THE PROBLEM OF ALTERNATIVE MONOTHEISMS: ANOTHER SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THEISM

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Abstract. Theistic and analytic philosophers of religion typically privilege classical theism by ignoring or underestimating the great threat of alternative monotheisms.[2] In this article I discuss numerous god-models, such as those involving weak, stupid, evil, morally indifferent, and non-revelatory gods. I find that theistic philosophers have not successfully eliminated these and other possibilities, or argued for their relative improbability. In fact, based on current evidence — especially concerning the hiddenness of God and the gratuitous evils in the world — many of these hypotheses appear to be more probable than theism. Also considering the — arguably infinite — number of alternative monotheisms, the inescapable conclusion is that theism is a very improbable god-concept, even when it is assumed that one and only one transcendent god exists.

I. THE PROBLEM

Numerous sceptical scholars analyse and scrutinise arguments for the existence of at least one god, generally finding them wanting.[3] Furthermore, when such arguments are combined, and contrasted against *contra* arguments, critical scholars conclude that such cases are not sufficient to make probable

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1   The author thanks Stephen Law, who offered many helpful criticisms and contributed much material concerning The Evil God Challenge. The author also wishes to thank Herman Philipse for his inspiration and feedback.

2   I take 'theism' to mean 'classical theism', which is but one of many possible monotheisms. Avoiding much of the discussion around classical theism, I wish to focus on the challenges in arguing for theism over monotheistic alternatives. I consider theism and alternative monotheisms as entailing the notion of divine transcendence.

3   Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (CUP, 2004); Graham Robert Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (CUP, 2006); Herman Philipse, *God in the Age of Science?: A Critique of Religious Reason* (OUP, 2012) (henceforth, "GAS").

the existence of a god or gods. Whilst I concur, I shall reflect on what can be known about the existence of god/s if (many or most of) the arguments are generally assumed to be persuasive.[4] In other words, for the sake of argument, and whilst formulating my argument within the framework of a Bayesian approach,[5] I shall temporarily suppose that there is good evidence that supports divine existence, and overlook the many good arguments for ontological naturalism, in the sense of the thesis that there are no gods.

I shall also temporarily suppose that there is good evidence that supports monotheism; granting that arguments from simplicity that are so popular amongst theistic philosophers in dismissing the many polytheisms have ontological significance. Of course, accepting the existence of a single transcendent god is not equivalent to asserting the existence of the god of classical theism (henceforth "God"). This seems especially pertinent, given that many philosophers seem to view 'naturalism' and 'classical theism' as the only two options worth considering.[6] There is indeed a very large literature, often revolving around Pascal's Wager, which asserts that there are plausible alternatives to theism that cannot just be overlooked, particularly in a probabilistic case.[7] The aim of this paper is to explain the magnitude of this problem, to expand on some of these alternatives, and to argue that when considering the totality of currently available evidence the truth of classical theism is very improbable — even when the existence of one and only one transcendent god is granted.[8]

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4   I am currently involved in interdisciplinary 'contra theism' projects, which highlight the many deficiencies in the most sophisticated cases for the existence of God. Such arguments include cosmological, teleological, axiological, and historical arguments.

5   For a discussion of the failure of alternative apologetic approaches, such as the use of deductive arguments, and the benefits of examining inductive/probabilistic arguments through a Bayesian lens, see Philipse (GAS). In Bayesian reasoning, we refer to the inherent plausibility of the theory as the 'prior probability', the likelihood of the evidence on the theory as the 'likelihood' (or the 'consequent probability'), and the overall result as the 'posterior probability' (or simply, the 'probability'). See also Raphael Lataster, "Bayesian Reasoning: Criticising the 'Criteria of Authenticity' and Calling for a Review of Biblical Criticism," *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2013): 271–293. Please note that many of the priors discussed throughout are subjective.

6   For example, see John Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach* (CUP, 2014), 2, 28–39, 72.

7   For example, see Paul Saka, "Pascal's Wager and the Many Gods Objection," *Religious Studies* 37, no. 3 (2001): 321–341.

8   This article limits the discussion to monotheism and what I describe as alternative monotheisms. Polytheisms and monistic/pantheistic god-concepts are discussed in other articles.

II. THE PARTIALLY GREAT AND MINIMALLY GREAT GODS

There are numerous — actually, infinitely many — alternatives to theism that describe the existence of one transcendent god. Positing alternative monotheisms is a straightforward task. The philosopher need only initially imagine the theistic god, for example, with one of the definitive properties altered, or removed altogether. For example, the theistic god, typically hypothesised as being maximally great, is alleged to be omnibenevolent. One alternative would be a god that is omnimalevolent.[9] There may also be gods that are somewhat, or very, good or evil.[10] Another possibility is a god that is balanced, morality-wise, and is neither good nor evil; one that is morally indifferent.[11] This scenario may also be the result of a world in which good and evil do not actually exist, so that there is no room for the existing god to be described as good or evil. Consider also how a hypothesis entailing a god that is not omnibenevolent can be considered 'simpler' than one entailing that god *must* be.[12] Some of these non-omnibenevolent gods may even better explain the evidence that gratuitous evil or suffering exists, as philosophers might expect that an all-good god would not tolerate the existence of gratuitous evil or suffering.[13]

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9   Law postulates an evil god, acknowledging earlier efforts by Madden, Hare, Cahn, Stein, New, and Millican. See Stephen Law, "The Evil-God Challenge," *Religious Studies* 46, no. 3 (2010): 353–373. Historically, many gods were considered evil, and were despised by believers. For example, the Egyptian Apep and the Marcionites' interpretation of the god of the Tanakh. See *The Book of Overthrowing Apep* and Sebastian Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion* (Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 58–59.

10   Daniels unknowingly, and too hastily, dismisses the possibility of an evil god, simply assuming that "the ultimate reason for people doing what they do, when they have one, is to get what's good". He also fails to provide a probabilistic case against such an evil god. See Charles B. Daniels, "God, demon, good, evil," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (1997): 177–181.

11   Cf. Philipse (GAS), 250. See also Oppy's discussion on evil and morally neutral gods in Graham Robert Oppy, "God, God* and God'," in *Faith and Reason: Friends Or Foes in the New Millennium?*, ed. Anthony Fisher and Hayden Ramsay (ATF Press, 2004), 171–186.

12   In other words, theism claims more about God than is necessary, which seems inconsistent with theistic apologists' constant appeals to simplicity.

13   I am not at all claiming that evil, or good, exists. Indeed, if there were no good and evil, it would seem that theism is impossible, as it posits a god that is all-good. Models of god that makes no such claims would still be possible. For example, a god that is 'merely' all-powerful and all-knowing.

Another divine property that can be tweaked is that of omnipotence. It is easy to imagine a less powerful god, such as one that is powerless to put an end to all evil (again, possibly providing a god-concept that better explains the existence of gratuitous evil). Similarly, there may be a god that does not have infinite or complete knowledge but has x amount of knowledge (which can again better explain the existence of gratuitous evil). Another god may have $x+1$ amount of knowledge, yet another might know $x+2$ facts about the world, and so forth. It is easy to see how there are an infinite number of possibly existing monotheistic gods, of which the theistic God is but one.[14] There may indeed be a god that is a 'maximally great entity', but there is no reason to suppose that there could not be a creator god that is slightly less great, such as Ialdabaoth, the Demiurge.[15] So far keeping to only these three definitive properties of God, it is obvious that while there may be an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good god, the god that exists might also be weak, stupid, and evil, or even reasonably-powerful, fairly-knowledgeable, and morally-indifferent. Alternatively, properties can be added, such as omniessence, which would conflict with other properties of the theistic god (like transcendence).[16] With such additional properties, there may also be yet more spectra on which to theorise about infinitely more alternatives. And likewise for the other presumed properties of God.

The philosophical theist is thus faced with a daunting task: arguing for the probability of theism given the infinitely many monotheistic alternatives. If the evidence was equally expected on all possible hypotheses (where each hypothesis purports the existence of a different monotheistic god), and each hypothesis is considered as inherently plausible as the next (as when the principle of indifference is invoked),[17] it would be impossible to decide which of the monotheisms is the most reasonably upheld. This may not be a problem for the broad-minded monotheist. For the theist, however, it becomes clear that the posterior probability of their preferred theory's truth relative to its

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14   Cf. Philipse (GAS), 246.
15   For a brief description of Ialdabaoth, see Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative and Cosmology in the Apocryphon of John* (Brill, 2006), 51–55.
16   Such possibilities shall be discussed in a forthcoming article.
17   Cf. Philipse (GAS), 247.

infinitely many monotheistic rivals, akin to rolling an infinitely sided die, is almost certainly minimal:[18]

$P(theism|e.b) = 1 / \infty$

Effectively:

$P(theism|e.b) = 0$

Conversely, the probability that a monotheistic alternative obtains would be:

$P(monotheistic\ alternatives|e.b) = (\infty - 1) / \infty$

Effectively:

$P(monotheistic\ alternatives|e.b) = 1$

Apart from the uncomfortable notion that variable properties can be added and subtracted at will from a definition of God that is effectively arbitrary, this problem of infinitely many monotheistic alternatives[19] is potentially overcome by those philosophical theists who appeal to simplicity,[20] so long as they can argue that simplicity is truth-conducive, and not merely a pragmatic criterion for theory choice.[21] Just as simplicity, in terms of cardinality, may lead the undecided towards monotheism rather than polytheism, so too may simplicity lead the undecided towards a god that is infinitely powerful rather than one that is only partially powerful.[22] In other words, these various models of god are apparently not equally probable: allegedly there is reason to consider theism the most probable monotheism, even if it is not itself very probable. According to Christian philosophers like Richard Swinburne and

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18   The notation on the left hand side of the equation simply means, "the probability of the truth of theism, considering all the evidence and background knowledge".

19   For those who would consider infinity/infinitesimals to be undefined, consider instead the limiting probability as the finite class of monotheistic hypotheses is continuously enlarged. For example, (one googol-1) / one googol, would suffice.

20   I primarily refer to the simplicity of a hypothesis, though this can also apply to the simplicity of a god, since apologists are often fond of assuming that a simpler god (or at least what they consider to be a simpler god) makes for a simpler — and presumably more probable — hypothesis.

21   Cf. Philipse (GAS), 212ff, 246ff.

22   I have argued elsewhere that polytheism, as a catch-all hypothesis, should be considered preferable to monotheism. See Raphael Lataster and Herman Philipse, "The Problem of Polytheisms: A Serious Challenge to Theism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, no. doi: 10.1007/s11153–015–9554-x (2015).

William Lane Craig, theism, simply, is *simpler*. Swinburne claims that "hypotheses attributing infinite values of properties to objects are simpler than ones attributing large finite values" and that "scientific practice shows this preference for infinite values over large finite values of a property".[23] He provides some examples:

> Newton's theory of gravity postulated that the gravitational force travelled with infinite velocity, rather than with some very large finite velocity (say 2,000,000,000.325 km/sec.), which would have predicted the observations equally well within the limit of accuracy to which measurements could be made. Only when Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, concerned with electromagnetism as well as with gravity, was adopted as the simplest theory covering a vast range of data did scientists accept as a consequence of that theory that the gravitational force travelled with a finite velocity. Likewise in the Middle Ages people believed that light travelled with an infinite velocity rather than with some large finite velocity equally compatible with observations. Only when observations were made by Römer in the seventeenth century incompatible with the infinite-velocity theory was it accepted that light had a finite velocity.[24]

Interestingly, these scientists preferred what are allegedly the simpler theories, and they were eventually proven wrong. William Lane Craig also endorses appeals to simplicity in arguing for the truth of theism:

> Considerations of simplicity might also come into play here. For example, it is simpler to posit one metaphysically necessary, infinite, omniscient, morally perfect being than to think that three separate necessary beings exist exemplifying these respective excellent-making properties. Similarly, with respect to quasi-maximally great beings, Swinburne's contention seems plausible that it is simpler (or perhaps less ad hoc) to posit either zero or infinity as the measure of a degreed property than to posit some inexplicably finite measure. Thus, it would be more plausible to think that maximal greatness is possibly instantiated than quasi-maximal greatness.[25]

There are numerous problems with the claim that these infinite qualities are simpler, the most relevant of which is that this sort of simplicity is not necessarily truth-conducive. The appeal to simplicity here is a non sequitur unless

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23   Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (OUP, 2004), 55.
24   Richard Swinburne, *Is There a God?*, Rev. ed. (OUP, 2010), 40–41. See also Swinburne (EG), 55, 97. In these passages, Swinburne also alludes to monotheism being simpler than polytheism.
25   William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Crossway Books, 2008), 188. See also 187.

it can be demonstrated that a hypothesis' relative simplicity makes it more probable or less probable. Swinburne and Craig have not done this; nor has any academic, in any field. Scholars such as Kosso and van Fraassen have recognised the pragmatic aesthetic of simpler explanations, but have not been able to comprehensively demonstrate the greater probability of simpler theories.[26] Complicating matters further for the theist, if simplicity is truth-conducive, so that theism is indeed more probable that similar concepts with, say, slightly weaker or less knowledgeable gods, the degree of preference ought to be justified. Alternatives cannot be brushed aside simply because theism is claimed as being simpler. A slight — or even very large — increase in theism's probability on the basis of its alleged simplicity may not necessarily be enough to overcome the probabilistic weight of the alternatives as a collective, especially when there are very — or infinitely — many, and especially when other factors that could affect the probabilities in favor of monotheistic alternatives are factored in.

It is the latter point to which I now turn. Simplicity can be considered an aspect of a theory's inherent plausibility or prior probability; the direct evidence, affecting the consequent probabilities, also play a crucial role in a proper probabilistic analysis. Whether or not theism is the simplest mono-theistic god-concept, it should not be taken as a given that theism is the most probable one, let alone probable (i.e., $p > 0.5$).

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26   Philosopher of Science, Peter Kosso, explains that "Simplicity is clearly a pragmatic virtue, and for that reason it is a good thing to strive for. But we have yet to see the connection between being simple and being true". See Peter Kosso, *Reading the Book of Nature: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (CUP, 1992), 46. Noting that equating truth and simplicity is groundless, van Fraassen argues along similar lines. See Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Clarendon, 1980). For critiques on this notion relating to Philosophy of Religion (specifically Swinburne's appeal to simplicity), see Julia Göhner, Marie I. Kaiser, and Christian Suhm, "Is Simplicity an Adequate Criterion of Theory Choice?," in *Richard Swinburne: Christian Philosophy in a Modern World*, ed. Nicola Mößner, Sebastian Schmoranzer, and Christian Weidemann (De Gruyter, 2008), 33–46; Johannes Korbmacher, Sebastian Schmoranzer, and Ansgar Seide, "Simply False? Swinburne on Simplicity as Evidence of Truth," in ibid., 47–60. Cf. Philipse (GAS), 212–220, 245–255.

III. THE EVIL GODS

Given the importance of simplicity, there is more information relevant to our investigations than the simplicity of a theory. For example, the existence of evil, or gratuitous suffering, which forms the basis of arguments from evil, is relevant to our probabilistic analysis. The logical argument from evil will here be overlooked, and even the evidential argument from evil as an argument for naturalism is irrelevant at present.[27] We are currently interested in which sort of god-hypothesis would have a greater likelihood given the existence of such evil. With the unjustified appeals to simplicity brushed aside, *ceteris paribus*, the effect of the evidence of gratuitous evil on various god-models will determine which is more likely, and thus — given equal priors — which is more probable. But let us first consider The Evil God Challenge.[28]

What is The Evil God Challenge? Those who believe in an omnipotent, omniscient and supremely good and benevolent deity face the following *evidential problem of evil*. The world contains great evils, such as immense suffering. Let us call evils for which there is no God-justifying reason *gratuitous evils*. Then a well-known argument runs:

(1) If God exists, gratuitous evils do not.

(2) Gratuitous evils exist.

(3) Therefore, there is no God.

While God might allow some suffering as the price paid for greater goods, he presumably would not allow *gratuitous* suffering — suffering for which there is no God-justifying reason. But much of the suffering that is observed does appear to be, from a divine perspective, gratuitous.[29] Therefore, that suffering is *good evidence that God does not exist*. Theists typically respond to the above argument by challenging its second premise. Some develop theodicies: expla-

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27   In the sense that this article is not arguing for naturalism.

28   Stephen Law will soon expand on this concept in a book to be published by OUP.

29   For example, the incredible pain many animals deal with, on a daily basis. Cf. William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979): 337. For a convincing argument about many seemingly gratuitous evils being good evidence for gratuitous evils, see Robert Bass, "Many Inscrutable Evils," *Ars Disputandi* 11, no. 1 (2011): 118–132; Robert Bass, "Inscrutable evils: still numerous, still relevant," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 75, no. 4 (2014): 379–384.

nations for why God allows such evils; explanations in terms of free will, for example. Others suggest that the second premise cannot be known to be true. They argue, for example, that our inability to think of reasons why God would allow the suffering we observe does not allow us to reasonably conclude there is no such reason; this is the position of the 'sceptical theists' — theists that are sceptical about our ability to know such reasons.

Enter the Evil God Challenge. The Challenge turns on the thought that similar responses are also available to someone who believes in an omnipotent, omniscient, and *omnimalevolent* being — i.e., an 'evil God', henceforth "Dog" — in order to deal with the following *mirror* problem: the *evidential problem of good*.

(1) If Dog exists, gratuitous goods do not.

(2) Gratuitous goods exist.

(3) Therefore, there is no Dog.

Gratuitous goods are goods (e.g., love, laughter, ice-cream, puppies, and rainbows) for which there is no Dog-justifying reason. Pre-theoretically, many of us would find this argument compelling and will use something like it to explain why philosophers would consider belief in Dog highly unreasonable. Surely there are abundant goods in the world for which there is unlikely to be any Dog-justifying reason. The Challenge, then, is for theists to explain why belief in God is significantly more reasonable than belief in Dog, with the latter seemingly being absurd; to explain why the presence of both good and evil in the world is fatal for the Dog hypothesis but not for the God hypothesis. Appropriately, just as a range of theodicies has been constructed to deal with the problem of evil, so a range of mirror theodicies (e.g., a mirror free-will theodicy) can be constructed to explain why Dog would allow various observed goods. For example, perhaps this truly is the worst of all worlds, and we — limited as we are — just cannot understand how. The evil god is simply mysterious and her ways inscrutable. All of this appears absurd. These mirror theodicies appear to be about as (in)effective as the standard theodicies. But if the mirror theodicies fail to salvage the Dog hypothesis (if they don't, there is still a serious rival to theism), philosophers can wonder why they ought to consider the standard versions as any more effective in salvaging the God hypothesis.

Sceptical theism also leaves these two hypotheses more or less rationally on par. If sceptical theism succeeds in dealing with the problem of evil, then sceptical theism — or rather, "sceptical dogism" — also succeeds in dealing with the problem of good. For it has the consequence that not only can philosophers not know the second premise of the first argument from evil, neither can they know the second premise of the second, mirror argument; sceptical dogism entails that, for all we know, there may be Dog-justifying reasons for the *goods* we observe. Some will suggest that there are at least arguments *for* the supremely good God not mirrored by arguments for the supremely evil Dog. However, most of the popular arguments for God's existence (cosmological, teleological, and so forth) are actually neutral with respect to God's moral character. There are some ontological and moral arguments specifically for a good God, but even many theists would doubt that they succeed in making the belief in God significantly more reasonable than belief in Dog. Mirror arguments for an evil god can also be constructed, such as this mirror version of a simple ontological argument:

(1) I can conceive of a maximally evil god.

(2) It is more evil for this being to exist in reality than merely in my imagination.

(3) Therefore, the evil being of which I am conceiving must exist in reality.

Some philosophers, such as Keith Ward, Edward Feser, and Christopher Weaver, suggest that the Evil God hypothesis can be shown to involve a logical contradiction, and can thus be ruled out a priori. Ward for example, asserts that it is an a priori truth that, "an omnipotent omniscient being cannot be evil".[30] As this is allegedly not true of the God hypothesis, the belief in God is significantly more reasonable than the belief in Dog. But this is mere presupposition and actually does disservice to what is supposed to be an omnipotent and free god. There is simply no logical reason to rule out the possibility that an all-knowing and all-powerful being can be very evil. In fact, the Judeo-Christian scriptures, usually relevant in discussions about philosophical theism, indicate that God is the source of evil.[31] This objection

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30   Keith Ward, "The Evil God Challenge — A Response," *Think* 14, no. 40 (2015): 43.
31   See Isaiah 45:7.

also overlooks the fact that many of us would, seemingly justifiably, reject belief in Dog on the basis of apparent gratuitous goods in the world,[32] notwithstanding the fact (if it is a fact) that the Dog hypothesis involves such a contradiction. And if sceptics are justified in rejecting the Dog hypothesis on that basis alone, then why is it not justifiable to reject the God hypothesis on the same sort of basis? Surely it is.

Another avenue for the theistic philosopher is to point to those who claim revelatory experiences of a good god. Can't such people reasonably believe given only their, in many cases highly compelling, experiences? But some individuals do indeed have experiences of an evil god (or similar), and yet it is commonly considered that *their* beliefs grounded in such experiences are unreasonable, and in some cases symptomatic of mental illness. One example would be the case of Dena Schlosser, who claims to have been ordered by what can only be described as an evil god, to mutilate her child.[33] When it comes to assessing the rationality of such claims, what relevant difference is there between these beliefs and the similarly grounded beliefs of the traditional theist? Why is one sort of experientially grounded belief reasonable if the other is not? Objective philosophers should not simply prefer one (relatively) plausible model over the other, even if one of them is more desirous.

It appears difficult to avoid the conclusion that both the God and Dog hypotheses are to an extent disconfirmed. If gratuitous goods and evils do exist, then a god-model that fits in between these two extremes should be preferred. Depending on the actual proportion of goods and evils in the world, philosophers ought to favour either a partially good god, a partially evil god,

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32 All else could be considered equal. The Christian theist might object, pointing to the Bible as supportive of God's existence, but this would assume too much. The Bible could easily be argued as being supportive of Dog's existence. The latter may even be more probable, considering the many divinely endorsed genocides and rapes in the Tanakh or Old Testament, the many contradictions found therein, and the religious schisms and religious violence that has eventuated. The theist may also point to personal religious experiences. Again, these could be a result of Dog's existence, and are arguably better explained, on the basis of inconsistency in revelation, on the Dog hypothesis.

33 Apologists' declarations about atheists being unable to declare what is evil — particularly absurd because many atheists do accept an objective standard of morality — notwithstanding. For more on the Schlosser case, see Theresa Porter and Helen Gavin, "Infanticide and Neonaticide: A Review of 40 Years of Research Literature on Incidence and Causes," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 11, no. 3 (2010): 101.

or a morally indifferent god ("Mig"),[34] or a less than omnipotent god who may not be completely able to realise its vision (likewise for a less than omniscient god). In any case, the existence of at least some good and some evil in the world works against the belief in the existence of Dog, as well as the existence of God. While the existence of gratuitous goods and evils may not conclusively rule out the existence of God and Dog, it surely is less expected, rendering those hypotheses relatively less probable. Note that somewhat similar arguments can also be made regarding stupid gods and weak gods. Unfortunately for the theist, yet more challenges await.

IV. THE DEISTIC AND QUASI-DEISTIC GODS

It could be agreed that it is simpler and more reasonable to accept that the one existing god is not sub-maximal, but is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, and yet it is still not necessary to concede that God, the god of theism, exists. Spare a thought for the god of deism, "Deo".[35] Deo is very similar to God, but is not a revelatory god. Deo does not interact or interfere with the creation. Deo does not require us, or anyone/anything else, to believe in her. It is easy to imagine that such a god is far greater than the god of theism, which is seemingly needy of human interaction, particularly with regards to being reminded about how great he is. When the focus shifts to Judeo-Christian theism, it is similarly easy to imagine that a deistic god is greater than the god that needs to constantly rectify the mistakes or imperfections of his creation.[36] That a perfect creature created by an all-powerful God could be-

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34   Cf. Philipse (GAS), 250–251.

35   For some resources on the development of deism and its crucial role in shaping the largely secular contemporary West, see C. J. Betts, *Early Deism in France: From the so-called 'déistes' of Lyon (1564) to Voltaire's 'Lettres philosophiques' (1734)* (Nijhoff Publishers, 1984) and Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (Routledge, 1989).

36   His creation Lucifer was perfect, but then was not (Ezekiel 28:15); God's early companions almost immediately defied him (Genesis 3); almost everyone in the world needed to be killed (Genesis 6–9); still not content with his children in the postdiluvian world, God punishes and segregates humanity by multiplying their languages (Genesis 11); only God's physical manifestation, betrayal, torture and 'death' on Earth could at last set the world to rights (Matthew 27, John 3:16); the latter was not, after all, the 'final solution', with God finally threatening to destroy the world, saving only a select few who are to be rewarded with the privilege of praising God's greatness and wisdom for all eternity (Revelation 5–7). Also of interest is Judges 1:19, which implies that Yahweh could not defeat 'chariots of iron'.

come imperfect seems unthinkable; likewise the need for worldwide floods, blood magic, and divine sacrifice. It also appears doubly unlikely that an all-knowing God would become disappointed with what he — omnipotent and omniscient as he is — created.

Furthermore, deistic god-concepts are far superior probabilistically to theism when reflecting on God's hiddenness in the world, if all else is held equal. Arguments from god's hiddenness tend to focus on the lack of direct evidence for the existence of God. An example would be:

(1) A god that requires our adoration would probably make its existence clear to us.

(2) It is not clear that such a god exists.

(3) Therefore, such a god probably does not exist.

One solution may be the overused appeal to God's alleged inscrutability, as in sceptical theism. But such a tactic removes the possibility for a proper probabilistic analysis, meaning that philosophers could well consider many of the infinitely many alternatives to theism just as — and even more — plausible.[37] A more reasonable objection would be that the lack of evidence is not evidence. However, in epistemic probabilistic analyses, which considers expectations about extant evidence, it certainly can be. Just as the order and the lack of radiation in this room indicates that a nuclear explosion did not occur here yesterday, so too does the lack of interactions with God indicate that God is not as interested in us as typically presumed. A less reasonable objection would be that God does not want to infringe upon our free will. That assumes that the knowledge of God's existence necessarily leads to a person's acceptance and worship of God, which even the Bible rules out, as made obvious by the fall of Lucifer and the disobedience of many ancient Israelites. Simply, if God does not make his love for us clear, it is reasonable to think that God — that is, the god of classical theism — does not exist. It seems that the best way for a supernaturalist to approach the argument is to concede that while it is unlikely that the sort of god described in the first premise ex-

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37 In attempting to refute Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness, Cuneo unconvincingly appeals to mere possibilities, such as the existence of 'divine love', which is different from 'human love'. See Terence Cuneo, "Another look at divine hiddenness," *Religious Studies* 49, no. 2 (2013): 151–164.

ists, some god might still exist. And so we abandon God and move on to Deo. With all else held equal (keep in mind that there are many possible deisms), Deo's existence is more probable than God's.

After all, the evidence of God's hiddenness would be more expected if there existed a god that did not wish for relationships with us. Such arguments do not necessarily rule out theism, but they do make theism less probable, and deism (or other alternatives, like the evil god of dogism who might want to harm us with her silence in order to condemn us to an eternity of suffering) more probable. Arguments from hiddenness, while they can be used to argue for naturalism in a direct comparison with classical theism, do no harm at all to Deo, or at least does not harm every single one of her kin (again, as with previous concepts, there are infinitely-many possible deisms). Hence, *ceteris paribus*, it is more likely that a deistic god exists. Furthermore, the concepts of simplicity appealed to by philosophical theists in order to arrive at a single omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent god can also lead one from theism to deism. Deism makes fewer claims about the world than theism. A fact that also points to its being more robust; there is less to be disconfirmed by future scientific discoveries. Similarly, deism is a catch-all hypothesis, while there is only one theism, or at least one brand of theism endorsed by a particular theistic philosopher.

There are also quasi-deistic gods to consider, ones that may be revelatory after all. It just so happens that the revelations are not intended for us. It is worth considering why it is that theistic philosophers so often assume that humans are of such great objective importance, that they deserve these divine communications. Such scholars ought to entertain the notion that the focus of such a god's (henceforth, "Queo") attention and infatuation may not, in fact, be *Homo sapiens*. This line of thought raises the possibility that many humans cannot bear the thought that they are some insignificant side-effect of other processes, so they invent religions in order to place themselves as the reason for everything and as the object of a loving god's unyielding love and attention. Assuming that a revelatory god does exist, it cannot simply be assumed that it is not some other species that has enamoured her.

Perhaps Queo has actually revealed himself, not to humans, but to an extraterrestrial species.[38] More locally, (s)he might have been revealed to oysters, bees, peacocks, artificially-intelligent robots, or inanimate rocks. For example, the true religious faith might lie with the sheep, whose god will deliver them from those ghastly oversized apes who enslave, and even eat them. Elements of this tradition could have become appropriated by both Jews (cf. their alleged Egyptian captivity) and Christians (cf. Jesus-shepherd motifs).[39] Mayhap Queo has even chosen to reveal god's self to other great apes, such as orangutans or gorillas. It could be some divine joke, that the species chosen to be graced with Queo's all-important reveal is not *Homo sapiens sapiens* (modern humans), but their closest relatives, *Pan paniscus* (bonobos) and *Pan troglodytes* (common chimpanzees).[40]

Consider also, the post-humanist possibilities that Queo has not yet revealed itself to humanity, or any other species, but will do so in future. It may be tomorrow, or one hundred years from now. It may be to *Homo sapiens sapiens*, or a slightly-evolved future human species (perhaps a *Homo evolvus*, *Homo noeticus* or *Homo sapiens luminous*), or a much-changed human species (such

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38   Theists may, irrelevantly, cite the Fermi paradox regarding the lack of evidence for alien civilisations. One novel solution holds that much of the observable universe is a simulation designed to make it appear as though humans are the only intelligent beings. See Stephen Baxter, "The Planetarium Hypothesis: A Resolution of the Fermi Paradox," *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* 54, no. 5/6 (2001): 210–216. Noted Creationist Ken Ham suspects that there are no intelligent extraterrestrials and surprisingly asserts that if there were, "any aliens would also be affected by Adam's sin, but because they are not Adam's descendants, they can't have salvation". See Ken Ham. "'We'll Find a New Earth within 20 Years'", accessed 29/07/2014, http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2014/07/20/well-find-a-new-earth-within-20-years.

39   See Exodus, Psalm 23, 1 Peter 5:4. Note that the archaeological evidence contradicts Jewish claims of Israelite servitude in ancient Egypt. See James Weinstein, "Exodus and the Archaeological Reality," in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (Eisenbrauns, 1997), 87; Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (Free Press, 2002), 62–69. Even respected rabbis such as David Wolpe doubt the historicity of the Exodus, and other aspects of the traditional Jewish origin tales. See Teresa Watanabe. "Doubting the Story of Exodus," accessed 06/07/2015, http://articles.latimes.com/2001/apr/13/news/mn-50481.

40   These two types of chimpanzees are the closest living relatives to humans. See Anne Fischer et al., "Evidence for a Complex Demographic History of Chimpanzees," *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 21, no. 5 (2004): 799–808. Note that the theist could accuse me of presupposing the possibility of a revelation to animals without linguistic capacities. This does not apply to all the examples provided, and would be ungenerous, since the omnipotent God should not be limited by linguistic concerns.

as the Eloi or the Morlocks),[41] or an alternative species (possibly long after humans are extinct), such as the nobly resilient cockroaches[42] or a highly-evolved race of cat-people.[43] Our collective ego, whilst visibly important to the survival of the species, cannot be considered authoritative in matters of objective truth, especially when the matter concerns human importance, where — presently unavailable — outsider perspectives may be required.

There appears to be no good reason to assume anthropocentrism, and a move to more biocentric views would surely allow for more objective philosophising. Indeed, given humanity's fleeting existence in a minute part of the universe, objective arguing for human primacy would be quite the challenge.[44] And that Queo would wait several more years should also not deter the theistic philosopher, given that many theistic religious adherents are content to believe that God had already waited billions (from the creation of the Universe, and the formation of Earth), millions (since the dawn of humankind), hundreds of thousands (since the rise of anatomically modern humans), or thousands (since the rise of human civilisation) of years, before finally revealing herself to only a handful of people in the sparsely-populated deserts of the Middle East.[45]

Similarly, it is possible that Queo has already revealed himself, though much earlier than is traditionally thought. Queo may have been revealed not to modern humans, but to human ancestors such as *Homo heidelbergensis*, *Homo erectus*, *Homo habilis*, *Australopithecus afarensis*, *Pierolapithecus catalaunicus*, or perhaps to the closely-related *Homo floresiensis* or *Homo neanderthalensis*. Or maybe the revelation is not for the advanced apes at all,

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41   See H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (Penguin, 2012).

42   Perhaps the comedian Ellen DeGeneres was correct, when she speculated about god being a giant bug, one that is unimpressed about all the cockroaches and ants that humans have killed. See Ellen DeGeneres, *My Point... and I Do Have One* (Bantam, 1995), 129.

43   *Felis sapiens* plays a prominent role in the surrealist humour of Rob Grant and Doug Naylor. Like humans, these cat people thought themselves very important, created religions, fought holy wars, and obeyed sexually restrictive commandments such as "Thou shalt not partake of carnal knowledge with more than four members of the opposite sex at any one session". See Grant Naylor, *Red Dwarf: Infinity Welcomes Careful Drivers* (Penguin Books, 1989), 123–128.

44   Consider also that humans are not the oldest extant species on Earth (there are also possibly many more older and life-sustaining planets throughout the universe), or the most numerous.

45   This references the God of Judeo-Christianity. See the Biblical books of Genesis and Mark. The populous Chinese, who would later invent the printing press, may have been a wiser choice. The focus on a handful of desert dwellers seems at odds with God's alleged love and desire that *all* shall enter into a relationship with him.

whose origins, like all animals, lie in primordial sludge. This grand revelation may have been reserved for (relatively) non-related species such as the many kinds of dinosaurs, or even earlier — and common — ancestors, such as primitive, single-celled, prokaryote-like organisms. These seemingly misanthropic imaginings are all possibilities that theistic philosophers have for the most part not even acknowledged, let alone eliminated.

It should also be considered that discourses on revelation tend to involve supernatural or miraculous claims, which are inherently implausible, so that again, deisms may be considered simpler and more probable.[46] Philosophers could also consider the possibility that the creator god is no longer present, or even dead. Philosophers could also consider the case of a single god that, whilst being transcendent and fully apart from the creation, is not immaterial as the God of theism is said to be; such a god arguably coheres better with the available evidence.[47] But such reasoning feels *gratuitous* at this stage. The point has been well made. There are numerous — arguably infinitely many — monotheistic alternatives to classical theism, and they have not all been comprehensively refuted or convincingly dismissed for being relatively less probable. In fact, many — perhaps infinitely many — of them are more probable than theism.

V. SUMMARISED ARGUMENT

The following is a summarised and very conservative[48] form of my argument from alternative monotheisms, which charitably assumes that some monotheistic god-model obtains:

(1) There are numerous logically possible monotheisms, of which theism is one.

(2) Many of these models can reasonably explain the evidence.

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46   Several scholars have argued against the crucial revelatory event that is Jesus' resurrection, and miraculous/supernatural claims in general. For example, see Raphael Lataster, "A Philosophical and Historical Analysis of William Lane Craig's Resurrection of Jesus Argument," *Think* 14, no. 39 (2015): 59–71.

47   Since substance dualism has not yet been established.

48   In that infinitely many alternatives are not appealed to, which could unsportingly reveal the probability of theism's truth as effectively being 0, even when monotheism is accepted.

(3) At least some of these models explain the evidence better than theism.

(4) Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that theism is unlikely to be true.

The first premise is obviously true. Numerous monotheistic god-models can be conceived, and theism, or an individual's specific brand of theism, is but one of them.[49] (2) is also true; it is (3) that may be contentious. Nevertheless, while arguments from evil and hiddenness do not decisively disprove the existence of God or of any god/s, they certainly point to the higher probability of alternative god-concepts. Other evidences that are taken to support theism over naturalism do not necessarily support theism over all alternative monotheisms. For example, the deistic god also creates and fine-tunes. Note that 'the evidence' refers to all currently available evidence and factors pertaining to reasonable belief, and that some of these models differ from theism only on one point (e.g., tolerance of evil, willingness to reveal), so that the higher likelihood results in a higher overall probability. This all leads naturally to (4). There are many monotheistic alternatives to theism that are more probable. As such, theism is very improbable, even when the existence of one and only one transcendent god is conceded.

VI. CONCLUSION

Thus is the *argument from alternative monotheisms*. For the sake of argument, it was assumed that the evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that one and only one transcendent god exists. However, if so, the evidence is not sufficient to declare that theism is probable, or at least the most probably instantiated of the monotheistic god-concepts; a task made more complicated by the fact that there are infinitely many monotheistic alternatives to theism. In fact, many of the alternatives to God, such as Dog (the Evil God), Mig (the morally indifferent god), Deo (a deistic god), and Queo (a quasi-deistic god), better explain the evidence; evidence such as the gratuitous goods and evils present in the world, and of the 'hiddenness of God'. In other words, it is relatively more probable that these, similar, and other gods exist. Of course, even if theism were the most

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49 Of course, secular critics might object that it is not clear that there are *any* logically possible monotheisms. But this is charitably assumed here, for the sake of argument.

probable of the monotheisms, the extent to which it is more probable needs to be established, since the catch-all hypothesis of alternative monotheisms could still be more probable than theism. Theistic philosophers have not accomplished this, even if the unjustified assertion that their notions of simplicity render a theory more probable were granted. Based on current evidence, theism should be considered a very improbable god-model, even when the existence of one and only one transcendent god is upheld.

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