all even numbers and the set of whole numbers are both infinite sets, and are thus both equal to each other ($\infty = \infty$). But if we try to match each member of these two sets together in pairs (2, 4, 6, ... with 1, 2, 3 ...), then we see that there should be twice as many whole numbers as even numbers. But if this is true, then we get $\infty = 2 \times \infty$, and this is obviously absurd.

Mackie, on the other hand, does not think that either of these examples proves that an actual infinite is absurd. Mackie argues that we must think of infinite sets differently than we conceive of finite sets. While our intuitions may lead us to think otherwise, when we are dealing with infinity we must remember that less than, equal to, and greater than, are simply not mutually exclusive. Thus, what seem to us to be absurdities are only our intuitive prejudices against infinity.

Mackie's objection to (2.2) is flawed because the question isn't whether or not it is possible for an actual infinite to exist in theory, but whether or not an actual infinite can obtain in our world. Mackie does not successfully resolve this problem. Indeed, his even numbers and whole numbers example is irrelevant since it only deals with *theoretical* infinite sets. And, still worse for Mackie, the al Ghazali argument he mentions demonstrates quite well the problems with the existence of an actual infinite in reality. The Jupiter-Saturn problem underscores the absurdities of Hilbert's Hotel, namely that it is impossible for an actually infinite set to exist in reality because it leads to all sorts of logical contradictions. Therefore, a proponent of the *kalam* argument does not misunderstand the true nature of infinity. On the contrary, she understands the nature of infinity so well that she does not believe it is possible for an actual infinite set of things to obtain in reality.

Premise One

Mackie's objections to premise two of the *kalam* argument—the universe began to exist—have come up short, but he could still show that premise one—everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence—should be rejected. Mackie contends: “there is *a priori* no good reason why a sheer origination of things, not determined by anything should be unacceptable, whereas the existence of a god with the power to create something out of nothing is acceptable” (Mackie, 2008). He concedes that the latest empirical evidence in astrophysics points to a beginning of the universe, a big bang. Nevertheless, Mackie does not see how this means there must be a God, and if there is a

God, how his existence is any less puzzling than the existence of the material world.

According to William Craig, there are three main objections Mackie raises:

- (i) If God began to exist at some point in time, then the origination of the material world is a puzzle.
- (ii) If God has existed for an infinite time in the past, then this again raises the problem of an actual infinite past.
- (iii) If God exists outside of time, then this is a mystery.

Let us analyze Mackie's critique of precisely one more closely and see if his objections hold up.

I will start with criticism (i): if God began to exist at some point in time, then the origination of the material world is a puzzle. Mackie does not see why God's eternal existence is any different from the universe suddenly coming into being. Mackie argues that we do not "know by rational necessity that nothing which originates in time originates by itself" (Mackie, 2008). While it is true that we cannot have one hundred percent certainty that things do not spontaneously pop into existence, this is surely implausible. Mackie is right that I do not know beyond the shadow of a doubt that a tiger will not suddenly appear uncaused and eat me while I type this chapter of my thesis, but I am certainly not warranted in believing such an event will occur. Likewise, we are not rationally justified in believing that the universe simply originated by itself with no cause. Moreover, Mackie is misunderstanding the theist's concept of God. God is very different from a tiger or any other being that begins to exist. The theist does not maintain that God suddenly appeared *ex nihilo* at some point in time: indeed, God exists extra-temporally and so God exists at all points in time (and out of time). That is to say that, since God does not have a beginning to his existence, the first premise of the *kalam* argument does not apply to Him.

Mackie thinks that this notion is just another ontological argument in disguise: the universe (or a tiger) cannot suddenly pop into existence, but God, being a *logically necessary* being, can. But again, Mackie misses the point. The *kalam* argument does not assert that God's existence is logically necessary, but that his existence is factually necessary (Craig, 2007). In other words, the *kalam* argument only describes God as being eternal and uncaused. This is not the same as claiming that it is impossible that God not exist like the ontological argument for God's existence claims.

Now let us turn to criticism (ii), if God has existed for an infinite time in the past, then this again raises the problem of an actual infinite past. Mackie writes: "has God existed for ever through an infinite time? But this would raise again the problem of the actual infinite" (Mackie, 2008). The proponent of the *kalam* argument, however, does not accept (ii) because God's existence is not comprised of an infinite series. If God is mutable and can change, then outside of creation his existence would, according to (ii), be an actual infinite series of temporal events. But theists hold that God does not change, meaning that outside of creation God's existence would not lead to an actual infinite series of temporal events. Thus, (ii) presents no problem to theists.

Even after (i) and (ii) have been refuted, Mackie can still accuse anyone who holds to *creatio ex nihilo* of affirming (iii), God's extra-temporal existence is mysterious. This, however, is no problem at all to theists, as they gladly grant that God's existence is mysterious, wonderful, and awesome. However, when Mackie says that God's existence is mysterious, he means that God's existence is unintelligible and does not make logical sense. But is this the case? In reply to Mackie's objection I respond that God's eternity *can* be made intelligible. It seems reasonable that, outside of time, God exists immutably

with a determination to create the universe. When God creates the universe, he enters into a temporal relation to his creation. God's existence, therefore, is not nonsense, but it is indeed mysterious and wonderful.

The Price of Mackie's Atheism

Now that I have defended the two premises of the *kalam* argument, I will show how unappealing Mackie's alternative to the *kalam* argument is. Mackie argues: "we should infer that [the big bang] must have had *some* physical antecedents, even if the big bang has to be taken as a discontinuity so radical that we cannot explain it, because we can find no laws which we can extrapolate backwards through this discontinuity" (Mackie, 2008). Mackie objects to saying that God has always existed and is not subject to our natural laws. But there is a stunning similarity between the theist's claim that God's eternal existence is mysterious, and Mackie's claim in this quote that the universe's eternal existence is mysterious. Based on the *kalam* argument, the theist has good reason to accept an ontologically mysterious being, God. However, the atheist has no knowledge about physical matter that should lead to such a quasi-pantheist claim as Mackie's, especially in light of the latest research in astrophysics.

Some astrophysicists propose an oscillating universe theory where the universe goes from big bang to big crunch forever and ever. Maybe this could be a viable scientific option for Mackie. After all, a pre-big-bang universe offers us a "discontinuity so radical" that we can extrapolate no laws from it. Yet, this theory raises the problem of an actually infinite series of causes. Maybe there was a big crunch before the big bang. But then we must ask what preceded *that* universe? Even if the big bangs and big

crunches that the oscillating universe theory entails “bend” time, the fact remains that there still is something causally prior to any event in the universe’s existence. Hence, the problem of eternal, mysterious matter pervades the oscillating universe model too.

Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that if at least one natural theological argument for God’s existence can be shown to significantly raise the probability of theism over naturalism with regards to our background knowledge, then we do not, even when presented with the data of good and evil, have good reason to reject theism. I argued that the *kalam* cosmological argument does exactly this. I then showed why Mackie fails to give us a good reason for rejecting the *kalam* argument. His objection to premise two is flawed because he fails to show how it is possible either for an actual infinite past to be traversed or for an actual infinite to exist. Mackie’s critique of premise one fails because he cannot find a good a priori reason to reject it. Finally, Mackie’s denial of the *kalam* argument leaves him no choice but to make quasi-religious claims about the nature of the material world. Clearly it is not the case that

$$P(N) \gg P(T)$$

or that

$$P(N|B) = P(T|B).$$

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. "Plantinga on 'Felix Culpa': Analysis and Critique." *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (April 2008): 123-140. Print.
- Aristotle, and Hugh Lawson-Tancred. *The Art of Rhetoric*. London: Penguin, 1991. Print.
- Baker, Alan, "Simplicity", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/simplicity/>.
- Copan, Paul. "Naturalism Is A Simpler Explanation Than Theism." *How Do You Know You're Not Wrong*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005. 47-56. Print.
- Craig, W. L. (2007). "Causal Premiss [sic] of the Kalam Argument". *Reasonable Faith with William Lane Craig: Q&A*. Reasonable Faith. Retrieved 27 November 2009.
- Craig, William L. "Professor Mackie and the Kalam Cosmological Argument." *Leadership University*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Feb. 2013. <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/mackie.html>.
- Craig, W. L. "The Kalam Cosmological Argument." *The Philosophy of Religion Reader*. Ed. Chad V. Meister. London: Routledge, 2008. N. pag. Print.
- Diller, Kevin. "Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World? Questions for Alvin Plantinga's Felix Culpa Theodicy." *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (January 2008): 87-101. Print.
- Dougherty, Trent and Paul Draper. "Explanation and the Problem of Evil." *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem Evil*. Ed. Justin McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. Print.
- Draper, Paul. "Natural Selection and the Problem of Evil (2007)." *Infidels.org*. N.p., 2007. Web. 01 Sept. 2013.
- Draper, Paul. "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists." *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. Ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996. 12-29. Print.
- Evans, C. Stephen., and R. Zachary Manis. *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: InterVarsity, 2009. Print.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel. *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. Bloomington: Indiana UP,

1996.

Mackie, J. I. "A Critique of Cosmological Arguments." *The Philosophy of Religion Reader*. Ed. Chad V. Meister. London: Routledge, 2008. N. pag. Print.

Naber, Gregory L. *Spacetime and Singularities: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Print.

Peterson, Michael L. *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998. Print.

Plantinga, Alvin. "Epistemic Probability and Evil." *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. Ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996. 69-96. Print.

Plantinga, Alvin. "Objections to Draper's Argument from Evil (2007)." *Infidels.org*. N.p., 2007. Web. 01 Sept. 2013.

Plantinga, Alvin. "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'" *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*. Ed. Peter Van Inwagen. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004. 1-25. Print.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.

Pruss, Alexander. "Theism, Naturalism and Simplicity." *The Prosblogion*. N.p., 20 Dec. 2012. Web. 01 Sept. 2013.

Russell, Bertrand. *Principles of Mathematics*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1937. Print.

Stenger, Victor. *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, Prometheus Books: New York, 2007.

Swinburne, Richard. *Is There a God?*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

Tooley, Michael, "The Problem of Evil", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/evil/>.

Turner, P. Roger. *Christ the Redeemer and the Best of All Creatable Worlds: Using Alvin Plantinga's 'O Felix Culpa Theodicy as a Response to William Rowe's Can God Be Free? And the Underlying Evidential Argument from Evil*. Thesis. Liberty University, 2009. Lynchburg: Liberty University, 2009. Print