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THEME OF THE ISSUE:
DEBATING RATIONALITY OF SECOND-ORDER RELIGIOUS BELIEF

DISCUSSIONS AND REPLIES

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

IS THERE A DILEMMA FOR FIRST-ORDER SUPERNATURALIST BELIEF?

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The importance of seventeenth-century religious epistemology is reflected in the enduring influence of David Hume's essay "Of Miracles."[1] Brandon Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican continue in the tradition of nuanced praise for this icon of religious skepticism.[2] They vigorously object to Hume's "Maxim on miracles" as it is usually and most plausibly interpreted; nevertheless, they see in Hume's treatment of miracles the lineaments of an argument that deserves refinement. It is an argument against "first-order supernaturalism."

Janusz Salamon defends a version of first-order religious belief against the challenge set forth by Thornhill-Miller and Millican.[3] This version of first-order religious belief identifies what is religiously ultimate with what is fundamentally *good*. This "axiologically grounded" religious outlook he calls "agatheism." While his "agatheism" is a bona fide case of first-order religious belief, it complements the Thornhill-Miller and Millican thesis in somewhat unexpected ways.

My plan is, first, to evaluate key elements of the Thornhill-Miller and Millican challenge, and then to comment more briefly on the shape of Salamon's religious epistemology as it relates to the problem of religious diversity and the conflict between naturalism and supernaturalism.

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1   Hume's essay "Of Miracles" is Section X of David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter Millican (OUP, [1748] 2007).
2   See Brandon Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma: Revisions of Humean Thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 1 (2015): 1–49.
3   See Janusz Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism in the Global Ethical Discourse: Reply to Millican and Thornhill-Miller", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 4 (2015): 197–245.

I. THE CHALLENGE TO FIRST-ORDER SUPERNATURALISM IN BRANDEN THORNHILL-MILLER AND PETER MILLICAN

Thornhill-Miller and Millican first draw a distinction between first-order and second-order supernaturalism.[4] First-order supernaturalism invokes the role of supernatural agents in accounting for the world and human religious experience; second-order supernaturalism takes natural processes to be the proximate causes of the world and human religious sensibilities. First-order religions vary in doctrinal content; second-order religion is comparatively amorphous but fairly uniform. First-order religions compete dogmatically with each other; second-order religion is tolerant and undogmatic. First-order religion is socially divisive; second-order religion is peace-making and peace-keeping. First-order religion is epistemically onerous; second-order religion is more or less epistemically innocuous.[5]

After a lengthy critique of Hume's Maxim on miracles,[6] the authors argue directly for their primary thesis: versions of first-order supernaturalism are "rationally unwarranted." They register a loud negative verdict regarding the epistemic status of first-order religious belief systems. This verdict is expressed in various ways, some stronger than others. "Rationally unwarranted" is a relatively tame expression of their sentiment. (But of course it

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4   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 3.

5   On this last point, the authors may disagree. But here it is easy to become entangled in a distinction between what is epistemically viable and what is pragmatically desirable (which, you might say, concerns the ethics of belief). This accounts for the emergence of a "Normal/Objective Dilemma" (NOD), where the personal and social benefits of religion stand in tension with the scientific view of the world. The tension is due to the contrasting advantages and disadvantages of each: the religious form of life, though rationally defective, produces various personal and social goods that are outside the power of science to effect (e.g., greater happiness, increased longevity, positive behavioral change, mental health, community support, sense of purpose, comfort in the face of hardship, etc.); scientific naturalism, though socially and subjectively impotent where religion is strong, is rationally exemplary. For their discussion of these themes, see ibid., 37–43 and 45. (Does naturalistic belief produce the personal and social benefits so often associated with a community of supernaturalists? Can naturalism even account for the desirability of the fruit that a religious form of life so often produces? That is to say, is it right to desire these goods, given naturalism? If the naturalist is right to desire and to seek the personal and social goods mentioned by the authors, but attributed by them to the practice of religion in the world, can this have a bearing on the epistemic status of religious belief?)

6   See ibid., 5–16.

does not follow that if supernaturalism is unwarranted, or if the evidence for supernaturalism is seriously "undermined", then scientific naturalism is better warranted or better grounded evidentially.)

The argument for their basic thesis is developed late in section III of their essay.[7] This argument issues in a dilemma for first-order supernaturalism, a dilemma that severely undermines the evidential value of miracle reports on behalf of any first-order supernaturalism. This "Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma" (CCDD) is stated as follows:

> in so far as religious phenomena (e.g., miracle reports, religious experiences or other apparent perceptions of supernatural agency) point towards specific aspects of particular religions, their diversity and mutual opposition undermines their evidential force; while in so far as such phenomena involve a 'common core' of similarity, they point towards a proximate common cause for these phenomena that is natural rather than supernatural.[8]

Here we have the conjunction of two independent conclusions. First, the evidential value of miracle reports on behalf of any particular first-order supernaturalism is severely undermined. Second, in all probability, strong similarities in reportage of miracles (and kindred phenomena) across belief systems suggest that these phenomena are caused by natural mechanisms and not by some supernatural agency. Jointly, these two conclusions spell serious trouble for first-order supernaturalism.

Strictly speaking, the authors' statement of CCDD suggests that these two conclusions express distinct lemmas that stand in tension with each other. CCDD is expressly called a dilemma. But if I understand each main part of CCDD correctly, then the dilemma does not consist in the juxtaposition of these two claims. We would have a dilemma of the first order if (a) one horn asserted that the phenomena point strongly toward supernatural agency and the second horn maintained that the phenomena most likely are caused by natural means rather than by supernatural means, and (b) both horns were more or less equally attractive on the arguments presented. But this is not reflected in the structure of CCDD.

The acronym "CCDD" reverses the order of the terms of the dilemma as stated by the authors. The second thesis makes direct reference to a "common

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7   See ibid., 15–20.
8   Ibid., 20.

core" across versions of supernaturalism. The first thesis alludes to a form of diversity among versions of supernaturalism. The *common core* refers to the phenomena thought to count as evidence for the respective belief systems among supernaturalists, and *diversity* (I take it) pertains to differences among their belief systems. This interpretation of CCDD may be mistaken since in the authors' statement of the diversity clause the referent of "their" in the phrase "their diversity and opposition" may (grammatically) be understood either as the religious phenomena that do the pointing or as the differences in belief (i.e., specific aspects of particular religions) across varieties of super-naturalism. The latter seems more likely, since the authors stress differences in aspects of religious systems when seeking to show that appeal to the same sort of phenomena (e.g., miracle reports) as evidence is otiose.

I suggest that CCDD embeds two claims that do not obviously stand in the relevant sort of tension to generate a significant dilemma. They may appear to because the first looks like a *diversity thesis* (D) and the second looks like a *common-core thesis* (CC). One key to identifying this confusion is that in the first statement of CCDD, the phenomena point to one sort of thing and in the second statement of CCDD the phenomena point to another sort of thing, and whatever tension there may be between these two sorts of things doesn't seem very telling. For then the worry would be about there being a "common cause" for disparate sets of religious beliefs. That may need some explaining alright, but if that is the central difficulty captured by CCDD, it doesn't seem very urgent, nor does it seem to track what the authors mean to be arguing in section III.

At any rate, the first thesis in CCDD does seem to express a dilemma. And it is this thesis that I wish to address in what follows.[9]

Thornhill-Miller and Millican say that "in so far as religious phenomena (e.g., miracle reports ...) point towards specific aspects of particular religions, their diversity and mutual opposition undermines their evidential force." How does this statement harbor a dilemma? It does so in the following way. Believers who embrace a particular form of first-order supernaturalism

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9   The second thesis may be viewed as an explanation for first-order religious beliefs across different systems of belief where each appeals in its own way to miracle reports as evidence that what is believed is true. It is the burden of sections 4–6 of their essay to develop this point. I address this point briefly below.

cannot have it both ways. They cannot depend on the evidence of miracle reports for support of their own particular doctrinal convictions and at the same time deny the evidential value of miracle reports made on behalf of competing systems of first-order supernatural belief. One group of first-order religious believers may find it attractive to accept miracle reports and regard these as evidence for their own beliefs, and find it attractive, as well, to deny the same evidential advantage to another group of first-order religious believers who believe differently and on the basis of other miracle reports. This is their dilemma, and as a consequence the evidential value of miracle reports is undermined — thus, religious believers should not rely on miracle reports as evidence for their own particular religious beliefs.

What is the argument for this claim? One argument stressed by the authors is a "contrary religions" argument. In summary of the point, they say that the argument "highlights the difficulty of supporting any particular supernatural explanatory framework when so many conflict."[10] What they mean is that a supernatural explanation for a miracle report (or for what is reported?) will not be of much service in a context where "contrary religions" are playing the same game with miracle reports.[11]

They consider two scenarios, one where the contest is between two or more distinct versions of first-order supernaturalism and one where the contest is between "supernaturalism as a whole" and "scientific naturalism."[12] They are rather dismissive of the first sort of case, especially where it involves the claim that this or that miracle would, if it happened, be "intimately tied

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10   Ibid.
11   Here is another hint as to how the twin theses of CCDD may be thought to reflect a dilemma. The first thesis alludes to a supernatural explanation for miracle reports and the second explicitly favors a naturalistic explanation for the same. But a similar problem arises for construing CCDD as the statement of a dilemma. For the first thesis does not suggest that a supernatural explanation for miracle reports is in some context reasonable. On the contrary, it expresses the way that their evidential force is undermined.
12   See ibid., 17. What they mean by "supernaturalism as a whole" is not altogether clear. Do they mean something like "a spectrum of (first-order) supernaturalisms" or are they alluding to "second-order supernaturalism"? I suspect it's the former rather than the latter. They speak of "miracle stories available within the combined religions traditions of the world" (17), and of "the abundance of supernatural manifestations reported in diverse religious traditions" (also 17). But I won't take the space here to chase down further exegetical clues on this point.

to the truth of the corresponding religion (and specifically to those crucial doctrines that make the religion logically contrary)."[13]

Perhaps only an "apologist", for example, would dream of arguing that "Jesus' miracles prove him beyond doubt to have been the Son of God."[14] But here the authors link their pejorative use of "apologist" with alleged *proof beyond doubt*, when the real point is whether a miraculous event may be *intimately tied* to a particular religious truth claim. An intimate tie need not be so intimate as to be tantamount to indubitable proof — a high degree of probability will do.

Now a "conventional" Christian will likely recognize that, should Jesus have been raised from the dead, this is some confirmation that he was specially authorized by God to reveal divine truth. And a thoughtful Christian of the conventional sort will be properly sensitive to the need for a judicious weighing of evidence for the occurrence of a miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus.[15]

The point is important since the authors insist that the phenomena under consideration "involve a 'common core.'" This implies that a phenomenon like reports of the resurrection of Jesus by alleged eyewitnesses shares a common core with miracle claims associated with other religions. Now surely the authors do not mean by "common core" that *what is reported (or what is believed) to have happened* in the case of Christian belief is comparable to *what is reported (or what is believed) to have happened* in a representative range of cases among non-Christian systems of belief. For there is slender evidence indeed for affinities of precisely this sort — viz., reportage of the resurrection of a great religious figure — across major religious traditions.

So their point, presumably, is that similarity resides in the *believing* that a miracle has happened. But this won't do. For similarity of *quality* of belief is no evidence of common *cause* of belief. In the case of the resurrection of Jesus, the first disciples of Jesus did not rest with reporting that Jesus was raised from the dead; they also reported on the reasons they had for believing that he rose from the dead. And the reasons they gave are the sorts of reasons an

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13   Ibid., 16.
14   Ibid.
15   I use the ill-advised phrase "conventional Christian" because that is the phrase used by the authors in their reference to Christians whose beliefs align with the tradition of the historic Christian church extending back to the first century.

intelligent eyewitness would require and find convincing. Indeed, the reasons they gave would be good reasons to believe that this was an actual event.

One reason why these would be good reasons is that they would be a means of filtering out the supposed nearly universal proneness to credulity among human persons, as alleged by Hume and supposed to be true by Thornhill-Miller and Millican. Explicit concern with evidence is one step toward curbing cognitive biases, whether in favor of supernaturalism or of naturalism. Acknowledging that human proneness to bias besets naturalists as well as supernaturalists, Thornhill-Miller and Millican stress the need to "systematically compensate" for the potency of bias and to remain "constantly alert to our profound and pervasive ability to deceive ourselves as well as others."[16] A first-order religious believer who credits evidence of the miraculous is not inherently more cognitively biased than naturalists who are unmoved by such evidence as there is.

The evidence available to an eyewitness of some miraculous event is further strengthened when the eyewitness also has background evidence of the right sort. Suppose eyewitnesses to the resurrection had independent background evidence for the existence of God, a God who has a track record of active demonstration that he cares for human persons in sundry ways. Suppose, further, that alleged eyewitnesses had evidence of the sort that justified a reasonable expectation that God would act on a grand scale to rescue humanity from peril.[17]

Background evidence of this sort may "dispose" one to believe that a miracle has occurred when there is also good circumstantial evidence that a miracle has occurred. For if God exists, then miracles are possible, and because they are possible a supernatural explanation is not automatically ruled out. A supernatural explanation may even be more plausible than a naturalistic one—such as when its occurrence is recalcitrant to explanation in terms of

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16   Ibid., 36.
17   The authors register their dissatisfaction with theistic arguments without entering into a detailed discussion of them. (See ibid., 47, n. 143.) While this topic goes well beyond their immediate goals, its significance is deep and urgent for a full assessment of their CCDD argument against first-order supernaturalism. Evidence for the existence of God, from whatever quarter, represents a strong potential defeater for their naturalism and for their argument.

natural laws.[18] In special circumstances it might even be reasonable to expect a miracle, which would, if it happened, be some confirmation that one was right to expect a miracle.[19]

We must also bear in mind the distinction between explaining belief that a miracle has occurred and explaining the occurrence of a miracle. Thornhill-Miller and Millican appeal to empirical research to support a wholly naturalistic explanation for supernaturalist *belief*. But suppose a miracle has occurred and a believer has plausible grounds for believing that it has. What then? The possibility of explaining the origin of such belief in terms of physical mechanisms will do nothing to vitiate the actual evidence the person has and may well be prepared to present to others. Causes are no substitute for reasons.

We should note that reductionist explanations that seek to account for the origin of religious belief, or for the character of religious experience, in terms of physical causes depend for their plausibility on such things as (1) first-person reports about internal states that match up with observations in the brain, (2) an accumulation of correlations between brain states and mental events, and (3) independent reasons to think that what is believed by the subject of an experiment is actually false. The first point denotes a persistent general problem for physicalist accounts of consciousness. The second pertains to the threat of illicit inference from correlations to causes.

The third factor is crucial to the argument that beliefs grounded in miracle reports, religious experiences, and the like are actually caused by natural mechanisms and bear no relation to the involvement of supernatural agents. Confidence that this is so derives from knowledge of cases where it is more or less obvious that what is believed is false or that the belief is induced by such factors — in other words, where credulity is strongly indicated or demonstrable. The peculiar reasons for thinking that many persons are moved to belief chiefly by aspects of their social situation and by features of their na-

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18   See R. Douglas Geivett, "The Evidential Value of Miracles", in *In Defense of Miracles*, ed. by R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 178–195, especially 179–181. See also R. Douglas Geivett, "Miracles [Addendum]", in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Donald M. Borchert, vol. 6 (Thomson Gale, 2006), 274–276.

19   See R. Douglas Geivett, "Hume and a Cumulative Case Argument", in *In Defense of Natural Theology: A Post-Humean Assessment*, ed. by James F. Sennett and Douglas Groothuis (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 297–329, especially 310–312. See also Geivett, "The Evidential Value of Miracles", 187–194.

ture arising in our evolutionary history are not obviously exhibited in those cases where reasons and evidence are taken seriously by the believer. Even with respect to religious experience and miracle reports a subject can apply suitable tests to ensure the greater likelihood that what they believe is true.[20]

Arguments from "common core" that stress general features of "contrary religions", and explanations in terms of purely naturalistic mechanisms (that, by the way, are little understood) are advanced by these authors without due consideration of specific cases. The arguments they give illustrate effectively why miracle reports must be assessed on a case-by-case basis and in light of the full range of evidence that bears on questions about the epistemic status of supernaturalist belief. And special priority must be given to the study of cases where reasons seem to matter to a believer and the reasons presented are prima facie plausible. In addition, similar studies should be devised for understanding the origin of *naturalist* belief, or *anti-supernaturalist* belief (which is not the same thing), and the results of studies of this kind should be no less widely disseminated.[21]

Suppose, finally, that we distinguish between the evidence of *first-hand experience* of a miracle and the evidence of *testimony* that a miracle once took place. Thornhill-Miller and Millican are, after all, concerned chiefly with miracle *reports* (as well as the phenomena of religious experience). Even here we must assess the grounds for belief on a case-by-case basis. And we must tease out the details of the evidence at our disposal. Here again, background evidence will be indispensable. And we must situate our account of the evidential value of miracle reports within the broader theory of testimonial evidence.

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20   See R. Douglas Geivett, "The Evidential Value of Religious Experience", in *The Rationality of Theism*, ed. by Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser (Routledge, 2003), 175–203.

21   Thornhill-Miller and Millican acknowledge that "a similar disparaging counter-argument may now be attempted on the other side, suggesting that it is the disbeliever's mind — rather than that of the believer — which is abnormal and somehow deficient" (38). The literature on this general point is much larger than the few items they cite. The disproportionate effort to demonstrate the scale of irrationality among believers may reflect a cognitive bias on their part. On what basis can we (or they) be sure that they have taken appropriate "compensatory" measures to ensure objectivity? How is anyone to allay suspicion that a particular supernaturalist or a particular naturalist, however intellectually sophisticated, has been suitably "alert to our profound and pervasive ability to deceive ourselves as well as others"? (36). The authors set forth an elaborate argument from "empirical research", but it is all for naught if they do not engage the supernaturalist on the question of evidence, where rationality is properly measured.

It is beyond the scope of this brief essay to fill out the details of a cumulative case for the Christian brand of theism. Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican deserve credit for setting forth several points of reference for moving forward toward this end. But their argument for a Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma falls short as an argument against first-order supernaturalism. And their proneness to condemn the run of first-order religious believers as irrational clashes rather conspicuously with their stated intention to foster "a more cooperation- and humility-enhancing understanding of religious diversity."[22]

II. THE AGATHEISM COUNTER-PROPOSAL
OF JANUSZ SALAMON

Thornhill-Miller and Millican conclude their essay with avowed openness to a second-order supernaturalism, according to which there exists "a luminous, *second-order* ultimate reality of some kind that yet lies beyond the comprehension of all our individual efforts to point to it."[23] Their basic proposal is that we should "abandon the competing dogmatisms of *first-order supernaturalism* and instead fall back on its *second-order* cousin, finding intimations of divinity in the general structures of the world and in our own religious instincts, while remaining fully committed to the enterprise of natural science."[24]

Janusz Salamon attempts a refinement of the Thornhill-Miller/Milllican hypothesis. On his reading of their essay, this is the two-part hypothesis that a second-order supernaturalism, in contrast to first-order supernaturalisms, (a) is intellectually plausible and (b) fosters a spirit of global cooperation among supernaturalists and between supernaturalists and naturalists. Thornhill-Miller and Millican do draw these conclusions. That second-order supernaturalism is intellectually acceptable, whereas first-order supernaturalism is not, is a major theme of their paper. However, it seems to me that the primary burden of their paper is to demonstrate the irrationality of first-order belief.

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22   See Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 2.

23   Ibid., 49.

24   Ibid., 46. Their concession to second-order supernaturalism is cautious, as might be expected of naturalists, and it depends heavily on the fortunes of a Fine-Tuning Argument whose intellectual support is notably fluid and whose implications are as yet indeterminate (see 1, 4).

Does this clear the way for their view that second-order religion is intellectually tolerable and that a religion of this sort would be a welcome tonic for the divisive spirit that pervades our religiously pluralistic context? I suppose it does. But is this their chief concern? I'm not so sure. Their support for second-order supernaturalism is cautious and tentative. Running through their discussion is the faintly expressed hope that we may one day be able to do without religion altogether.[25] Second-order religion is a compromise, an interim measure, to be tolerated by the naturalist who is burdened with sharing the public sphere with religious believers. And anyway, it beats first-order religion, which is rather more of a nuisance. This is the impression I get from reading Thornhill-Miller and Millican.

Salamon sees things differently. In his view, the effort to create shared space for naturalism and supernaturalism is a dominant objective. The "main rationale" for their hypothesis is to calm restive spirits.[26] This accounts for Salamon's focus on conditions for "global ethical discourse" in his reply to Thornhill-Miller and Millican. Salamon echoes a legitimate concern for civility in our religiously plural context, and he does so in a way that seems altogether genuine. This is reason enough to examine his proposal closely.

His basic proposal is that religious belief of the first order is properly grounded in our axiological consciousness: "it identifies the Ultimate Reality religiously conceived with the ultimate good which is postulated as a transcendental condition of our axiological consciousness through which we perceive and evaluate the goods at which our actions are aimed and towards which our hopes are directed."[27] Our axiological orientation is ontologically rooted in the good (*to agathon*), which is Ultimate or Absolute. The essential goodness of the Absolute is the axiological center of Salamon's supernaturalism, which he calls "agatheism." *Agatheos* is a postulate and concrete visions of the Absolute, reflected in various first-order religious traditions, are products of human religious imagination.[28]

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25   See, for example, ibid., 47.

26   See Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism", 200.

27   Ibid., 201.

28   There are strong affinities between Salamon's proposal and John Hick's conception of "the Real", his view of what religions have in common morally, and his notion of "mythological truth." See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (YUP, 1989).

This is the core idea of Salamon's "new paradigm of the atheism/religion debate."[29] It ties directly to his account of global ethical discourse and it calls for an "alternative epistemological option of conceiving the nature and grounds of religious belief."[30] I will comment briefly on three aspects of his religious epistemology.

First, it is strongly motivated by the desire to develop a model of ethical discourse in the context of religious diversity. Stated more generally, the contours of his religious epistemology are shaped by practical aims. And here there arises the possibility of conflating the ethics of belief with standards of epistemic justification.

Salamon aims to construct an epistemology of religious *belief*. A central task of any such endeavor is to explain how religious beliefs are *epistemically grounded*. And this amounts to describing (in general terms) what makes it likely that what is believed is *true*. So religious epistemology is largely concerned with what grounds a believer's judgment that this or that proposition is true. There are many accounts of this in the philosophy of religion. Some religious believers are evidentialists while others are anti-evidentialists. Some unapologetic fideists are neither.[31] In any case, epistemic grounding is tied to the *epistemic aim* of believing what's true.

This means that Salamon's option in religious epistemology should be oriented toward this cognitive aim of believing what's true. However, his practical concern for satisfying our global ethical needs and desires is a significant constraint on the option he's prepared to accept. So we must ask, does this practical concern drive his analysis of meeting our cognitive aim, viz., to believe what is true? If it does, then it will not serve as a plausible option. The satisfaction of our global ethical needs and desires in the sphere of religion cannot serve as an indicator of what is true.[32]

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29   For details, see Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism", §1 (198–207).
30   Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism", 200. For details, see §II (207–223), and §IV (230–243).
31   For a collection of essays representing a range of prominent approaches, see R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (OUP, 1992).
32   I have discussed the problem of religious knowledge in the current "post-secular" context in an unpublished paper titled "Neither Secular nor Religious? The Paradox of Pluralism and the Problem of Religious Knowledge" (presented at the V Congreso Mundial y Asamblea General de la COMIUCAP, Universidad de Santo Tomás, Bogotá D.C., Colombia, July 8, 2017).

Second, if our cognitive goal of believing what's true is made to subserve some practical concern (global harmony, for example), then the need for a leveling conception of God and of religious truth is liable to control the epistemic agenda. It is no surprise that agatheism is, as Salamon says, a "thinner" concept than theism of the classical sort. But we must let the evidence speak for itself. If the evidence points to the existence of a God with discernible properties, a God who has acted in history and who has revealed himself in sundry ways (including the pages of scripture, miracles, and what have you), then this will tend to specify the content of true religion in a way that worries pluralists and naturalists.[33]

Third, the forgoing puts us only a short step away from the view that God is cognitively inaccessible. Salamon is critical of theistic arguments precisely on the grounds that God transcends human concepts. God, as God is in himself (pardon the pronoun), is strictly unknowable. Theism in the classical sense is a "thick" concept that can have no literal referent. The being of a conceptually "thin" Absolute good, as envisoned in agatheism, is the best we can come up with, and this can only be postulated.

What, then, is the basis for believing anything in particular about "Agatheos"? This is where *imagination* plays a role, and here is a potential point of contact between Salamon and Thornhill-Miller/Millican. Particular forms of supernaturalism arise through the exercise of human imagination. First-order supernaturalisms are personal and social constructs. The difference between Salamon and Thornhill-Miller/Millican is that Salamon welcomes this result and Thornhill-Miller/Millican consider it a blight.

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33   Evidence may include, but need not be limited to, evidence that figures in traditional arguments for the existence of God and the character of religious experience. Paul Moser has described a category of evidence that is available only when a would-be believer is prepared to obey God's will, whatever it may be and whatever the cost. This is rooted in a consideration of what sort of being God is and how God would choose to reveal himself given that he is perfectly morally good. This view bears comparison with Janusz Salamon's approach since both he and Moser start with a conception of the "Ultimate" in terms of the goodness of its nature. For Moser, goodness is a perfection of God's nature as Person that makes God worship-worthy. For Salamon, the Ultimate is "good", but in an ontologically austere sense that may not entail personhood. For Moser's view, see his many writings, including *The Elusive God* (CUP, 2008), and *The Evidence for God*. (CUP, 2009).

The upshot is that first-order supernatural belief is explained *causally* in both the Thornhill-Miller/Millican account and in the Salamon account. It is doubtful that "first-order" religious believers will welcome Salamon's proposal any more than they would Thornhill-Miller's and Millican's. Salamon sees in the *agathon* an intellectually permissible common core across versions of first-order supernaturalism and supposes that this will be enough to mitigate the fearsome dogmatism of individual cases of supernaturalism. This seems unlikely. Salamon suggests that first-order religious believers will turn away from the Thornhill-Miller/Millican account "because it misconstrues the nature and grounds of religious belief."[34] I suspect that first-order religious believers would resist the Salamon account for much the same reason. Salamon's proposal is indeed a refinement of Thornhill-Miller and Millican after all, and as such it must share in several of its liabilities.

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34   Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism", 197.

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IMAGININGS

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Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace

(John Lennon)

I. IMAGINE

In Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican's challenging and provocative essay, we hear a considerably longer, more scholarly and less melodic rendition of John Lennon's catchy tune — without religion, or at least without first-order supernaturalisms (the kinds of religion we find in the world), there'd be significantly less intra-group violence.[1] First-order supernaturalist beliefs, as defined by Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican (hereafter M&M), are "beliefs that claim unique authority for some particular religious tradition

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1   While it is beyond the scope of my argument, I'd like to correct the authors' misconstrual of my views. Footnote 106 implies that I think that atheism is "abnormal and somehow deficient." However, while I argue that atheism is abnormal in the technical sense of falling outside the norm, and that it is non-natural, in the technical sense that it is neither intuitive nor does it fall out easily from our typical belief processes, I explicitly reject the inference that atheism is somehow deficient. Modern science is both abnormal and non-natural and yet one who affirms it is not deficient.

in preference to all others" (3). According to M&M, first-order supernatural-ist beliefs are exclusivist, dogmatic, empirically unsupported, and irrational. Moreover, again according to M&M, we have perfectly natural explanations of the causes that underlie such beliefs (they seem to conceive of such natu-ral explanations as debunking explanations). They then make a case for sec-ond-order supernaturalism, "which maintains that the universe in general, and the religious sensitivities of humanity in particular, have been formed by supernatural powers *working through natural processes*" (3). Second-order supernaturalism is a kind of theism, more closely akin to deism than, say, Christianity or Buddhism. It is, as such, universal (according to contempo-rary *psychology* of religion), empirically supported (according to *philosophy* in the form of the Fine-Tuning Argument), and beneficial (and so justified *pragmatically*). With respect to its pragmatic value, second-order supernatu-ralism, according to M&M, gets the good(s) of religion (cooperation, trust, etc) without its bad(s) (conflict and violence). Second-order supernaturalism is thus rational (and possibly true) and inconducive to violence. In this paper, I will examine just one small but important part of M&M's argument: the claim that (first-order) religion is a primary motivator of violence and that its elimination would eliminate or curtail a great deal of violence in the world. Imagine, they say, no religion, too.

Janusz Salamon offers a friendly extension or clarification of M&M's sec-ond-order theism, one that I think, with emendations, has promise. He ar-gues that the core of first-order religions, the belief that Ultimate Reality *is* the Ultimate Good (agatheism), is rational (agreeing that their particular claims are not) and, if widely conceded and endorsed by adherents of first-order reli-gions, would reduce conflict in the world.

While I favor the virtue of intellectual humility endorsed in both papers, I will argue contra M&M that (a) belief in first-order religion is not a primary motivator of conflict and violence (and so eliminating first-order religion won't reduce violence). Second, partly contra Salamon, who I think is half right (but not half wrong), I will argue that (b) the religious resources for compassion can and should come from within both the particular (often exclusivist) and the universal (agatheistic) aspects of religious beliefs. Finally, I will argue that (c) both are guilty, as I am, of the philosopher's obsession with belief.

II. RESPONSE TO M&M

Without re-presenting their entire case, I will highlight some of M&M's more supportive and suggestive remarks:

> The dark side of the exclusivity and certainty that produces in-group cohesion is the conflict with out-groups and the common tendency to vilify the 'other' that it also creates (41).

> But clearly supernatural belief systems — and those that involve *certainty* and *exclusivity* in particular — constitute a significant part of the problem, especially when (beyond the examples already cited) the mere implicit contextual presence of religious symbols is shown to increase intergroup bias even among the non-religious (42).

> The rise over the past century of various forms of fundamentalist-style religious belief in response to globalisation has recently crescendoed, arguably becoming a defining characteristic and source of conflict in our age (43).

Relying on insights drawn from the cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion, M&M argue that religion's cooperative and cohesive benefits did and do draw competitive individuals into increasingly larger and more successful social groups. Yet, they go on, in-group (friend, good, trust) creates out-group (enemy, bad, fear), which, in turn, leads to dehumanization, conflict, and, ultimately, violence. They assume, I think wrongly, that the very thing that creates in-group is the very thing that creates out-group, thus engendering violence.

Brief cautionary interlude. M&M repeatedly cite recent work in cognitive psychology and its more speculative sibling, evolutionary psychology. Let me offer a caution — while some studies do show this or that, many (perhaps most) do not.[2] The cognitive science of religion is in its infancy and evolutionary psychology is even infanter (yes, I just invented that term). If we were to apply the epistemology of disagreement to cognitive science of religion (CSR)

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2   See Harold Pashler and Eric-Jan Wagenmakers "Editors' Introduction to the Special Section on Replicability in Psychological Science: A Crisis of Confidence?" *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 6 (2012); Stéphane Doyen et al., "Behavioral Priming: It's All in the Mind, but Whose Mind?", *PLOS ONE* 7, no. 1 (2012); Christine R. Harris et al., "Two failures to replicate high-performance-goal priming effects", *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 8 (2013); David R. Shanks et al., "Priming Intelligent Behavior: An Elusive Phenomenon", *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 4 (2013).

(as they do to first-order religion), we should be as skeptical of CSR as M&M are of first-order religion. I don't mean to reject all of the findings of CSR; but we should approach them with caution and affirm them with humility.

Back to the main argument. With cries of "Allahu Akbar" ringing in our ears, it's easy (if you try) to think that if (first-order) religion were eliminated, there'd be no more war. But, and here's my imagine: if religion were eliminated over night, we'd wake up to exactly (or nearly exactly) the same conflicts around the world. And these conflicts would persist because the root causes of the conflict, not being religion, would remain.

Let me ease into my claim. While M&M claim that "fundamentalist-style religious belief …[is] … arguably becoming a defining characteristic and source of conflict in our age", one wonders where the boundaries of "our age" lie. It's only a very short memory and, I believe, confirmation bias and bigotry aimed primarily at Muslims that lead us to think that religion lies at the heart of violence. M&M concede that secular motivations are often responsible for war; they write, "A war survey carried out by the BBC even suggests that *non*-religious absolutist ideologies and forms of tribalism have been responsible for more war, death, and destruction in recorded history than purely religious motivations" (42). But they immediately return to their claim that first-order religions *clearly* constitute a significant part of the problem (42). I think it's not so clear and recent history belies the claim.

The twentieth-century (arguably, "our age") was the bloodiest in human history, with casualties vastly exceeding any previous conflict. None of the bloodiest of these conflicts was motivated by religion. Mao Zedong, for example, is responsible for 30-80 million deaths, Hitler for 12 million in death camps and 60 million as a result of World War 2, Leopold II of Belgium for 8 million deaths, Joseph Stalin's gulags and purges and starvations killed 7 million, and Hideki Tojo of Japan, 5 million. I have omitted such notables as Pol Pot, Tito, Saddam Hussein, and Kim Il Sung. Not a single one motivated by religious belief. 9-11, I believe, has so clouded clear thinking on the causes of violence that we have already forgotten the bloodiest century in human history (and the non-religious causes of its conflicts).

Let me state clearly: while I think religion is not (or is seldom) the primary motivation for violence, it is or can be a secondary or tertiary motivation and a force multiplier. That said, I think religion's motivational role is

subservient to a human being's primary motivations to violence. Indeed, I think we should focus on these primary motivational causes of violence, not on religion's secondary role.

Why, then, are humans (sometimes) violent? I reject the claim that humans are inherently violent or that the human tendency to violence is more pronounced than their tendency to cooperation. However, I do believe that humans can be powerfully and primally motivated to violence under certain conditions. Let me lay out my basic argument.

Let me start with the evolution of cooperation. It's important to begin here because it demonstrates a substantial agreement with M&M on the role of religion in securing cooperation. My argument in outline:

(1) Humans are disposed to favor *self* and *kin*.

(2) With the advent of agricultural societies, specialized labor (cooperative benefits) and out-group fears (competition) required cooperation beyond kin (increasingly bigger *tribes*).

(3) People behave in prosocial, cooperative ways when they think they are being watched.

(4) Big Gods are agents that watch everything we do and that reward the righteous and punish the wicked.

(5) People in societies with big Gods tend to be more prosocial (from (3) and (4)).[3]

Groups with increased prosocial, cooperative behavior win over less cooperative groups (conflict and competition combined to facilitate belief in big Gods).[4] Religion then, of the Big God sort, played a central role in securing human cooperation. So far, I think M&M and I are in agreement.

But we might part company here. What primarily motivated cooperation? I suspect the desire for food, say, and shelter and mates; not, as one

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3   See Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2013).
4   See David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

might think, fear of God. While God-beliefs were essential in securing in-group, they were not the primary motivator. But God-beliefs did effectively secure and expand in-group (or so it seems, with all the cautions about the current state of affairs in cognitive and evolutionary psychology duly noted).

What, then, is the source of violence? I agree with M&M that in-group creates out-group and that in-group/out-group conflict is often the source of violence. However, I don't think it cognitively or evolutionarily warranted to think of religion as *a* or *the* primary or driving force of either in-group or out-group. What, then, are the human being's primary motivations (or causes) for violence? Here, in brief, is an outline of my argument:

(1) Violence almost always originates in threats to self, kin and tribe (people typically fight over land, kin and food).

(2) Threats to self-kin-tribe instinctively elicit fight or flight responses.

(3) Religion, like other tribal markers, is not a primary cause of violence.

(4) While tribal markers make identification of in-group (family, friend) and out-group (competitor, enemy) easier, they are not the primary motive in violence.

Let me develop this a bit more. We are, one and all, most primally concerned for our own *self*. Our own struggle for survival finds expression in our deepest needs and desires for food, say, and for mates. And when faced with human threats to self — say, someone stealing one's food or encroaching on one's land (our source of food) or preventing us from mating — one find an instinctual desire to fight (or flee if one senses one cannot win). Our most primal instinct to fight, then, is in response to *threats to self*.

Inclusive fitness has moved many species from exclusive concern for self to deep care and concern for kin. In a sense, the domain of *me* expanded evolutionarily to include *me* and *mine* — that is, kin. Human beings, then, have a deep sense of attachment to and trust in kin. This is reinforced by various social urges: we take pleasure in helping our offspring and feel pain when we see them hurt. When faced with human, non-kin threats to kin — if someone takes one's family's food or one's family's land or seeks to harm one's

child — we have a corresponding urge to fight (or flee). Our second most primal instinct to fight, then, is in response to *threats to kin.*

Finally, as noted in the above argument, we have cultivated pro-social behaviors in non-kin groups — *tribes*. Again, while religion played a role in ensuring in-group cooperation, the motivation for entering into non-king groups was to secure cooperative benefits — we hunt and farm better in groups, there are more mates in groups, we fight better in groups (especially if we share a deep, common bond), the costs of child-rearing are best shared, etc. Big Gods bound selfish individuals and kin-loving families into flourishing non-kin communities. When faced with certain sorts of human threats to *tribe*–if another group raids one's storehouse of food, ransacks one's land, or seeks to enslave the group's members — we have a corresponding urge to fight (or flee). Our third most primal instinct to fight, then, is in response to *threats to tribe.*

In summary: Natural selection has equipped human beings with a predilection for violence under certain circumstances. Human beings fight, primarily, over threats to *self* (threats to food, water, land, mates, etc). Human beings fight, secondarily, over threats to *family*. And human beings fight, third, over threats to *tribe* (city, state, nation). Human beings are especially inclined towards violence when competition for food, land, mates, etc. is high. Moreover, and I won't belabor this, natural selection also equipped us to be concerned about social status; we have an inbuilt sense of shame and honor which is not easily assuaged. Finally, young adult males seem especially vulnerable to these pressures.

Threats to self, kin and tribe during times of intense competition over often scarce resources are the primary motivators of violence. Religion tags along as a tribal marker.

If religion were to magically disappear one night, we would wake up to continued violence if the original conditions that instigated the violence were still in place. If a group of people still fears for or has lost the lives of some of their people or their land, or if they have been shamed and are seeking honor, then they will feel the urge to fight. Suppose, instead, that everyone instantaneously converts to a second-order religion; if a group of people still fears for their lives or land, or if they have been shamed and are seeking honor, then they will feel the urge to fight. Unless the deeper sources of conflict have like-

wise magically disappeared, second-order religion will not reduce intergroup conflict or the urge to fight.

III. RESPONSE TO SALAMON

As noted in the opening, I said that I thought Salamon's Agatheism is half right. But I want to work my way up to what I think is right about his claim. This will help us see what I think needs to be added to his claim.

Salamon concedes M&M's central epistemological claim that "the contradictions between divergent religious belief systems, in conjunction with new understandings of the cognitive forces that shape their common features, persuasively challenge the rationality of *most kinds* of supernatural belief" (1). He writes: "I will grant them most of their empirically grounded arguments designed to challenge the evidential basis of the first-order religions…" (206). But this is surely to grant too much.

While in common parlance we often attribute rationality and irrationality to beliefs, more properly and philosophically speaking, rationality and irrationality are properties of persons in relation to their beliefs (given certain epistemic situations). Take the belief that the earth is flat. Is it rational or irrational? We know it to be false, of course. Given that I know it to be false, it would be irrational for me to believe that the earth is flat. But surely it was rational for many human beings throughout most of human history to believe that the earth is flat. Even in our time, surely there are people who are (non-culpably) unaware of the evidence for the sphericity of the earth; such people would rationally believe that the earth is flat. But claiming that the belief that the earth is flat is irrational (independent of persons and their epistemic situations) makes little sense. It is rational for some people to believe in some circumstances and not for others. The claim that *the belief that the earth is flat is irrational* is simply nonsense.

Are first-order religions irrational? Again, independent of any particular persons in their particular epistemic situations, the claim that *most kinds of supernatural beliefs are irrational* is a nonsense claim. Even if indexed to the present, the claim that *in this day and age, most kinds of supernatural beliefs are irrational* is a nonsense claim.

Of course, we might charitably hold that M&M are really claiming that in this day and age, with our new understandings of psychology and philosophy and science, it would be irrational for most people in most epistemic situations to hold supernatural beliefs. But why think that? In order for the relevant scientific and philosophical considerations to constitute a defeater or a debunker of one's supernatural beliefs, one would have to be aware of them, understand their import, and not have a defeater-defeater for them. But hardly anyone is in that epistemic situation. Most people are unaware of Hume's argument against miracles, the epistemology of disagreement, the cognitive and evolutionary psychology of religion and/or the Fine-Tuning argument. In what sense, then, given most people's epistemic situations, are most people's first-order religious beliefs irrational? None I can see.

So I don't think there is any obvious epistemic need to jump from first-order to second-order religious beliefs. Nor, as I argued in the previous section, is there a pragmatic need.

Indeed, I believe that both good old-time first-order religion and something like Salamon's Agatheism are pragmatically necessary in the fight against tribal violence in the contemporary world. That is, while I don't think religion is fundamentally part of the problem, I think it can and should be part of the solution. And robbing religion of its first-order power would reduce its effectiveness in combatting violence (or subduing our very natural tendencies to violence in certain threatening circumstances).

As I see it, various forms of tribalism — nationalism, patriotism, imperialism, colonialism, genocide, wars — have co-opted religion for tribalistic ends. Tribalism is the driver and it has reshaped religion to its own self-serving ends.

Salamon, then, seeks to rescue the Good from self-serving religion. And to that I say, "Amen." All major religions have coalesced on the view that God is Good, that God is on the side of the Good, and that Good hates evil (I can't make the case here but I think that even the most esoteric religions, even the so-called atheistic religions like Buddhism, have been unable to resist Agatheism; something we should expect if CSR is correct). All major religions are Agatheistic. And so, there is this shared, universal, tribe-unspecific belief in Reality as Good. Religious leaders need to do a better job making religious believers motivationally (not merely cognitively) aware of the deepest content of their beliefs.

Even if the second-order religion of M&M were more rational and less conducive to tribalism, I don't see how it has the resources to motivate principled goodness towards those outside of one's tribe. Make no mistake, religion is but one identifying feature of tribes; as I've argued it's not even one of the most important. Getting rid of first-order religion will not get rid of tribes or tribalism. Indeed, given our instincts, I believe we'll never eliminate tribalism. Tribalism, like religion, "is so intuitive and so hard to eliminate even when the effort is made" (44). So if we wish for Goodness to spread and grow, we need to find ways to tame the tribal instinct which we can never kill.

For that, first-order religion may be essential. Salamon is keenly aware that M&M's morally bereft supernaturalism ignores, "the importance of a number of fundamental aspects of religious belief, such as (a) its soteriological/eschatological perspective presupposing some formulation of "what can I hope"…; (b) its metanoetic/transformational function…; and (c) its relational/inter-subjective character associated with religious attitude of worship and love, and presupposing freedom of assent" (216). With respect to (a)-(c), Agatheism is hands-down the winner. Indeed, (a)-(c) are in the province of first-order religion.

Moreover, as Salamon notes, first-order religion could even be rational. Indeed, I think for most people in most epistemic situation, most people rationally hold their first-order beliefs (but not, as Salamon claims, because the doxastic core of their first-order religion is internally coherent; I don't think rationality is a property of beliefs and I don't think coherence is either a necessary or a sufficient condition of a person's being rational (230)).

My suggestion is that we tap into particular first-order religious beliefs not simply for their underlying agatheism but also for their very particular understandings of and motivations to compassion and peace.

Let me speak for the Abrahamic traditions, which are often considered the worst re: violence. Christians need to understand and embrace Jesus's radically inclusive kingdom, not use Christianity as a tribal identifier and justifier of, say, exploitation of other's resources, unjust war or territorial expansion. Jews need to understand that YHWH chose them to take the news of God's compassionate and just nation to the world (and not keep the news to themselves). And Muslims need to understand that Allah forbids religious

coercion (Quran 2:256), and created religious diversity so that the various religious groups could outdo one another in good (Quran 49:13).

Demanding that religious believers abandon their traditions in favor of Fine-Tuning, second-order supernaturalism would deprive us of the resources of some of a religious person's most motivational beliefs.

IV. THE OBSESSION WITH BELIEF

Let me conclude with a confession. I, like most philosophers, have an obsession with belief. I've sinned thusly and boldly my entire career. M&M claim that if we can get humanity to give up its irrational first-order religious beliefs and endorse their second-order supernaturalism, the world will be a better place. Salamon holds that second-order supernaturalism is existentially defective and offers agatheistic belief as a richer alternative. In both instances, they hold that ridding ourselves of exclusivistic belief and replacing them with more universalistic beliefs, we will be less tribal and, hence, less prone to violence. But I've grown increasingly aware of the impotence of (most) beliefs. As Salamon puts his argument:

> [T]o the extent to which various first-order religious traditions have as its core agatheistic belief conceived in the way just outlined, they are in no way bound to be a breeding ground for irrationality or intergroup conflict. (204)

I think this a mistaken or impoverished way of understanding religion. I'll be brief and suggestive here. Since individuals flourish when bound into other-regarding communities with shared norms and values, *rituals* in which individuals "lose their selves" facilitate one's sense of belonging to a community (hence, human flourishing). While philosophers focus on binding beliefs, social scientists study complex systems involving both beliefs and practices. Recent social scientific work suggests that other aspects of religious practice are/were essential means of creating and strengthening a harmonious moral community.[5] Recent social scientific research suggests that humans are cognitively constituted to morally respond to rituals. The experience of participating in rituals increases in-group affiliation to a greater degree than

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5   Jesse Graham and Jonathan Haidt, "Beyond Beliefs: Religions bind individuals into moral communities", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 1 (2010).

group activity alone.[6] Groups of individuals that walk, sing or dance together synchronously show greater liking, trust, cooperation, and self-sacrifice than groups performing the same behaviors while not in synchrony.[7] Religious rituals, socio-historically, are powerful means of securing cooperation, solidarity and success in intergroup competition.[8] Finally, corporate religious rituals reinforce commitment to moralizing high gods which, in turn, suppresses selfishness and increases cooperation.[9] Mutually reinforcing belief-ritual complexes expand community by galvanizing solidarity (maybe as extended family) and reinforce prosocial behavior by increasing trust.[10]

The bottom line: eliminating exclusivist *beliefs* will not break down tribalism's barriers. Cognitive psychology suggests that *knowing who we can trust* is more important in that regard than *knowing who shares our beliefs*. Knowing who we can trust is determined not primarily by belief but by showing commitment to the group in costly and/or regular ways. We are continually scanning individuals in our group for trustworthiness and violations of trust. The human family will expand only through more expansive rituals of trust and commitment, not through elimination of exclusivist belief. By focusing on belief, we are only skimming the surface of human motivation.

V. CONCLUSION

Philosophers are obsessed with beliefs and trade in abstract metaphysics that stands at a huge existential distance from us more ordinary believers. For most of us, our most cherished beliefs are embedded in thick and rich traditional narratives that both inform and motivate. As Salamon notes, Hume's

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6   Nicole J. Wen, Patricia A. Herrmann, and Cristine H. Legare, "Ritual increases children's affiliation with in-group members", *Evolution and Human Behavior* 37, no. 1 (2016).
7   Scott S. Wiltermuth and Chip Heath, "Synchrony and Cooperation", *Psychological science* 20, no. 1 (2009).
8   Joseph Henrich, "The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion", *Evolution and Human Behavior* 30, no. 4 (2009).
9   Scott Atran and Joseph Henrich, "The Evolution of Religion: How Cognitive By-Products, Adaptive Learning Heuristics, Ritual Displays, and Group Competition Generate Deep Commitments to Prosocial Religions", *Biological Theory* 5, no. 1 (2010); Ara Norenzayan and Azim F. Shariff, "The Origin and Evolution of Religious Prosociality", *Science* 322, no. 5898 (2008).
10   Norenzayan, *Big Gods*.

severe and sterile rationalism is unlikely to connect with most folks' ways of thinking. Salamon's agatheism is a substantial improvement on M&M's bare theism. But while agatheism is an improvement, it, too, rejects as irrational many of the (to me clearly rational) particularistic beliefs of a tradition that can and should provide intellectual ground for religiously-based compassion and peace. But, more deeply, religious *ritual* not religious *belief* is essential for understanding/proving who we can trust and hence essential for expanding the human family and tribe.[11] This, of course, makes expanding human communities vastly more difficult. But without understanding how trust is achieved, we won't make any progress on expanding in-group; and without expanding in-group to include the former out-group (bad, competitor, etc), we cannot secure peace.

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11   It is not the atheist's lack of belief, then, that makes them less trustworthy. It's that we have no rituals by which atheists have proven their trust.

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FIRST-ORDER THEISTIC RELIGION:
INTENTIONAL POWER BEYOND BELIEF

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Abstract. Diversity and disagreement in the religious beliefs among many religious people seem here to stay, however much they bother some inquirers. Even so, the latter inquirers appear not to be similarly bothered by diversity and disagreement in the scientific beliefs among many scientists. They sometimes propose that we should take religious beliefs to be noncognitive and perhaps even nonontological and noncausal regarding their apparent referents, but they do not propose the same for scientific beliefs.[1] Perhaps they would account for this difference in terms of more extensive diversity and disagreement among religious beliefs than scientific beliefs. We shall attend to the alleged significance of diversity and disagreement among religious beliefs, with an eye toward its bearing on epistemic and ontological matters in religion. In particular, we shall ask whether the significance recommends a retreat from first-order to "second-order" religion, as suggested by Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican.[2]

1. A PROPOSED DILEMMA FOR FIRST-ORDER RELIGION

Stephen Jay Gould has offered the following statement of what we may call a "second-order" approach to religion, along with a "first-order" approach to science.

> Science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts. Religion, on the other hand, operates in the equally important, but utterly different, realm of

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1   See, for instance, Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (Ballantine, 1999).

2   B. Thornhill-Miller & P. Millican, "The Common-Core/ Diversity Dilemma: Revisions of Humean Thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief", in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* 7, no. 1 (2015).

human purposes, meanings, and values — subjects that the factual domain of science might illuminate, but can never resolve (4).

Religion, according to Gould, functions in the realm of "human purposes, meanings, and value", but not *divine* purposes, meanings, and values. If the purposes in question were divine, religion would tap in to something causal and factual independent of human purposes, meanings, and values. Gould, however, denies such independence for religion. He offers science and religion as two "non-overlapping magisteria" characterized by mutual "respectful noninterference" (5). Religion will be "respectful" of science only if it avoids claims to causal and factual significance beyond human purposes, meanings, and values.

Thornhill-Miller and Millican (hereafter 'TM&M') offer an approach to "second-order religion" that extends the kind of "respectful noninterference" offered by Gould's model of non-overlapping magisteria. They claim that "the contradictions between different religious belief systems, in conjunction with new understandings of the cognitive forces that shape their common features, persuasively challenge the rationality of most kinds of supernatural belief" (1). In addition, they hold that "an attractive compromise may be available by moving from the competing factions and mutual contradictions of 'first-order' supernaturalism to a more abstract and tolerant 'second-order' view, which itself can be given some distinctive (albeit controversial) intellectual support through the increasingly popular Fine Tuning Argument" (1). We need to clarify their suggestions.

TM&M rely on the following "dilemma":

> *The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma:* In so far as religious phenomena (e.g. miracle reports, religious experiences, or other apparent perceptions of supernatural agency) point towards specific aspects of particular religions, their diversity and mutual opposition undermines their evidential force; while in so far as such phenomena involve a 'common core' of similarity, they point towards a proximate common cause for these phenomena that is natural rather than supernatural (2; cf. 20).

They note that a natural proximate common cause for religious phenomena is consistent with a supernatural *ultimate* cause, but, as we shall see, they deny any (compelling evidence for) intervention of a supernatural ultimate cause in the domain of "causal order" (146).

TM&M claim that the "diversity and mutual opposition [of religious phe-nomena] undermines their evidential force." This claim is not obviously true, because it seems to neglect the person-variability of evidence or "evidential force". At a minimum, they would need to specify *whom* the evidential force is undermined for. You might have compelling evidence from your experi-ence that God commands you to keep the Sabbath, for instance, whereas I could have compelling evidence from my experience that God does not re-quire me to keep the Sabbath. My evidence would not automatically defeat your evidence for you, because your experience differs from mine regard-ing what God commands about keeping the Sabbath. My experience and evidence would not automatically trump yours regarding evidential force *for you*, because my experience and evidence need not be shared by you. Evi-dence is person-variable in this manner, and it thus contrasts with truth and factuality.

If God exists, God could issue opposing commands to you and me for keeping the Sabbath. You could get the divine command: Keep the Sabbath. In contrast, I could get the divine command: Do not keep the Sabbath. Each of us could have undefeated evidence for God's having given the respective command to each of us. God could have different specific purposes for you and me, and thus issue correspondingly different, even opposing, commands to us. Perhaps, however, this kind of opposition is too weak for the dilemma in question.

TM&M may have in mind a stronger kind of opposition, such as a case where, on your evidence, God commands *all* people to keep the Sabbath while, on my evidence, God commands *all* people not to keep the Sabbath. If God is consistent in commanding, God would not command both that all people keep the Sabbath *and* that all people not keep the Sabbath. Going beyond actual truth and factuality, *evidence* among people is not constrained by such consistency. You could have undefeated evidence, relative to your overall experience, that God commands all people to keep the Sabbath, and I could have undefeated evidence, relative to my overall experience, that God commands all people not to keep the Sabbath.

Evidence that bears on human experience is a function ultimately of what one's experience indicates overall, and it can be at odds with the evidence and experience of another person. So, diversity or opposition in this area of

experience will not undermine religious evidence for a person. This results from the fact that a person's undefeated evidence for a claim does not entail the truth of the claim or the factuality of what the claim is about. So, TM&M need to support their claim about the undermining of evidence in a way that does not confuse evidence and truth or factuality, and honors the person-variability of evidence.

A related problem emerges from the claim of TM&M that the "possibility [of a fine-tuned universe] therefore casts doubt on the unique authority of *any* particular religious orthodoxy, while at the same time potentially supporting the theory of a cosmic Designer in a manner that is potentially friendly to more general religious attitudes" (4). This is a mistake. A mere "possibility" will not cast doubt on the unique authority of a religious position that is not an analytic claim, because a mere possibility does not yield actual evidence against the authority of such a position. If the doubt in question is to be evidentially relevant, it must be supported by evidence and thus probable to some extent, and not a mere possibility. So, we would need a case for the evidential support of the claim that the universe is fine-tuned and for its bearing against a religious position, and this is no small task, given the various serious objections in circulation to fine-tuning arguments.[3]

2. NATURALISTIC EXPLANATION?

TM&M hold that "important new research from the psychology of religion, religious studies, and the cognitive science of religion now offers the prospect of persuasive naturalistic explanation for what appears to be a 'common core' of key religious phenomena such as religious experiences, afterlife beliefs, and the apparent perception of supernatural agency" (23). The alleged "persuasive naturalistic explanation" allows for an ultimate supernatural explanation, but TM&M advise that we not rely on a supernatural explanation regarding the causal order of things. Even so, if there is a compatible supernatural explanation, it will matter to inquirers who seek a suitably full explanation of religious experience. Such inquirers will want to include an explanation if it

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3   See, for instance, Mark Colyvan, Jay Garfield, and Graham Priest, "Problems with the Argument from Fine Tuning", *Synthese* 145, no. 3 (2005).

refers to something causally real in religious experience. So, we would do well not to dismiss supernatural explanation without careful scrutiny.

TM&M rely on an alleged hypersensitive agency-detection device (HADD) and a particular theory of mind (ToM) among humans for their naturalistic case. Regarding HADD, they remark:

> [The] *hypersensitive agency detection device* (HADD) is the human cognitive operator that has been postulated to explain why it is normal for us to see agency rather than randomness everywhere in the world around us: why we see faces in clouds, attribute illness and bad weather to witchcraft, and perceive the hand of fate in our lives rather than the action of abstract and impersonal forces. The evolutionary advantage of its hyperactivity is commonly explained with the observation that the cost of perceiving more agents than actually exist (e.g. mistaking wind in the tall grass for a predator) is low, while perceiving too few agents (e.g. mistaking a predator for wind) would, at some point, be fatal (9).

Regarding the particular *Theory of mind* (ToM), they refer to "the human capacity to attribute mental states — such as beliefs, desires, and intentions — to oneself and to others", and suggest that this capacity is natural and common, if not routine.

TM&M add:

> HADD and ToM together lead us to find specific kinds of meaning and design in randomness, to see the action of invisible agents even in unplanned, non-intentional processes, and to attempt to relate to such agents as we would to other intentional beings. Working together, these two processes — all by themselves — seem to provide a reasonably persuasive naturalistic explanation for the belief in invisible, intelligent supernatural agents like the gods and spirits found universally across human cultures (30).

This is a sweeping approach to naturalism and supernatural agents, by any standard. Whether the naturalistic explanation on offer is "reasonably persuasive" for a person will depend on the particular evidence actually had by that person for the existence of a supernatural agent. One cannot ignore such specific evidence by invoking a tendency of humans to attribute intentional agency in certain circumstances. A key issue is whether a person's evidence includes a pattern of one's being led toward a goal, intentionally, by an agent transcendent to humans. We shall return to this important matter after further identification of the motive for the second-order religion offered by TM&M.

TM&M add a practical consideration to their case against first-order religion:

> If consideration of the practical benefit of holding religious beliefs is admissible in the naturalism/supernaturalism debate, we would argue that again there is much greater reason to discourage rather than encourage *first-order* supernaturalist beliefs. The in-group benefits to be gained are outweighed by the actual and potential out-group damage. And with such massive destructive power increasingly wielded around the world, there is perhaps today no greater threat to humanity than intergroup conflict motivated by exclusivist and other-worldly religious thinking (43).

It clouds the discussion now to invoke this kind of practical consideration, because the key issue now is *epistemic*, bearing on the *evidence* one has for various assumptions of first-order religion. The latter evidence could be strong even if some practical difficulties face first-order religion in human history. So, we should postpone practical considerations until we settle the key epistemic issue about first-order religion.

3. A DICHOTOMY IN DOUBT

TM&M suggest a dichotomy for science and religion akin to Gould's non-overlapping magisteria characterized by mutual respectful noninterference:

> Functionally, naturalistic and supernaturalistic thinking can be seen as outcomes of two different human *learning systems*, the one oriented towards 'understanding and managing *physical causal* relationships in a mechanistic fashion', and the other 'concerned with understanding and managing *social relationships* in a normative and deferential fashion'. So even though supernaturalist beliefs serve poorly as explanations of how the world works, they might be seen as well-motivated — even 'rational' in a sense — if they function effectively to improve individual well-being and to supply the norms and customs that hold communities together (45).

Gould would approve of this kind of dichotomy, but we still need a case for it based on definite evidence among particular humans. We shall see that the evidence for first-order religion does not yield so easily.

According to TM&M:

> The more subtle … response is to abandon the competing dogmatisms of *first-order supernaturalism* and instead fall back onto an undogmatic version of its *second-order* cousin, finding intimations of divinity in the general

structures of the world and in our own religious instincts, while remaining fully committed to the enterprise of natural science. On this understanding of things, although creation is seen as *ultimately* deriving from a supernatural source, that source is distant and unknowable, and the role of science is to reveal the *proximate* foundation of our existence: the empirical universe through whose causal processes we have been made. Thus even while believing that the world itself is ultimately created and sustained by a guiding supernatural power, our scientific and historical enquiry can proceed in the same way as for the atheist, without resort to magical or supernatural intervention in the causal order (146).

Here the plot thickens, to the point of being confusing. Is not "creation" itself, being inherently causal and "deriving" from a supernatural source, part of "the causal order"? If so, we will have first-order supernaturalism after all, at least by the lights of what TM&M offer, owing to creation causally "deriving" from a fine-tuner. In addition, are not "intimations of divinity" (even in human "religious instincts") inherently causal, being causally intimated to someone or other in experience? If so, we will have first-order supernaturalism after all, if with more or less specificity. So, the dichotomy offered for first-order and second-order domains appears to break down, owing to overlap of the domains with regard to causal roles (of a kind disallowed by Gould's model of two magisteria).

TM&M had promised to leave a place for *religious* belief-systems in their second-order story of religion. At least, Thornhill-Miller seems to be inclined in that direction, while Millican sides with Hume against religion (5). Why should we think, however, that the proposed fine-tuner is, even if supernatural, a *religious* object? Being an acknowledged supernatural object does not entail being a religious object. An object of magic, for instance, could be supernatural without being a religious object, as various anthropologists have noted. So, TM&M need to show that their supernatural fine-tuner serves also as a religious object. Given that their fine-tuner is, in their words, "distant and unknowable", this will not be a small task.

A key issue concerns what is required of a religious object. We should not collapse religion into either ethics, philosophy, theory, magic, or the acknowledgment of a supernatural object. Otherwise, we will disregard what actually motivates *religious* people, namely, something irreducible to either ethics, philosophy, theory, magic, or the acknowledgment of a supernatural

object. At a minimum, a religious person is devoted, as a priority, to something (beyond a mere belief) that gives the ultimate meaning or significance of his or her life, beyond any passing meaning in life. This "giving" of ultimate life-meaning in religion is causal (but not necessarily coercive), and not just a belief or a theory. So, religious devotion is *de re,* and not just *de dicto.* It is related to a causal meaning-giving reality beyond a belief, and not just to intellectual content, even if that reality is described in a way that falls short of full accuracy. If this kind of causal component is lacking in a supposed "religion", we may consider it a philosophy, a theory, or an ethics rather than a first-order religion.

Some religious people could be devoted, for instance, to God, who gives them ultimate life-meaning, while they have inaccuracy in their understandings of God. Even so, religious people need not be theistic in their beliefs; they can acknowledge something other than God as what gives them ultimate life-meaning, as in the case of many religious Buddhists. The characterization of religions quickly becomes complex, but it is clear that religion does not reduce to ethics, philosophy, theory, magic, or acknowledgment of the supernatural. We need not digress to complex religious differences to grasp the point at hand.

Why should we expect religious people to accept something as religiously, ontically, and causally thin as what TM&M offer in their second-order religion, particularly if the religious evidence motivating those people is not so thin? Perhaps we should not. The second-order religion offered by TM&M leaves religious people largely with *ethics* (rather than religion) coupled with a "distant and unknowable" source of creation — the "distant and unknowable" fine-tuner. Perhaps some deist philosophers would settle for this kind of second-order position, but the followers of the major monotheistic religions, among other major living religions, typically would not. The "distant and unknowable" fine-tuner on offer is functionally too thin in human lives to give ultimate life-meaning to humans. As a result, it is not a religious object for religious humans even if it is supernatural.

TM&M offer the following hope for their second-order position: "It is not obviously *unreasonable* to base one's religious commitments on this optimistic second-order theistic view, as long as it remains unrefuted and seems to bring substantial psychological and social benefits. Perhaps by the time

human physics has settled this issue, we shall also be in a better situation to judge how well different aspects of human society can cope without religion (for better or worse)" (47). Three problems arise here. First, as suggested, an appeal to practical value, including "psychological and social benefits", is premature when the matter of evidential support is unsettled. Our primary question about religion is epistemic, and not practical. Second, we lack evidence for proposing the fine-tuner on offer as "theistic." A fine-tuner may be "supernatural", but it does not follow that it is "theistic." We have no good reason to suppose that it has the minimal moral decency required to be God (on a wide range of conceptions of God). So, the jump from the unknowable fine-tuner in question to theism is premature at best. Third, we should not suppose that "human physics" will settle the issue of either the correctness or the epistemic reasonableness of theism. A divine being could supply the needed evidence for theism without doing so through "human physics." It would be question-begging to require that human physics be the medium for evidence that settles the question of the epistemic reasonableness of theism.

Contrary to TM&M, the diversity and opposition among religious beliefs may yield evidential support, rather than trouble, for first-order religion. Perhaps God allows these as a kind of redemptive test for humans, to identify whether they will focus on God *de re* rather than on merely *de dicto* beliefs about God. We have a hint of this from the apostle Paul: "Indeed, there have to be factions [or divisions] among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine [in relation to God]" (1 Corinthians 11:18; I use the NRSV translation here and in what follows, unless otherwise noted). This could be a divine purpose for diversity and disagreement in religions, and thus the latter need not count against evidence for theistic belief or first-order theistic religion. In addition, the diversity and disagreement in question are compatible with realist truth in a particular religion, even if it is difficult to confirm such truth. So, diversity and disagreement in religions do not call for a retreat from ontic commitment in religion to an allegedly nonontic or noncausal second-order. Instead, they call for renewed attention to the relevant evidence for a person with regard to a religious position. Answers may not come easy, but this is no reason to retreat from the reality of answers to be discovered. The same lesson holds for the sciences, where it is more readily accepted.

4. EXPERIENTIAL EVIDENCE FOR FIRST-ORDER THEISTIC RELIGION

Religious evidence comes to many humans in various ways and forms. We can get a sense of what kind of evidence can motivate first-order theistic religion by attending to an actual case of evidence for such religion. The religious evidence offered by the apostle Paul for the Jewish-Christian God will serve this purpose for us. Paul, following Jesus, thinks of God as worthy of worship and hence inherently morally perfect and thus perfectly loving toward all people, including the enemies of God. He also portrays God as being rejectable by humans; that is, humans can reject any offer from God for humans to be reconciled to God in a cooperative relationship. God, in other words, does not coerce human cooperation with God or even human acknowledgment of God's reality or goodness. Coercion in this area would preclude genuine human agency in deciding how to relate to God, and thus would put at risk the role of genuine love in human relating to God.

Paul represents God as being self-manifested or self-presented to some humans on occasion, for divine redemptive purposes aimed at the reconciliation of humans to God. For instance, Paul attributes the following statement to God, drawing from Isaiah 65:1: "I have *shown myself* (ἐμφανὴς ἐγενόμην) to those who did not ask for me" (Romans 10:20, italics added). He thinks of this self-manifestation of God as a presentation of God's moral character to receptive humans. In attracting a person's attention *de re,* this self-manifestation figures crucially in the guiding religious experience and foundational evidence for God's reality and character for that person. It supplies God's self-authentication, with regard to God's reality and character, to receptive humans. This is not the self-authentication of a propositional claim or a subjective experience. Instead, *God* as an intentional agent is doing the self-authentication of divine reality and character to some humans.

Paul remarks that "all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Romans 8:14). If God is perfectly loving *Lord*, then God will try to *lead* people in a way that is best for them, all things considered. Morally perfect lordship seeks to provide morally significant leadership, for the good of all involved. A key issue concerns what this intended leading by God would be *toward.* That is, what would be its goal(s), given that it would be goal-directed

in virtue of being intentional or purposive? In Galatians 5:18, Paul speaks of being "led by the Spirit" of God in connection with loving others, among other "fruit" of God's Spirit. A perfectly good God who seeks obedient "children of God" would want those children to be led by the Spirit of God toward *imitatio Dei* as central to what is best for them, all things considered.

Paul offers a needed hint of the divine goal of leading in some of his prayers for people. He prays: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all…" (1 Thessalonians 3:12). In addition: "This is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight (πάσῃ αἰσθήσει) to help you to determine what is best…" (Philippians 1:9–10). The love (*agapē*) in question, both divine and human, would include the volitional component, beyond any emotional component, of *willing* what is best for others, all things considered. It also would be a basis for human experience and recognition of God's moral character and will. God's redemptive purpose of *imitatio Dei* would be to promote such love by relating it to human access to the divine character and will.

Paul acknowledges the epistemic significance of experienced *agapē* in connection with a gift to cooperative humans from God*:* "Hope [in God] does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). Paul would say the same for faith in God: Its evidential anchor is something to be received cooperatively from God directly in human experience, and that something is integral to God's moral character: divine *agapē.* Paul thus is denying a kind of disappointment that includes epistemic, or evidential, disappointment. Hope and faith in God do not epistemically disappoint people with such hope and faith, according to Paul, because God has supplied needed supporting evidence to them in the self-manifestation of divine *agapē* to them. God thereby self-authenticates God's reality and character.[4]

The divine *agapē* in question is morally and volitionally robust, being *righteous* love. It thus is morally *convicting* toward unselfish love in the conscience of a receptive, cooperative human, because it clashes with a selfish human will. The experiential reality of being thus convicted is evidence of

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4   For further explanation of Paul's epistemology, see Paul K. Moser, *The Severity of God* (CUP 2013), 138–66, and Moser, *The God Relationship* (CUP, 2017), 210–27, 288–300.

God's reality, and it receives attention in John's Gospel. For instance, John 16:8 states: "When [the Spirit of God] comes, he will convict (ἐλέγξει) the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (RSV translation, using "convict" from the margin). A related idea emerges in Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I convict (ἐλέγχω) and instruct (παιδεύω)" (my translation).

Just as there can be convicting as challenging a person *against* sin, there also can be convicting as challenging a person *toward* righteous love. So, a person's being convicted need not be simply negative; it can have a positive moral and interpersonal goal toward which one is challenged. In addition, a person's being convicted toward loving others need not be static over time but could increase beyond self-interested goals over time. This increase would benefit one's becoming *increasingly* loving toward others, even toward one's enemies. This is central to Paul's two prayers noted above, and it agrees with the primary love commands from Jesus (Mark 12:30–31; cf. John 21:15–19).

One's being convicted and led by God toward *agapē* for all people is irreducible to a belief. A belief need not include an intrusion from volitional pressure on an agent toward *agapē* that appears not to be of the agent's own doing. Such pressure, particularly toward enemy-love, goes against one's natural tendencies and those of one's peers. It involves experience of a will, and no mere belief. The experienced will in question is an intentional power beyond belief, and its self-manifestation can give experiential evidence to a person. A belief could arise for one without one's being experientially *intruded upon* by a divine self-manifestation in the uncoercive manner suggested. So, one's being convicted by God does not reduce to a belief. The increasing or extending of being convicted to love others as God does would be crucial to one's awareness in conscience of being led by God in an *intentional* manner.

The divine conviction of a person toward loving others would not stop with one recipient of that person's love, but would extend eventually to *all* available recipients of this love. It would be an ongoing process moving a person, uncoercively, *toward a goal*, thus making it intentional and person-guided, and not haphazard or nonpersonal. In being convicted, a person thus would have evidence of an *intentional agent*, and not a mere physical process, motivating his or her being convicted toward loving others. This would take one beyond mere efficient causation to an experience of the intention or purpose of a loving agent in action. Absence of moral defect in the agent would

indicate a morally perfect agent at work, perhaps even an agent worthy of worship.[5]

The ultimate goal sought by a morally perfect God would be divine–human fellowship, or *koinonia*, for the sake of what is best for all concerned. This goal would be crucial to a lastingly flourishing community for all concerned, under divine guidance. It would include an I–Thou acquaintance with God irreducible to an I–It relationship. In this respect, the *koinonia* relationship sought by God would be *interpersonal* and hence irreducible to any relation to a nonintentional object. It thus would differ from typical scientific knowledge of an object and any merely *de dicto* knowledge that something is the case. We might think of it as filial knowing whereby a parent draws a child in to a morally robust relationship of benevolent fellowship under parental authority. Even so, God could hide divine self-manifestation from people opposed or indifferent to it, in order to avoid their being further alienated from God. A redemptive God would wait for the opportune time for such an intervention in human experience. So, God need not make evidence of God's reality publicly available to all inquirers. Many people (including, evidently, TM&M) assume otherwise, and thereby beg a key question about the divine giving of self-evidence.[6]

If one's experiential evidence of seemingly being convicted and led by God into morally robust *koinonia* faces no defeater, that evidence will underwrite well-grounded, epistemically reasonable belief in God for one. The fact that other religious people hold some beliefs in conflict with one's belief in God will not be a defeater for one, because a conflicting belief does not automatically yield evidence for one against one's belief. A defeater will arise for one only if one's evidence supports that defeater, and that typically will be a function ultimately of what one's overall experience indicates regarding what is the case. Evidence is a truth- or factuality-indicator of some sort, and mere conflicting beliefs fall short of that status. So, one cannot undermine a person's well-grounded belief in God just by an appeal to the conflicting beliefs held by some other religious people.

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5   For further discussion of being convicted and led by God, in connection with human conscience, see Moser, *The God Relationship*, 313–23.
6   For relevant discussion of divine hiding, see Moser, ibid. 161–90.

The relevant belief in God can be *de re*, relating directly to God, with minimal *de dicto* content. This is important because it allows one to be convicted and led by God without one's having a conceptual understanding of God as God. It also allows that different people led by God could have different understandings of God and even know God by different names. This kind of diversity would not undermine or otherwise threaten the well-groundedness of belief in God. As long as the *de re* experiential base is in place, in the absence of defeaters, one's belief in God can be epistemically reasonable for one. In that case, one need not retreat to a causally thin "second-order" religion or settle for a "distant and unknowable" fine-tuner. One's theism then may be reasonable for one in being first-order and causally robust.

5. GOODNESS AND GOD

Divine *agapē* would be morally good, even morally perfect, but it does not follow that God is goodness. Being worthy of worship, morally perfect, and thus set on the redemption of people in need, God would be an intentional agent, but not all goodness is an intentional agent. The goodness of the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, is not an intentional agent, even if its author is such an agent. So, a strict identity between God and goodness will fail. Even so, goodness can figure in evidence for religious belief, and Janusz Salamon recruits this consideration in his approach to first-order religion. He offers *agatheism*, which "identifies God or the Ultimate Reality with the ultimate *good* (*to agathon*)", and explains:

> I refer to as 'agatheism' or 'religion of the *good*' ('*to agathon*' in Greek), since it identifies the Ultimate Reality religiously conceived with the ultimate good which is postulated as a transcendental condition of our axiological consciousness through which we perceive and evaluate the goods at which our actions are aimed and towards which our hopes are directed. Agatheism conceives the Absolute as *Agatheos* by attributing to it first and foremost the characteristic of perfect goodness (but *not necessarily* all the other attributes of God of the Western classical theism, since 'agatheism' is a 'thinner' concept than 'theism', capturing the agathological core of a broad range of religious concepts of the Absolute).[7]

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7   Janusz Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism in the Global Ethical Discourse: Reply to Millican and Thornhill-Miller", in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion,* 7, no. 4 (2015).

Given that "agatheism is a thinner concept than theism", I recommend that we not call it *theism* at all. It does not require theism, either logically, conceptually, or metaphysically, so far as our available evidence indicates. Since *religion* likewise does not require theism, "agathoreligion" would be a less misleading term here. A Neoplatonist, for instance, could accept agatheism without accepting theism even as a basis for axiology.

Salamon represents his understanding of religious belief as follows:

> The reason why science cannot either confirm or disconfirm religious belief is that religious belief — even if 'acquired' in the context of a religious community and drawing on the resources of a religious tradition — is *about* the aspect of reality that is essentially subjective, expressing our particular, first-person, specifically human perspective on the world. Religious belief pertains primarily to the realm of values, the realm of the ultimate good, not to the realm of facts about the physical universe… (238).

Even if mere religious belief "pertains primarily to the realm of values", we cannot say this for *theistic* religious belief. Being worthy of worship, God would *have* value, of course, but God would not *be* a value. Instead, God would be an intentional agent with a morally perfect character. As a result, *theistic* religious belief would pertain mainly to the realm of a morally perfect agent worthy of worship, that is, to God, and not to a realm of values. In addition, it would be up to God whether God self-manifests to inquirers using scientific inquiry, and God seems not to prefer that option. Perhaps God's redemptive aim for humans accounts for this.

Agatheism relies on a coherentist approach to epistemic justification. Salamon explains:

> [T]he epistemic justification of religious belief should be conceived along the lines of the metaphor of a doxastic ladder hanging at the ceiling of the fundamental agatheistic belief in the Ultimate Reality as the ultimate good. All particular beliefs of a given religious belief system are justified against the background of their antecedent probability relative to what the fundamental agatheistic belief may be thought to entail, that is they are justified to the extent they are part of an *internally* coherent belief system which coheres with the fundamental agatheistic belief.… [N]ew beliefs have [their] *primary* justificatory ground not in the experiences themselves, since such ground would be insufficient for justification, but in the fundamental agatheistic belief. Therefore, what an epistemologist of religious belief has to concentrate on in the first place is the possibility of epistemic justification

of the fundamental agatheistic belief itself, which in turn grounds all other first-order religious beliefs… (236–37).

It is unclear how *theistic* beliefs in a religious system would "have their primary justificatory ground" in the "fundamental agatheistic belief." In particular, it is unclear what specific kind of doxastic coherence can provide such a ground. If the fundamental agatheistic belief is neutral on theism (and it is), and the needed ground is not in experiences, then other beliefs will have to yield the needed ground. Which beliefs, however, will ground those other beliefs, if doxastic coherence must do the work? Will they be beliefs about God ungrounded in any experience? If so, what will recommend them as being epistemically different from a coherent fairy tale? Once doxastic coherence becomes the ultimate standard, the answers do not come easily.

Salamon notes part of the problem facing epistemic coherentism:

Given that variety of worldviews may be coherent with the undisputable findings of science, and given that each of them may be internally coherent, it seems there can be no other *ultimate* basis of this fateful choice between various comprehensive worldviews — differing primarily in the way they define the ultimate good and the ultimate meaning of human existence — than the agathological imagination that leads various people to choose various 'agathological landscapes' as agathologically optimal, or to put it differently, as conceptualising in the optimal way the potentialities for good inherent in the human reality (240).

This appeal to "agathological imagination" seems to reduce an *epistemic* issue to a *psychological* issue and hence to set aside the key epistemic matter at hand, particularly the matter of *evidential* support. Mere imagination does not generate evidence for independent factuality, even if it generates mere beliefs that fit together, perhaps in the way the parts of a fairy tale fit together. We thus need a better epistemic standard.

Perhaps practical reason can serve a purpose here. Salamon adds:

[T]he choices between various conceptions of the ultimate good take a form of a postulate of practical reason which is an object of rational belief, but the reasons for the belief are of practical nature, that is pertaining to our acts of will and our actions. As such, they cannot be settled by science, because they pertain to the question about 'what ought to be' or 'what might be', not 'what is' (243).

Even if these questions cannot be settled by science, we should hesitate to let mere "acts of will" or acts of "imagination" take on a normative epistemic role, such as that of conferring epistemic justification. Acts of will or imagination can come too easy, in terms of being evidentially arbitrary as truth-indicators, to yield epistemic justification. Such justification cannot be created so readily if it figures in knowledge.

Salamon holds that the pertinent religious beliefs have their "*primary* justificatory ground not in the experiences themselves, since such ground would be insufficient for justification" (237) It is unclear, however, why an experiential ground would be insufficient for justification. Here we must not confuse one's *having* a justification (on the basis of experience) and one's *giving* a justification (which goes beyond experience to claims or beliefs). One's experience can be justifying evidence for one, because it can be an undefeated indicator (if fallible and defeasible) for one of truth or factuality. In addition, it can be best explained for one, in terms of why it is as it is, by a proposition that owes its justification to it. So, abductive considerations can bear on experiential evidence, and allow for one's assessing various claims for epistemic standing.[8]

Given that evidence is person-relative, one's epistemic assessment will be likewise, but this is no defect in an epistemology. Instead, it is a candid acknowledgment that the domain of the epistemic is not to be confused with the domain of truth or factuality regarding claims. Given this consideration, one reasonably can avoid a retreat to second-order religion in the face of religious disagreement. I therefore suspect that first-order theistic religion is here to stay.

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8   For details on this approach to evidence, including its bearing on skepticism, see Paul K. Moser, *Knowledge and Evidence* (CUP 1989), and Moser, *The Elusive God* (CUP, 2008).

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SUPERNATURAL EXPLANATIONS AND INSPIRATIONS

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Abstract: I propose, in partial response to the rich essays by Millican & Thornhill-Miller and Salamon that religious traditions are too diverse to be represented either by a cosmological core or even (though this is more plausible) an ethical. Religious sensibility is more often inspirational than explanatory, does not always require a transcendent origin of all things (however reasonable that thesis may be in the abstract), and does not always support the sort of humanistic values preferred in the European Enlightenment. A widely shared global religion is more likely to be eclectic than carefully 'rational', and is likely to be opposed by a more overtly 'supernatural' project founded in revelation.

A COSMOLOGICAL CORE?

Religious diversity is taken by many to suggest that no particular religious tradition should be endorsed as the one true creed. This conclusion does not follow merely from there being many different 'religious' beliefs and practices: there are after all many different conceptions of the ordinary, physical world, and most — but not necessarily all — of them may be mistaken. The problem is rather that there seems no neutral and unbiased way of deciding between 'religious' traditions, whereas most of us — or at least most likely readers of this volume — will agree that there are unbiased, 'scientific' or 'scholarly' ways of deciding between stories about the physical world, or even about human history. One attractive answer is to suggest that there are after all 'core doctrines' shared by all or almost all traditions, and that these can be given a rational basis, even if they cannot finally be proved. I shall suggest that 'supernaturalism' is not necessarily a common theme, whether interpreted cosmologically or ethically, and that 'supernaturalist' religion, especially in its Abrahamic forms, is very likely to be at odds with the commoner 'natural religion'.

What exactly is meant by such terms as 'religious' or 'supernatural' is contentious. The simple answer may be merely that ghosts, ancestral spirits, gods and demons are universal features of the human landscape, under many names and disguises. Heirs of the European Enlightenment are generally certain that such spirits don't exist, excluded from the 'real world' because they cannot be caught, weighed or dismembered. Thomas Sprat, in his *History of the Royal Society,* declared his faith in the 'Real Philosophy' in terms that echoed St. Athanasius' rejection of pagan oracles:

> The poets of old to make all things look more venerable than they were devised a thousand false Chimaeras; on every Field, River, Grove and Cave they bestowed a Fantasm of their own making: With these they amazed the world. ... And in the modern Ages these Fantastical Forms were reviv'd and possessed Christendom. ... All which abuses if those acute Philosophers did not promote, yet they were never able to overcome; nay, not even so much as King Oberon and his invisible Army. But from the time in which the Real Philosophy has appear'd there is scarce any whisper remaining of such horrors. ... The cours of things goes quietly along, in its own true channel of Natural Causes and Effects. For this we are beholden to Experiments; which though they have not yet completed the discovery of the true world, yet they have already vanquished those wild inhabitants of the false world, that us'd to astonish the minds of men.[1]

That same 'real philosophy' may also in the end eliminate all older notions of personal choice and consciousness, as well as any good reason to consider that our minds could ever grasp reality. 'What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call 'thought' that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe?"[2] Maybe we can exclude ghosts, ancestral spirits, gods, demons, and even formal and final causes (as Enlightenment philosophers proposed) but we had better not exclude *all* conscious agencies and meanings, nor all rational explanations of the way things are.

Whether that criticism of Sprat's Real Philosophy could *compel* us to preserve some elements of the older story may be moot, but it does, perhaps, suggest that 'supernaturalism' of a sort is at least respectable. Is such a 'rational supernaturalism' to be found in all or most 'religions'? Is it what Millican and

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1   Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* 3rd ed. (Elibron, [1722] 2005), 340; cf. Athanasius, ed., *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 2nd ed. (Bles, 1944; written c.318 AD), ch.8, para.47.
2   David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779), part 2.

Thornhill-Miller have in mind? They seem to identify the 'core' of religious belief as proposing a 'supernatural' explanation of the obvious truth that the world exists, that there is no logical or mathematical reason to expect it to be so 'fine-tuned' for the emergence of living, sentient and intelligent creatures like ourselves, and perhaps also for that most surprising fact of all—that we can reasonably expect to understand the inner workings of a universe immensely older, larger and more alien than any environment for which our evolutionary history could prepare us. If there is a grand explanation for the world's existence, and its nature, it cannot be merely one more already existing thing, but must lie entirely outside the world.[3] 'Natural laws'—that is, the regular patterns to be observed in the world at large—do not themselves explain the existence of a universe. They do not even dictate what the universe must be, if it exists at all. It is—as Wittgenstein remarked—a delusion to suppose that such laws are ever explanations[4]: they merely specify what needs to be explained.

This cosmological argument has been formulated and rebutted many times, but it can be acknowledged as at least a *reasonable* doctrine: any grand explanation must rely on the reality of something that does not exist simply as one more being or feature amongst many actual or potential beings or features. On the one hand it cannot be merely 'contingent' but must, somehow, be metaphysically necessary. On the other, its connection to the ordinary world examined at many different levels by scientists and scholars cannot be simply 'logical': particular existential claims are never *necessary* truths—unless there is indeed something utterly unlike all merely empirical entia whose essence requires its existence. The Grand Explanation must be something that *must* be real (its imagined unreality must be impossible), but the existence of the ordinary world, precisely, *isn't* something that must be. This conclusion can be partly evaded by proposing that all *possible* worlds are real (but only a few of them contain such sentient creatures as ourselves, who must then—unsurprisingly—discover that the world *they* live in is compatible with their own existence), but though this may be an imaginable solu-

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3   Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma: Revisions of Humean thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 1 (2015).

4   'At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena': Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 6.371.

tion to the 'fine-tuning' puzzle it plainly does not provide a reason for the existence of such a multiverse, nor even for the existence of apparently 'fine-tuned' bubble worlds[5]. Nothing that we ordinarily encounter or imagine *has* to exist: either there is no explanation for the existence of such contingencies or the explanation must be much more like the personal choice of an intelligence than the automatic issue of a given nature. So even if we no longer find it possible to believe in any *particular* providence — that lightning expresses a god's anger, or that the innocent will be saved from ruin — it may be that a *general* providence is responsible for the world's (or worlds') existence, and for its (their) intelligibility.

So the common thread of 'religious' sensibility is — perhaps — to acknowledge that the world — the complete totality of all contingencies — is or has been 'chosen' (as it were) by a reality whose being and actions (as it were) are not determined by anything beyond itself. We gesture toward that reality under the title 'God' or 'the Divine' or 'Brahman' or (best of all) 'the Nameless'. This account has more than merely cosmological significance: it is not, after all, an especially useful cosmological hypothesis, in that — precisely — we can infer nothing at all about the nature of the worlds and creatures that the Nameless 'chooses' merely from what we know of Its own reality. We cannot even be confident that the Nameless chooses that the world of our experience will continue to abide by its current seeming regularities, or that we will not momentarily find ourselves in what seems an entirely different world or history. We cannot do more than hope that we shall be permitted to rely on our reasoned convictions, but must be ready to re-evaluate our lives at any moment. Which is perhaps not bad advice. However useless as a cosmological construct, the Nameless origin of all things is a salutary goad to living life as it comes!

But of course another response may be simple resentment, or at least indifference. The Nameless need not evoke any sentiment of respect, or love, or worship: the thought of It is merely to unsettle any too quick reliance on what we imagine we know already. No ceremonies or ritual practices do more than dis-

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5   It is a common fallacy to suppose that in an infinite array of worlds all *possible* worlds must definitely exist: there may be infinitely many possible worlds that don't exist alongside the infinitely many ones that do. So the infinite multiverse does not guarantee the existence of any fine-tuned world, and our actual existence remains without clear explanation.

guise our nakedness before the imagination of something, not ourselves, that is larger and older and even stranger than Laniakea[6]. The sight of the night sky (itself, as we know, merely a visible fragment of the sidereal universe, let alone of an imagined multiverse) may evoke identical feelings of awe or exultation. But neither the sky nor the Nameless Itself can be propitiated or appeased or even mildly pleased. Nor of course can it be defied, insulted or evaded. Insofar as the Nameless is hypothesised as a sort of explanation for there being a relatively intelligence-friendly universe proponents of this argument may suggest that the imagined 'choice' is to promote the existence of intelligent agencies something like ourselves. But others, less entranced by our own intelligence, may suggest instead that the Nameless is (as J.B.S. Haldane has it) 'inordinately fond of beetles', or even of entirely empty spaces. That *humanity* is the focus of creation can only be a revelation, not a reasonably neutral judgment.[7]

DIVERSE RELIGIOUS AFFECTS

Is it true, in any case, that all 'religious' traditions are agreed in seeking a cosmological Grand Explanation, or even in the evocation of untrammelled mystery or an Unknowable Transcendent? The currently popular anthropological explanation for 'religious' feeling may be that our ancestors found it easiest to identify *personal* agency in the world around, and so made themselves at home in a world of gods and demons. But there seems to be no empirical evidence for the story, and some clear argument against it. Only sophisticated investigators think it important to explain what ordinarily occurs: what usually happens is the context for explanation, and invites no further comment. Why, for example, is it dark at night? And why do we think children (mostly) cute?

> Possibly the most pathetic of all the delusions of the modern students of primitive belief is the notion they have about the thing they call anthropomorphism. They believe that primitive men attributed phenomena to a god in human form in order to explain them, because his mind in its sullen limitation could not reach any further than his own clownish existence. The

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6   See R. B. Tully et al., "The Laniakea supercluster of galaxies", *Nature* 513, no. 7516 (2014).

7   See my "God, Reason and Extraterrestrials", in *God, Mind and Knowledge (The British Society for the Philosophy of Religion Series)*, ed. Andrew Moore (Ashgate, 2014).

thunder was called the voice of a man, the lightning the eyes of a man, be-
cause by this explanation they were made more reasonable and comfortable.
The final cure for all this kind of philosophy is to walk down a lane at night.
Anyone who does so will discover very quickly that men pictured some-
thing semi-human at the back of all things, not because such a thought was
natural, but because it was supernatural; not because it made things more
comprehensible, but because it made them a hundred times more incom-
prehensible and mysterious. For a man walking down a lane at night can see
the conspicuous fact that as long as nature keeps to her own course, she has
no power with us at all. As long as a tree is a tree, it is a top-heavy monster
with a hundred arms, a thousand tongues, and only one leg. But so long as a
tree is a tree, it does not frighten us at all. It begins to be something alien, to
be something strange, only when it looks like ourselves. When a tree really
looks like a man our knees knock under us. And when the whole universe
looks like a man we fall upon our faces.[8]

Explanation, in brief, is unlikely ever to have been the point, even for sto-
ries — like the oldest Mediterranean myth we know — that purport to offer
a fairly plain and even impersonal account of cosmic history. In that oldest
story Something, the primeval mound, Atum, emerged — for no particular
reason — from Nothing, and gradually diversified into the million things:
the One that became a Million[9]. 'Personal beings' whom we might call gods
emerged fairly late in the process. Nothing at all lies beyond the actual beings,
which act according to their purely contingent nature, and so at last abandon
the world, or at least this world, to us and to our kindred. Even if there is life
'beyond the grave' this too is subject to the Fates, to Fate. Whatever now stands
out against a background of other creatures (whatever, that is, 'exists') will at
last be swallowed up again in Nothing, maybe to emerge again in the endless
cycle, but without any prospect of 'leaving the world behind' or encounter-
ing any Mystery beyond. Here and now we mortals had better acknowledge
the many powers that govern human — and animal — life: Sex, War, Pride and
Cleverness. We may also recognize the many moods that alter our perception
of what is happening. Asking for *an explanation* or imagining that we can
ever transcend our status to encounter the Unknown God is futile. Here we
are, and may as well put up with it. In all generations we invent or rediscover

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8   Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (Brodley Head, 1905), 63.
9   See Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans.
John Baines (Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 172–85.

rituals to mark out particular stages of our lives, and help us to forget mortality a while. We readily identify with particular tribes and orders, and asking us instead to adopt a 'common core' of doctrine, belief or practice may be to ignore the real significance of doctrines, beliefs and practices. We may quietly acknowledge that there is a common pattern — but it is a common pattern to be established in very different ways. A 'thin' religiosity, and especially one that downplays all emotional affect, is no match for the actual 'thick' traditions.

Trying to identify a common core in the belief that this is more likely to be reliable than any of the different doctrines, and in the hope that we can thereby avoid intransigent and possibly violent conflicts between different tribes and cults, is not an enterprise that has had much success in the past. Islam, Rational Deism, Bahai-ism, Western Vedanta, have all at various times attempted to identify and promote what was taken to be a universal doctrine. Other religious believers have rather regarded these as heresies, or rival cults. Even if they were 'thin' in their beginnings, they soon thickened — and of course the particular themes that each reformer sought to emphasise as 'the true core of religion' reflected their own presuppositions. There is a parallel with the search for a universal language: it turns out, in practice, that the proposed new language is far more parochial than its inventors fondly supposed, and that it simply serves the purposes of one particular tribe (if it survives at all). The more 'eclectic' route to a universal language is simply to permit the diffusion of terms and idioms: English in its multiple variants is far better known than Esperanto, and may itself be surpassed as a 'lingua franca' or a 'creole' through the intermixture of different language communities — which will still retain their dialects or even private codes despite also speaking Global (itself perhaps a blend, somehow, of Spanglish and Mandarin Chinese)[10].

Is this simply to concede that the diversity of creeds and practices is an argument for there being no one right way? Instead of insisting that there is some definite matter on which all the creeds agree (that there is a 'supernatural' explanation of existence), and that this is enough for us, let us concede that the tribes do *not* agree (and that their disagreement is a large part of their

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10   On the problem of devising or developing a truly 'global' religion, and an attempted taxonomy of existing forms, see also my "World Religions and World Orders", *Religious Studies* 26, no. 1 (1990), and "Global Religion", in *Philosophy and the natural environment*, ed. Robin Attfield and Andrew Belsey, Royal Institute of Philosophy, supplement 36 (CUP, 1994)

vitality). Not all 'religious' traditions aim to explain the universe, nor are they all focused even on the Mystery — the brute inexplicability of all things. They are ways of living very much as languages are ways of speaking. Creeds, rituals and languages all alike are changing over time, but not only nor always so as to speak truth about the universe: that is not the only nor even the most important function either of language or religion! Durkheim's thesis needs to be remembered. By his account most actual believers 'feel that the real function of religion is not to make us think, to enrich our knowledge, nor to add to the conceptions which we owe to science others of another origin and another character, but rather, it is to make us act, to aid us to live.' He does also concede that religion 'is not merely a system of practices — but also a system of ideas whose object is to explain the world.'[11] But the primary purpose of 'religion', in its broadest sense, is inspiration rather than explanation.

> The believer who has communicated with his god is not merely a man who sees new truths of which the unbeliever is ignorant; he is a man who is stronger. He feels within him more force, either to endure the trials of existence, or to conquer them. It is as though he were raised above the miseries of the world, because he is raised above his condition as a mere man; he believes that he is saved from evil, under whatever form he may conceive this evil. The first article in every creed is the belief in salvation by faith.

The faith intended here, it should be noted, is not an unreasoning belief in particular propositions, but the determination to continue loyal to a particular vision, god and tribe.

NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL

And how does this impact on the very notion of the 'supernatural'? One response, in line with my earlier note that not all traditions aim to 'explain' reality by reference to a reality beyond the 'natural' world, would be that the practices and stories to which Durkheim is referring exist to encourage, channel and discipline entirely 'natural' feelings and desires. Music and movement, colourful display, processions, public ceremonies and painful initiations mark out our lives. We all learn what to do with ourselves, as individuals and as collectives, from seeing, hearing and participating in the rituals of our time

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11   Émile Durkheim, *The elementary forms of the religious life* (Allen & Unwin, 1915), 428.

and tribe. Human Nature is not simply biological, but expressed in multiple forms according to tribal patterns (which are also changing constantly but are very rarely reinvented utterly *de novo*). How indeed could we ever expect to invent some entirely novel way, as though we could have ever stripped off our language, cultural habits and remembered histories?

And yet perhaps there are occasional signs of some movement beyond the usual, beyond the 'natural'. The 'supernatural' as a category may have a significance other than the cosmological. Natural explanations are always likely (maybe certain) to be circular, and the only Grand Explanations must lie outside the frame of 'natural law' and usual events. Correspondingly, most moral and political 'revolutions' are only turns of the wheel: some new class displaces the old rulers, but fulfils much the same function. Even if a new 'Golden Age' occurs it will soon give way to Silver, Bronze and Iron once again. Is there any way away from the constant repetition of old errors? Does anyone hope to escape?

> A man cannot think himself out of mental evil; for it is the organ of thought that has become diseased, ungovernable, and, as it were, independent. He can only be saved by will or faith. The moment his mere reason moves, it moves in the old circular rut; he will go round and round his logical circle, just as a man in a third-class carriage on the Inner Circle will go round and round the Inner Circle unless he performs the voluntary, vigorous, and mystical act of getting out at Gower Street.[12]

Plainly, I am more in sympathy with Salamon's agatheistic response to the suggestion of a more global, 'second order' religiosity: namely, that the issue lies with the *ethical* rather than the cosmological, inspiration rather than explanation.[13] And even the purportedly cosmological gets its popular force in the way I have suggested: 'when the whole universe looks like a man we fall upon our faces'. The first move might indeed be to propose that there is a common *ethical* and emotional core in all religion: that both tribal and proselytizing religions, for example, endorse some version of the Golden Rule — to treat others as we would wish ourselves to be treated. Maybe we can acknowledge that, despite the myriad claims that there are no ethical universals, al-

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12   Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (House of Stratus, [1908] 2001), 11.
13   Janusz Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism in the Global Ethical Discourse: Reply to Millican and Thornhill-Miller", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 4 (2015): 230ff.

most all peoples everywhere consider loyalty, courage, fairness and sobriety
to be virtues. No-one applauds cowardly and drunken traitors — even if there
are some disagreements about the proper locus of our loyalties (to family,
nation, church, party — or the Nameless). We find in 'religion' the courage
to continue, to 'have faith' in the eventual victory over 'evil' (which is to say,
over rage, malice, pride and ignorance). The scientific enterprise itself — as I
indicated earlier — depends on faith, on the indemonstrable conviction that
our investigations will have appropriate issue (and that we can usually trust
our colleagues to report their own results both accurately and honestly). It
is perhaps not easy to maintain this conviction in the face of teachers who
insist that 'reasonable people' must acknowledge that we are barely evolved
primates, programmed to prefer our own immediate kindred, likely to jump
to easy conclusions, and indifferent to any truth that we are ill-equipped to
discover. And in identifying the common 'ethical' core we may be misled by
a similar, naturally ungrounded hope: why may we not notice that, left to
ourselves, humanity constantly recreates caste societies, that we divide the
world, and our own species, into the 'pure' and the 'impure' (male and female,
freeborn and slave, native-born and foreign), that we ratify scapegoating and
revenge? Why on the other hand do we so easily assume that 'everyone' really
agrees to value 'human beings' more than other creatures, or that 'everyone'
wants a comfortable life? Those seeking a merely naturalistic account of either
our ethical or our epistemic habits usually neglect to notice what our actual
habits are, preferring to emphasise only the likelihood that we will have some
'good' feelings of a kind that they themselves endorse, and some prudential
insights. A merely naturalistic epistemology, like a merely naturalistic ethical
philosophy, is no more than a convenient fiction.

So is there a fully 'supernatural' option, in ethics as in cosmology? That
was indeed the message often maintained by the Hebrews: Abram walked
away from the household of his ancestors and the gods of the Chaldaeans,
summoned to obey a wholly distinctive voice and be turned at last into Abra-
ham[14]. The only name that Moses learnt for his God was '*Eh'je asher eh'je:* I

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14   *Genesis* 11.31-12.4; 17.1-8.

will be who I will'[15]. Christians in their turn refused to follow the obvious, natural and eclectic religion of the Roman world, refusing to accept the names and natures expected of them. They insisted instead — more vehemently even than the Hebrews — that there had been a great mistake in human and natural history, and that it was their novel duty to be loyal to an agent 'from outside', and so assist in the creation of a new humanity, a new world, growing within the carcase of the old and destined to be revealed 'in glory' at the last[16]. It is here that 'the supernatural' has its real beginning. The gods of the nations, after all, have only their given natures, within a world unfolding according to regular and expected patterns. Our duties, as family members or citizens, are ready made for us — for the freeborn as much as for the slaves. Extreme versions of this doctrine or attitude are encapsulated in the familiar Gnostic myth: this world here was and is devised by a lesser, ignorant and probably malicious, god, and the true light is breaking in from Outside Over There. Nothing 'natural', nothing that usually happens or is usually preferred, is really of any value, and true agents of the light are indeed, as the Romans thought them, 'enemies of (natural) humanity'. This option is indeed extreme — and probably incoherent. We cannot suppose ourselves (and the world) entirely and irredeemably corrupt without abandoning any hope even of recognizing or admiring the 'supernatural' call. The preferred account was rather that this is indeed a 'fallen' world, which still contains the possibility of re-creation.

'Supernaturalism', in brief, is only one religious option, rather than the core of all religion, and is better understood in ethical than cosmological terms. Thought of the transcendent and incomprehensible cause of everything may evoke religious awe, but without any hint that we should live in any particular way, or have any hope of understanding. Such awe, considered as a natural and humanly familiar mood, is itself a part of the usual human world, and leaves our expectations of that world untouched. Nothing in the world, or in our life within it, is radically transformed by this, any more than by the sudden onset of romantic love, or music, or success in sport or business. All such suddenly euphoric passions are significant in their way (they carry us

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15   *Exodus* 3.13. See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, tr. N. Plaice et al. (Blackwell, [1959] 1985), 1235f. See also Kornelis H Miskotte, *When the Gods are Silent*, tr. J. W. Doberstein, (Collins, 1967), 297.

16   See Paul *Epistle to the Romans* 18.19-25.

'out of ourselves' and out of our usual troubles), but do not necessarily turn us toward the 'the supernatural'. The 'supernatural' demand that brought Abram out of Haran, and the people of Israel out of Egypt, or that broke the social bonds of ordinarily civilized life for followers of Christ, identifies a religious form distinct from others (including, of course, many of the forms which Christian Churches promoted in the later centuries). As such it does not constitute the core of all religious forms, but rather a rejection of most religion. Whatever broad or narrow religious sensibility eventually converts terrestrial humanity (Esperanto, as it were, or Mandarin-infected Spanglish) those who follow the *supernatural* call will be outsiders, rebels, spies, as much as they were in the Roman Empire. If they are right, the New Heaven and New Earth will supersede the old (and there will be no more sea)[17]. The lay theologian John Wren-Lewis emphasised the creative and non-circular message of this gospel, with a passing rebuke to the enterprise of 'explaining' things by appeal to an unknown and unknowable cause:

> If 'supernatural' means 'creative — capable of changing the ordinary order of nature' — modern science and technology actually realize the supernatural, whereas by contrast traditional religion, by identifying the supernatural with something hidden behind the scenes of experience, actually had the effect of making people think of life as a matter of conforming to the laws of the great overall system[18].

Or is there one last twist to this elaborate story? If the supernaturalist preaches liberation from all other bonds, and an end to all idolatry, maybe that is, after all, a hidden, esoteric, theme in all or very many serious religious traditions? Maybe all such traditions contain contradictions: on the one hand, they validate existing ties of loyalty and status, giving symbolic form to significant life events and habitual distinctions; on the other, they intimate that all these stories, symbols, regulatory habits are only superficially important. They provide us with a quiet and familiar context for our lives, hinting always that there is beauty and high purpose in even most trivial happenings. But the real focus of our endeavours must always lie beyond.

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17   Revelation 21.1.

18   John Wren-Lewis 'Sense of the Supernatural': *Guardian* 3rd September 1964. I have addressed the thought of Wren-Lewis at greater length in an essay to be included in Victoria Harrison and Harriet Harman, eds., *Atheisms* (Routledge, forthcoming).

> The ancient traditions of devotion and reflection, of worship and enquiry, have seen themselves as *schools.* Christianity and Vedantic Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism and Islam are schools… whose pedagogy has the twofold purpose — however differently conceived and executed in the different traditions — of weaning us from our idolatry and purifying our desire.[19]

Just as the Nameless origin of all things offers no convenient predictions (except, just possibly, that we have a little better chance of understanding things than if the 'natural universe' was all and we were only a minor branch of primates on an unremarkable rock) so also the call of the Unknown offers no safe haven, no assurance that the future will be to our taste (except, just possibly, that the future will be forever). There is little point in thus leaving home and our comfort zone unless there really is a reality beyond our idols and beyond our wishes. And we shall succeed in it (if this is possible) only by using the rituals for their real purpose. We may hope, in the interests of global peace, that the many 'religious' traditions of humankind (including Western humanism) may find some points of 'agreement', whether that is in a set of 'core beliefs and practices' or in a tolerant eclecticism which acknowledges that 'there cannot be only one way to so great a mystery'. But granted the diversity of belief and practice even within any single such tradition, and granted the possibility of intrusive revelations, contrary to the thoughts and habits that we 'naturally' adopt, the hope of unity is perhaps unlikely to be fulfilled. In 384 AD Symmachus, as prefect of the city, pleaded with the emperor to allow the ancient *Ara Pacis* to remain in the Roman Senate:

> The divine Mind has distributed different guardians and different cults to different cities. As souls are separately given to infants as they are born, so to peoples the genius of their destiny. We ask, then, for peace for the gods of our fathers and of our country. It is just that all worship should be considered as one. We look on the same stars, the sky is common, the same world surrounds us. What difference does it make by what pains each seeks the truth? We cannot attain to so great a secret by one road (*uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum*)[20].

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19 Nicholas Lash, *The Beginning and the End of 'Religion'* (CUP, 1996), 21.

20 Symmachus *Relation* 3, ch. 10: taken from http://www.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/ texts/sym-amb/symrel3f.html (accessed 18th July 2017). It is worth adding that the aphorism is greater than its author. James O'Donnell remarks, after prolonged reading of Symmachus's letters, that 'rarely do we get so comprehensive a literary portrait surviving from antiquity of so

His plea — which was in essence a plea for ancestral privilege, for existing rights of property, for slavery and class distinctions — was rejected, in the name of a wilder, genuinely 'supernatural', order.

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thoroughly wearisome, fatuous, and pompous an individual. The letters are simply as preposterous as their author was' (James J.O'Donnell "The Demise of Paganism", *Traditio* 35 (1979).

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WHY ATHEISM HAS NOT BECOME A SUBJECT OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Recently, this periodical published an essay by Peter Millican and Branden Thornhill-Miller, who attempted, through the synthesis of two different resources, namely a revision of Hume's philosophy of religion and an adaptation of the cognitive science of religion, to propose a simulacrum of religion that would be able to help a contemporary thinking person to accommodate 'traditional religions', or as they put it, the first-order religions, to the scientific and naturalistic worldview.[1] Since this position is effectively a continuation not only of the criticism of religion of the Enlightenment era — as represented by Hume — but also has parallels in the Ancient Greek philosophy, it raises the question as to why the genesis of atheism has not as yet attracted sufficient attention from philosophers of religion.

Responding to them, Janusz Salamon also appealed to multifold sources (including contemporary philosophy of pluralism and ancient practical philosophy) and proposed a positive reconsidering of traditional religions through such modernistic reconstruction that would make them more or less acceptable for a 'contemporary thinking' human being.[2] In spite of many differences between these two positions, they are united by the conviction that contemporary religious pluralism significantly challenges the rationality of 'supernaturalistic' religious beliefs. Nevertheless, Salamon's attitude differs from theirs more

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1   Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma: Revisions of Humean thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 1 (2015).

2   Janusz Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism in the Global Ethical Discourse: Reply to Millican and Thornhill-Miller", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 7, no. 4 (2015).

than Dariusz Łukasiewicz thinks about it.[3] While his position is close to a "second-order religion", his opponents offer what is contrary to any religion, i.e. an amalgam of an ephemeral deism in their view of the world and (what is of more importance) robust atheism concerning the essence and origin of religion itself.

Salamon's apology of the traditional religions is carried out by promoting the idea of *'agatheism'* (from Greek noun *to agathon* — «the good», and adjective *agathos* — «good»), that understands an abstract Deity as Goodness capable of keeping in itself all key values of traditional religions. That the meaning of these symbols is substantiated by Goodness makes religious traditions more attractive to the contemporary person than atheism would be. Such an idea, in fact, develops and continues John Hick's theology. His critics reproved and still reprove him emphasizing that his *Real in itself* is so abstract and unequipped for the dialogue with humans (just like Kantian *Ding an sich* that was a 'model' for it) even through the mediating symbols of the world religions (their 'connection' with it being not stronger than a 'kinship' between phenomenon and noumenon) that its ability to affect historical religions is rather problematic.[4] Salamon, in his turn, would like to make this *Real in itself* more 'communicative' through the identification of it with a more understandable *eidos* of Goodness.[5]

First of all, Salamon's portrayal of predecessors raises some objections. It is true, they are very diverse. Among them there are Plato, Augustine, Kant and Newman. These names are given without any clarification, although for the first figure of this row Goodness was a god, for the second (and he isn't alone in this view) God was a goodness, while the third and fourth didn't rely on this identity, but tried to prove that the main good habits of our soul can be best explained through the assumption of God's existence. However, the last figure in Salamon's list, Cardinal John Henry Newman, in fact, opens a line of those who elaborated a classical theistic moral argument for God's existence. Among them there are William Sorley, Hastings Rashdall, and Alfred

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3   Dariusz Łukasiewicz. "Agathological Rationalism and First-Order Religions." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 2 (2017).

4   The objections altogether with Hick's responses are represented in John Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (Palgrave, 2001).

5   Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism" 202.

Taylor.[6] They have many outstanding successors to this day. The most convincing emphasis on this idea can be found in the writings of the great apologist Clive Staples Lewis, who uses a moral argument as a starting point for the justification of theism's coherence.[7] Nevertheless Salamon doesn't even mention them, probably due to his commitment to a 'theology of Ultimate Reality'. It is all too easy to share his hopes that (if I understand him well) agatheism is a more refined model of religious consciousness than theism because it delegates the function of foundation of all good that exist in the world to the Ultimate Reality or the Absolute.[8] It is hardly acceptable not only because these concepts belong to significantly different 'weight categories' in so far it is *ultimism* that could be recognized a conceptual opposition of theism, while agatheism can be only a particular accentuation of it. The fact is that even speaking the language of agatheism, only a theistic interpretation of the Absolute can assure a truly agatheistic understanding of it. As far as other interpretations are concerned, even those, more influential in the frames of monism, like various forms of panentheism or acosmism, acknowledge that a Deity that isn't a Good Person can either contain and manifest both good and evil (worldly evil as well), or step by step, 'with many reservations' overcome evil in itself, in the spirit of Böhme, Schelling or Berdyaev. To some extent it can also produce evil, for example, as a mystification of this world, as Advaita Vedānta teaches. One more remark is about Salamon's underestimation of the differences in the understanding of good in various religions. The idea of good in Buddhism differs significantly from Christian and Muslim visions of the same concept, so the notion of Good-in-Itself is no more able to assure dialogue between religious traditions than the Hickean concept of

6   See: John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent,* Cambridge library collection. Philosophy (Burns, Oates, and Co., 1870), 105–15; William Ritchie Sorley, *Moral values and the idea of God,* Gifford Lectures 1914/15 (CUP, 1918); H. Rashdall, "The Moral Argument for Personal Immortality", in *King's College lectures on immortality*, ed. J. F. Bethune-Baker and W. R. Matthews (Univ. of London Press, 1920); Alfred Edward Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist,* Gifford Lectures 1926/1928 (Macmillan, 1930).

7   See: Kathleen Edwards, ed., *The complete C.S. Lewis Signature classics* (HarperOne, 2002), 11–25. Review of the recent sources can be found in M. Linville, "The Moral Argument", in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William L. Craig and James P. Moreland (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

8   Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism" 202.

Real-in-Itself is capable of neutralizing contradicting dogmatic statements of the world religions.

Nevertheless, the value of Salamon's idea of *agatheism* seems rather significant. One of the hallmarks of the philosophical language is that, once being born, key terms can 'stay asleep' for a long time, until they will be awakened, sometimes in very unusual way. Thus, probably only a few historians of ethical theories know that the concept of *Agathologie* was coined for the first time by the Protestant theologian and philosopher Christoph Friedrich von Ammon (1766-1850),[9] a champion of 'supernaturalistic rationalism', as a name for a certain area of ethics. Afterwards this concept was forgotten almost for two centuries. It was mentioned only in some famous historical-philosophical dictionaries,[10] being completely displaced by the newer term *Axiologie*. However, in the beginning of the 21st century it was rediscovered by the Belgian researcher of ancient Greece Sylvain Delcomminette in his monumental work on Plato without mentioning Ammon.[11] I also coined this concept without any knowledge about Ammon's writings. The results of this research were recently published in a book, presenting an effort to show that ethics founded on the good has to have certain theoretical advantages over ideals of the big triune of ethical metatheories, i.e. utilitarianism, ethics of duty, and ethics of virtue.[12] Salamon's usage of the same term for the purposes of theology is highly justified due to the fact that the attribute of 'omnibenevolence' is the most important of all the *omni*-attributes of the real (not 'ultimistic') God. It is reasonable also because any real (not postmodern) religion proposes its adepts a way to achieve the ultimate good, although, as we said earlier, this good can be understood differently.

To my mind, the articulation of his own vision was much more important for Salamon than the controversy with Millican and Brandon Thornhill-Miller. I state it because it is clear that polemics with them requires not a

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9   See chapter 'Agathologie, oder von dem höchsten Gute' in Christoph Friedrich von Ammon, *Handbuch der christlichen Sittenlehre* 1 (Göschen, 1823), 215–259.

10   See, for example, Rudolf Eisler, ed., *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Begriffe: Historisch-quellenmäßig bearbeitet*, (Mittler, 1910), 19.

11   Sylvain Delcomminette, *Le Philèbe de Platon: Introduction à l'agathologie platonicienne,* (Brill, 2006).

12   Vladimir K. Shokhin, *Agathology: modernity and classics* (Moscow: Canon + ROOOI 'Reabilitatsia', 2014), 19-118 (in Russian).

delicate rapier of agatheism (they hardly would be very sensitive to it), but much more simple weapons of argumentation.

Their basic idea is incredibly simple in itself, in spite of the innumerable literature references and footnotes. They believe that in primordial times religion was useful for animals called humans as a tool created by all-explaining and all-caring Evolution for the sake of their survival and adaptation to the environment. However later, in the course of the linear development of culture and knowledge (assured by the providence of the same Evolution, of course) religion gradually became an obstacle for the realization of the Evolution's purposes.[13] As far as it is too hard for humanity, accustomed to this old-fashioned, harmful, authoritarian, exclusivist and non-tolerant phenomenon, to get rid of it, the resistive organism of religion has to be 'sterilized' and channelled into a 'naturalist religion', and we have nothing to do, but patiently wait until human beings are able to get free of this prejudice completely.

This general approach to religion triggers evident associations with main points of Soviet 'scientific atheism'. In both cases epistemological ('parasitizing' of religion on realities of the world temporarily not explained by science) and social (the tendency of religion to separate people from each other) aspects of religion are denounced. However some significant differences between Soviet atheistic approach and one proposed by Western censurers of religion can be discovered as well. First, Soviet 'scientific atheists' would nev-

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13   This doctrine of Evolution, substituting God in the contemporary naturalist theories, i.e. playing a role of Nature of Holbach's philosophy, reminds me of the doctrine of *Prakriti* (*Pradhāna*), i.e. active and all-explaining primal matter of the ancient Hindu philosophy Sāṅkhya. The opponents of this system always wondered, how unconscious (like clay, using the image of the followers of Sāñkhya themselves) primal matter is able to unroll and roll again a universe, thus realizing its purposes, in fact the purposes of the pure spiritual subjects (*puruṣa*) that can't have any purpose by definition. At last, quite late, in the 16th century A.D., under the constant pressure of criticism, a concept of Îçhvara was introduced into Sāṅkhya. This deity took upon itself the function of coordination between primal matter and pure subjects. Nevertheless, there are at least two reasons pointing out that even before the rationalization of this doctrine it was less irrational than contemporary naturalistic evolutionism. First, the self-revealing of Prakriti as an endless variety of world forms developed only from the higher principles towards lower ones. Thus this idea of involution (the same as the doctrine of emanations in Neoplatonism) could better conform to the law of sufficient reason. Secondly, in spite of all its unconsciousness, Prakriti, according to this theory, acts 'teleologically' for the sake of the spiritual beings external to it (the same as unconscious milk feeds the child or woman serves her lover: Sāṅkhya-kārikā, vss. 56-61), while no one sets Evolution any task fulfilled by her so carefully.

er agree to substitute (even temporarily) any real religion even by its 'natural-istic' copy. Second, for them the main social fault of religion was its harmful intention to distract the people from the construction of a glorious collective future, and to lead them into the world of illusions, but not non-tolerance, just because Soviet society hadn't any idea of what tolerance really means.

However a trial of real religion, presented in the mentioned article and illustrated with many antireligious stereotypes, resembles not only atheism of the Soviet kind. Striking similarities with very archaic patterns of argumen-tation are also evident. To begin with, Millican's and Tornhill-Miller's initial thesis that the very 'diversity' of the historical religions and their 'mutual op-position undermines their evident force'[14] thus making them untenable, has no evident force itself. I stress this statement due to many logical inconsisten-cies when we compare religion with other forms of human activity. Could we say that permanent mutual opposition of huge variety of scientific theories, that is crucial for the development of them makes untenable science itself? Or could we state that the economy becomes untenable due to the competition, generally essential for the technical project, or that politics dies because of the mutual opposition of political programs and parties, the opposition making a core of any open society? Or would it be wise to suggest that the diversity of artistic styles and movements urgent for the development of culture kills an art itself? Or, at last, would anybody affirm that the main pattern of the philo-sophical practice, i.e. permanent controversy between different philosophical schools and trends, dating back to the first professional philosopher in the history of humanity, Xenophanes of Colophon (the 6th — 5th centuries B. C.), and his slightly younger contemporaries in India, threatens the existence of philosophy? Do we need to name also other practices, or will these examples be sufficient? Or maybe an exception to the rule is to be made only in the case of religion, where prosperity should emerge not from richness but from poverty? Or maybe contemporary criterions of truth, including the most im-portant of them, i.e. flourishing diversity, must be neglected in this single case? Or isn't the evil of double standard, i.e. of uneven scales, one of the most formidable obstacles for rationality? If for the authors of the article history of philosophy would start earlier than from Hume, they, no doubt, would

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14   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 3ff.

discover that their foremost argument against religion was proposed already in the epoch of 'primitive naturalism'. Thus, some of the older sophists, living in the middle of the 5th century B.C., as well as many followers of Democritus and the Cynics, divided the world into the 'true' things existing according to the nature (*physis*), and 'false' existing according to the human 'institutions' (*nomos*), 'custom' (*ēthos*) and opinion (*doxa*). According to them, religion definitely belongs to the second group. If religion would be true itself, all nations would worship the same way and the same gods.[15] However, being consistent enough, they, on the same ground, have proclaimed 'false' all state establishments, and morality itself, proposing for instance, to follow justice as 'institution' in the public eye, while to 'follow nature' privately.[16]

The second key argument against real religion proposed by Millican and Thornhill-Miller (don't forget, they would like to substitute it temporarily with a non-real one) is also amazing. Living, unlike Hume, in the time of highly developed empirical science, they succeeded in making a rather significant collection of quotes from contradictory sources. Some authors mentioned in the article state that during 'controlled studies' of intercessory prayer they could make sure that 'there is no scientifically discernible effect' for it. Others suggest that this effect is rare and dubious, while the third group has discovered its 'substantial, significant *negative* effect on health'. As far as generally 'medical miracles' are considered to be the 'most evident for the veracity of supernatural belief', the failure to verify them empirically as well as their plurality (sic!) significantly shakes faith in them.[17] If the authors of

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15   Plato explicitly wrote about it in his last work: Plat. Leg. 889 e. At the same time, had these naïve philosophers thought that the nature itself can be to some extend individualized, different local 'institutions' about gods, also would have been considered rather 'natural' by them. Thus Xenophones mentions the sophist Hippias (V cent. B.C.) who believed that 'institutions of nature', unlike those of humans, ought to be uniform in everything (Xen. Mem. IV, 4, 19-20). As Plutarch (46–127 C.E.) witnesses, the ideal of the universal uniformity is present in the thought of the founder of stoicism Zeno of Citium (334-262 B.C.), who was close to the Cynics. In *'On Fate and Virtue of Alexander'* Plutarch emphasizes that according to Zeno's 'State', written as an alternative to the great Platonic dialogue, humans have to live not in different towns and settlements, but all have to have common life and common order like a herd on the common pasture (I.6).

16   As it follows from the most important witness about his thoughts presented by Oxyrhyncus Papiri (Oxyrh.Pap.XI, N 1354), this was the honestly expressed position of Antiphon the Sophist (ca. 470-411 B.C.).

17   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 21–23.

the fundamental article on religion would have any kind of personal religious experience themselves, they would know that the effectiveness of prayer depends not least on *who* is praying. If they would respect religion, I would dare to remind them of the necessity to be more attentive to the witnesses of the basic religious sources, at least of the most known, the Bible, bringing out clearly that God of monotheistic religions *doesn't like* experiments with Him.[18] Finally, if it would be possible to discuss their position seriously, I could give a plenty of examples of the effectiveness of intercession of 'one who worships Him and obeys His will' (John 9:31).[19] However, in our case it would be meaningless, because both the authors and scholars to whom they are referring belong to the group described by the same texts as those who 'neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead' (Luke 16:31). As far as they are 'those educated who disdain religion',[20] as one of the younger contemporaries of Hume wrote, I'd like to propose them to join a retrospective journey into history. This time it will be Buddhist antiquity; the last note of their article allows to presume that they scorn it a little less than Christianity.[21] Those scholars whose authority Millican and Thornhill-Miller invoke, remind me of prince Payasi from the extensive *Payasi Sutta* included into the *Dîgha Nikāya* collection of longer sermons. Sutta tells us about the discussion between Payasi and the Buddha's disciple Kumara-Kassapa which happened soon after the death of the Buddha. Payasi, an atheist and materialist, was curious not about the effectiveness of prayer, but something more serious; he doubted the existence of a human soul, and could even find out strictly scientific 'refutation' of it. Once he put a sentenced thief into a large pot, bound and gagged. Then he sealed over the top of the pot with damp skin, covered it with unheated clay, placed the pot in an oven and light a large fire. Once the man was dead, the pot was opened, but he couldn't observe

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18   See, for instance: *Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah* (Deut 6:16); compare with: *He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'* (Ex 17:7).

19   It would be enough to mention, for instance, that through intercessory prayer of Russian archbishop St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco (1896 — 1966) numerous people were healed from terminal diseases, and some of them are still alive.

20   See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Unger, 1799).

21   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 48–49).

how the soul comes out of the body and escapes. The second experiment with another corpse confirmed 'non-effectiveness' of soul — Payasi again couldn't observe how the soul escapes. The third 'test experiment', when Payasi demanded to skin in his presence one more miserable victim, finally convinced him that it is impossible to see the escape of the soul from the body, and it means that the soul itself is completely invented.[22] Sure, educated and probably even sympathetic informers of Millican and Thornhill-Miller can't be compared with the monstrous Payasi. Nevertheless, one similarity between them exists. It is their common belief in the effectiveness of the methods of 'experimental physics' in the domain of meta-physics.

The third main rebuke delivered by Millican and Thornhill-Miller to real, primarily 'supranaturalistic' religions is their intolerance and xenophobia.[23] This statement is more serious than those previously discussed. It is true that history of Christianity knew Crusades, inquisition and bloody inter-denominational wars. Islam also was associated with active intolerance, but nowadays it thrills not only the outer world, but from time to time also itself with jihadism and religious terrorism. In the history of the Oriental religions, I mean, Buddhism and Hinduism, there weren't too many of such black pages, but their attitude, taken by Hick and his followers as a pattern of religious openness[24] is very typical and very skillful missionary strategy of exactly the

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22   Dīgha-Nikāya II.316-358 (volume and pages are referred to according to the classical edition of Pāli Texts Society).

23   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 40–41.

24   Thus, in his major work on theology of religions Hick, on the one hand, says that different empirical religious traditions guarantee their ethno-cultural communities almost equal access to the reception of rays of *Real in itself* (probably he had a kind of measuring device), while on the other, he suggests that Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism succeeded to move further than religions of the Semitic origins 'in the development of pluralistic worldview', and we can expect that they will significantly contribute to the spreading of it. See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, (Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 373, 375, 378. One of the numerous followers of Hick, indologist and theologian Harold Coward also considers that in contrast to the 'Western religions' Buddhism is characterized by the unique openness to the huge variety of beliefs, readiness to welcome any achievements of others and self-criticism, in the spirit of the contemporary science. See Harold G. Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Sri Satguru Publications, 1985), 32, 84-86. Earlier I referred to numerous Pāli sources to make it clear that at least, the orthodox Buddhists demonstrated rather critical and even contemptuous attitude to the representatives of other religious communities together with a lack of criticism towards themselves. See Vladimir K. Shokhin, "On Some Features of Bud-

same inclusivism that champions of religious pluralism criticize vehemently in the Catholic Church.[25] However our authors go even further by stating that non-tolerance, xenophobia, and authoritarianism are not only a reality of 'basic religions', but their essential and distinctive features. Referring to new informants, who were able to 'calculate' necessary data, they suggest that these 'religious diseases' can infect even non-religious population.[26] Well, but how to interpret in this case a variety of the historical facts, telling about repressions of 'supranaturalist' religions by 'naturalist regimes' and persecutions outweighing in cruelty all what we know about religious wars? What to do with the executions of clergy in revolutionary France, both during the three years of the *Convention nationale* and the two months of the *Commune de Paris*? How to explain genocide of Armenians that started with blood torture of priests and monks and Greek Christians, committed not by Islamists, but by Turkish secularists? What explanation can be found for many decades of persecutions and executions of clergy and laity of all confessions in the Soviet Union? What can be said about outrages committed upon believers by the communist regimes in Spain and in Latin America? What about the explicit ban of religion which took place in some Balkan countries? Presently in the West (unlike Asia and Africa) there are, certainly, no open religious persecutions, but atheistic exclusivism and worldview xenophobia are flourishing. Let me give just two examples. Recently the Parliamentary Assembly of EU adopted the resolution demanding the exclusion of creationism as an antiscientific position from public spheres not only because it contradicts evolutionism as the only true scientific worldview, but due to the reason that 'the creationist movements possess real political power'.[27] When not so long

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dhist Missionary Work and Double Standards in Religious Studies", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 15, no. 2 (2005).

25   One of the prominent indologists of the 20th century Paul Hacker (1913 — 1979), while studying Buddhist and Hinduist texts came to the conclusion that inclusivism (he was one among those who introduced this term into religious studies) is a specific feature of Indian mentality A fruitful discussion about 'exclusiveness of inclusivism' in India is presented in the fundamental collection of articles Gerhard Oberhammer, ed., *Inklusivismus: Eine indische Denkform,* (Brill, 1983).

26   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 42.

27   Resolution 1580, approved October, 4, 2007 (by the 35th session). Such 'hybrid' "scientific" and political argumentation evidently reminds strategies of the Soviet antireligious polemics,

ago the former world-renowned atheist Anthony Flew converted and pro-claimed himself a philosophical theist, his former 'brothers in trade' started to draw caricatures of him, atheistic sites declared a 'witch hunt', and Richard Dawkins explicitly stated that Flew's change of mind is not only an apostasy, but a result of senile dementia.[28] Contemporary cases of such 'hunts' from the theistic side aren't known, at least for me, although according to Millican and Thornhill-Miller all supranaturalists seriously threaten the world pluralistic civilization. It is significant enough that referring to many atheists they are 'ashamed' to mention 'the Four Horsemen of Apocalypse' with whom they have many commonalities in the view of religion.

Nevertheless, it ought to be said that some strategical differences between them also exist. 'The Horsemen' demand in practice to 'crush the vermin' (*écrasez l'infâme*) of religion, while the two scholars to whom we refer con-sider that it can still be useful for some purposes, especially taking into ac-count, for instance, that there are more autists among atheists than among believers. However, in their understanding of the origin of religion they are very similar to the 'horsemen'. The latter think that there are certain memes, responsible for religion. These memes are hardly comprehensible but have more or less 'noble roots', generating most probably from the realities called by Jung 'archetypes of the collective unconscious'. Millican and Thornhill-Miller recognize all three basic concepts of the genesis of religion existing presently in what is called the cognitive science of religion, i.e. (1) religion as 'directly biologically based adaptation promoting cooperation'; (2) religion as a by-product, incorporating a set of results of other cognitive processes; (3) religion as initially a by-product of evolution, stepdaughter of it, who af-ter 'cultural selection' became a good daughter.[29] It is worth mentioning here that they don't pay the necessary attention to the fact that the proposed 'lift

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starting with 'science has proved that there is not any God' and ending with assertions that the Church is 'the internal fifth column' promoting the interests of the external enemies of the state. Some formulations of the resolution, like an idea that creationism is dangerous because it is able to assume a likeness of science, thus adopting itself to evolutionism, are very akin to the quotes from the Soviet antireligious propaganda of 1970s and 1980s. Some other more general parallels were mentioned in the beginning of this paper.

28   See Antony G. N. Flew and Roy A. Varghese, *There is a God: How the world's most notori-ous atheist changed his mind* (Harper Collins, 2007), 171.

29   Thornhill-Miller and Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma", 35–36.

cranes' of evolution are rather weak and not more convincing than the hypothesis that a giraffe has a long neck because it has to reach tasty fruits growing on high trees.[30] Anyway, all three options require the *naturalist faith* that airproofs minds of its adherents much stronger than any supranaturalistic belief. It goes, first of all, about the faith in pure animality and 'occasionality' of human being that excludes its belonging to any 'kingdom of Forms'. It is exactly the faith that was propagated by Lucretius (1st century B.C.), who was a successor of Archelaus (5th century B.C.) and Democritus (5th — 4th centuries B.C.) as well as the forefather of the evolutionist anthropology, forgotten by his ill-informed successors.[31]

It seems, such atheistic fideism has also explicable psychological roots. Indeed, someone able to read the score, but incapable of hearing and perceiving real sounds, can create a pragmatic theory of the genesis of music from the 'true needs' to which it responds. A blind man is able to construct the same pragmatic theory of art, while a eunuch can 'guess' why 'indeed and not in name' men and women desire each other. Analogically, a person having no spiritual ear, vision and Eros, but sure that such abilities aren't necessary for the understanding of religion and mystical experience, or even subconsciously jealous of those who have religious intuitions, nevertheless believes that he can investigate what religion has to be 'in reality'. Sadly, it is a common belief that whilst mathematics, simultaneous translation, or sports require special gifts and abilities, religion, as well as philosophy and politics, can be easily 'understood' by anyone.

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30   I give this example just because other fruit-eating animals have no such long neck as giraffes. 'Social togetherness' also can be achieved by much more simple and effective mechanisms, although many contemporary anthropologists doing their best to reduce a human being to animal and elevating animals to humans, would hardly find religion in the alveary, as well as in a colony of ants or penguins.

31   Lucretius explained the origin of social life and civilization by the necessity of adaptation and competition in the environment, surrounding human tribes, initially knowing only how to copulate and kill wild animals with cudgels. Later through the imitation of animals' sounds they learned how to speak. It is significant that while despising religion personally Lucretius, nevertheless, considered it to be one of the first steps of civilization that preceded even metal-working. The detailed description of his whole social anthropology can be found in his famous poem. See: Lucr. *De nat. rerum* V. 925-1450.

These constituents of the atheistic psychology altogether with the phenomenon, which I have described elsewhere as an 'underlying paradox of atheism',[32] as well as the constant repeatability of the same 'memes' (both on the level of the same intellectual patterns and anti-numinous feelings, to use Rudolph Otto's idiom), parodic imitation of religion both in personal fideism and in public ideological institutions[33] can be observed throughout the course of history of thought. Thus, the question is bound to arise — why the origin of atheism still doesn't attract any attention of philosophy of religion.

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32   Paradoxically, divine essences, non-existing as reality for atheistic mind, quite often become objects of rejection, offense and even fierce hatred for the adherents of atheism. This inherent irrationality (typical for supranaturalists, as Millican and Thornhill-Miller believe), can be found already in the ideas of one of the 'fathers' of the ancient Greek atheism Diagoras of Melos (the 5th century B.C.) as well as of Theodorus the Atheist (340 — 250), Lucian of Samosata (circ. 125-180 C.E.) and some other Greek naturalists wherefrom the first one took revenge on those Olympic gods whom he denied. The same phenomenon is also present in the thought of some Buddhist and Jaina philosophers, who enjoyed humiliating of the god Îçvara, as well as in the writings of a former priest Jean Meslier, Paul Holbach, in the sarcasms of the founders of Marxism and Friedrich Nietzsche, who fiercely 'reduced to ashes' seemingly non-existing God, and this his constant hatred was accompanied with psychic attacks. One more example are some French existentialists whose passion in rejection God made their Soviet critics to suspect that they recognize his existence. Finally, it can be found in the writings of John Schellenberg's follower Theodore M. Drange, who edited 'argument of non-belief' in such a way as to insult God of Christians, while at the same time denying the existence of Him, as well as in the works of the 'New Atheists', whom Schellenberg sincerely despises. I wrote about this phenomenon in: V. K. Shokhin, 'Methodological Pluralism and the Subject Matter of Philosophy of Religion', in Sebastian T. Kolodziejczyk and Janusz Salamon, *Knowledge, Action, Pluralism: Contemporary Perspectives in Philosophy of Religion* (Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2014), 328.

33   It goes, first of all about the substitution of Church by quasi-Church institutions with their detailed imitations of Scripture, Tradition, church councils, dogmas, heresies, hagiographies, etc. Such substitutions often happened in time of atheistic dictatorships, particularly during the Communist dictatorship in the USSR, that was the longest of all. Pure speculative efforts are also of much interest. Thus it is commonly known that Auguste Comte had scolded 'old Holbach's atheism' for its failure to produce a positive substitute of religion. For him such substitution could be realized in the form of a new universal unity in common service to Humanity. This Humanity understood as a Highest Being (Grand Être) was, in fact, his deity that substituted Holbach's Matter. In 1848 Comte created a pseudo-ecclesiological structure 'Positivist Society', and in the end of his life proclaimed himself Pontifex Maximus of the new cult. Erection of Positivism on the ruins of Catholicism inspired many of positivist thinkers. Thus, for Émile-Auguste Chartier (Alain) the history of humanity was a substitute of the sacred history, while Comte was deified by him not less than Epicurus by the same 'Holbach of antiquity' Lucretius Carus. There were also many other adherents who were inclined to see in Comte 'the apostolic soul of the universal France' and to consider positivism 'the only salvational teaching'.

To my mind, it can be explained by the lack of the social request for such a research. The average modern man, more and more desiring to be just one of the animals, reducing his or her being only to psychosomatic needs easily satisfied without any 'agatheism' (it partly explains why evolutionism seems to be so attractive[34]), atheism is the best worldview and psychological norm. It is also known from the intellectual history that in most cases the origin of a norm is considered to be less interesting than the origin of deviant phenomena. Medicine deals with medical histories, not with histories of health.

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34   I'm speaking about attractiveness because evolutionism as a worldview has a non-scientific origin, although one of the most powerful myths of our times tries to prove otherwise. There is no experimental basis that would be able to demonstrate the origin of species many centuries ago. C.S. Lewis in his essay 'The Funeral of a Great Myth' (published in 1967) wrote that attractiveness of evolutionism is based on the romantic desire of people of Modernity to be absolutely free from any obligations towards universe as well as on their hope in infinite self-improving of mankind in future. No doubts, he was not mistaken, but I think that the motive of the substantiation of human rights for the overall animality as well as a contempt for spirit presently play a key role. One of the best testimonies for such a shift to 'legal animalism' is that zoophilia is becoming quite a legal area of applied ethics where even a rivalry takes place between two 'schools', one of them insisting that coupling between humans and animals transgress on the latter's rights while another emphasizes the romantic ethos of these relationships. See e.g. Nick White, "Issues of consent in human-animal sexual relations", 2008. https://njw.name/consent/ (accessed 14.03.2017).

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DEFENDING THE COMMON-CORE/DIVERSITY DILEMMA: ONE AUTHOR'S REPLY TO ABRAM, HEIM, LUKASIEWICZ, MOSER, OPPY, SALAMON, SENOR, TALIAFERRO & POROT

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Branden Thornhill-Miller and I feel tremendously grateful — and honoured — to have received so many interesting and thoughtful critical responses to our paper on "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma" (henceforth *"CCDD"*). In writing it, we hoped to provoke discussion and debate, but could not expect that it would provoke so much, and so quickly. As our critics have appreciated, the paper was also itself a *product* of discussion and debate, with the two of us trying to find a position, or range of positions, that we could agree fell within the "rational limits of supernatural belief" (*CCDD*, 2). This involved significant compromise on both sides, and hence it would be a mistake for any reader to assume that all of the views expressed in the paper can be unequivocally attributed to either of us. At some points, indeed, we felt compelled to highlight that we were attracted towards significantly different paths (2, 5, 46–9), with my own tendency being towards scepticism and naturalism "in the spirit of David Hume" (2), and thus inclined "to 'bite the bullet' of cool, parsimonious reason and learn to live with a godless world" (46).

1. EMPATHY, AND LOSS OF FAITH

In at least one case, namely that of the Fine Tuning Argument (to be discussed in §3 below), this context puts me in the unusual situation of being obliged to defend *as rationally respectable* a position of which I am seriously sceptical on intellectual grounds. To be clear in advance, therefore, I do not find this argument persuasive, but it does seem to me legitimately to raise significant

questions that invite (but do not compel) a divine answer. *CCDD*'s references to this argument came from me rather than my co-author,[1] and are there because I cannot imagine personally maintaining a belief in a divine creator without being able to draw on some respectable evidence that can survive critical scrutiny (as, I believe, the vast majority of other theistic arguments and supposed evidence cannot, a topic obviously too big to address further here).[2] Many people are — for good or ill — less scrupulous in this respect, but many of my philosophical colleagues would no doubt insist on being significantly more scrupulous.[3] Again, I should stress that my own inclinations are in the latter direction: we philosophers tend to view it as desirable to base our theoretical views on (what we take to be) fully rational criteria, and are systematically encultured towards doing so. But in responding to those who would criticise our paper for failing to stick to such a strong "rationalist" line, I would ask them to imagine the situation of someone who is persuaded by the sceptical case but psychologically unable to maintain this; for whom the prospect of casting off all supernatural religious belief seems too much to bear, potentially undermining both their optimism about the universe, and also — perhaps just as significantly — their social context.

Those who have never fallen under the spell of religion might find it surprising how traumatic relinquishing it can be, even for those whose ideals are strongly committed to rationality. My own experience of this was probably relatively mild, because it occurred whilst I was still young, in response to a combination of factors that came together when I was an undergraduate. As

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1   Obviously. no implications can be drawn regarding Branden Thornhill-Miller's beliefs from my own views as expressed in this current reply to critics. But the example given here makes clear that even views suggested in the jointly-authored *CCDD* cannot be assumed to be those of either of us individually: the paper involved a great deal of discussion and compromise, to endeavour to reach — as far as possible — positions that both of us felt were rationally sustainable given the philosophical and psychological evidence. Not surprisingly, the philosophical sections II and III (and 46–7 of VIII) mainly reflect my work, while sections IV to VII (and the rest of VIII), focused on empirical and religious studies, mainly reflect my co-author's work. However we discussed and agreed the paper throughout.

2   This answers Taliaferro and Porot: "We are sceptical of the idea that one can reasonably appreciate the individual and social benefits of a belief system without seeing any legitimate merit to the content of those beliefs. ... We don't assume that TMM necessarily share this intuition, but we would like to know whether or not they do." (228).

3   As, for example, Moser (38–9).

a keen and highly involved Anglican, I was shocked on encountering fundamentalist believers at Oxford, and the discovery that otherwise highly intelligent people could reflectively endorse — as literal truth — the moral atrocities and fanciful tales of the Old Testament, made me ponder more seriously than ever before whether my own religious beliefs were reasonably founded. I decided to change subject (from Mathematics) to Philosophy and Theology to sort myself out, after which various events jolted me out of my middle-class complacency into realising how awful the world is for so many people, bringing a new vividness to the Problem of Evil. The theological answers were unconvincing under critical scrutiny, as were the philosophical theistic arguments, while David Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* made many of them seem not only inadequate, but risible. By the time I was studying Philosophy of Religion as an Oxford postgraduate, my theism was evaporating, but — crucially — my nominal Christianity remained, at least for a few years. When my turn came at a postgraduate seminar, I presented a paper arguing that the sincere Christian should be prepared to accept the non-existence of God if that was where the evidence pointed (an idea received more warmly by the Professor of Theology than by the Professor of Philosophy of Religion). Even after moving on to teaching posts elsewhere, I continued to attend church erratically, until the recitation of creeds (whose dubious history I had studied) became just too much to tolerate. Acknowledging that I could no longer call myself a Christian was a serious personal ordeal, even when it was based on so much study and thought, and even though I had most of my life ahead of me, with virtually none of my new social context threatened by my loss of faith. Against this background, I find it relatively easy to empathise with those who feel that their religious commitments, entwined within their lives over decades, are completely impossible to relinquish, whatever contrary theoretical arguments might be presented.

2. BENEFITS OF RELIGION WITHOUT FIRST-ORDER BELIEF?

Perhaps the most controversial suggestion in our paper was the idea that what we call "second-order" religious belief could provide some kind of middle ground here, preserving some of the social and psychological benefits of religion while abandoning the specific "first-order" religious beliefs that are

undermined by the Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma. This idea was treated with great scepticism by most of our critics (Heim, 253–4; Łukasiewicz, 223; Moser, 38–39; Oppy, 262–3; Salamon, 216–30; Taliaferro & Porot, 228–30), and though sympathetic to such scepticism, I take seriously the possibility that second-order religion could indeed suffice to bring such benefits, since I am unaware of empirical evidence that would show otherwise.[4] Religions come in many varieties (as Oppy stresses in response to Salamon, 260–2), and plenty of people apparently find comfort in superstitious beliefs that would not count as *religious*. Many believers might well identify with Salamon's view that takes ethics as central to the role of religion (to be discussed in §4 below), but this is by no means universal. Many people also express what might be called "metaphysical" yearnings, for the idea that this world and mortal life are not "all there is": that the world is not merely material, and there is something beyond or some deeper purpose to it all (whether or not this conforms to any ethical ideal). Moreover such feelings need not be *selfish*, in the sense of yearning for a heavenly future state. It is commonplace for people to devote their lives to their ideals, and even to sacrifice their lives where necessary, an observation not confined to those who expect posthumous reward.

I fully acknowledge that second-order religion as we presented it is likely to be seen as somewhat elitist, "thin" (Salamon, 199; Moser, 38), and "existentially irrelevant" (Salamon, 225), especially if it is interpreted rigorously, refraining from any first-order "contamination". But that is not the interpretation we were proposing: we were not suggesting a complete divorce from culturally-conditioned religious practices, but rather, that such religious expression should be followed in an "undogmatic and non-prejudicial" spirit (48).[5] Many religious believers, especially perhaps in the Far East beyond the hegemony of the dominant and exclusivist monotheisms, participate in

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4   But I make no claim to special expertise here, and will be interested to see the response of my co-author to relevant points, e.g. McCauley's work as discussed by Heim (250–3).

5   It may be that several critics have been misled by an unfortunate ambiguity in the text of our paper, where we refer to "second-order theism — or deism — .." (4). For example, Oppy (259) and Senor (221, n. 5) both read this, not unreasonably, as implying an *equation* between second-order theism and deism, but our intention here was to refer to "second-order (theism or deism)", to clarify that deism was *included* within the category (but not *required*). Moser (37) also misinterprets our notion of second-order religion, in presuming that it must be entirely non-causal.

combinations of religious practices that are, strictly viewed, incoherent, and often, at least in part, "vulgarly superstitious".[6] Buddhism is combined with worshipping the idols of Hinduism or Shinto, for example, apparently meeting both the social and "existential" needs of those concerned, despite the theoretical shortcomings.[7] At the other extreme from vulgar superstition, Christian Quakerism involves no exclusivist creed, and those involved probably have a wide variety of incompatible views on the status of Jesus and other controversial doctrines. It would presumably be possible for religions in general to move away from dogmatic expression of beliefs and enforced theological purity, to put more emphasis on the social and ceremonial side, and far less on doctrinal orthodoxy.[8] This might then enable adherents to experience personal fulfilment through a range of "valid spiritual paths", without any focus on the incompatibility of their "presume[d] metaphysical conditions" (Heim, 247, nn. 35, 37).

Now imagine a participant in such a religious group, who starts with doubts about particular historical teachings and eventually becomes sceptical about whether there is even any supernatural agency in the universe. One can imagine their feeling somewhat conflicted about religious participation, even of the undogmatic kind. Suppose that they later become convinced — through the Fine Tuning Argument, perhaps — that there is some ultimate Designer, albeit one of whom we can know virtually nothing, but who can, not unreasonably, be taken as the implicit focal point of many religions. My expectation is that this new conviction could make a significant difference to such a person, helping to remove their conflicted concerns by giving them confidence that "there is something more" to the universe, and

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6   Oppy remarks that "Since Hume wrote his *Natural History of Religion*, it has been a commonplace that 'vulgar superstitions' are much better suited to the relief of existential anxiety than are the abstruse deliverances of theologians." (262–3).

7   Heim also draws attention to this phenomenon (247), apparently viewing it as in tension with our view, which I do not. The only mention of "polytheism" in our paper suggested that it would be unattractive to "any conventional Jew, Christian, or Muslim" (17); perhaps our understanding of what counts as "conventional" differs here.

8   This coheres with Oppy's suggestion that first-order religion could move towards less authoritative forms that "might be able to deliver the in-group goods without also delivering the out-group damage" (271–2). But note also that undogmatic first-order religious institutions are entirely compatible with individual second-order belief.

hope of a positive purpose to it all.[9] And although I would not now see myself as being that person, I can imagine an alternative history in which I might have found significant consolation in such a resolution.[10]

3. THE FINE TUNING ARGUMENT

In support of our conception of second-order religion, our paper put a modest emphasis on the Fine Tuning Argument, with one brief mention in the abstract (1), three sentences in the introduction (3–4), and a paragraph and footnote in the concluding section (47). This makes a striking contrast with its relative prominence in the critical responses, where — compared to our total of four occurrences — the phrase "fine tuning" (and cognates) appear five times in Senor's, 15 times in Moser's, 29 times in Oppy's and 47 times in Salamon's. Per page, these four responses give an overall frequency more than 12 times our own, strongly suggesting that more is being read into our nod towards this argument than we intended. Accordingly, Salamon states that our conception of second-order religion is "supposed to be … supported *solely* by the Fine-Tuning Argument for the existence of God" (199, his emphasis). Abram likewise says that such belief "would rely on the Fine-Tuning Argument alone" (239). Senor says of us: "The ground of such belief, they aver, is the fine-tuning argument" (214). Oppy is initially more guarded (259–60), but later describes us as proposing "a second-order religion that is strongly supported by fine-tuning considerations" (264).

What we actually said, however, was that second-order religion "can be given some distinctive (albeit controversial) intellectual support through the increasingly popular Fine Tuning Argument" (1); that "Second-order theism is … likely to be particularly attractive to adherents of the Fine-Tuning Ar-

9   This expectation reflects the view — based on psychological evidence and the study of world religions — of my co-author, Branden Thornhill-Miller, who plans to elaborate on second-order religion and its implications in a future paper.

10   Late in my teens, largely under the influence of an inspirational vicar, I contemplated a career in the Church. Suppose this had come to pass, and that religious doubts had only occurred to me when I was settled as a priest, part of a community and with a family to support, feeling highly fulfilled by helping others through my pastoral work and with no other career in sight. In that case, I could easily have been strongly attracted towards religious viewpoints which — as an academic philosopher — I have the luxury of viewing as insufficiently intellectually rigorous.

gument" (3); and that "the assessment of the argument is disputed, but we doubt that it is decisively refutable given the current state of knowledge, as long as its conclusion is suitably restricted" (47). This is at best faint praise for the argument, and certainly gives no suggestion that it is the *only* thing that second-order religion has going for it.

As already stated, I personally do not find the Fine Tuning Argument persuasive, but I am convinced that it is significantly better than most atheist philosophers seem to think (as long as its conclusion is, indeed, suitably restricted). Oppy is probably expressing a standard view when he says — having apparently agreed with us that Ontological, Cosmological, and Moral Arguments are "decisively refutable" — that "there is no reason to suppose that extant fine-tuning arguments are in better standing than other kinds of theistic arguments (265).[11] Moser is less explicit, but refers to a well-known paper that expresses "various serious objections" to the argument (34).[12] In favour of the argument, we raised the possibility that "in the future — possibly a distant future — the development of physics [may] strengthen ... the argument, for example by ... corroborating the naturalistic inexplicability of the 'anthropic coincidences'" (47).

To flesh out this speculation, suppose that by 1,000 years' time, physics has long since consolidated and removed all the irritating conflicts and lacunae that currently bedevil it. For at least 500 of those years, there has been no hint of contradiction between the successors of quantum mechanics and general relativity, while the material and forces in the universe have also ap-

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11   The phrase "decisively refutable" is our own (47). Oppy himself says that the Ontological, Cosmological, and Moral Arguments are "unsuccessful", and adds that he takes this to be true also "for all the other classes of extant theistic arguments" (265).

12   These "serious" objections are mainly based on considerations of mathematical probability that bear little relation to the physics, and seem to me implausible. There are, of course, obvious difficulties in applying probability rigorously to the unique case of the creation of the universe, but in the sort of scenario I sketch below, such absolute theoretical rejection would I believe seem unconvincing. Any objection purporting to show that an inference to divine action would be unjustified *no matter how extreme the phenomena may be* has to be viewed with extreme suspicion (and in general, the most effective way of opposing Design Arguments is not to rule them out on principle, but rather, to acknowledge that they could have force if the empirical evidence were sufficiently impressive, but to point out that it isn't). To be fair to the paper in question, these issues are recognised towards the end (Colyvan *et al.* 2005, 332).

parently become well understood.[13] The formation of the universe is also well understood in terms of the relevant laws, starting from a "Big Bang" with specific initial conditions, and developing through time towards our recognisable future with corroborative evidence at every main stage. Physical explanation, however, is still incomplete: many "anthropic coincidences" remain, with apparently arbitrary constants — all of which have resisted deeper attempts at explanation — fitting together in ways that seem precisely adjusted to enable the evolution of a complex universe with galaxies, stars, planets, and chemistry capable of supporting life (through mechanisms that are again by now well understood). Strikingly, no such "coincidence" becomes apparent within these theories until billions of years have elapsed after the Big Bang: what stands out as remarkable is not the early part of this journey, but the long-term end result of the interaction of all these laws. Way back in the 21st century, various theories were proposed to explain this apparent fine tuning as a selection effect, by speculating about evolving sequences of universes or an infinite "world ensemble", but these have all long since proved untenable.[14] Meanwhile, the development of computation has proceeded apace, with quantum computers — hugely improved since their initial mass-production more than 950 years earlier — now able to simulate alternative physical theories with unparalleled speed and accuracy. Again and again these simulations give the same message: across a huge range of such theories, with the relevant

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13   This is emphatically not the current situation. The existence of "dark matter" was corroborated only in 1980, and the first direct evidence for "dark energy" came only in 1998. We still don't have much clue what either of these are (assuming they genuinely exist), but analysis of seven years of data from NASA's Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe, released in January 2010, suggests that 72.8% of the mass of the universe is constituted by dark energy, and 22.7% by dark matter. That leaves only 4.56% of atomic matter, the stuff that we knew to exist prior to 1980. The very recent development, uncertainty, and even internal contradictions of current physics give excellent reason for *scepticism* about "fine tuning", but not for dogmatic *rejection* of the idea.

14   Some may argue that such proof is impossible, but the history of science strongly suggests that our imaginations are rather poor at predicting what may or may not become possible in the future. In his 1835 *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, ignorant of the developing science of spectroscopy, Auguste Comte notoriously asserted that we could never know the chemical composition of the stars. Bell's Theorem gives a more contemporary example, enabling the demonstration — through statistical calculation and empirical testing — of a limitation on quantum "hidden variable" theories that would probably have seemed to most philosophers (including myself) to be impossible to establish.

constants varied in trillions of different ways, it has turned out that every such constant has to be within a very narrow proportion of the theoretically "feasible" range in order to generate anything like a complex chemical universe. The constants seem to be "fine tuned", and all attempts to explain this fine tuning have utterly failed, over centuries of trying, and while science in other respects has been developing fruitfully.

To be clear, I do not personally consider this scenario at all likely, but see nothing inconceivable in it.[15] And if this were to come about, then it seems to me that the remarkable apparent fine-tuning would give at least some evidence for a cosmic intelligent power, one able to *plan* and *foresee*, from the time of the Big Bang, how the universe was going to develop over the subsequent billions of years. The "coincidence" that seems to demand explanation only becomes apparent long after the initial state, and this is a distinctive feature of the Fine Tuning Argument that makes it especially suitable for indicating an *intelligent*, *forward-planning agent* (as well as one of cosmic scale). Hence it is not merely an update of the traditional Design Argument which Hume demolished, but has distinctive virtues.[16] Oppy disagrees, deploying a standard objection:

> On the theistic view, [the fine tuning of the initial causal state] will be a matter of God's initial disposition to create a big-bang universe ... in which the fine-tuned constants take the values that they do ... I suspect that most theists will favour the view that God's initial creative disposition is brutely contingent — God could have had quite different initial creative dispositions and there is nothing that explains why God had the creative dispositions that he did rather than [others] ... I prefer the variant of the naturalistic view on which the initial state of our universe is brutely necessary ... then the views are simply on a par with respect to the virtues of the explanations that they give of the fine-tuning of the causal order for life. (266)

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15   By contrast, I cannot envisage any future scenario that would vindicate the Ontological, Cosmological, or Moral Arguments for God (though future discoveries could make consciousness another interesting field for discussion).

16   Compare the conclusion of Colyvan et al. (2005): "In each epoch, what it is about the cosmos that is supposed to warrant the design hypothesis has been different: the mechanistic solar system, biological organs, and now: fine tuning. But the fundamental flaws in the design argument really have nothing to do with the particular suspect chosen. ... the fine-tuning version of the argument is no better than its predecessors" (334).

This, however, seems to miss the point, because the theist who favours the Fine Tuning Argument — while perhaps agreeing that "God could have had quite different initial creative dispositions" — will not agree that "there is nothing that explains why God had the creative dispositions that he did rather than others". Even if, in some sense, we take as "brute facts" that God is omnipotent,[17] omniscient, and values loving relationships with sentient creatures, it is not then a *further* brute fact — given this overall orientation — that he chose to create a universe whose specific physical constants were precisely "tuned" in such a way as to facilitate the evolution of such creatures. Hence I conclude that the Fine Tuning Argument has more explanatory virtue than Oppy suggests, and remains in play as a potential (albeit highly debatable) support for second-order theism.

4. SALAMON'S AGATHEISM

Salamon's "agatheism" provides a fascinating counterpoint to our second-order religion, focusing on morality as the core notion rather than cosmic purpose, but otherwise playing a somewhat similar role. Certainly his vision of religions coming together through recognition of a fundamental and enlightened moral core is an attractive one, but serious questions arise about its supposed basis and viability. There is no space here for the extensive discussion that Salamon's deep and interesting paper deserves, so I shall confine myself to a few brief points, sketching my position fairly forthrightly rather than arguing for it with any subtlety.

To begin with, I share Oppy's scepticism (260–2) that first-order religions are, in general, founded on an agatheistic moral view, and am more inclined towards Łukasiewicz's view "that 'true' first-order religions are grounded mainly in religious authority and in the past" (229). First-order religion is largely a confused mess that exhibits far too much respect for ancient and less enlightened times, and consequently preserves a legacy which has often been strongly conditioned by superstitious stories, historical contingency, and vi-

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17   Although it points to cosmic power, the Fine Tuning Argument does not strictly support *omnipotence*. Indeed in general, fine tuning is better evidence for an *architect* who is having to achieve some task within tight constraints, rather than a creator *ex nihilo* who could bring about exactly what he wants without any causal limitations.

cious battles (either over doctrine, or more obviously for naked power). Examples of all this are legion, and familiar.

When religion frames so many people's view of "life, the universe, and everything", it is bound to be closely associated with morality; moreover some varieties of religion (and specific religious texts such as *Matthew* 5–7) indeed exhibit great moral enlightenment. But this has not apparently been the main driving force of most historical religion, as evidenced by what happens when the superstitious stories, theological orthodoxies, and power struggles come into opposition with ethical values. Then we end up, for example, with Biblical texts in which the first four of the ten commandments all focus on devotion to Yahweh;[18] and in which the ultimate crime — punishable through future generations — is "the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat", namely setting up idols of golden calves in Bethel and Dan (thus depriving Jerusalem of income from religious tribute). By contrast, the genocide of six entire nations, simply because they inhabit the Promised Land, is not only permitted but positively encouraged (and we should not be surprised to discover that *Deuteronomy* 20:14–17 has inspired so-called "Islamic State" in some of their atrocities).

If religion were genuinely founded on a moral core, then one would expect this to be the dominant factor in religious debate and discussion, but history tells a very different story. The Reformation was primarily about religious authority, and in its wake both Catholics and Protestants apparently considered it entirely in order — for example in the Thirty Years' War and the English Civil War — to kill each other with enthusiasm.[19] A similar pattern is seen still in Islam, where the ancient conflict between Shia and Sunni (again fundamentally about authority) shows no sign of abating, while appeals to morally enlightened passages within the *Quran* seem largely to fall on deaf ears. So far from religion being shaped around moral considerations, brute historical fact suggests that there is a lot to be said for Hume's view that re-

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18   The four are: "You shall have no other gods before me"; "You shall not make for yourself an idol ... for I ... am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation"; "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God"; "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy ... a sabbath to the Lord your God" (*Deuteronomy* 5: 6–21).
19   Moreover the Thirty Years' War gives a very clear example in which it was religious affiliation that initially triggered the conflict and determined the sides; there is no question of a basis in some broader social concern that was independent of religion.

ligion *corrupts* morality, recommending spurious "virtues", promoting intol-
erance, and encouraging the vices of hypocrisy, self-deception, and simple-
minded credulity.[20] Contemporary societies that are politically dominated by
clergy or religious orthodoxies tell a sorry tale, in line with his pessimistic
comment that "If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical nar-
ration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which at-
tend it." (*Dialogues* 12.11).

Abram "aims to expand Salamon's agatheistic position and divert Thorn-
hill-Miller's and Millican's attention to the sphere of morality" (240). Having
acknowledged the sceptical view of Bernard Williams,[21] much of the focus
of her response is to emphasise the power of religion to sustain "conclusive",
"unconditional", "inescapable" commitment "that requires our compliance"
(244) and enables us to "become passionate about morality" (247). She appar-
ently agrees with Rowan Williams that "to do something [morally] extraor-
dinary ..., one has to subscribe to the idea of a transcendent source of value"
(245). I am not persuaded by this last claim, since there are plenty of exam-
ples of heroic atheists, and of people who have devoted their lives to values
without any suggestion of a "transcendent source". But suppose it were true
that the absolute heights of heroism empirically went along with religious
belief — what would follow? Personally, I would rather live in a world with-
out such heroes: where *nobody* believes that they have "inescapable" commit-
ments derived from a transcendent source that unconditionally requires their
compliance (e.g. to become terrorist martyrs). The history of those who are
"passionate" about their religiously-inspired moral beliefs is depressing rath-
er than uplifting, with religion often serving to harden their hearts against
more homely secular virtues such as benevolence, empathy, and pity. Voltaire
had good reason to stress how unnatural religious views can lead to unnatu-
ral acts of violence and injustice:

> In days gone by, there were people who said to us: 'You believe in incompre-
> hensible, contradictory and impossible things because we have commanded
> you to; now then, commit unjust acts because we likewise order you to do
> so.' ... Certainly any one who has the power to make you believe absurdities

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20   For more discussion and references, see Millican (2002), 34–40 and especially 38.
21   She quotes him (242) as remarking that appeal to God in morality "either adds nothing at
all, or it adds the wrong sort of thing" — a sentiment with which Hume would obviously concur.

has the power to make you commit injustices. If you do not use the intelligence with which God endowed your mind to resist believing impossibilities, you will not be able to use the sense of injustice which God planted in your heart to resist a command to do evil. Once a single faculty of your soul has been tyrannized, all the other faculties will submit to the same fate. This has been the cause of all the religious crimes that have flooded the earth. (Voltaire 1765, 277–8)

Ridiculous beliefs — for example that forcible religious conversion under torture can save a soul from eternal damnation, or that martyrdom can gain eternal bliss in the company of 72 willing virgins — can very easily lead to unspeakable acts, as history amply confirms. Morality is far safer if kept beyond the grasp of "passionate" religious enthusiasm.

Another serious difficulty for agatheism is the familiar Problem of Evil, which threatens to drive a wedge between metaphysics and morals. This is too big a topic to embark on here, so I shall simply observe that agatheism looks far harder to square with the empirical data than is our second-order religion with its ultimate creator (or perhaps fine-tuner) who generally lets the world alone. The latter might not offer as much personal support and consolation as the view that the world is governed by moral perfection, but for those who do find it existentially adequate, it is probably much easier to maintain against the hard and depressing evidence of experience.

5. SUPERNATURALISM

Turning now to the more sceptical elements of our paper, Taliaferro and Porot take us to task for using the term "supernatural" to characterise our target, for three reasons. First, they believe the term "suggests … a clear understanding of what is natural" (215). In my idiolect, however, it suggests no such thing, and I agree entirely with the points they make about our contemporary "lack of a clear understanding of what is material" (216), and how far modern physics has moved from early-modern paradigms. Secondly, they take the term to imply *distortion* or *lack* compared with the natural (217). Again, I do not understand it as having such pejorative overtones, and "*super*natural" sounds to me like an attribution of something *more* than natural, rather than some-

thing less (a view strongly confirmed by the Oxford English Dictionary).[22] Thirdly, they dislike "the way in which 'supernatural' as ... currently defined in English, includes not just God ... [but] ghosts, spooks, vampires, telepathy, astro-projection, witches, Delphic oracles, dead ancestral spirits, poltergeists, and so on" (217). This requires more discussion.

In the first sentence of our Introduction, we characterised our topic as "belief in supernatural agents such as gods, angels, and spirits"; we then spoke of "such invisible powers" and "instances of perceived supernatural agency". Given this focus, two reasonable alternatives to the word "supernatural" would be Hume's term, "invisible, intelligent powers", or — perhaps preferably for Taliaferro and Porot — "incorporeal agents". Now I take it that incorporeal agency can reasonably be considered as "supernatural" in the sense of being in radical tension with our scientific understanding of the natural world. The limits of physical matter admittedly remain very unclear, potentially embracing "psychic" qualities (with panpsychism now taken seriously by a fair number of philosophers); this indeed makes terms such as "physicalism" and "naturalism" hard to pin down. But as far as I know there has been no serious *scientific* evidence of *agents that are entirely incorporeal*; and the belief that such agents exist remains clearly in the religious (and perhaps parapsychological) rather than scientific domain, completely dissociated from our developing understanding of biology, evolution, and the mechanisms of human thought and action. This is not, of course, to presume that it is false or universally rejected by scientists; but in general parlance incorporeal agents would count as "supernatural" if anything does.[23] Talk of incorporeal agents will also embrace some of the occult entities whose company Taliaferro and Porot resent (though by no means all of them: vampires and telepathy, for example, need involve no such agency). I can understand why they dislike belief in God being put alongside belief in dead ancestral spirits and so forth, but those do all happen to be instances of the topic under discussion. And it is

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22   The non-obsolete OED definitions of the adjective are "1(a) Belonging to a realm or system that *transcends nature*, as that of *divine*, magical, or ghostly *beings* ..."; "1(b) Relating to, dealing with, or characterized by such a realm, system, or force"; and "2. *More than what is natural or ordinary; unnaturally or extraordinarily great*; abnormal, extraordinary." (my emphasis).

23   As the *OED* clearly confirms. And again, most would consider the power to act without a body a *superpower* rather than a limitation.

indeed an implication of our view that some of the processes that lead to belief in divine action lead also to belief in ancestral spirits and witchcraft that most would regard as "superstitious". I acknowledge that "there is a tendency to associate what is supernatural with that which is superstitious" (218), but on our view, such an association is not entirely inappropriate: if the same psychological processes are, indeed, involved in both, then that is highly relevant to their assessment. Overall, therefore, I am unconvinced by any objection of principle to the term "supernatural", and from a stylistic point of view, "supernatural belief" seems clearly preferable to "belief in incorporeal agency". I also note that our other critics raised no objection to the term, and indeed used it themselves. But just to be very clear, our use of the term "supernatural" is not in any way intended to function as a *persuasive definition*: the issues we raise are to be decided by discussion and argument, not by verbally enshrined prejudices.

6. HUME ON MIRACLES

I hold no brief to defend Hume against the charge of racism, though Taliaferro and Porot overstate it unfairly.[24] And I am prepared to accept that his apparent unwillingness here to accept phenomena beyond his experience may suggest parallels with his view on miracles.[25] Moreover I agree with Taliaferro and Porot that Hume's confusing discussion of "his case of world-wide total darkness" (221), and his failure to link the issue of miracles more clearly with the idea of divine *teleology* (222), are serious weaknesses.[26] But I take issue with Taliaferro and Porot's discussion of contrary miracles. They are in

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24   They say, for example, that Hume "grants [Willams] no more skills than a parrot" (220), which would of course be both ridiculous and extremely offensive. Hume actually says that Williams is "likely ... admired for very slender accomplishments", in much the same way as a parrot can be admired for "speak[ing] a few words plainly". What count as "very slender accomplishments" for humans and parrots are clearly quite different, and Hume expresses no doubt that Williams has some "parts and learning" by comparison with other Jamaicans.

25   Just as Taliaferro and Porot should acknowledge the equally obvious parallels between religious and "superstitious" beliefs involving incorporeal agents. Note that if, as they claim, "Hume seems just as ready to dismiss reports of intelligent blacks as to dismiss miracle stories due to an errant imagination or … cognitive biases" (220), then this makes his undervaluing of the evidence for black people's accomplishments more a cognitive than a moral failing.

26   Both points are made very explicitly in Millican (2011), §18 (182–4) — this paper is referred to several times in *CCDD* (see footnotes 11, 13, 14, and 15).

danger of misrepresenting us when they refer to "TMM's revision of Hume's critique of miracles" and then go on to state a view, supposedly "As [TMM] phrased it" (223), which looks very like the Humean position *that we were explicitly criticising* (on 15–16). We ourselves said:

> Hume goes much too far when arguing that miracles 'pretended to have been wrought' in contrary religions are 'to be regarded as contrary facts'. ... Indeed, as we have seen, M_1 and M_2 need not be 'contrary' even in the weak sense of merely making each other *less probable*, despite the strict contrariety of their associated religions, R_1 and R_2. (16)

Against this background, it seems strange that Taliaferro and Porot should argue so forcefully towards the conclusion: "To say that incoherence between doctrines establishes that the miracle did not happen, even when all … faiths could (in principle) agree that it did, is misguided." (224). We agree, and we never said — or even suggested — any such thing.

A more substantial disagreement emerges when Taliaferro and Porot address the issue of whether believers can "rationally reject the miracles of other faiths without rejecting the miracles of their own faith" (226), but here I believe they have overlooked the force of our argument. Their concern seems to be to establish the potential for *asymmetries* between different religions based on the content of the relevant beliefs (e.g. moral egalitarianism versus hierarchy), and they point out correctly that "it seems perfectly coherent for a believer to say that they don't believe the testimony of a miracle for a religion that generates other false claims" (225). This, of course, is *exactly* the sort of reasoning that Hume was proposing regarding "contrary miracles": rejecting miracle stories on the basis that the corresponding religion is presumed to be false. And so ironically Taliaferro and Porot are now apparently lining up on Hume's side, in favour of a kind of reasoning on which we were casting doubt (though on the basis of probabilistic considerations rather than alleged incoherence).

In our discussion of "contrary miracles", we were not denying that a believer might justifiably draw distinctions between miracle stories in different religions, and indeed the question of *justification* here is irrelevant. Taliaferro and Porot (225) quote us as saying:

> The point here is not that Christian believers are *logically compelled to deny* the miracles of rival religions (as the contrary religions argument would

suggest), but rather, that these believers *will in fact want to deny* them. (*CCDD*, 19)

Our denial of logical compulsion here was made *against Hume*, as the parenthesis makes very clear. And our point was that, notwithstanding this lack of compulsion, most believers would *in fact* deny the miracle stories of other religions. *Whether or not this denial would be justified*, such religious believers would then be faced with a host of miraculous reports from a multitude of religions, *the vast majority of which they consider to be false*. This would immediately imply that miracle reports are statistically very unreliable. It would also raise the question of how these false reports came about, with a very plausible explanation being that "humans are naturally drawn towards belief in the supernatural, with a vivid imagination driven by hopes and fears, cognitive biases, lack of critical judgement, and a delight in miracle stories etc." (17). Both the obvious statistical message, and the naturalistic explanation, cast serious doubt not only on the miracle stories of *other* religions, but also on those of the believer's religion itself. And thus we reach a clear instance of the Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma: "That in so far as ... miracle reports ... point towards specific aspects of particular religions, their diversity and mutual opposition undermines their evidential force; while in so far as [they] involve a 'common core' of similarity, they point towards a proximate common cause ... that is natural rather than supernatural." (3, 20).

7. RATIONALITY AND OBJECTIVITY

Our discussion raised big questions about rationality and objectivity, and many interesting points have been made in response. As Moser (33–5), Oppy (268), and Senor (216–20) observe, what it is rational to believe will inevitably depend to some extent on the epistemological situation of the individual believer, and hence we were being imprecise in talking with such apparent generality of the "rational limits of supernatural belief" (2). More substantially, it is debatable how far general third-person (e.g. statistical) considerations should be taken into account by the rational subject who has a first-person experience as of a supernatural agent, or who receives religious testimony from someone he trusts. Taliaferro and Porot suggest that objective testing — for example of the efficacy of petitionary prayer — is especially

problematic when God's existence is in question, given his supposed necessity and omnipresence (226–7).[27] They also provide an amusing story of a religious experience striking Thornhill-Miller and me whilst walking back to Hertford College after giving a paper elsewhere (232–3).[28] Senor (217) suggests that we are inappropriately assuming "a general parity among the practitioners of various religions regarding the experiences they have and the beliefs they form on the basis of them",[29] and argues that testimony can be "a rationality conferring process", even if it cannot ultimately be traced back to genuine religious experiences (219–20).[30] Moser points out that diversity does not necessarily imply disagreement, speculating that "God could issue opposing commands to you and me for keeping the Sabbath", giving us both "undefeated evidence", bearing in mind that "God could have different spe-

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27   I suspect, however, that their points about prayer are self-defeating, since if "There is no one on earth who is not prayed for" (226) — and if this lack of a control group undermines any attempt to test prayer's efficacy — then it seems to follow that individual prayer (in the context of universal collective prayers) has no curative value. They cannot have it both ways: either *individual* prayer is ineffective, or it has specific good effects that could be detectable.

28   The story somewhat chimes with me, since I have sung the *Magnificat* many times in the past, and have probably got closest through music — including Church music — to what I might be tempted to call a religious experience. But the example has an easy answer: "once … supernatural agents (whose veracity cannot be guaranteed) are brought into the picture, it becomes obvious that mere humans will be unable to tell with any reliability what source any miracle has" (*CCDD*, 17 n. 27). The Problem of Evil would strongly dissuade me from accepting *any* religious experience as involving genuine contact with an omniperfect God, because even supernatural beings are to be judged morally by how they act, not by how they choose to present themselves to potentially gullible observers.

29   He also suggests that we offer no relevant empirical evidence for this, apparently overlooking the wealth of psychological studies cited in our paper that point towards such commonality.

30   There is, however, a serious problem here. Suppose we accept, with Senor, that "a testifier might not be rational in her belief, but sincerely assert that P and a hearer might thereby come to rationally believe that P. So, even if TMM's argument might cause problems for the rationality of specific religions in a general, person-neutral sense, many believers might be rational in their beliefs." (220). This seems to be presented as a vindication of the potential rationality of religious belief. But any victory here is obviously Pyrrhic, for its premise is that rational belief can be founded on irrational testimony. On that basis, almost any belief that is not *obviously* false can in principle be rationally held, if based on a confident report from someone who is fully trusted but in fact utterly deluded on the matter in question. I therefore think we were wise to focus, in *CCDD*, on the "rational limits of supernatural belief" from a well-informed and intersubjective point of view, rather than that of the individual believer.

cific purposes for you and me" (33). Oppy (268–9) and Senor (220) point to epistemological externalism as potentially playing a role in these discussions.

Other significant points concern an implicit contrast that we may have seemed to assume between religious diversity and an imagined naturalistic unanimity. Taliaferro and Porot indeed allege unfairness here, noting the considerable diversity between "different naturalistic accounts of human persons" and of "the human mind" (223–4). Such diversity "also concerns deep matters in metaphysics, epistemology, value theory, philosophy of language, and other sub-fields" (228). In the same vein, Oppy says:

> Some, but not all, intelligent, reflective, interested, well-informed philosophers have been, and some, but not all, intelligent, reflective, interested and well-informed philosophers are, determinists, substance dualists, consequentialists, communitarians, virtue ethicists, logical pluralists, phenomenologists, existentialists, physicalists, legal positivists, and so forth. What credence, then, can we give to claims that it is *irrational* to believe in determinism, or consequentialism, or communitarianism ... etc.? (269–70)

He also goes on to stress that the "human cognitive failings — egocentric bias, confirmation bias, optimistic bias, and the like" that we highlight as an epistemological problem with regard to religion "are universal ... So a question naturally arises about the extent to which the views of Thornhill-Miller and Millican on the question of the rationality of naturalistic and theistic beliefs are themselves affected by these universal cognitive failings." (270).

All these are interesting questions, deserving of far longer and more detailed answers than I am able to give here.[31] But in brief, I continue to think that there are special problems with the diversity in religious belief, which fully justify the place that we gave it in our paper, and which strongly cohere with our emphasis on the Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma. First, the extent of religious diversity is longstanding, widespread and notorious, characterised by uncompromising and violent disagreement throughout recorded history, and relatively little rational engagement. Secondly, and relatedly, the

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31   Other very interesting issues are raised by Heim (249–50) in relation to our discussion of the "Normal/Objective Dilemma", and I regret that lack of space precludes addressing those here. One point worth noting, however, is Heim's approving mention of Damasio's view "that emotion is an integral element in the way 'higher' human reason works" (249). As I have noted elsewhere (Millican 2002, 425), Damasio's book in turn approvingly mentions Hume, who in this respect yet again achieved insights that were well ahead of his time.

existential concerns that motivate religion typically give the relevant beliefs an intensity out of all proportion to the evidence, making believers peculiarly weak at assessing that evidence objectively, and giving religious institutions a concern for orthodoxy which often crushes even further any prospect of calm, objective reflection. Thirdly, for these and associated reasons, religious diversity is deeply entrenched, with rival communities only rarely attempting to learn from each other or modify their views: religious affiliation for most people is therefore overwhelmingly determined by geography or family community, rather than by rational investigation or discussion. Fourthly, in so far as religion is based on personal experience rather than local tradition or teaching, it is clear that such experiences are culturally conditioned, with the common underlying features typically interpreted by the believer as having doctrinal implications that almost invariably mirror the relevant community. Fifthly — as we documented at length — psychological studies clearly suggest that several mechanisms that lie behind supernatural religious beliefs also commonly lead to superstitious beliefs which defy any rational credibility.

Senor suggests that a religious belief could be justified on externalist grounds if "it is the product of a properly functioning, reliable, truth-aimed belief-forming process operating in an appropriate environment" (220). There are at least two problems with this. First, externalist accounts of justification are essentially *third-person*, based on an outside view of the processes involved rather than the believer's own perspective. These often fit well with our everyday ascriptions of knowledge (including to animals and unreflective people), but they are far less helpful when we ourselves are plagued with epistemological doubts. In these circumstances, it is of little help to know that *if* our belief that P is the product of a reliable process operating in a standard way, *then* it counts as knowledge: our worry is precisely that it might not be the product of such a process, and hence would not count as knowledge. Thus externalism does not alleviate our epistemological concern, but instead repackages it at a higher level: uncertainty over *whether P is true* gets replaced by uncertainty over *whether I know that P*. When we seek *reflective* knowledge from the first-person point of view, mere externalist considerations are not sufficient.

The second problem with relying on externalism here is that the relevant belief-forming processes — if individuated in the obvious way — simply are

not reliable in general, as the sheer statistics of disagreement indicate clearly.[32] In response, it seems to me to be a desperate expedient to suggest, as Moser does, that there "could be a divine purpose for diversity and disagreement in religions, and thus the latter need not count against evidence for theistic belief or first-order theistic religion" (39). Suppose, if you will, that God has excellent reason (unknown to us) for dividing mankind into ten groups, who all receive different and mutually incompatible revelations about the divine nature or the destiny of the universe. Even if God is blameless here (for he knows best), this obviously undermines his record as a reliable source of truth, when at least 90% of us are told something false.[33]

The points above suggest some obvious answers to the "partners in crime" objection which alleges that the situation in naturalistic philosophy is no better than in first-order religion. If it was in fact the case that disagreements in epistemology, ethics, or metaphysics persisted, over generations and between communities, in the same way as differences in religion, and when they were raised, tended to precipitate dogmatic assertion (or special pleading in favour of supposedly privileged personal revelations) rather than rational discussion (in which the claimed evidence is exposed to critical scrutiny), then I would agree wholeheartedly that this gave good reason to withhold confidence from

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32   This does not take for granted that the mere existence of proximate natural causal mechanisms undermines religious beliefs, as Senor (218) and Taliaferro & Porot (230–2) may be presuming. I agree that it would be possible — perhaps even to be expected — for God to exploit such mechanisms if he wished to generate religious experiences. But the problem is that these mechanisms operate in many cases where the resulting beliefs are clearly unreasonable, thus demonstrating their unreliability. A superficially tempting response might be to reconceptualise the mechanisms in such a way that genuine divine initiation becomes treated as *definitive* of them, thus making the relevant type of mechanism an *infallible* indicator of God's presence (i.e. if God did not initiate the process, then it should not be counted as an instance of truthful mechanism *T*). But then we get back to the problem of being unable to tell, *from the first-person point of view of the believer*, whether such a divine knowledge-generating mechanism is indeed operative, or whether instead it is the (indistinguishable, and apparently far more common) delusive variant *F*, with no deity playing any part in the process.

33   Floating this possibility — of some unknown divine purpose in fostering disagreement — also seems to be in tension with an earlier remark, in which Moser criticised us for appealing to a "mere 'possibility'" on the basis that "a mere possibility does not yield actual evidence" (34). As regards that particular case, we should have made clear that the Fine Tuning Argument, if *accepted*, would suggest the consequences we described, having explicitly made the point that they were "only to be expected" if "the universe has in fact been finely tuned" (4).

the relevant beliefs.[34] Likewise, if it turned out that particular commonplace experiences — for example of intentional action — were standardly interpreted quite differently by members of different philosophical clans, even when all the objective data pointed to commonality, then I would refrain from giving these interpretations any significant evidential weight in respect of the crucial disagreements. When matters are genuinely controversial, and objective evidence is hard to identify, the withholding of assent is not to be regretted: appropriate scepticism can readily be embraced! Oppy's list of debatable philosophical doctrines includes many plausible examples of such cases, mostly taken from ethics (e.g. consequentialism, communitarianism, virtue ethics, existentialism) and from a range of notoriously difficult areas where our attempts to understand the objective and subjective worlds come into tension (e.g. determinism, substance dualism, phenomenology, physicalism). In the former group, it is unclear that there even exists any objective method of resolution (since ethical judgements plausibly require emotional engagement), and many would question whether seeking literal *truth* (as opposed, say, to culturally sensitive reflective equilibrium) is appropriate. In the latter group, not only are the issues complex and interlocking, with questions of debatable definition as well as disputed evidence, but also, it often seems likely here that our theorising is running well ahead of any solid scientific basis. And in all of these areas, our philosophical "intuitions" are so contaminated with ancient and modern baggage (much of it associated with religion), that it should be no surprise that agreement is hard to reach.[35]

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34   Scepticism should also be extended, of course, to "the views of Thornhill-Miller and Millican", if careful analysis yields significant evidence that our arguments are fallacious, perhaps owing to the various "universal cognitive failings" that we highlight as promoting supernatural beliefs (cf. Oppy 270). The great virtue of debates such as this is precisely to enable the exposure of any fallacies, and to facilitate cleansing of the contending arguments from dependence on unnoticed biases or question-begging etc. No procedure can *guarantee* achievement of a rational outcome in such contentious and difficult matters, but calm, open, reasoned debate radically improves the odds.

35   For example, traditional religious beliefs generally go together with an embrace of dualism and a rejection of consequentialism and determinism (since the Free Will Defence depends on a libertarian account of freedom), as confirmed by the survey results at https://philpapers.org/surveys/linear_most_with.pl?A=main%3AGod%3AAtheism.

In other areas of philosophy, less marked by tribal "schools", there is substantial progress, and it is achieved largely through dialogue and reasoned debate. Most of us agree most of the time, for example, when an argument is valid or invalid, when various theories are mutually consistent or inconsistent, and what constitutes a strong point for, or against, some theory. Our views on these things are not determined by our upbringing, and we learn them at least largely through the development of understanding rather than authoritative instruction. A more distinctive but perhaps equally important point is that philosophy itself is a very unusual discipline, with a strong tradition of exploring questions at the frontiers of discovery and understanding. Hence it has often been historically the midwife of other disciplines, for example physics and political theory in the 17th century (e.g. Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke), and of economics and psychology in the 18th century (e.g. Hume, Smith, Hartley). Once such new fields have matured sufficiently to have their own established methods of investigation, they typically pass on to more specialist thinkers, and cease to count as "philosophy". Thus the questions that today count as "philosophical" are typically those that are either enduringly difficult and controversial (including questions of value), or those that currently lie at the frontiers of investigation (e.g. in the borderlands of cognitive science and artificial intelligence).

Philosophy therefore embraces a high proportion of controversial questions where methods are uncertain, doubt is appropriate and dogmatism is not to be trusted. The same of course goes for first-order religion, but here there is no such creditable track record of fruitful novelty, rigorous debate, and theoretical development down through the ages. Whereas secular philosophy — both natural and social — has delivered impressive change in the scientific, political, and ethical arenas over the last 400 years or so, it is only relatively recently that the main established religions have even started to move away from implausible literalist beliefs (e.g. creation and worldwide flood stories) that remained unquestioned for many times longer, even in the teeth of discoveries that should have cast serious doubt on them. In the moral sphere, they likewise continue to drag their feet, slow as always to reconsider the prejudices that in the past were used to justify slavery, and more recently to reject contraception, homosexuality, assisted death, and much else (not to mention specifically religious "crimes" such as apostasy and heresy).

I conclude that the "partners in crime" defence of first-order religion cannot work. But even if it were to succeed in putting philosophy in the same boat, the appropriate response would be to extend our scepticism to philosophy, not to withdraw it from first-order religion.

In short, therefore, and despite the challenges posed by the very interesting responses discussed here (all too briefly), I believe that the Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma remains a significant sceptical challenge to first-order religion.

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NATURALISTIC EXPLANATIONS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

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Abstract. Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican as well as Janusz Salamon put forward versions of supernaturalism that avoid the existence of a religion which alone provides the true revelation and the only way to salvation and which teaches that God acted in this world. Their rejection of revealed, exclusive religion is based on an argument from religious diversity and an argument from natural explanations of religious phenomena. These two together form the 'common-core/diversity dilemma'. In this article I refute these two arguments by arguing that explaining the origin of belief in supernatural agents does not provide a reason for not believing in the existence of supernatural agents.

I. THE THESIS OF THIS ARTICLE

(1.1) In this article I shall argue that both arguments against first-order supernaturalism that are put forward by Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican (Thornhill-Miller 2015) and that are accepted by Janusz Salamon (Salamon 2015) are unsuccessful and thus are no reasons for accepting either Thornhill-Miller's and Millican's 'second-order supernaturalism' or Salamon's 'agatheism'.

(1.2) 'First-order supernaturalism' consists of 'supernaturalist beliefs that claim unique authority for some particular religious tradition in preference to all others' (Thornhill-Miller 2015, p. 3). Thornhill-Miller and Millican contrast this with 'second-order supernaturalism, which maintains that the universe in general, and the religious sensitivities of humanity in particular, have been formed by supernatural powers working through natural processes.' This is what Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) called 'natural religion'. Like Mendelssohn and Lessing, Thornhill-Miller and Millican as well as Salamon think that a religion, like

Christianity, that claims that this religion alone is based on true revelation and provides salvation and that God acted in this world, is irrational.

(1.3) The two arguments against first-order supernaturalism constitute the horns of the 'common core/diversity dilemma' (CCDD), put forward by Branden Thornhill-Miller and Peter Millican:

> [The first, oppositional or sceptical, horn:] That in so far as religious phenomena (e.g. miracle reports, religious experiences, or other apparent perceptions of supernatural agency) point towards specific aspects of particular religions, their diversity and mutual opposition undermines their evidential force; [The second, common-core or naturalistic, horn:] while in so far as such phenomena involve a 'common core' of similarity, they point towards a proximate common cause for these phenomena that is natural rather than supernatural. (3)

The authors apply the first horn to miracles that are responses to prayers and the second horn to religious experiences. (21) Let me respond to both horns.

II. THE ARGUMENT FROM CONFLICTING REPORTS AGAINST FIRST-ORDER SUPERNATURALISM

(2.1) We can summarise the authors' statement of the first horn as follows:

> 'Prayer is popularly attributed with the power to effect medical cures in many *different* religions, and is commonly understood within them as evidence of specific religious truth. Yet religions conflict on the various specifics, so such evidential claims cannot reasonably be accepted unless they have solid empirical backing to distinguish them from the claims that they implicitly contradict. Without such differential support, the best that could be hoped for is evidence of prayer's efficacy in general.' (22) But 'there is no scientifically discernible effect for intercessory prayer as assessed in controlled studies.'[1]

(2.2) I respond first that although responses to petitionary prayer can provide evidence for the existence of God or for the truth of a religion, the

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1   Masters et al. 2006, 21 quoted in Thornhill-Miller 2015, 21. By contrast, Brown et al. 2010 using a different methodology, comes to a different conclusion: 'This study found a significant effect of PIP [proximal intercessory prayer] on auditory function across the tested population (P < 0.003).' Swinburne 2006 argues that we should not expect that God would respond to prayers in controlled studies. Brown 2012, ch. 2 discusses how healings through divine intervention can be discovered. Keener 2011, chs. 7–9 presents contemporary healing reports from various cultures.

theist does not have to hold that there is such evidence. God may choose not to answer prayer in a visible and provable way. He may answer prayers only when not being subjected to controlled studies, he may respond in a non-detectable way, or he may, for various reasons, not respond at all. Christians believe that God sometimes heals people in response to prayer, but the evidence for this is often not strong enough to raise the probability of the existence of God or of Christian doctrine significantly for someone who attributes a low prior probability to Christian doctrine (i. e. someone who does not believe Christian doctrine already). The main purpose of these healings is presumably the health of the person and the interaction between God and the person. Even the person himself often does not know with certainty whether he was healed through divine intervention. If somebody has cancer and is healed after his and others' petitionary prayer in a way that surprises all the doctors, that is a good reason for believing that God intervened, but it could also have been a spontaneous healing or an effect of psychological changes, because these things happen sometimes. In either case the person has a reason for thanking God.

(2.3) Responses to prayer need not be evidence for the truth of a specific religion. Even if there is only one religion that provides the true revelation and salvation, God can also answer the prayers of people who have not heard the true revelation or who have not accepted it. Therefore it is not true that the 'diversity and mutual opposition [of the reports of responses to prayer] undermines their evidential force.'

(2.4) Even if reports about answers to prayers would conflict with each other because they are supposed to confirm the religion in which they are reported, it could be that the reports in one religion are true and those in the other religions are false. Thornhill-Miller and Millican provide no evidence for their claim that there are credible reports of responses to prayers that are in mutual opposition. However, even if something undermined the evidential force of reports of answers to prayers, that would not make much difference because no religion's rationality depends on such reports.

(2.5) More relevant here, but not discussed by Thornhill-Miller and Millican, are other miracles, in particular the resurrection of Jesus. It is often ar-

gued that there is strong evidence for it.[2] If there were equally much evidence for a miracle that would confirm a different, conflicting religion, then in at least one case there would be misleading evidence. However, as far as I can see there are no such conflicting miracle reports. And even if something undermined the evidential force of the reports of the resurrection of Jesus, that would undermine only one item of evidence for the existence of God among many. One can believe in Jesus' resurrection without believing that the historical evidence for it is strong enough to convince somebody who attributes a low prior probability to the existence of God.

I conclude that the first horn of the CCDD provides no good reasons for believing that there is no true first-order supernaturalism.

III. THE ARGUMENT FROM BIASES AGAINST FIRST-ORDER SUPERNATURALISM

(3.1) We can summarise the authors' statement of the second horn as follows:

> There is a common core of religious experiences that turn out to be explicable in naturalistic terms. 'Recent research in the cognitive science of religion […] provides a persuasive naturalistic explanation for the near-universal tendency to attribute events to supernatural agents.' (28) First, 'our *hypersensitive agency detection device* (HADD) is the human cognitive operator that has been postulated to explain why it is normal for us to see agency rather than randomness everywhere in the world around us: why we see faces in clouds, attribute illness and bad weather to witchcraft, and perceive the hand of fate in our lives rather than the action of abstract and impersonal forces. The evolutionary advantage of its hyperactivity is commonly explained with the observation that the cost of perceiving more agents than actually exist (e.g. mistaking wind in the tall grass for a predator) is low, while perceiving too few agents (e.g. mistaking a predator for wind) would, at some point, be fatal.' (29) Second, 'Theory of mind (ToM) refers to the capacity to attribute mental states — such as beliefs, desires, and intentions — to oneself and to others.' (29) 'We consistently overextend ToM, projecting humanlike qualities of consciousness even to inanimate objects and abstract forces, and are thus predisposed to see gods, spirits, witches and other agents — whether visible or invisible — acting in the world.' (30) 'HADD and ToM together lead us to find specific kinds of meaning and design in randomness, to see

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2   Swinburne 2003, McGrew 2012, Wright 2003, Craig 2000, Habermas 2004.

the action of invisible agents even in unplanned, non-intentional processes, and to attempt to relate to such agents as we would to other intentional beings. Working together, these two processes — all by themselves — seem to provide a reasonably persuasive naturalistic explanation for the belief in invisible, intelligent supernatural agents like the gods and spirits found universally across human cultures.' (30)

Now we can understand better their claim concerning CCDD: 'The contradictions between different religious belief systems, in conjunction with new understandings of the cognitive forces that shape their common features, persuasively challenge the rationality of most kinds of supernatural belief.' (1)

(3.2) In reply, I first ask whether these biases exist. They certainly exist in some people in some situations. But do they exist in all people, and are they at work in all religious experiences and beliefs? Many of us never attributed illness or bad weather to witchcraft. Some people seem to have the opposite bias. They believe that the universe, the animals and we human beings came into being just by material causal processes.

(3.3) There are things or events that are caused by agency, and other things that are caused by non-personal causes. There are agents with bodies, and, most people believe, there are bodiless agents, such as God, angels, demons, or ghosts. If a person believes in agents that do not exist, that can be due to a bias or due to some other error, such as certain beliefs in his environment. However, you can discover the existence of a bias only if you make the assumption that the beliefs in question are false and if they are in fact false. If you assume that there are no demons in waterfalls and that thunder is not caused by some demon or god, then you can be justified in assuming that somebody who believes in such demons has a bias to believe in more agents than actually exist. But you cannot use the hypothesis of a belief bias in order to defeat the truth of beliefs on whose falsity you based the bias hypothesis. So you cannot use HADD and ToM for defeating beliefs in demons or God if the theories of HADD and ToM are based on the assumption that there are no bodiless agents. Can the theories of HADD and ToM be justified without assuming that there are no bodiless agents? They certainly need the assumption that some beliefs about bodiless agents are false, for example the belief that thunder is caused by a god. But does this assumption justify belief in a bias towards believing in more agents than actually exist that is at work in all

beliefs in agents? Imagine that when you come home you discover that your living room is in a mess, the content of all drawers is on the floor, and the door is open with a broken lock. If you then believe that a person broke in in order to steal, are there HADD and ToM at work? Should you question your conclusion that there was an intruder, thinking that you should 'systematically compensate' (36) for your bias towards believing in actions where there are none? If you believe that you have a bias towards beliefs of kind P, then you should not just simply lower the credence of all your P-beliefs. Instead, you should gather evidence and perceptual data and revise your P-beliefs in their light. In the case of the intruder, not much will change. Likewise, perhaps belief in God remains unchanged if the believer tries hard to base it on evidence. Perhaps it has always been based on evidence. The reference to HADD and ToM does nothing to show that it is not.

(3.4) Even if we accept that HADD and ToM exist, we should conclude only that we must try hard to base our beliefs about God and religion on evidence and perception. That is, we should search for all our beliefs and perceptual experiences that support propositions about God or religion and try to draw the right conclusions from them. Even if we accept that HADD and ToM exist it is wrong to simply lower our credence in all our beliefs in actions or agents, or in our beliefs in bodiless agents. It would also be wrong to ascribe to all beliefs in bodiless agents a lower probability than the one they have in virtue of the evidence and the perceptual experiences. Instead, if we accept that HADD and ToM exist, we should make an effort to base our beliefs about God, ghosts, demons, and religion on the evidence and on perceptual experiences. We should make this effort anyway. Thornhill-Miller's and Millican's assumption that 'sceptical considerations such as the Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma' (46) defeat, or lower the probability of, beliefs in bodiless agents and in supernatural interventions is wrong.

(3.5) More simply put, Thornhill-Miller and Millican commit a genetic fallacy when they think that putting forward a naturalistic explanation of beliefs in supernatural agents or supernatural actions supports the assumption that these beliefs are false. Saying that belief in God is caused by a bias to believe in more agents than there are does nothing to support the view that there is no God. If you have good reasons for believing that there is no God, then you may be justified in believing that belief in God is often caused by

HADD or ToM. But you cannot use HADD or ToM in order to defend rationally the belief that there is no God or that first-order supernaturalism is false. For that you would need to defeat the usual arguments for God's existence or to put forward evidence against the existence of God, for example the evil in this world. HADD and ToM are not among the evidence for or against the existence of God.

(3.6) We can see why this is so also by considering for what naturalistic explanations of beliefs or experiences are relevant. A naturalistic explanation of a belief in *p* can undermine the claim that the existence of belief in *p* is evidence for the truth of *p*. For example, Jesus' disciples believed not only that Jesus rose from the dead but that they believe that Jesus rose and is the saviour *because* they saw and had conversations with the risen Jesus. The resurrection and the encounters explain how the disciples came to acquire this belief. If it is hard to explain the existence of this belief in another way, then the belief is evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. If, on the other hand, there is a plausible account of how the disciples might have acquired this belief even though Jesus did in fact not rise from the dead, then the belief is not evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Only in such special cases is some people's belief in *p* evidence for the truth of *p*. In all other cases putting forward an explanation how the belief in *p* might have emerged does nothing to show that *p* is false and does not justify not believing *p*.

(3.7) I conclude that the Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma, and the arguments from diversity and from naturalistic explanations of religious phenomena included in it, do not defeat, or lower the probability of, any beliefs in supernatural agents and supernatural actions. These arguments therefore do not support preferring second-order supernaturalism or Salamon's agatheism to first-order supernaturalism, for example Christian doctrine. Considerations about what causes religious beliefs and about religious diversity are not relevant for finding out the truth about God. Thornhill-Miller's and Millican's mistake (and many other critics of revealed religion made this mistake) is that they try to refute revealed religion in some other way than by examining the evidence, and thus the various arguments, for or against the existence of God and the evidence for or against Christian doctrine.

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IN DEFENCE OF AGATHEISM: CLARIFYING A GOOD-CENTRED INTERPRETATION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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I. INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, responding to B. Thornhill-Miller's and P. Millican's (later TMM) Humean-style critique of 'first-order religious belief' (i.e., adherence to any particular religious tradition) as unavoidably irrational in the face of religious diversity and deliverances of empirical sciences,[1] I enunciated a new *pluralistic* interpretation of *first-order* religious belief capable of accommodating the epistemological challenge of religious diversity and also immune to falsification by any future science, since grounded in the human axiological consciousness.[2] I termed such axiologically grounded religious belief 'agatheism', since I stipulated that agatheistic belief identifies God, the Absolute or the ultimate reality religiously conceived with the ultimate good that must be postulated — as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Kant *et al.* agree — as the ultimate end of all human agency and thus an explanation of its irreducibly teleological character and a source of its meaning. My reply to TMM's concern about irrationality of doxastic commitment to a particular religious tradition boiled down to a suggestion that to the extent the fundamental agatheistic religious belief is presupposed in such tradition as its doxastic core, its belief system — if internally coherent and aligned with a

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1   Branden Thornhill-Miller, Peter Millican, "The Common-Core/Diversity Dilemma, Revisions of Humean Thought, New Empirical Research, and the Limits of Rational Religious Belief", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (2015), 1–49.

2   Janusz Salamon, "Atheism and Agatheism in the Global Ethical Discourse: Reply to Millican and Thornhill-Miller", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 7, no. 4 (2015), 226.

worldview that is consistent with undisputed scientific findings — may be considered rational, despite there being a plurality of such belief systems.

Since a number of noted philosophers of religion responded to my proposal graciously but critically, I wish to clarify further what agatheism is supposed to entail in order to delineate the areas of genuine disagreement from the areas of possible misunderstanding. It will be convenient to start with highlighting what agatheism has to offer in the face of the epistemic challenge of religious diversity, because this, I suggest, is one area in which agatheism has clear advantage over the epistemological positions occupied by the theistic critics of agatheism to whom I want to reply. All things considered, I fail to see how my theistic critics can explain the facts about religious diversity without recourse to exclusivism and falling into the trap of the TMM's 'Common Core/Diversity Dilemma'. Any pretence at being 'inclusivist' will not do, since on a closer look it will turn out that in the face of the epistemic challenge of religious diversity, there is no middle ground, only stronger or weaker versions of either exclusivism (presupposing that only one religious tradition may be 'right') or pluralism (presupposing that more than one religious tradition may be 'right').

II. AGATHEISM AS A PLURALISTIC INTERPRETATION OF RELIGION

Agatheism identifies God, the Absolute or the ultimate reality (*theós* or *to theion* in Greek) with the ultimate good (*to agathon* in Greek) as the ultimate end of all human pursuits and posits that maximal realisation of human potentialities for good (*agatheia*) is possible only in proper alignment with the ultimate reality so conceived (*Agatheos*).

Agatheism can be construed as an agathological interpretation of religion, since it theorizes that various religious belief systems are ultimately products of human *agathological imagination* and human reflection on the deliverances of agathological imagination.[3] Agathological imagination is taken to

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3   The term '*agathological* imagination' is consciously adopted in this context (in preference to '*agatheistic* imagination') to make clear that we are talking not about some special 'religious sense' (like Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*) but about a faculty of practical reason which is employed in all instances of normative thinking, in ethics, politics, etc. While postulating that religious

be this dimension of the faculty of practical reason which is intentionally directed — of no choice of ours — towards the ultimate human good and guides our mental activity leading to value judgments by imagining and comparing agathological alternatives as more or less optimal, relative to our sense of the good as a transcendental limetic concept.[4] Since our directedness towards the

belief is grounded in agathological imagination as a dimension of *practical* reason and playing down the importance of more 'theoretical' reasons for religious belief (such as Design Arguments) one inevitably invites associations with Kant and his philosophy of religion. This is unfortunate, because assuming that the epistemology of religious belief presupposed by agatheism is identical with that of Kant is bound to result in serious misreading of agatheism. Agatheism does *not* presuppose Kantian transcendental idealism, since if it did, it would inevitably lead to an interpretation of religion espoused by John Hick, while agatheism was originally conceived primarily as an alternative to Hick's theory of religious pluralism which faces an insurmountable 'problem of emptiness' by being unable to formulate any substantive claims about the ultimate reality which might make it relevant to religious concerns. (For a discussion of the 'problem of emptiness' faced by Hick, see: Mikael Stenmark, "Religious Pluralism and the Some-Are-Equally-Right View", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 1, no. 2 (2009), 21–35). Moreover, speaking about agatheism being grounded in axiology, I do *not* imply that it is Kant's 'moral argument' that provides the main rational ground for agatheism. Unlike Kant, I do not presuppose that we need to postulate God's existence in order to make sense of morality. On the contrary, I assume that there are satisfactory ways to make sense of our moral obligations towards other sentient beings without recourse to God. Agatheism answers a different set of questions than that about the foundation of morality, namely questions about the ultimate meaning of our finite existence as perceived through the lenses of our axiological consciousness which directs our thoughts and hopes towards some ultimate good which does not seem to be realisable in the physical universe. Thus the fundamental philosophical intuition behind agatheism has much more in common with Plato's idealism than with Kant's. For this reason I insist that the term 'agathological' (as a subterm of 'axiological') rather than 'moral' or 'ethical' should be used in connection with agatheism, since it points more accurately in the direction of the concerns from which agatheistic religious belief arises, and diverts attention from misleading associations with the Kantian 'moral argument' for the existence of God.

4   I take the concept of 'the good' ('*to agathon*') to be a transcendental concept in the Kantian sense as a form of our thought prior to experience of things which we perceive as having a property of goodness, and thus a concept that is primarily related to rational subject of perception, rather than intrinsically related to being. Following G. E. Moore, as well as the Medieval theorists of transcendentals, I take it to be a primitive, simple, first-known, and self-evident concept that cannot be analysed by taking recourse to a still higher genus. At the same time I take the concept of the 'good' (in the sense of the 'ultimate good') to be a 'limetic concept' (from Latin *limes* — limit, frontier) by metaphorising the concept of a *limes* of a mathematical function as indicating a point towards which something tends in an asymptotic manner without ever reaching it. The concept of God or the Absolute as '*Agatheos*' is also a limetic concept. I stipulate that both in the case of the concept of the 'ultimate good' and the concept of '*Agatheos*', the user of the concept presupposes that the reality to which the concept refers is only pointed to as the

good appears to be the fundamental phenomenologically given 'fact' about our axiological consciousness, it requires postulation of a *telos* without which the irreducibly teleological character of our axiological consciousness would be unexplainable, making an analysis of human agency by reference to an agents' reasons impossible. The ultimate good is thus postulated as a transcendental condition of our axiological consciousness.

Agatheism posits that religious worldviews result from the fundamental choice of an option to make sense of our axiological consciousness by conceiving the ultimate human good in religious rather than in naturalistic terms. Since it is agathological imagination that plays the decisive role in choosing among the fundamental agathological options and agathological imagination is a dimension of practical reason, it will not be possible to establish by way of theoretical argument which option is rationally superior. Yet taking a stance regarding this all-important matter may be a psychological necessity, as well as a condition of living an 'examined life', therefore opting for a religious conceptualisation of the ultimate human good that identifies the ultimate good towards which our axiological consciousness is directed with the ultimate reality religiously conceived, may be as good a choice as any.

An important implication of such axiological construal of the grounds of religious belief is that the domain of religious thinking and religious practice is no longer seen as *sui generis,* but (*pace* Kierkegaard) is an extension of agathological thinking in the ethical realm (and perhaps also in the realm of aesthetics *kalokagato*logically conceived). Therefore religious believers do not engage in an activity that is entirely foreign to the non-believers, but rather are devoted in a different way to the same central human task of exploration into the realm of the human good that takes place in connection with every human activity aimed at conceptualisation and realisation of some human (or non-human) good.

Agatheism is centrally a *pluralistic* interpretation of religion, since it theorizes that the fundamental agatheistic belief is presupposed by all or nearly all post-axial religious traditions and explains the fact of religious diversity (i.e.,

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ultimate horizon that is of its nature unreachable, although present as the background against which we perceive values that make their claim on us and are yet to be realised, as horizon is always 'present' when we perceive distant points on a trail that are yet to be reached.

plurality of internally diverse and constantly evolving religious traditions) by reference to unavoidably plural, diverse and revisable deliverances of agathological imagination as its source. When exercised in the realm of religion, agathological imagination guided by the fundamental agatheistic belief identifying the Absolute with the ultimate good, searches for the optimal conceptualisation of the nature of the Absolute and its relation to the human world, attempting to approximate the human view of the matter to the 'God's eye view'. While individual believers exercise agathological imagination when assenting to particular religious truth-claims and aligning themselves in an existential manner to the Absolute as the ultimate good, typically religious beliefs systems are products of agathological imagination exercised over long periods of time in the context of religious traditions as traditions of interpretation by many individuals, especially prominent representatives of the relevant traditions. Thus diverse religious belief systems may be conceived as a range of 'agathological landscapes' — conceived throughout human history by geniuses of agathological imagination, such as founders of new religious traditions, saints, mystics and great religious thinkers — which agathological imagination of 'ordinary' believers takes as a reliable source of inspiration and the point of departure in their own religious search and spiritual journey.

An agatheistic account of religion takes seriously the practical orientation that religious believers typically exhibit and it sees religious belief systems as never divorced from religious practice understood as *living out* the proper alignment with the ultimate reality as the ultimate good. While various religious belief systems do contain visions of what their adherents consider to be the optimal ways of conceiving the Absolute as 'the ultimate good *simpliciter*', the beliefs about the Absolute and their eventual veridicality are important for religious believers not for purely cognitive reasons, but because they entail optimal ways of conceiving *human potentialities for good* vis-à-vis the ultimate reality as 'the ultimate good *for us*' towards which their existence is directed. So whatever the religious rhetoric may be, it is more plausible to think that human beings hold religious beliefs and follow religious practices not because — to put it in theistic terms — God needs them to worship him, but because they sense they need God to achieve their own fulfillment by realising their own creaturely potentialities for good. For this reason religious believers (with the exception of theologians and perhaps also religious leaders

who may see religious doctrines as defining the borders of their communities and thus the limits of their power) tend to concern themselves with religious *orthopraxis* more than with religious orthodoxy and therefore associate being an exemplary believer not so much with just 'believing in something' (holding certain beliefs), but with 'doing something', 'adopting certain attitude towards God' ('believing God' vs. 'believing in God'), also 'undergoing something' (undergoing spiritual transformation or moral conversion) and 'hoping for something'. To be able to do all that believers have to hold some particular religious beliefs, including believes about the nature of the Absolute and its relation to the human world, but it is the more practical dimensions of the religious attitude that tend to occupy the attention of adherents of religious traditions, because it is they — rather than solely an intellectual assent to some set of religious doctrines — that appear to be relevant to the achievement of the religious *telos*, which is not different from the human *telos*, namely realisation of the ultimate human good. Among such 'practical' aspects of religious belief — all expressing the proper alignment with the Absolute as the ultimate good — are (a) its soteriological/eschatological perspective presupposing some formulation of the nature of the human predicament and of "what can I hope", to use Kant's phrase; (b) its metanoetic/transformational function presupposing some paradigm of spirituality; and (c) its relational/inter-subjective character associated with religious attitudes of devotion and love, usually manifested also in solidaristic attitudes towards other members of one's religious community.

Perhaps the most central of them all is spiritual development or *metanoetic transformation*. The Greek noun '*metanoia*' — signifying a change of mind — in the biblical vocabulary acquires more specific meaning of 'conversion' as turning towards God, so in the context of agatheism metanoetic transformation is synonymous with agathological transformation as adoption of the fundamental orientation towards the good. John Hick identified it as *the* aspect of religious belief that is universal across all religious traditions and defined it as 'transformation from self-centredness to other-centredness'. The universality of the metanoetic dimension of religious belief is crucial to the possibility of a *pluralistic* interpretation of religion and at this junction agatheism does not depart from the age-old intuitions expressed poetically by the Sufi mystic Rumi in the saying that "the lamps are many, but the Light is one", and turned

into the central insight of religious pluralism by John Hick. To the extent a rational hope may be entertained that a given religious tradition constitutes a reliable path to the achievement of human fulfillment in accordance with the vision of the ultimate human good conceived in that tradition, it is rational to be committed to the belief system and religious practice of that tradition despite the fact that there are many such paths defined by different religious belief systems, which gives rise to a legitimate suspicion that it is unlikely that only one of them — and therefore unlikely that *any* of them — express fully and infallibly the truth of the nature of the Absolute. There is no good reason to think that while being cognitively and morally limited human beings could not reach the ultimate destination of their journey while having only limited and therefore fallible and revisable insight into the nature of the ultimate good as the end of the journey. One piece of equipment on such journey appears to be absolutely necessary: the agatheistic belief, or better the agatheistic faith that our human unquenchable thirst for the good, which manifests itself in the good-directedness of our axiological consciousness that shapes our entire attitude towards reality, does not mislead us, but rather leads us towards the fulfillment of the promise it carries.

With such a turn of mind an agatheist — whether a Christian or Jewish or Hindu agatheist — will not be troubled by religious diversity, since his agathological imagination, serving as a kind of agathological conscience, will assure him — in a manner reminiscent of Socrates' *daimon* — that one cannot go wrong going in the direction of the good, following the path that leads towards the horizon of the ultimate good. An agatheist will treat the stories about the nature of the ultimate good told by the fellow pilgrims as necessarily only verisimilitudinous, but capable of serving as reliable directions on the path towards the ultimate goal, if they pass the test of agathological verification. Since in the realm of values the nature of the subject matter confines us to the first-person perspective and admits no possibility of an objectively verifiable and therefore conclusive evidence being available, an agatheist will be satisfied with a kind of moral certainty, or — better to say — *agathological certainty*. Agathological certainty as a state of mind has a certain phenomenal quality which is a source of subjective reassurance, and can be captured by the adjective 'agatonic', created by conjunction of '*agathon*' and 'the tonic' — a musical term referring to the central tone of a scale that is perceived subjectively by a

listener as the point of 'departure' and 'arrival' of a musical narrative, and thus as a kind of *telos* and the point of psychological *rest*. Thus the word 'agatonic', metaphorising the musical 'tonic', takes on a meaning of 'rest of the mind in the good', or 'rest of the mind in the confidence of reaching the good, realising the good, or being directed towards the good'. This agatonic sense of 'the rest of the mind in the good' that accompanies our mental states of certainty in the sphere of moral and agathological beliefs is analogical to the sense of 'rest of the mind in truth', which accompanies our states of certainty in the realm of beliefs about existentially irrelevant facts of the matter, but unlike in the case of certainty about factual beliefs, certainty about moral and agathological beliefs carries with it a sense of fulfilled obligation and hence a peculiar kind of satisfaction that we associate with the state of happiness.

Since it is obvious that such state of subjective certainty accompanies the religious attitude of the adherents of diverse religious traditions, his agathological conscience will warn an agatheist against his inclination to see himself in a cognitively and soteriologically privileged position *vis-à-vis* adherents of other religious traditions and will present to him as agathologically unacceptable exclusivist theories of religious diversity as postulating serious limitation of the chances of actualisation of the potentialities for good of the majority of human beings, while a more generous interpretation of the facts about religious diversity — envisaging the possibility of realisation of much greater human good than if religious exclusivism would be true — is available.

As I argued elsewhere,[5] *a theist* — who usually more often than a non-theist finds religious pluralism disturbing — can accept a pluralistic interpretation of religious diversity consistent with agatheism without loosing epistemic confidence in the foundations of his *theistic* worldview, spiritual practice or moral commitments, namely by adopting a strategy akin to the strategy of 'sceptical theism'. According to such 'sceptical pluralism', as I called it, we should be sceptical of our ability to discern the full truth about the possible ways through which God can lead various individuals to the ultimate fulfilment of their creaturely potential. In particular, a sceptical pluralist of the

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5   Janusz Salamon, "Theodicy of Justice as Fairness and Sceptical Pluralism", in S. Kołodziejczyk and J. Salamon, *Knowledge, Action, Pluralism: Contemporary Perspectives in Philosophy of Religion*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Press, 2013, 249–278.

kind I envisage will argue that we should be sceptical that our epistemic confidence in our understanding of God's purposes with respect to us individually and our co-religionists somehow limits God in achieving the purpose of leading other people — especially religious aliens — to the maximal fulfilment of their human (God-given) potential in ways that are beyond our intellectual grasp. Moreover, a sceptical pluralist will propose that we should grant that our inability to think of a good reason for allowing religious diversity to persist and indeed to flourish is indicative of whether or not God might have a good reason for allowing it. If there is a God, he knows much more than we do about the relevant facts regarding the diversity of religious beliefs and practices and regarding their soteriological, spiritual or moral efficacy in allowing various individuals to fulfil their human potential, and thus it would not be surprising at all if God had reasons for allowing religious diversity to persist and flourish that we cannot fathom.

III. ADVANTAGES OF AGATHEISM: REPLYING TO THE THEISTIC CRITICS

While questioning the plausibility of exclusivist interpretations of religious diversity, agatheism envisages the possibility of rational justification of unconditional and agathologically efficacious religious commitment within the context of plural and diverse religious traditions. Therefore agatheism is meant to be as much an epistemology of religious belief, as a theory of religious diversity.

R. D. Geivett and P. Moser, as evidentialists with regard to justification of religious belief, found it difficult to see how a first-order agatheistic belief could constitute a basis of an *epistemology* of religious belief given that I have granted TMM most of their *empirically* grounded arguments designed to challenge the evidential basis of the first-order religious traditions. Geivett thinks that my practical aim to encourage adherents of diverse religious traditions to accept such interpretation of religious diversity which would facilitate their constructive involvement in the global ethical discourse conflicts with my aim to construct an epistemology of religious belief that should be oriented towards the cognitive aim of believing what is true, and this puts me in danger of conflating the ethics of belief with standards of epistemic justification.

He writes:

> Stated more generally, the contours of his religious epistemology are shaped
> by practical aims. (...) However, his practical concern for satisfying our glob-
> al ethical needs and desires is a significant constraint on the option he is
> prepared to accept. (…) But we must let the evidence speak for itself. If the
> evidence points to the existence of a God with discernible properties, a God
> who has acted in history and who has revealed himself in sundry ways (in-
> cluding the pages of scripture, miracles, and what have you), then this will
> tend to specify the content of true religion in a way that worries pluralists
> and naturalists.[6]

In a footnote Geivett adds that such evidence „may include, but need not be
limited to, evidence that figures in traditional arguments for the existence
of God and the character of religious experience"[7], and in another place re-
minds the reader that in addition to evidentialism there are also anti-eviden-
tialist and fideist epistemologies, apparently implying that all of them have
sufficient resources to ground epistemically religious beliefs of the adherents
of first-order religious traditions, which "amounts to describing (in general
terms) what makes it likely that what is believed is *true*."[8] Geivett fails to see
such epistemological grounding in agatheism. Concluding his assessment of
agatheism, he asks: "What, then, is the basis for believing anything in particu-
lar about Agatheos? This is where *imagination* plays a role … Particular forms
of supernaturalism arise through the exercise of human imagination. First
order supernaturalisms are personal and social constructs."[9]

Moser echoes Geivett's criticism:

> Agatheism relies on a coherentist approach to epistemic justification. Sala-
> mon explains: *[T]he epistemic justification of religious belief should be con-*
> *ceived along the lines of the metaphor of a doxastic ladder hanging at the ceil-*
> *ing of the fundamental agatheistic belief in the Ultimate Reality as the ultimate*
> *good. All particular beliefs of a given religious belief system are justified against*
> *the background of their antecedent probability relative to what the fundamen-*
> *tal agatheistic belief may be thought to entail, that is they are justified to the*

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6   R. Douglas Geivett, "Is There a Dilemma for First-Order Supernaturalist Belief?", *Euro-*
pean Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Vol. 9, no. 3, 12–13.
7   Ibid, 13.
8   Ibid, 12.
9   Ibid, 13.

extent they are part of an internally coherent belief system which coheres with the fundamental agatheistic belief. (236–37).

It is unclear how *theistic* beliefs in a religious system would "have their primary justificatory ground" in the "fundamental agatheistic belief." In particular, it is unclear what specific kind of doxastic coherence can provide such a ground. If the fundamental agatheistic belief is neutral on theism (and it is), and the needed ground is not in experiences, then other beliefs will have to yield the needed ground. Which beliefs, however, will ground those other beliefs, if doxastic coherence must do the work? Will they be beliefs about God ungrounded in any experience? … Mere imagination does generate evidence for independent factuality, even if it generates mere beliefs that fit together, perhaps in the way the parts of a fairy tale fit together. We thus need a better epistemic standard.[10]

Like Geivett, Moser insists that first-order religious beliefs must and can be epistemically grounded in something evidentially more secure than human axiological consciousness, and he sees a possibility of experiential grounding of such beliefs. He writes:

We can get a sense of what kind of evidence can motivate first-order theistic religion by attending to an actual case of evidence for such religion. … Paul, following Jesus, thinks of God as worthy of worship and hence inherently morally perfect and thus perfectly loving toward all people, including the enemies of God. … Paul represents God as being self-manifested or self-presented to some humans on occasion, for divine redemptive purposes aimed at the reconciliation of humans to God. … He thinks of this self-manifestation of God as a presentation of God's moral character to receptive humans. In attracting a person's attention *de re,* this self-manifestation figures crucially in the guiding religious experience and foundational evidence for God's reality and character for that person. It supplies God's self-authentication, with regard to God's reality and character, to receptive humans. This is not the self-authentication of a propositional claim or a subjective experience. Instead, *God* as an intentional agent is doing the self-authentication of divine reality and character to some humans.[11]

The crux of my response to Geivett and Moser will be to suggest that their own epistemological stance looks much weaker when confronted with the challenge of inter-religious and intra-religious diversity, than it would if the

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10   Paul K. Moser, "First-Order Theistic Religion: Intentional Power Beyond Belief", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 9, no. 3, 45–46.

11   Ibid, 40.

only contender they had to face would be a naturalistic critic. It is somewhat ironic that while the present-day practitioners of philosophical apologetics tend to construe their arguments with the naturalistic colleagues in mind, it is the persistent diversity of *religious* belief that calls into question the plausibility of their exclusivist accounts of religious belief. Indeed, one may argue that what gives plausibility to the agatheistic account of religion more than anything else is the recognition that all three dominant strands of contemporary epistemology of religion pointed out by Geivett (evidentialist, anti-evidentialist and fideist) fair much better when it comes to establishing the possibility of rational religious commitment in the face of the naturalist challenge, than to defending rationality of assenting to the truth of only one particular, clearly defined, religious belief system (as opposed to more generic 'religious belief' or 'theistic belief'), since the arguments one will be employing almost always may also be employed by adherents of other religious traditions to establish in an analogous way rationality of their doxastic commitment.

For example, Plantinga's anti-evidentialist epistemology of warranted Christian belief is hard to challenge by a naturalist (perhaps only by characterising it as ultimately a form of epistemologically sophisticated fideism), but it suffices to suggest that one can easily imagine how one could go about establishing a possibility of a warranted Muslim or a warranted Hindu belief in order to diminish significantly the epistemic appeal of Plantinga's proposal.

Many of Swinburne's probabilistic arguments in favour of the rationality of Christian theism may be easily adapted to support rationality of a Jewish or a Muslim belief system and defending a coherence of such alternative religious belief system will also be far from difficult. After all, if it is possible to establish a high probability of the Incarnation of God, is it not going to be possible to produce at least equally strong argument that it is very unlikely that God could become man? Moreover, if the only thing that a Swinburnian evidentialist will be capable of establishing is high probability of existence of a theistic God, but he will not able to show that the probability of veridicality of the *more specific* doctrines of his religious tradition is *significantly higher* than that of the alternative religious views, he will be clinging to one's own religious tradition for reasons other than the evidentialist arguments, presumably some 'internal evidences' of adequacy of once religious stance emerging from within one's religious practice. But adherents of other religious traditions will have similar

and equally good reasons to stick to their religious beliefs and practices, in which case Swinburnian evidentialism may be wedded to religious exclusivism only at the price of effectively collapsing into fideism.

Needless to say, a Kierkegaardian unapologetic fideist or a scriptural fundamentalist will have nothing to say regarding the question of epistemic superiority of Christian fideism over Muslim fideism, or how the claims of (some) Jews concerning the authority of the Tanakh are related to the claims (some) Christians make about the Bible as an infallible source of religious truth.

One of the most interesting projects in recent epistemology of religion — W. P. Alston's *Perceiving God* — can be saved, as I argued elsewhere, only when it is given a pluralistic reading, so that instead of individuating plurality of mystical doxastic practices, only one of which (e.g., Christian mystical practice) might be reliable, rationality of one mystical doxastic practice *reliable across plurality of mystical traditions* will be defended.[12]

All these strands of religious epistemology are also seriously undermined by intra-religious (i.e., denominational) diversity, because there are good reasons to resist a temptation to make one's epistemic job easier by defining religious belief system very loosely — e.g., 'mere Christianity', 'the great truths of the Gospel' or even 'classical theism', because this would amount to watering down what first-order religious traditions are about while our debate concerns rationality of first-order religious belief. Delineating the religious belief system under discussion in an arbitrary way, instead of linking it to some historically and communally defined religious tradition, may always be challenged by asking: why not to define the belief system under consideration in a more inclusive way and, for example, instead of defending the rationality of doxastic commitment to Presbyterianism rather than to Russian Orthodoxy defend rationality of some mainstream Christian belief, or instead of debating rationality of Western classical theism defend theism maximally broadly conceived to include Madhva's clearly theistic Dvaita Vedanta and perhaps even Ramanuja's semi-pantheistic theism? But by doing so we would be gradually departing from an exclusivist stance, because we would be effectively justifying at once commitment to more than one religious tradition

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12 Janusz Salamon, "Light Out of Plenitude: Towards Epistemology of Mystical Inclusivism", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 2, no. 2 (2010), 141–175.

covered by the category defined in such an inclusivist way. Thus if our task is
to defend the rationality of commitment to one religious belief system *exclu-
sivistically conceived*, we have to be attentive to even minor doxastic disagree-
ments which differentiate between various religious belief systems, so that,
for example, within Judaism or Hinduism or Protestant Christianity there
will be multitude of religious belief systems in need of rational justification.
However, grounding epistemologically religious belief systems so narrowly
defined and exclusivistically conceived will be very difficult and I point out
this vulnerability of the dominant religious epistemologies in the face of reli-
gious diversity, because I fail to see how the theistic critics of agatheism — in-
cluding Geivett and Moser — can do better than Plantinga or Swinburne
without retreating ultimately — at least to some degree — to fideism of one
kind or another, in which case their claim to being able to ground first-order
religious beliefs in accordance with much better epistemic standards than
does agatheism may turn out to be dubious. In short, if both evidentialists
and anti-evidentialists when faced with the challenge of religious diversity
will end up with no choice but to resort to some kind of fideistic leap of faith
to justify their commitment to a particular religious belief system conceived
in an exclusivist manner, then it may turn out that agatheism with its fragile
epistemic foundations, but foundations which will not be shaken by religious
diversity, has after all something to offer — something *epistemological*, not
merely ethical. After all, I do not consider the agatheistic interpretation of re-
ligious diversity to be some kind of epistemological golden bullet, but simply
suggest to assess the *relative rationality* of various interpretations of the facts
about religious diversity, and I'm inclined to believe that agatheism is an im-
provement on other pluralistic theories of religious diversity, while exclusiv-
ist religious mentality is arguably on the decline in many parts of the world.

Attending to details of Geivett's and Moser's critique of agatheism, one
might assert that to the extent agatheism takes religious beliefs as deliver-
ances of agathological imagination to be "personal and social constructs", as
Geivett puts it, they should not be considered any more *arbitrary* than will
be a belief in the divine designer of the universe held by Geivett's evidential-
ist religious believer, or a belief in God self-manifesting himself to Moser's
evidentialist religious believer, or a 'properly basic belief' held by Plantin-
ga's anti-evidentialist believer that God is just speaking to me in the voice

of my moral conscience, or a belief of a an adherent to some religious tradition — say, a Greek Orthodox or a Roman Catholic — that God has revealed a fuller truth about himself in Christ and in Christ has reconciled the world to himself, since his church teaches that the Christian Bible is the infallible source of religious truth and the Christian Bible teaches just that. In all such cases the assent of the belief-holder will not be entirely arbitrary, because it will not be entirely voluntary, but rather will take place in a manner that could be best analysed in externalist terms, i.e., the believer — sometimes after considering the matter and more often than not in an 'implicit' (as J. H. Newman would say), almost unconscious way — will just find herself believing something as true and believing it firmly. As I have already mentioned, this assent, when pertaining to the realm of values, the realm of what ought to be or might be, rather than what is — being an expression of the state of mind which can be described as agathological certainty, is accompanied by an inner *experience* I called the 'agatonic' feeling, which serves as a kind of agathological conscience and an epistemic compass in that particular doxastic realm. Perhaps the easiest way to assure the reader that speaking about the exercise of agathological imagination, agathological certainty and the accompanying agatonic feeling I do not have in mind some unusual phenomena and experiences that ordinary believer would be unfamiliar with, is to point to the experience of the inner moral imperative manifesting itself in what has traditionally been rendered as "a voice of conscience". J. N. Newman based his entire religious epistemology on a phenomenology of conscience, suggesting that the awareness of the formal aspect of conscience (that is its very activity, not what it prescribes, but *that* it prescribes, carrying with it an *external* sanction) is the main source of the human inclination to believe in a higher *moral* power which is, according to him, the beginning of all religious faith.[13] When speaking about the exercise of agathological imagination I have something analogical in mind. So now the question arises: would evidentialists, like Moser and Geivett, allow such phenomenona to count as *experiences* which might serve as an empirical evidence that could ground epistemologically any religious beliefs? If the answer is 'yes', then we do have

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13   Cf. John H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, red. I. Ker, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985: V.1.

at least a groundwork of agatheistic epistemology of religious belief in view, and describing religious beliefs as being "personal or social constructs" will not amount to an objection, since they will be human constructs in more or less the same way as any religious doctrine of any religious tradition is likely to be, namely shaped throughout the ages by various individuals and groups of individuals coming to consciousness of what appears to them to be true about the Absolute and its relation to the human world.

If the answer is 'no', then it is hard to see why experiences of self-manifestation of God which Moser takes to be paradigmatic, *if interpreted in an exclusivist manner*, deserve a superior epistemic status given the awareness of the facts about religious diversity. When explaining the crucial importance of *de re* versus *de dicto* distinction for his epistemology of religious belief, Moser writes:

> The relevant belief in God can be *de re,* relating directly to God, with minimal *de dicto* content. This is important because it allows one to be convicted and led by God without one's having a conceptual understanding of God as God. It also allows that different people led by God could have different understandings of God and even know God by different names. This kind of diversity would not undermine or otherwise threaten the well-groundedness of belief in God. As long as the *de re* experiential base is in place, in the absence of defeaters, one's belief in God can be epistemically reasonable for one.[14]

In another place he writes:

> So religious devotion is *de re,* and not just *de dicto.* It is related to a causal meaning-giving reality beyond a belief, and not just to intellectual content, even if that reality is described in a way that falls short of full accuracy.[15]

What is fascinating about Moser's position is that I have a sense that 80% of what he writes is fully compatible with agatheism as a *pluralistic* interpretation of religion, but then he chooses to make an exclusivist turn and I end up thinking that his exclusivism is as difficult to defend as any other mentioned above, and moreover it is difficult to graps in what sense the religious belief he is referring to is a *first-order* belief. Presumably the minimum necessary for qualifying a belief as *first-order* is that the concept of God or the ultimate

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14   Moser, „First-Order Theistic Religion", 44.
15   Ibid., 38.

reality to which one is relating (as "a causal meaning-giving reality beyond a belief", as Moser puts it) has to be to some minimal degree *differentiated* from other views of God or the ultimate reality. Clearly, when TMM argue against the possibility of a rational first-order religious belief, they mean: a Christian belief (or perhaps a Catholic Christian belief) and a Mulism Shia belief, and so on. But if Moser postulates that the *de dicto* content of the religious belief can be so "minimal", that it "allows that different people led by God could have different understandings of God and even know God by different names" and he allows that "that reality [beyond belief] is described in a way that falls short of full accuracy", why would such belief have to be conceived as a first-order belief? How minimal may the *de dicto* content be to allow to call "that reality beyond belief" *God*? Does Moser mean to suggest that the Pauline "self-manifestation of God" as the experience that can ensure "well-groundedness of belief in God" leaves the believer to whom God manifested himself without doubt that God is a *person*? But that would be insufficient for grounding even a 'Western classical theistic' belief (which would not be really first-order), since Hindu Vishnavites report such experiences, and indeed religious life of many Bhakti Vishnavites centres on devotional (loving) attitude towards Ishvara *as a personal God.* But at the same time most of such believers will hold a belief that *ultimately* the Absolute is strictly speaking *not* a person, but is beyond all descriptions and conceptualisations, referred to as Para Brahman (in Vaishnavism and Shaivism) or Nirguna Brahman (in Advaita Vedanta). So it is hard to see how the Pauline experience Moser is referring to — unless understood on an analogy to Paul's own "experience" on the road to Damascus that was arguably unique rather than paradigmatic — could epistemically ground a *first-order* religious belief, settling the matter of the nature of the Absolute that is encountered. In particular, it is difficult to understand how any experience might ground a belief in the moral *perfection* or in omnibenevolence of the Absolute encountered in the experience, or indeed how one might form on the ground of such experience a belief that one has encountered God or the Absolute in the first place. It seems more plausible to think — as agatheism recommends — that religious experiences on their own cannot ground such belief, unless considered in connection with the *pre-existing* agatheistic belief which can *not* be based

on the evidence of religious experiences or any other instances of perceived supernatural agency.

Moser has one more, somewhat baffling, objection, namely to the appropriateness of my use of the term 'agatheism' itself. He writes:

> Given that 'agatheism is a thinner concept than theism,' I recommend that we not call it *theism* at all. It does not require theism, either logically, conceptually, or metaphysically, so far as our available evidence indicates. Since *religion* likewise does not require theism, "agathoreligion" would be a less misleading term here. A Neoplatonist, for instance, could accept agatheism without accepting theism even as a basis for axiology.[16]

The first reply which comes to mind immediately is that pantheism, panentheism or henotheism are also not species of Western classical theism and nobody seem to protest against the use of such terms, although one might complain that a term like 'pantheism' might mislead a newcomer to philosophy, suggesting that it a belief that all reality is identical with God as God is understood in classical theism. The terms '*theós*' and '*to theion*' were used by Plato and a host of other ancient thinkers, including Plotinus, in variety of contexts and more often than not ascribing to it significantly different meaning than that presupposed by the contemporary Western users of the term 'theism'. Interestingly enough, another of my theistic critics, V. Shokhin, being a noted expert on Indian philosophy of religion, thinks that agatheism may be entirely unproblematic *only* on a theistic interpretation of the Absolute, although he believes so for reasons that I find to a degree problematic, because he takes 'Agatheos' to be an equivalent of 'a Deity' and since according to some Asian conceptions a Deity can contain, manifest or produce both good and evil, he thinks agatheism cannot be applied to Asian religions.[17] However, firstly, the ultimate reality or the Absolute in the Asian context should arguably *not* be identified with some Deity, because a Deity will in most cases in the Asian context will not be properly referred to as the ultimate reality. Perhaps even more importantly, since agatheism is purposely defined in a maximally broad and inclusive way as the belief which identifies the ultimate reality with the ultimate good as the ultimate end of all human pursuits and posits that maxi-

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16   Ibid., 45.
17   Vladimir Shokhin, "Why Atheism Has Not Become a Subject of Philosophy of Religion", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 9, no. 3, 65.

mal realisation of human potentialities for good (*agatheia*) is possible only in proper alignment with the ultimate reality so conceived (*Agatheos*), it is not immediately obvious that the conceptions which construe the Absolute as in some sense not perfectly good or *not yet* maximally good (such as proposed by Boehme, Schelling, Berdyaev or Whitehead) should be excluded from consideration. After all, one should keep in mind that the point of departure of the agatheistic thinking is the teleological nature (good-directedness) of the human axiological consciousness and Agatheos is postulated as the ultimate good to explain this phenomenon, but for this it suffices to postulate the ultimate good *for us*, that is the reality which grounds the hope of the maximal realisation of the creaturely potentialities for good. It seems that the above mentioned 'philosophical' conceptions of the Absolute, from Boehme to Whitehead, as well as the Asian conceptions of the ultimate reality (or at least most of them) can fulfil this 'function' and thus fall under the definition of Agatheos.

D. Łukasiewicz offers a very different and very interesting kind of criticism which could be describe as external, because instead of looking for inconsistencies in the way agatheism is defined and presented, he takes it to be a genuinely new idea and then asks whether agatheism is compatible with Christian orthodoxy. He concludes his analysis with a resounding 'no'. If such verdict would be justified, it would be a serious blow to the project, since while being a pluralistic interpretation of religion which does include (moderately) progressive and (mildly) revisionist elements, agatheism at the same time acknowledges the importance of the context of tradition conceived not as a combination of changeless beliefs, rigid rules and oppressive institutions, but as a treasury of inspiring agathological insights and models of religious practice which may greatly enrich and supplement, rather than suppress free exercise of agathological imagination which will be guiding both one's doxastic and orthopractical progress towards greater realisation of one's agathological potential. So while being, so to speak, a non-denominational agatheist seems in principle possible (although the person is still likely to draw inspiration from representatives of some tradition or traditions), general incompatibility of agatheism with first-order religious traditions would be hardly a desirable outcome.

Łukasiewicz sees agatheism in this manner:

> Salamon proposes a new religion or, more accurately, a new spiritual world-view deeply rooted in the Platonist philosophical tradition. But his proposal is rather an alternative to first-order religions — just like Thornhill-Miller's and Millican's second-order religion is an alternative to them.[18]

His own reading of the situation is as follows:

> Let us remember that first-order religions consist of yet another element which is inherent and irreducible part of their creed: religious authority. A religious authority is based on some recorded past events, divine revelations, written texts, social and religious institutions, traditions, etc. As grounded in the past that authority is in a sense necessary and closed to any revision or falsification.[19]

These seem to me both too radical conclusions, so at least on some occasions Łukasiewicz must have got me wrong.

The first clearly false step of Łukasiewicz to be corrected is his understanding of agathological imagination. He makes a distinction (which I have not made) between 'ordinary believers', 'reflective believers' and 'hyper-reflective believers' and then writes:

> On Salamon's view, hyper-reflective believers have a very special epistemic instrument at their disposal called 'agathological imagination', which allows them to evaluate the rationality of first-order religions. Agathalogical imagination — one may also call it axiological intuition — allows to evaluate whether and to what extent the Ultimate Reality (the Divine) or simply God of a given first-order religion is perfect or truly good.[20]

This would be a serious misreading of the role of agathological imagination.

Firstly, agathological imagination, despite somewhat unfamiliar label, is an imaginative dimension of the practical reason exercised by *everybody* and constantly, and not just in the realm of religion, but in connection with all mental activity that leads to value-judgments. Agathological imagination is not employed in rare instances by special individuals "to evaluate the rationality of first-order religions", but is active on every occasion a person assents to normative truth-claims, which happens all the time. Agathological imagination

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18   Dariusz Łukasiewicz, "Agathological Rationalism and First-Order Religions", *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 9, no. 2, 228.

19   Ibid., 227.

20   Ibid., 225.

is thus employed not only by hyper-reflective believers who for some reason began to ask themselves whether Tibetan Buddhism is not more rational than Roman Catholicism, but it is active on every occasion an ordinary believer renews and confirms her religious commitment and that may take place every day at a daily prayer. The crucial point that Łukasiewicz missed is then that agathological imagination guides one's assent (or withholding of the assent) not only when the question 'what to believe' arises, but much more often when the question 'whether to believe' what is recommended to the person by others. Agatheism is a theory of religious belief which is supposed to explain the content of their beliefs (i.e., how they came to believe *what* they believe), but also explain *why* people believe what they believe, irrespectively of whether their beliefs where recommended to them by others — which is much more often than not the case — or whether they happen to change their beliefs on reflection and perhaps even formed some of their beliefs themselves. So Łukasiewicz may be right that many religious believers never asses the rationality of their beliefs *vis-à-vis* possible doxastic alternatives, but it still may be true — as I believe it is — that the answer to the question *why* such believers believe what they believe is: because of the 'agathological certainty' accompanying the activity of agathological imagination — activity which is typically implicit, tacit, unconscious, better to be accounted in an externalist fashion — that *it is good* to believe it (and this sense of the 'good' is related to the good-directedness of our axiological consciousness identified already by Socrates and Plato).

Now having put the record straight regarding the relevance of agathological imagination for religious belief (and all other beliefs which are axiologically grounded) we should be able to answer two inter-related questions put forward by Łukasiewicz, both pertaining to the ability to settle the matter of rationality of one or more religious traditions. Łukasiewicz suspects that I wish to stipulate that on agatheism *all* religions may be rational (in the agathological sense of rationality), but asks for clarification what on agatheism might be the justification for excluding the possibility that *all* religions may be irrational. A more sophisticated question formulated by Łukasiewicz and motivated by the awareness that in the future one's agathological imagination may deliver a different verdict regarding the agathological rationality of one's beliefs. As a consequence such person will find himself in an epistemic situation in which he will hold that (a) his own first-order religion is at least

as rational as some other first-order religions, but it may well be more or the most rational of them, *and* (b) other first-order religions may, conceivably, be assessed in the future as more rational than his/her own religion. Łukasiewicz sets the problem as follows:

> The question arises if the above-sketched position is a coherent view. A hyper-reflective Christian believer believes, for example, that Jesus is God and that God's nature is truine. He/she also believes that such a "social" nature of God is more satisfactory for agathological imagination than a belief that God is a "a metaphysically single being", or that the Divine or the Ultimate Reality is impersonal. But still he/she holds that *it is possible* that other first order religions which reject Christ's divinity are closer to God or to the Ultimate Reality, or simply to the truth closer to God or to the Ultimate Reality, or simply to the truth. In brief, a hyper-reflective Christian believer believes that Jesus is God and that it is a *good* thing that Jesus is God. However, that believer also holds (as a hyper-reflective believer is obliged to hold) that it is possible that *it is not a good* thing that Jesus is God. Agathological operator "it is good that…" plays here a crucial role since we are discussing the agatheistic notion of rationality. At first glance it seems to be a coherent view. Surely, one can believe that *p* and believe that it is possible that not-*p*. However, here arises another question: is that believer still a Christian? Or, more generally: is such first-order agatheistc religion really a first-order religion? Let us remember that first-order religions consist of yet another element which is inherent and irreducible part of their creed: religious authority. A religious authority is based on some recorded past events, divine revelations, written texts, social and religious institutions, traditions, etc. As grounded in the past that authority is in a sense necessary and closed to any revision or falsification.[21]

The simplest answer to this uneasy question would be that postulating agatheism as a an explanatory hypothesis regarding how and why people believe in the sphere of religion does not change anything in the epistemic situation of a believer. The only thing that changes when one adopts the agatheistic understanding of religion is that the *reason* for potential change of belief is formulated differently (in terms of 'being good', 'better', 'contributing to the greater good', etc., instead of 'being false'). So it is not the case that acceptance of agatheism somehow undermines the confidence of a Christian agatheist or requires Łukasiewicz's hyper-reflective believer to cultivate in himself doxastic uncertainty. There is *no* difference whatsoever between a Christian agatheist and a Christian who never heard about agatheism and agathologi-

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21   Ibid., 228.

cal imagination and who while fully committed to his faith may on occasions have moments of doubt about the truthfulness of some beliefs that he held for decades because they were recommended to him when he was a child. The situation of both of them will be analogous to the situation of someone who is currently totally committed to the marital relationship and cannot *imagine* (sic!) the breakup of the marriage and yet purely theoretically is aware that there exist such option that he will fall in love with someone else. It is obvious that such theoretical possibility must not undermine in any way the stability of the present commitment. The same goes for belief in the divinity of Christ. When one is a deeply devout Christian, one's agathological imagination will simply present this believe as a great good and this will be accompanied by the agathological certainty (or the agatonic feeling, i.e., the feeling of 'the rest of the mind in the good'). She will perceive the possibility of changing religious belief and religious affiliation as purely theoretical and equally unlikely as will a happy husband see a possibility of divorcing his wife.

As to whether "all first-order religions can be irrational, etc.", this is simply a wrongly put question. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a rational or irrational religion or religious tradition. Rationality is person-specific. There can be only individuals for whom it is rational or irrational to hold certain beliefs given their epistemic situation. Agatheism as a pluralistic interpretation of religion envisages possibility that in the context of plural and diverse (rather than just one and homogenous) religious traditions people may enter into proper alignment with God, the Absolute or the ultimate reality as a condition of the maximal fulfillment of their potentialities for good. So on agatheism it is highly unlikely that *any* great religion will be abandoned by its adherents as irrational. Of course, we know that theoretically a 'death' of a religion is possible and here agatheism shows its explanatory potential: it can provide an answer why the ancient Greek and Roman religions have been replaced by Christianity — an answer which goes beyond purely socio-political concerns — namely: Christianity triumphed because it was considered agathologically more attractive (offering a greater good). The same was true about the expansion of Buddhism and Islam in the early stages of their existence. But again, rationality is person-specific, so what appears as rational to some people at some times and places, must not necessarily be rational for other people at other times and places.

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EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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Abstract. Experimental Philosophy is a new and controversial movement that challenges some of the central findings within analytic philosophy by marshalling empirical evidence. The purpose of this short paper is twofold: (i) to introduce some of the work done in experimental philosophy concerning issues in philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics and (ii) to connect this work with several debates within the philosophy of religion. The provisional conclusion is that philosophers of religion must critically engage experimental philosophy.

EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Experimental Philosophy (EP) is an emerging movement within the domain of philosophy that makes use of empirical data to inform philosophical research. As evidenced by their liberal use of surveys to probe the pre-philosophical intuitions of 'the folk', practitioners of EP (experimentalists) are fond of gathering empirical data via the tools of psychology and the social sciences. These findings are then used in a variety of ways: (i) analyzing concepts, (ii) assessing philosophical arguments with empirical premises, (iii) developing debunking arguments, and (iv) exposing biases that influence philosophical practice (Machery & O'Neill, 2014). In particular, experimental work involving (i) and (iv) has been used to undermine a number of key claims that are fundamental to several central areas of contemporary analytic philosophy.

EP is widely seen to cut against the grain of 'traditional' philosophical methodology, sometimes referred to as 'armchair' philosophy, which, some argue, relies almost exclusively on *a priori* justification. Given its controversial nature and given the fact that it is relatively new (not more than two dec-

ades), it is unsurprising that there is still widespread disagreement concerning the relative merits of EP. The still nascent findings of EP are being critically examined (refined by some and rejected by others) and the jury is still out. Nevertheless, the preliminary results are intriguing and, in my opinion, must be taken seriously. They raise important questions and pose legitimate challenges to long held assumptions.

Cast in another light, however, EP may not be as controversial as many might think. Even those who (many would agree) are staunch defenders of *a priori* methodology have implicitly endorsed something very much like EP. Here, for example, is Frank Jackson:

> I am sometimes asked… why, if conceptual analysis is concerned to elucidate what governs our classificatory practice, don't I advocate doing *serious opinion polls* on people's responses to various cases? My answer is that I do — when it is necessary. Everyone who presents the Gettier cases to a class of students is doing their own bit of fieldwork, and we all know the answer they get in the vast majority of cases. But it is also true that often we know that *our own case is typical* and so can generalize from it to others. (Jackson, 1998, 36-7)

I want to emphasize two things here. First, Jackson straightforwardly concedes that opinion polls (like the ones run by experimentalists) may be necessary for the project of conceptual analysis. Second, he claims that such polls are usually *un*necessary since we *often* know that our own intuitions are typical and can be generalized. Experimentalists would, I believe, wholeheartedly agree with the basic sentiment of Jackson's first point. However, by plunging into Jackson's recommended opinion polls, they have (perhaps) surprisingly found that the second point may legitimately be challenged — what many philosophers have taken to be typical may not actually be so.

PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS

To see this, consider a recent study that cuts at the heart of a heated debate that is central to contemporary philosophy of mind — the nature of consciousness. In this debate the concept of *phenomenal* consciousness, made famous over the past several decades by a number of prominent philosophers,[1]

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1   See (Chalmers, 1996), (Jackson, 1982), (Kripke, 1982), and (Nagel, 1974).

has been used to adjudicate debates over the truth or falsity of physicalism. What's importantly claimed about this concept (explicitly and implicitly) is that it can readily be found amongst the variety of concepts that are available to *any* ordinary person. It is a natural way for the folk to categorize certain conscious experiences. Moreover, it is the easily accessible nature of this "central and manifest aspect of our mental lives" (Chalmers, 1996, 207) that provides the rhetorical force behind many of the arguments raised against physicalism.

But is it really the case that the folk carve up the world according to the concept of phenomenal consciousness so cherished by philosophers? More specifically, do the folk categorize mental states like 'seeing red' (made famous by Frank Jackson in the 'Mary' thought experiment (Jackson, 1982)) and 'feeling pain' as both falling under the concept of phenomenal consciousness? Interested in answering these (and other allied) questions, Justin Sytsma and Edouard Machery conducted a variety of surveys to study the folk concepts of subjective experience. In one study Sytsma and Machery probed participants concerning simple robots with the working assumption that participants would, if they shared the concept of phenomenal consciousness prized by philosophers, "treat perception analogously to bodily sensations, tending to deny both to a simple robot" (Sytsma & Machery, 2010, 309). That is, they assumed that participants would deny that simple robots have states like 'seeing red' or 'feeling pain' because these kinds of states are *phenomenally* conscious states and simple robots don't have phenomenally conscious states.

Participants were divided into two groups: philosophers (those with undergraduate or graduate level training in philosophy) and non-philosophers. They randomly received one of four possible vignettes describing an agent and these vignettes were varied along two different dimensions. In half the vignettes the agent was a simple robot (Jimmy) while in the other half the agent was a normal human (Timmy). Moreover, in half of the vignettes the participants were asked if the agent (Jimmy or Timmy) 'saw red' (on a 7-point scale where 1 is 'clearly no', 4 is 'not sure', and 7 is 'clearly yes') while in the other half of the participants were asked if the agent 'felt pain'.

Here are two of the simple robot vignettes used in their study:

> Jimmy is a relatively simple robot built at a state university. He has a video camera for eyes, wheels for moving about, and two grasping arms with touch

sensors that he can move objects with. As part of a psychological experi-
ment, he was put in a room that was empty except for one blue box, one
red box, and one green box (the boxes were identical in all respects except
color). An instruction was then transmitted to Jimmy. It read: Put the red
box in front of the door. Jimmy did this with no noticeable difficulty. Did
Jimmy see red?

Jimmy is a relatively simple robot built at a state university. He has a video
camera for eyes, wheels for moving about, and two grasping arms with touch
sensors that he can move objects with. As part of a psychological experiment,
he was put in a room that was empty except for one blue box, one red box,
and one green box (the boxes were identical in all respects except color). An
instruction was then transmitted to Jimmy. It read: Put the red box in front
of the door. When Jimmy grasped the red box, however, it gave him a strong
electric shock. He let go of the box and moved away from it. He did not try
to move the box again. Did Jimmy feel pain when he was shocked?

The remaining two vignettes were identical except all instances of 'Jimmy'
were replaced with 'Timmy' — the ordinary human.

So how did the participants fare? As expected philosophers treated feel-
ing pain and seeing red in a uniform manner. They were *un*willing to ascribe
either state to the robot and were willing to ascribe both states to the human.
Contrary to expectation, however, non-philosophers did not treat the states
in a uniform manner. They were willing to ascribe the state of seeing red to
the robot but not the state of feeling pain. Aside from the question of whether
or not simple robots like Jimmy really have the relevant mental states, it's in-
teresting that folk and philosophical attributions diverge. This, according to
Sytsma and Machery, suggests that the "philosopher's concept of phenomenal
consciousness is *not* how the folk understand subjective experience." (Sytsma
& Machery, 2010, 312)

I realize, of course, that there are a number of issues that can be raised
about the effectiveness of the surveys and whether any conclusions (as strong
as Sytsma and Machery's conclusions) regarding the folk concept of subjec-
tive experience can be drawn from such studies. Needless to say, the surveys
have been critiqued and refined and have pushed the debate forward in vari-
ous ways. The results are interesting nonetheless and Sytsma and Machery
raise a legitimate challenge. Perhaps there is no folk concept of *phenomenal*
consciousness that coincides with that of the philosophers. If this were the

case it seems the rhetorical force behind some of the best anti-physicalist arguments based on the nature of consciousness would be undermined.

What is, perhaps, more interesting for my present purposes is what Sytsma and Machery went on to probe in their study. Sytsma and Machery also asked participants how they thought *other* ordinary people would answer the questions embedded in the vignettes. While philosophers and non-philosophers alike were good at predicting how the folk would answer questions regarding Timmy's seeing red, Timmy's feeling pain, and Jimmy's feeling pain, philosophers were noticeably worse than non-philosophers at predicting how others would answer the question regarding Jimmy's seeing red. Philosophers mistakenly thought others would not ascribe seeing red to Jimmy. Consequently, Sytsma and Machery conclude, "in contrast to philosophers, non-philosophers' evaluation of whether ordinary people will ascribe seeing red to the robot is well calibrated." (Sytsma & Machery, 2010, 314)

To return to the second claim I earlier emphasized regarding Jackson's comments about conceptual analysis, it seems that Sytsma and Machery's probes demonstrate that it is not obvious that what is deemed 'typical' by philosophers is actually so. The responses of the philosophers who participated in Sytsma and Machery's studies clearly run counter to this sentiment. Of course, Jackson may argue that this is a rare exception in which philosophical intuition is not well-calibrated in picking out whether an intuition is typical or not. But this is difficult to defend given the growing body of results that challenges this claim. Moreover, even if we granted that only a very limited number of philosophical intuitions were not well-calibrated with regard to what is typical it seems we must grant that experimental work, at least in *this* area of philosophy of mind, would benefit those engaged in the relevant debates.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

So there is a case to be made for taking experimental philosophy seriously, at least in some domains. But what does phenomenal consciousness have to do with philosophy of religion? One might be tempted to think, for whatever reason, that philosophy of religion is immune to EP in a way that philosophy of mind, for example, is not. This, I think, would be a mistake. I hope it's fairly obvious how the deliverances of EP, like my abbreviated introduction to Syts-

ma and Machery's work, can impact various issues in philosophy of religion. Consider the so-called Argument from Consciousness (for the existence of God) recently developed and refined by J.P. Moreland.

In a number of places (Moreland 1998, 2008), he has argued that reflection on the nature of phenomenal consciousness can give rise to an argument for the existence of God. His argument can be regimented as follows:

1. Genuinely nonphysical mental states exist.

2. There is an explanation for the existence of mental states.

3. Personal explanation is different from natural scientific explanation.

4. The explanation for the existence of mental states is either personal or natural scientific.

5. The explanation is not natural scientific.

6. Therefore, the explanation is personal.

7. If the explanation is personal, then it is theistic.

8. Therefore, the explanation is theistic.

There is much to be said about this interesting argument, but two premises in particular are relevantly implicated by Sytsma and Machery's experimental work regarding the nature of consciousness.

Premise (1) is at the heart of the central debate in philosophy of mind just discussed — the nature of consciousness. Many working in this area of philosophy are physicalists (Papineau, 2002) and they reject (1). Premise (5) and the possibility of offering a physical explanation of consciousness is also deeply intertwined with this debate (Levine, 2001). What matters is that the plausibility of these premises could potentially be undermined by Sytsma and Machery's experimental work.

How have philosophers defended premise (1)? Take, again, Frank Jackson's famous argument against physicalism based on Mary (Jackson, 1982). Mary is a color vision scientist locked in a black and white room who knows

all the physical facts about color vision but has not, herself, had any color experiences. The success of this argument, many believe, hinges on a crucial claim — the claim that Mary learns a new fact when leaving the black and white room. She learns what it is like to see colors. If she indeed learns a new fact, despite having already known all the physical facts, then physicalism is false. But why think she learns a new fact? Here's Jackson:

> What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a color television monitor? Will she learn anything or not? *It seems just obvious* that she will learn something about the world and our visual experience of it. (Jackson, 1982, 130)

His evidence for this critical claim is that 'it seems just obvious.' One reasonable interpretation of this sentiment is that Mary's learning something new accords with common sense — what any ordinary person (that is, 'the folk') would be willing to accept. On this reading of Jackson, we can see that folk intuitions are absolutely fundamental to the success of his argument. What EP attempts to uncover is whether or not the claim that Mary learns a new fact is really a matter of common sense.

Returning to Moreland's first premise, we can legitimately ask about the kind of evidence that is being marshalled in defense of this claim. Because the evidence for (1) is arguably grounded in common sense, getting at folk intuitions becomes exceedingly important. But if the force behind (1) is derived, by and large, by the *philosophical* conception of phenomenal consciousness and its seeming *in*applicability to certain physical objects like brains, a finding that suggested the folk do not even have a concept of phenomenal consciousness could be devastating. Consequently, it would not be a matter of common sense that (1) is true.

Similarly, in defending (5) Moreland argues that the mind-brain correlation is 'radically contingent.' But is the correlation of mental and physical states *really* 'radically contingent'? Interpreted in a straightforward way, Moreland's claim seems to entail the possibility of zombie worlds, where a zombie is an entity physically identical to a normal conscious human being but with no phenomenal consciousness. How is the claim that zombie worlds are possible to be defended? It is based, by and large, on an appeal to intuition or common sense. But if evidence (like that of Sytsma and Machery) supports the claim that most people do not even have a concept of phenomenal con-

sciousness it seems the evidence for the possibility of zombie worlds would be significantly weakened. In fact, a reasonable person could even argue that the possibility of zombie worlds is nothing more than a fiction conjured by philosophers, a concept with no grounding in common sense. Consequently, premise (5) would be undermined.

One, of course, might raise two related worries here. First, how can the fact that the folk do not clearly hold the philosophical conception of phenomenal consciousness have any bearing on whether phenomenal consciousness exists, or whether in particular 'genuinely nonphysical mental states exist'? Second, are there interesting philosophical implications to be revealed here, or rather only interesting sociological and psychological implications about what philosophers and non-philosophers think about various issues concerning religion?

In answer to the first, I must agree that there may be unwarranted ontological inferences being made by appealing to folk intuitions in making claims about the nature of consciousness. This, all will agree, can be risky business. Does the fact that a suitably large number of people intuitively believe that the Sun revolves around the Earth justify us in believing the ontological claims that flow out of the geocentric theory of our solar system? Surely not, but the issue here is not whether making ontological inferences based on folk intuitions is a risk worth taking. The issue is that many influential philosophical arguments concerning the nature of consciousness seem to rest on such inferences. Perhaps there are a variety of reasons for resisting such inferences, but insofar as this is what is being done in many parts of philosophy of mind it's important to see whether the empirical claims regarding folk intuitions that support these arguments are in fact true.

The second worry is related to the first and not much has to be added. We must ask, again, what is the driving force behind many of the philosophical arguments we are concerned with? How do philosophers defend the premises of their arguments? More often than not, the really critical premises are defended by an appeal to common sense — what 'seems just obvious.' And if getting a better understanding of these intuitions is a matter of sociology and psychology then it seems these disciplines must be implicated in the assessment of philosophical arguments. Moreover, as I will mention briefly in the conclusion of this paper, the distinction between philosophy and other disci-

plines (like sociology and psychology) may not be so clear. This, however, is a large topic that would take us too far astray.

The basic point is this: experimental work in philosophy of mind can have interesting implications for philosophical debates concerning the existence of God. In what follows I will review some of the literature in three other areas of experimental philosophy that have implications for several issues in philosophy of religion. It is my hope that these brief introductions would speak for themselves and make obvious the importance of experimental work regarding the future of philosophy of religion.

ATTRIBUTIONS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND SOULS

In an important series of papers Adam Arico, Brian Fiala, and Shaun Nichols (2011, 2014) developed a model to explain how humans make *attributions* of consciousness. They call it the AGENCY model. The idea is that there are certain cues (the presence of eyes, motion trajectories, and contingent interactions) that trigger human brains to form an AGENT concept and classify the source of these cues as an agent. The triggering of an AGENT concept, in turn, strongly disposes a human to engage in a variety of behaviors: following gazes, attributing certain mental states (like desires and intentions), anticipating goal directed behavior, and imitating behavior. To this list of behaviors, Arico et al. add the disposition to attribute *conscious* mental states.

One thing to keep in mind about this model is that the workings of this model largely occur sub-consciously in a fast, unreflective manner. Like intuitions, the resulting dispositions for behaviors occur automatically when the AGENT concept is triggered.

To test this model Arico et al. ran reaction-time studies where participants were asked to answer whether or not a given property, say, the property of feeling pain could be attributed to a given entity, say, a dog. They used a variety of properties ranging from 'feeling pain' to 'being made of metal' to 'being colored white.' They also used a variety of entities ranging from mammals to insects to plants to inanimate natural objects. One interesting finding of this study is that participants were significantly more likely to attribute simple conscious states (e.g. pain, anger) to insects than to cars or clouds.

Moreover, participants were significantly *slower* in rejecting attributions of simple conscious states to insects than to cars or clouds.

This, Arico et al. argue, lends support to the claim that categorizing an entity as an AGENT indeed disposes one to attribute conscious states. This explains why participants are highly likely and quick to attribute conscious states to insects. Insects have all the relevant cues — they have eyes, have motion trajectories, and engage in contingent interactions. This also explains why participants were highly likely and quick to deny conscious states to vehicles — the absence of the relevant cues. Finally, the model also explains why so few participants denied simple conscious states to insects and why it took significantly longer for participants to make such denials. This is because participants would have had a strong disposition to attribute simple conscious states based on their AGENT concepts being triggered. To make a denial these participants would have had to actively suppress this disposition causing the increase in reaction time.

There are other interesting details and thought-provoking discussions regarding the rich body of results they gathered (in particular data regarding plants). What interests me, however, is that they go on to make a philosophically provocative claim regarding intuitions about the consciousness of other entities. They write:

> A number of prominent philosophers have built explicit theories of mind partly on the basis of our intuitions about what is conscious and what is not. One such case is Ned Block's famous example in which we are to imagine that all the residents of China are rigged up with radio transmitters so as to functionally mimic a living brain (Block, 1978)… Notice, however, that if our proposal is correct, there is a potential explanation for these intuitions that does not involve the denial that the nation of China enjoys conscious states. Instead, it may be that the example tends to provoke these intuitions because the sorts of cues that typically incline a subject toward attributions of consciousness are not salient with respect to the nation of China. (Arico, Fiala, Goldberg, & Nichols, 2011, 348)

The reason we are reluctant to attribute consciousness to the Chinese nation is because it doesn't have any of the typical cues that trigger the AGENT concept which in turn disposes us to attribute consciousness. Because of this we fail to have the intuitive pull that, in most cases, draws us to make attributions of consciousness. This, then, inclines us to *feel* that the Chinese nation is not

conscious (even though it is functionally equivalent to a normal conscious human). But this failure to elicit the relevant intuitions, according to Arico et al.'s view, is merely a consequence of the way our psychological mechanisms are set up to respond to various cues. It may not have anything deep to say about whether a given entity is *really* conscious or not. So there is a potential explanation for why many people resist the idea that the Chinese nation is conscious regardless of whether or not the Chinese nation really is conscious.

Why is this relevant to philosophy of religion? One way the relevance may be developed is to see that belief in non-physical souls (and disembodied gods)[2] is a critical tenet in a variety of religious traditions. Here is what Paul Bloom writes:

> More significant for religion, dualism makes it possible to imagine souls without bodies. Christianity and Judaism, for instance, involve a God who created the universe, performs miracles, and listens to prayers. He is omnipotent and omniscient, possessing infinite kindness, justice and mercy. But he does not, in any real sense, have a body. (Bloom, 2009, 123)

If the AGENCY model can be used to explain why we may be led astray about which entities have conscious states and which do not, it may also be used to explain why humans (perhaps) *falsely believe* in mind-body dualism. For it may intuitively seem to us that we have no physical parts that can serve as the locus of conscious mental states. The best candidate, given what we know about human physiology, is the brain. But when we are confronted with an actual brain all we perceive is a hunk of inert matter. Brains have no cues to trigger the relevant dispositions in us to make attributions of consciousness. So it may seem all too natural for many of us that the soul (or mind), as a center of consciousness, cannot be realized in any physical part of the body. But if souls exist (since, many of the religiously inclined would say, *we* are souls and we exist) and they cannot be identified or reduced to any physical part of our bodies we are forced to conclude that the soul must not be physical. Hence, our belief in mind-body dualism. But, given the AGENCY model, our resistance to attributing consciousness to the brain can be given a purely psychological explanation that may not have any deep metaphysical import.

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2   For more on this and other kinds of religious cognition studied under the umbrella of cognitive science of religion see (Atran, 2005) and (Barrett, 2004).

Given this account of why we don't attribute consciousness to physical entities like brains when brains may very well be conscious, it may no longer be so obvious that non-physical souls exist. It seems to me that philosophers of religion are faced with an interesting challenge based on experimental work carried out by experimentalists like Arico et al. regarding beliefs that are central to a variety of religious traditions.

SEMANTIC REFERENCE AND DIVINE NAMES

Turning briefly to language, a number of heated debates over semantic reference straightforwardly make their way into discussions about religion. Consider the debate over the semantic reference of terms like 'Allah' and 'God.' Do these terms co-refer? Some will argue that the answer must be 'no.' Others, however, are happy to say 'yes' and claim that they refer to the same entity — the God of the Abrahamic traditions. Who is right? Here is how Miroslav Volf enters this debate:

> Should Christians reject 'Allah' as a term for God? … 'Allah' is simply Arabic for 'God' (with the definite article) just as *Theos* is Greek for 'God' and *Bog* is Croatian for 'God'. A slightly different way to make the same point is that 'Allah', like 'God' is not a proper name, but a descriptive term. 'Barack Obama' is a proper name; 'president' is a descriptive term… for the most part we don't translate proper names… we translate descriptive terms. (Volf, 2011, 82)

Volf makes a number of interesting claims in this short passage, but are they true? He assumes that 'God' is a description and not a name. But is this obvious? Kripke, for one, doesn't seem to be so sure:

> In the case of some terms, people might have doubts as to whether they're names or descriptions; like 'God' — does it describe God as the unique divine being or is it a name of God? (Kripke, 1982, 26-7)

Volf's claim that 'God' is a description and not a name seems ripe for experimental work. Where do folk intuitions lie regarding this matter? I wouldn't be surprised if studies generated unexpected results.

Be that as it may, even if we were to concede that Volf was right in claiming that 'God' is a description and not a name, we could easily reframe the debate to re-generate the original tension. We can simply focus on an explicit

name like 'Jehovah' or 'Yahweh' and rerun the debate, but for convenience of exposition I will continue to use 'God.'

The natural question to ask at this juncture is: how do *names* refer to their referents? This question lies at the core of a large literature in the philosophy of language. There are two primary competing theories: the description theory and the causal theory. But which is right? Kripke famously argued for the causal theory and many philosophers believe he made a convincing case. But how did Kripke defend his arguments? Largely by eliciting intuitions based on specific cases. A case Kripke made famous in this regard is his fictional case about Gödel (and Schmidt). Gödel, of course, is the famous mathematician known for proving the incompleteness theorem. Gödel is an interesting case because the fact that he proved the incompleteness theorem is, for the most part, the only thing that most people know about him. Based on these ideas Kripke developed the following counterfactual scenario:

> Suppose that Gödel was not in fact the author of this theorem. A man named 'Schmidt', whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and it was thereafter attributed to Gödel. On the view in question, then, when our ordinary man uses the name 'Gödel', he really means to refer to Schmidt, because Schmidt is the unique person satisfying the description, 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'… so since the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about 'Gödel', are in fact always referring to Schmidt. *But it seems to me that we are not.* (Kripke, 1982, 84)

It is interesting that Kripke's evidence against the claim that 'Gödel' actually refers to Schmidt in this case is his simple intuition. He writes: "it seems to me that we are not." Kripke, of course, while referring to his own intuitions was implicitly using them to make a generalization. He assumed, like Jackson above, that in talking about his own intuitions he would be appealing to the intuitions of those in his audience (and beyond). Given the way many have responded to Kripke's work it is likely that the intuitions of most in his audience (other philosophers) shared his intuitions. So the causal theory of names established itself as a legitimate candidate in the philosophical debates over theories of reference.

If Kripke is right it may be open to those in the debate over the reference of terms like 'God' or 'Allah' to deploy the causal theory of reference as a tool

for defending the co-reference of these terms. They, after all, seem to have a shared causal origin in Abraham and a compelling argument can be made.

But this is where experimental philosophers have stepped in. They are interested in whether the Kripkean intuition about the Gödel case is in fact a broadly shared intuition. To investigate this Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, in several papers (2004, 2013), have called the generality of the Kripkean intuition into question. Machery et al. have done cross-cultural work regarding the Gödel case to see whether or not intuitions align with Kripke's. Among the many interesting findings they reported on, they discovered a genuine diversity of intuitions between western cultures (e.g. U.S.) and eastern cultures (e.g. China) regarding the reference of names. These findings, along with Machery et al.'s interpretation of the findings, have not gone unchallenged. But the data is there and it raises important questions. Perhaps Machery et al.'s work is tapping into real diversity. If so, it calls the status of the causal theory, and perhaps the claim that 'God' and 'Allah' co-refer, into question.

FREE WILL, DETERMINISM, AND DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

The last topic I will consider is free will. This has been a source of debate for centuries within various religious circles and no resolution seems to be in sight. It is thought, by some, that the existence of God, traditionally conceived, poses a threat to human free will. This is because God is omniscient. If God's knowledge encompasses even future events that have not yet transpired how can we simultaneously maintain that robust choices are available to humans (in the sense that humans could have done otherwise)? Here is a sampling of this tension found in Mainmonides:

> Does God know or does He not know that a certain individual will be good or bad? If thou sayest, 'He knows', then it necessarily follows that [that] man is compelled to act as God knew beforehand he would act, otherwise God's knowledge would be imperfect… (Maimonides 1996, 99-100)

And here is a more contemporary sampling from Nelson Pike:

> There is a pitfall in the doctrine of divine omniscience. That knowing involves believing (truly) is surely a tempting philosophical view. And the idea that God's attributes (including omniscience) are essentially connected to

> His nature, together with the idea that an omniscient being would hold no false beliefs and would hold beliefs about the outcome of human actions in advance to their performance… then if one affirms the existence of God, one is committed to the view that no human action is voluntary. (Pike, 1965, 46)

An interesting, but not particularly relevant, feature of Pike's classic paper is that he begins by asserting "that if God is omniscient, no human action is voluntary… seems intuitively false." Apparently Pike believes there is no *prima facie* intuition that there is a conflict between divine omniscience and voluntary action. Whether or not this claim is true, Pike goes on to argue that there indeed is a conflict. Nevertheless, Pike's assertion is open to empirical investigation and, hence, is open to the work of experimentalists.

Be that as it may, the tension between divine omniscience and voluntary action is similar, in many ways, with the problem facing free will in the area of metaphysics. Regarding divine omniscience, if God knows at time t_1 (say a thousand years before Daniel's birth) that Daniel would do x at a later time t_2 then it seems, given the infallibility of God's knowledge, that Daniel must do x at t_2. But then it seems at t_1 that Daniel had no choice whether or not he would do x at t_2. In traditional metaphysics the problem is often couched in terms of the troublesome relationship between free will and determinism. If the universe unfolds in deterministic fashion it seems that humans are 'compelled' to act in ways that were set in motion (millions of) years in advance of any human's birth and consequently do not have robust choices.

Many interlocutors in these debates take for granted that the intuitive position, the position we all share before we engage in philosophical deliberation, is one of *in*compatibilism. That is, the default position is that free will is *not* compatible with determinism (or divine omniscience). Much ink has been spilled by compatibilists over the years to try and demonstrate that the default position is mistaken and that, though counterintuitive, free will is indeed compatible with determinism. So while there is obvious disagreement between the camps, what many incompatibilists and compatibilists have shared is the assumption that incompatibilism is intuitive and is therefore the default position.

But, experimental philosophers have wondered, is incompatibilism *really* the default position? Shaun Nichols and Joshua Knobe (2007) ran experi-

ments to probe the intuitions of the folk on these matters. They introduced the following two universes to participants:

> Imagine a universe (Universe A) in which everything that happens is completely caused by whatever happened before it. This is true from the very beginning of the universe, so what happened in the beginning of the universe caused what happened next, and so on right up until the present.

> Imagine a universe (Universe B) in which almost everything that happens is completely caused by whatever happened before it. The one exception is human decision making. (Knobe, 2014, 71-2)

Then the participants were given vignettes that describe events taking place in one of the two universes. For example, a man named Bill has become attracted to his secretary, and he decides that the only way to be with her is to kill his wife and 3 children. He kills his family. The participants were then asked: if Bill existed in Universe A (the deterministic universe), is Bill fully morally responsible for killing his wife and 3 children? Surprisingly, most participants (72%) answered 'yes.' This suggests that causally determined agents can still be morally responsible.[3] Perhaps the folk see no real tension here — Universe A is compatible with human moral responsibility.

Again, there is much more to be said and there is an ongoing debate involving other philosophers (Nahmias, Morris, Nadelhoffer, & Turner, 2006). The preliminary results, however, seem to indicate that the assumption that *in*compatibilism is the default position in debates over free will may be mistaken. The shape of the debates in this area of metaphysics could change quite dramatically if this were the case and the burden of proof were reversed.

Results like this would also have an obvious effect on the debates over free will occurring within the philosophy of religion. Since most operate under the assumption that there is some intuitive tension involved in simultaneously keeping commitments to human free will and divine omniscience together, discovering that the folk have no such tension (regarding free will and

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3   It should be noted that the probes are focused on moral responsibility and not free will. But most would grant that the kind of free will anyone should be interested in is the kind of free will that undergirds moral responsibility. So probing for moral responsibility just is probing for free will.

determinism) would likely transform the face of this debate.[4] The difficult problems of reconciling divine omniscience and free will may turn out to be *not* as pressing as many philosophers of religion have presumed.

CONCLUSION

I hope it is evident that many of the studies carried out in experimental philosophy have the potential to inform a variety of issues that are central to philosophy of religion. I find a lot of what experimentalists have said and done to be interesting and relevant. I also find their vision of philosophy, a vision that construes philosophy as a discipline that uses *all* available tools to attack problems, to be very attractive.

In fact, Kwame Appiah, in his 2007 presidential address at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, argued that the current movement in experimental philosophy was a matter of philosophical restoration, not innovation. Not only was Isaac Newton called a 'philosopher' in the English of his day, but philosophers like Thomas Reid and David Hume engaged in and encouraged activities (relevant to their thinking) that they themselves described in experimental terms. Moreover, in assessing the relationship of a particular empirical science, like psychology, with the historical roots of philosophy, Appiah writes:

> The point is not just that the canonical philosophers belong as much to the history of what we now call psychology as to the genealogy of philosophy. It's that you would have had a hard time explaining to them that *this* part of their work was *echt* philosophy and *that* part of their work was not. Trying to separate their 'metaphysical' from their psychological claims is, I fear, rather like trying to peel a raspberry. (Appiah, 2008, 10)

What this suggests, perhaps, is that by supplementing our contemporary philosophical practices with the methods emerging out of experimental philosophy, we may very well be *restoring* a vision of philosophy that is a truer representation of 'traditional' philosophy than that which is practiced solely in the armchair.

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4   For an interesting discussion of how compatibilism and divine determinism are or are not relevantly similar see (Helm, 1993, 2010), (Flew, 2003) and (Byrne, 2008).

If the broad contours of what I have presented in this paper are on the right track then it behooves philosophers of religion to take EP seriously and, where applicable, engage in experimental work themselves. This is not, however, a call to burn the armchair. Instead it is a collaborative suggestion that aims to avoid limiting philosophical reflection to the *a priori*. Why not throw everything that is available to us (psychology, sociology, neuroscience, etc.) at the debates central to philosophy of religion? I believe philosophers of religion will not merely benefit from the growing body of data being collected and analyzed by experimental philosophers; I believe philosophers of religion, with their distinctive interests and concepts, can bring novel perspectives to the table and push experimental work forward in unforeseen and fruitful ways.

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A BAYESIAN BASELINE FOR BELIEF
IN UNCOMMON EVENTS

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Abstract. The plausibility of uncommon events and miracles based on testimony of such an event has been much discussed. When analyzing the probabilities involved, it has mostly been assumed that the common events can be taken as data in the calculations. However, we usually have only testimonies for the common events. While this difference does not have a significant effect on the inductive part of the inference, it has a large influence on how one should view the reliability of testimonies. In this work, a full Bayesian solution is given for the more realistic case, where one has a large number of testimonies for a common event and one testimony for an uncommon event. A free-running parameter is given for the unreliability of testimony, to be determined from data. It is seen that, in order for there to be a large amount of testimonies for a common event, the testimonies will probably be quite reliable. For this reason, because the testimonies are quite reliable based on the testimonies for the common events, the probability for the uncommon event, given a testimony for it, is also higher. Perhaps surprisingly, in the simple case, the increase in plausibility from testimony for the uncommon events is of the same magnitude as the decrease in plausibility from induction. In summary, one should be more open-minded when considering the plausibility of uncommon events.

INTRODUCTION

Is it reasonable to believe in a testimony of an uncommon event in the face of otherwise uniform contrary evidence from prior events? This question has been much discussed historically, with notable contributions from David Hume (Hume 1748), John Earman (Earman 2000), Peter Millican (Millican 2013), and many others.

David Hume's argument was not clearly formulated, but basically he argued that the evidence for common events (e.g., events compatible with

the perceived laws of nature) is so strong that the testimony for uncommon events (e.g., miracles or exceptions to the perceived laws of nature) is usually not strong enough evidence for the uncommon event to be believable. "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" is the oft-used and dangerously poorly-defined phrase connected to Hume's position.

J. Earman (Earman 2000) does a systematic job of both trying to find a precise form for Hume's argument and then analyzing the argument in detail, leading to the view that Hume's argument is largely incorrect. Earman makes two important points:

(1) With a Bayesian calculation of inductive inference, the probability of an uncommon event does indeed go down with the amount of common events (as $1/(n+2)$), but never to zero. Hence, based on induction, one can hence never be certain that the uncommon will not happen.

(2) While discussing the role and reliability of testimonies for uncommon events, Earman shows that the testimony can often provide enough credibility for the uncommon event. Notably, in considering the evidential force of a testimony, one needs to consider, not just how often witnesses are wrong in general, but what is the probability that the witness would make just such a particular claim and be in error with that claim. For example, when a witness is testifying that John Doe won the lottery, it is not enough to suggest that a testimony is in general wrong with e.g. 10% probability, but one needs to take into account the probability that the claim would be made about John Doe in particular (why just him?) and also the probability that the claim indeed would be erroneous.

Coming to the present work, the calculations published on the topic up to now assume a large amount of common events. In reality we usually have a large amount of *testimonies* for the common events. That is, we do not have uniform *evidence* against the uncommon events. What we may have is uniform *testimony* against the uncommon events or miracles. In this sense, it can be said, that up to now, the problem of uncommon events and their believability based on testimony has not been fully analyzed, even on the basic level.

So, this paper will offer a full Bayesian solution for the more realistic case, namely, for the question: How believable is an uncommon event when we have a uniform mass of *testimony* to the contrary? The calculation can be seen as a baseline for further discussions on the topic, with nuances to be added as later as different additions and changes to the model are explored. Further consideration will involve considerations for several testimonies of the same event, the independence of the witnesses, the effects of prior beliefs against the uncommon event, and whether or not those testifying to a rare event are less trustworthy than those testifying to a common event.

In addition, the calculations will relax one common assumption in the discussions about uncommon events/miracles. We will not presume to know the probability of a testimony being wrong. Rather, we will assign a probability for the probability of a testimony being wrong, and let the data determine the most probable probability for a testimony being wrong.

The word miracle can have several definitions. For the purposes of this paper, a miracle is taken to be just one kind of uncommon event. Hence, the argument presented aims to be more general, the result providing a baseline for inference concerning uncommon events, without concentrating on the particulars of different cases. The results will then apply to miracles, testimonies of rare natural events like winning a lottery, and rare-event measurements in physics (e.g. the possibility of proton decay).

For simplicity, the paper will concentrate on a binary case of mutually exclusive outcomes. One outcome is taken to be common, i.e. there are more testimonies for that outcome than for the uncommon outcome. In cases where there are more than two types of outcomes, they can be grouped into two mutually exclusive sets, the inference proceeding in the same vein, except for the possible modifications to the prior probabilities used.

A further complication in the field has been that the usage of probabilities in the discussion has been partial, with several authors dissecting the full formulas for partial arguments based on the full formulation, see e.g. (Ahmed 2015), with the full solution nowhere to be seen. The aim here will be to show the full solution for the simple default situation with few assumptions. From there, different assumptions can be added whenever the assumptions are well grounded.

The calculation will first be made for the case where we have several testimonies of common events and one testimony for an uncommon event. After obtaining the solution, its basic behavior as the number of testimonies for the common events increases will be discussed. We will then add known false testimonies for uncommon events to the calculation and show how the solution behaves for that case.

NOMENCLATURE AND TOOLS

Below is a table of notations used in the paper. For simplicity, the logical AND symbol, $\cap$, is usually dropped in the probability notation between propositions.

$\neg A$	Not A
$A \cap B$	A and B
$A \cup B$	A or B
$p(A \mid B)$	Conditional probability of A being true given that B is true
$p(A\,B)$	Probability of A and B.
B	A common event, (black ball drawn for an urn)
W	An uncommon event (white ball drawn from an urn), equivalent to $\neg B$ in our examples
B_i	The result of the i'th event is common (i'th ball was black)
B^l	l common events B
$t(...)$	Testimony of an event
n	Number of testimonies of a common event
$t(B)^n$	n testimonies of a common event
C^n	A vector of n real events (W or B) behind the n testimonies
v	The (unknown) probability for the uncommon event to happen
d	The (unknown) probability for a testimony to be wrong, $d = p\big(W\big|t(B)\big) = p(B|t(W))$
J_W, J_B	Intermediate terms used in the calculation to simplify representation

We will be using general Bayesian methodology, which is basically finding out the joint probability distribution for all the parameters relevant to the case and calculating the wanted probability distribution from the joint distribution by using marginalization and the Bayes rule. (This approach is generally applicable and much used in the machine-learning community because from the joint distribution one can systematically calculate whatever probability one happens to need.)

The Bayes rule in one sense is a way to move the propositions to or from the condition-side inside the parenthesis of probabilities, that is, if a proposition is in the conditions-side, we can move it to the side for which probabilities are calculated for (Sivia 1996; Gelman et al. 2003):

$$p(A|B) = p(B|A)\frac{p(A)}{p(B)}.$$

With marginalisation, we can remove unwanted propositions from the parenthesis. That is, we sum over all possible values of the unwanted proposition or variable (Sivia 1996; Gelman et al. 2003):

$$p(A) = \sum_{\textit{Over all values of B}} p(A\,B).$$

So, if we don't know B, we don't need to, and often should not, assume any particular value for it to estimate A. Instead, we take into account all relevant values for B by summing the joint probability of A and B over all values of B. With these two tools, in principle any probability can be calculated in a systematic way, as long as the joint probability for all the relevant propositions can be formulated.

THE BASELINE MODEL

It can be beneficial to think of the following model and discussion in terms of the following simple thought-experiment: We have an urn, which may contain only black (B) and white (W) balls. We have several testimonies of black balls (common events), drawn out of the urn, and one testimony of a white ball (an uncommon event). We will write down a probabilistic model for the case and be able to infer both the best estimates for the frequency of black and white balls in the urn and best estimates for the reliability of the witnesses. Based on these, we should be able answer the following: What is the probability that the one ball, testified to be white, was in fact white?

The general case is this: There are n testimonies t of a common event B, $t(B)^n$, and one testimony for an uncommon event W, $t(W)$. What is the probability of W being in fact true given the testimonies, $p(W\,|\,t(W)\,t(B)^n)$?

We will assume as little as we can about the probability of the witnesses being wrong, d, and about the real probability of the uncommon event happening, v. In effect, we will assign only reasonable prior probabilities for these probabilities and in the end let the data decide the most probable values for these probabilities. (These kinds of priors are often called hyperpriors in the data-analysis literature.)

For simplicity, we will use uniform priors $v \sim U(0,1), \ d \sim U(0,0.2)$ where the notation $x \sim U(a,b)$ denotes that x is distributed uniformly between a and b, i.e. that the probability density for x is constant between a and b and zero elsewhere. With the latter prior we have assumed that in general the testimonies are over 80% reliable, an assumption which will be seen to matter less and less as n increases.

In this case, the joint distribution factors as (see Appendix A for details)

$$p(\,W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ v\ d\,) = p(v)\ p(d)\ p(W|v)\ p(C^n|v)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ p(t(B)^n|C^n d)$$

And the wanted probability is

$$p(W\ |\ t(W)\ t(B)^n) = \frac{p(W\ t(W)\ t(B)^n)}{p(t(W)\ t(B)^n)} = \frac{p(W\ t(W)\ t(B)^n)}{p(W\ t(W)\ t(B)^n) + p(B\ t(W)\ t(B)^n)} = \frac{J_W}{J_W + J_B}$$

where we have terms of the form (by marginalization)

$$J_W = p(W\ t(W)\ t(B)^n) = \sum_{\forall C^n} \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p(W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ v\ d)$$

where the sum is over all possible combinations of the elements of C^n, that is, we marginalize over all the possibilities in $(W_1 \cup B_1) \cap (W_2 \cup B_2) \cap \ldots \cap (W_n \cup B_n)$. After calculations, the terms amount to (see the Appendix A for details)

$$J_W = \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ v(1-d)(2dv - d - v + 1)^n$$

and

$$J_B = \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ (1-v)\ d\ (2dv - d - v + 1)^n$$

which are numerical functions of n. With these terms in hand, we are now in the position to show some results.

Results of the baseline model

To reiterate, in previous works (see e.g. (Earman 2000)), it has been shown that when n common events are taken as data, simple Bayesian inference with reasonable priors assigns a $1/(n+2)$ probability for the uncommon event happening. This simple case of inductive inference does not take into account the

testimonies for the events (common or uncommon), as is done in the current model.

Figure 1 shows the probability for the uncommon event, with one testimony for the uncommon event, as a function of n, the number of testimonies for the common event, $p(W \mid t(W)\, t(B)^n)$. Perhaps surprisingly, as the number of testimonies for the common event (n) grows large, the probability for the uncommon event given the testimonies approaches the value 0.5 asymptotically. This represents a significant difference to the results of the simple inductive inference mentioned above, where the probability approaches zero asymptotically.
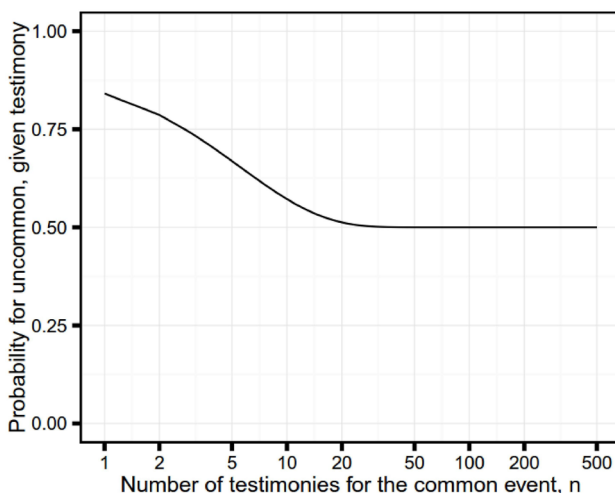
Figure 1. Probability for the uncommon event with one testimony for it, in the face of n testimonies for past common events. Note the logarithmic horizontal axis.

What is the reason for the difference of the results for the present more realistic model? Why does even one testimony for an uncommon event overcome the inductive part of the inference from the large amount of common events?

The basic reason is that, for there to be a large consistent amount of testimonies for the common events, the testimonies themselves have to be reliable. That is, if the testimonies were unreliable, it would be unlikely to have a uniform set of testimonies for the common case. Rather, there would likely be some testimonies for the uncommon event.

Note that the available testimonies affect the likely unreliability of testimonies in the model. So, if the testimonies are homogenous, it will be very likely that testimonies are reliable (low d), and the testimonies have a uniform source

(low v). So, if there are e.g. 10^6 testimonies for the common event, the probability for an uncommon event will be of the order of 10^{-6}, this being the probability for an uncommon event without a testimony for it. However, if there is one testimony for an uncommon event, the likelihood for that testimony being wrong will also be of the order of 10^{-6}.

Figure 2 shows the mean values of the probability of the uncommon event happening (v) and of the probability of a testimony being false (d) for n testimonies for common events and one uncommon event. It is seen that as the number of testimonies (n) for the common event increases, the probability of the uncommon event decreases as expected, but at the same time the probability of a false testimony also decreases, and roughly at the same rate. Hence, even one testimony for an uncommon event is able to balance out the inductive part of the inference and make the uncommon event almost believable.

On the other hand, if there are more past testimonies for the uncommon event, the inductive part of the inference will not be so strong against the uncommon events, resulting in a not-so-low v.
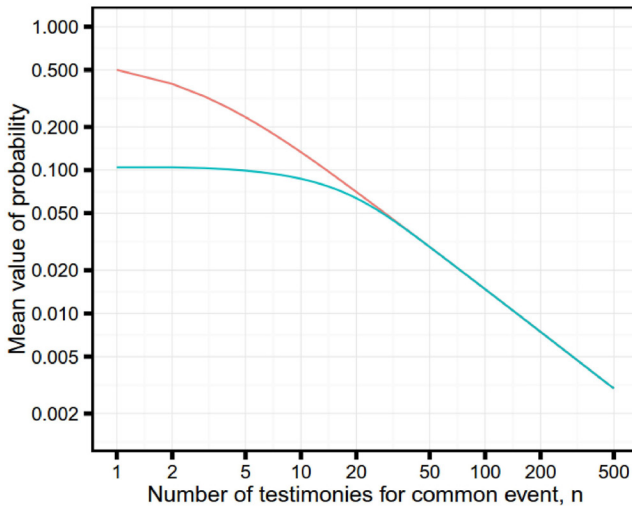

Figure 2. Mean values for the probabilities for the uncommon event (red) and false testimony (blue). Note the logarithmic axes.

APPENDED CASE WITH KNOWN ERRONEOUS TESTIMONIES

Let us now append the previous case by including an l amount of false testimonies for the uncommon event. Our additional data is then $B^l \cap t(W)^l$. The probability we will be interested in is $p(W \mid t(W) \; t(B)^n \; B^l \; t(W)^l)$.

The joint distribution will now factor as (see Appendix B for more details)

$$p(W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l\ v\ d)$$
$$= p(v)\ p(d)\ p(W|v)\ p(C^n|v)p(B^l|v)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ p(t(W)^l|B^l\ d)\ p(\ t(B)^n|C^n\ d)$$

The calculations will proceed as before, with some additional terms. The wanted probability is again of the form

$$p(W\ |\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l) = \frac{J_W'}{J_W' + J_B'}$$

where

$$J_W' = \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ v(1-v)^l(1-d)d^l(2dv - d - v + 1)^n$$

$$J_B' = \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ (1-v)^{l+1}\ d^{l+1}\ (2dv - d - v + 1)^n$$

Results for the case with erroneous testimonies

Figure 3 shows the probability for the uncommon event given the testimonies for the appended case. Shown are cases with the number of known false testimonies $l = 0, 1, 3, 10,$ and 50.
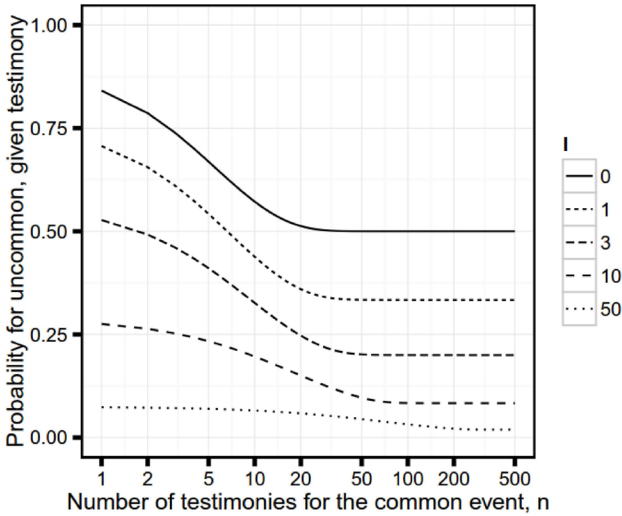

Figure 3. Probability for the uncommon event with one testimony for it, in the face of n testimonies for a common event, and different amounts of known false testimonies. Note the logarithmic horizontal axis.

Figure 4 shows the mean values of the probabilities of the uncommon event happening (v) and for a testimony being false (d) for cases with different number of known false testimonies for the uncommon event.
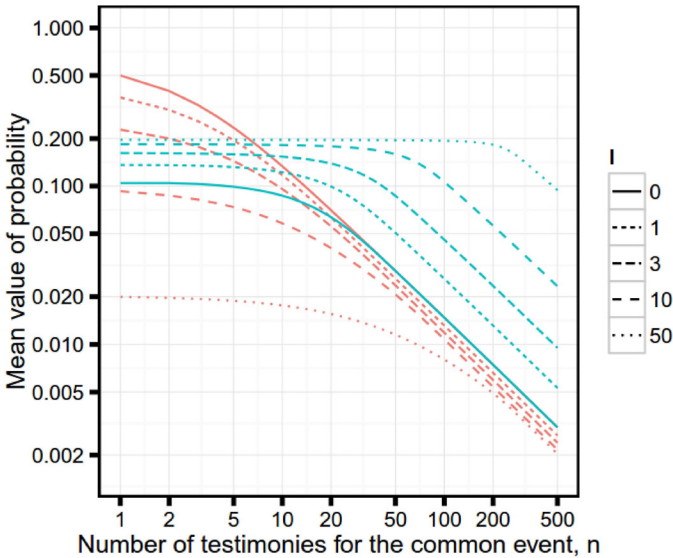

Figure 4. Mean values for the probabilities for the uncommon event (red) and false testimony (blue), given a number l of known false testimonies. Note the logarithmic axes.

One can see from the results that a small amount of known false testimonies for uncommon events does not significantly alter the believability of an uncommon event for which one testimony is not known to be false. For example, with three known false testimonies for an uncommon event and a large number of testimonies for common events, the probability for an uncommon event given one testimony for it is still roughly 0.2.

DISCUSSION

In the present model only a few assumptions were made and e.g. the probabilities for an uncommon event and the testimonies were left open and decided based on the available data. Yet, and importantly, it was assumed that the probability of a false testimony is symmetric, that is, that it is as likely for a person to make a mistake in the testimony for an uncommon as in

the testimony for a common event. Hence, the number of testimonies for a common event had a bearing on the reliability on testimonies in general and hence also for the testimony for the uncommon event. It might be tempting to disconnect the two probabilities or to assume that a testimony for an uncommon event is more likely to be false than a testimony for a common event. While the former is possible, it would be hard to maintain that there is no connection between the reliability for the testimonies of uncommon and common events, the disconnection possibly leading to absurd results for low values of n. The latter option of assuming that the testimonies for uncommon events are less reliable seems biased. Because such an assumption would equate bringing more information to bear on the case, there should be a clear and agreed-on grounding for making this assumption. The author suspects that such an assumption is not sustainable, but leaves that for further, more nuanced, discussions.

For simplicity, the present model has two outcomes, a common and an uncommon event. In several applications, there will be many different kinds of common and uncommon outcomes. In this case, as noted earlier, different kinds of common or uncommon events can be combined into a single set of outcomes and the analysis will then proceed the same as for the binary case. One may want to use a different prior distribution for v, e.g. a distribution concentrated more on values above 0.5 would give more probability for common outcomes, which might be reasonable if they are more numerous in type. However, as long as the prior is reasonable, giving a non-zero possibility for both outcomes, the effect of this choice will dwindle as the number of testimonies increases. In this case one might also relax the assumption about the symmetricity of probabilities for testimonies being wrong. Whether or not one should relax the assumption here, depends on the model of testimony one might entertain. If the source of the testimony is taken to be in some sense intrinsically random, with errors being made uniformly from the truth to random outcomes, distributed uniformly to all possible outcomes, the option with more numerous outcomes will be more falsely testified-to. In cases where the types of common outcomes are more numerous, this would make uncommon events more plausible given a testimony for it, and vice versa. Note that the present model does not use probabilities for testimonies, but instead probabilities for a testimony when the true event is known. That is, the

model does not use terms of the form $p(t(B))$, which are highly dependent on frequencies of occurrence, but terms of the form $p(t(B)|W)$, which are not dependent on frequencies of occurrence (v). For cases where testimony is less random in this sense, i.e. not heavily dependent on the number of different possible outcomes, the present simple assumption of symmetric probability for false testimonies is quite plausible.

For the model with known false testimonies for the uncommon event, the false testimonies might be viewed as a reason to relax the symmetry of the reliability of the testimonies of common and uncommon events. This exercise and grounding thereof is also left for further study on the matter.

For most readers, the present result will be intuitively acceptable in well-defined and simple cases. Take the urn with black and possibly some white balls. However many testimonies of black balls drawn from the urn, already one testimony of a white ball is enough to make the claim of a white ball almost believable. Similarly, while most testimonies report white swans and black crows, a bird watcher's testimony of a black swan or a white crow should be met with an open mind (Taleb 2007). Indeed, in the words of John Stuart Mill: "No amount of observations of white swans can allow the inference that all swans are white, but the observation of a single black swan is sufficient to refute that conclusion". Also along these lines, the decades of crystallographic experiments and articles observing only periodic crystals should not have been taken as strong evidence against D. Shechtman's reports about quasicrystals (D. Shechtman et al. 1984; Daniel Shechtman 2013).

In these easy-to-agree cases we do not have additional underlying assumptions or information against the uncommon event happening, or against the reliability of the particular witness. The inference is based purely on induction from testimonies of many common events. As was demonstrated, the strength of proper inductive inference from testimonies is rather weak and can be (almost) overcome with one (average) witness to the contrary.

Because the baseline results is 0.5 probability for an uncommon event based on one (normal) testimony, it is often the particulars of each case that decide whether or not we should believe the claim. Hence, it is not so much induction but additional information or assumptions about reality or about the reliability or unreliability of a witness that make claims about uncommon events believable or unbelievable. In practice, our background knowl-

edge leads to an intuition about the believability of a claim. Upon enlarging on the present baseline result, our aim will be to codify relevant parts from our background information to probabilistic form, enabling inference with transparent assumptions in each particular case.

Let us briefly consider a claim of an uncommon event which is intuitively almost certainly false: Let's say you walk down the street, and a man in a tin-foil hat tells you that the government is using orbital mind control rays to make everyone an unwitting slave to Beyoncé. This is the only testimony you have received to this effect and every other piece of testimony you have supports the negation of this claim. Should you now adopt a surprisingly high credence that the man in the tin foil hat is correct?

Here, we are apt to disbelieve the claim, not only because of induction, which would only take us to a tie, but because the particulars of the case make the claim unbelievable: the unfashionable hat, the lack of motive for the government to make Beyoncé a puppet-master of the world, most people in fact not being unwitting slaves to Beyoncé, the intuitive and scientific difficulties related to controlling particular thoughts with physical processes, let alone with "rays", and so on. Each of these particulars would lower the probability of the claim by one to several orders of magnitude. So, we should disbelieve the claim, partly based on induction, and importantly because of the several improbable particulars.

This is of course analogous to the criminal cases in the courts. Whether or not a defendant has a criminal history matters only somewhat. While the defense attorney could bring thousands of testimonies about events of non-criminal conduct on part of the defendant, this, the inductive part of inference, would matter little. The particulars of the case will matter much more.

Similarly, in the case of supernatural miracles, it is likely not be the inductive part of inference which makes a miracle claim intuitively unbelievable to many, but additional assumptions (or lack thereof) about underlying reality. Thus, in the case of supernatural miracles, it is likely that background assumptions about unbreakable natural laws and closed systems (*ceteris paribus* assumptions), are the main reason for miracle claims being intuitively unbelievable.

CONCLUSIONS

The main result of the paper is that, when we have a large amount of testimonies for a common event and even only one testimony for an uncommon event, the probability we should assign for the uncommon event is surprisingly large, namely 0.5. This is assuming that, without information to the contrary, we are treating all the testimonies the same way, and we are not assuming additional structure for reality behind the events.

The result underlines the fact that trying to put limits on what can happen or will happen in the future, based on what has been testified to have happened in the past, is always an uncertain form of inference, far from the comforting certainty often ascribed to it. Sweeping Humean claims against uncommon events based on numerous common events are, in fact, incorrect.

In addition, for the case with some known-false testimonies for the uncommon event, the probability for the uncommon event is lower but not significantly so. Hence, the additional Humean argument against uncommon events based on some false testimonies of uncommon events does not seem to have much force either.

The result is also relevant for science; We should be more open to testimonies for "weird" empirical results which may not be in line with previous measurements or the current theoretical understanding. Daniel Shechtman's discovery of quasicrystals represents one such case.

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APPENDIX A DETAILED CALCULATIONS FOR THE BASELINE MODEL

Joint factorization

Figure A1 gives the dependencies between the parameters of the model as a directed acyclic graph (Pearl 1997; Neapolitan 2004)
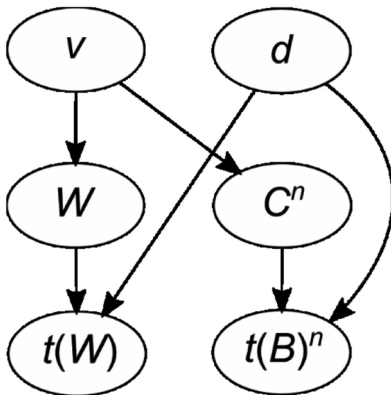

Figure A1. Directed acyclic graph of the case.

The arrows in the graph represent direct probabilistic dependencies between the parameters of the model. The natural factorization of the joint distribution can be read from the DAG (Neapolitan 2004) to be

$$p(W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ v\ d\ ) = p(v)\ p(d)\ p(W|v)\ p(C^n|v)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ p(t(B)^n|C^n d)$$

Summation over possibilities of C^n

Recall that in the simple model we have two terms of the form

$$J_W = p(W\ t(W)\ t(B)^n) = \sum_{\forall C^n} \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p(W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ v\ d)$$

In this section we will calculate this term, notably the sum over all possibilities of C^n. Now

$$J_W = \sum_{\forall C^n} \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p(v)\ p(d)\ p(W|v)\ p(C^n|v)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ p(t(B)^n|C^n d)$$

$$= \int_0^1 dv\ p(v)\ p(W|v) \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p(d)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d) \sum_{\forall C^n} p(C^n|v)\ p(t(B)^n|C^n d)$$

$$= c \int_0^1 dv\ p(W|v) \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ S_n\ ,$$

where the constant c is a product of the constant priors of v and d, and

$$p(W|v) = v$$

$$p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d) = 1 - d$$

$$S_n = \sum_{\forall C^n} p(C^n|v)\ p(t(B)^n|C^n d) = (1 - v - d + 2vd)^n$$

The following is an inductive proof for the last identity:

For $S2$, the sum is over the possibilities $(W_1 \cup B_1) \cap (W_2 \cup B_2)$

$$S_2 = p(W_1\ W_2\ |\ v)\ p(t(B_1)t(B_2)\ |\ W_1\ W_2\ d) + p(W_1\ B_2\ |\ v)\ p(t(B_1)t(B_2)\ |\ W_1\ B_2\ d)$$
$$+ p(B_1\ W_2\ |\ v)\ p(t(B_1)t(B_2)\ |\ B_1\ W_2\ d) + p(B_1\ B_2\ |\ v)\ p(t(B_1)t(B_2)\ |B_1\ B_2\ d)$$
$$= v^2 d^2 + 2v(1 - v)d(1 - d) + (1 - v)^2(1 - d)^2 = (1 - v - d + 2vd)^2.$$

Next, with a lower case c_i we will denote the i'th element of C^n and similarly for $t(B)^n$. For $S_n + 1$, we have

$$S_{n+1} = \sum_{\forall C^{n+1}} p(C^{n+1}|v)\ p(t(B)^{n+1}|C^{n+1}d) = \sum_{\forall c_{n+1}} \sum_{\forall C^n} p(C^n c_{n+1}|v)\ p(t(B)^n t(B)_{n+1}|C^n c_{n+1} d)$$

$$= \sum_{\forall c_{n+1}} \sum_{\forall C^n} p(C^n|v)\ p(c_{n+1}|v)\ p(t(B)^n|C^n d)\ p(t(B)_{n+1}|c_{n+1} d)$$

$$= S_n \sum_{\forall c_{n+1}} p(c_{n+1}|v)p(t(B)_{n+1}|c_{n+1}d) = (1 - v - d + 2vd)^{n+1}\ \blacksquare$$

APPENDIX B DETAILED CALCULATIONS FOR THE CASE WITH ERRONEOUS TESTIMONIES

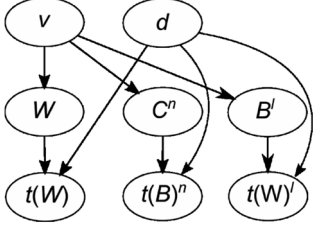Figure B1 gives the dependencies between the parameters of the model.

Figure B1. A directed acyclic graph of the model with erraneous testimonies.

Again, the joint distribution can be read from the graph to be

$$p\big(W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l\ v\ d\big)$$
$$= p(v)\ p(d)\ p(W|v)\ p(C^n|v)p(B^l|v)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ p\big(t(W)^l|B^l\ d\big)\ p(\ t(B)^n|C^n\ d)$$

And the wanted probability is

$$p\big(W\ |\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l\big) = \frac{p\big(W\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l\big)}{p\big(t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l\big)} = \frac{J_W{}'}{J_W{}' + J_B{}'}$$

Where

$$J_W' = \sum_{\forall C^n} \int_0^1 dv \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p\big(W\ C^n\ t(W)\ t(B)^n\ B^l\ t(W)^l\ v\ d\big)$$

$$= \int_0^1 dv\ p(v)\ p(W|v)p\big(B^l|v\big) \int_0^{0.2} dd\ p(d)\ p(t(W)\ |\ W\ d)\ p\big(t(W)^l|B^l\ d\big) \sum_{\forall C^n} p(C^n|v)\ p(\ t(B)^n|C^n\ d)$$

$$= c \int_0^1 dv\ v(1-v)^l \int_0^{0.2} dd\ (1-d)d^l\ S_n.$$

And similarly

$$J_B' = c \int_0^1 dv\ (1-v)^{l+1} \int_0^{0.2} dd\ d^{l+1}\ S_n.$$

ATONEMENT'S AXIOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

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Abstract. According to the *Felix Culpa Theodicy,* possible worlds that contain atonement and incarnation have a high value, and in light of this value God is justified in actualizing such a world, despite all of the moral evil that has accompanied it. Focusing upon Alvin Plantinga's articulation of this theodicy, this paper investigates *FCT* on the basis of normative ethical considerations, and argues for the following position. On the one hand, the deontic status of at least some actions depends upon the consequences of those actions. On the other hand, the existence of atonement depends upon the deontic status of at least one action. Under certain circumstances, this two-way dependence yields a contradiction if atonement has the kind of value conferred upon it by *FCT*. So this theodicy cannot be true. This paper concludes by discussing some implications for Molinism and evidential arguments from moral evil.

In certain theological contexts the value of atonement is considered to either surpass many states of affairs of great value, or be unsurpassable in value. The *Felix Culpa Theodicy* (*FCT*) taps into this theological perspective from the Christian tradition.[1] According to this theodicy, God is morally justified in actualizing a world with divine atonement (and incarnation), despite all of the moral evil that has accompanied it, precisely because of the great value of atonement (and incarnation).

Alvin Plantinga offers a characteristically thorough articulation and defense of this theodicy within a Molinist framework.[2] While this *FCT* has raised a variety of philosophical and theological questions that merit serious attention,[3] this

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[1]   Stemming from the Roman Catholic Easter Vigil liturgy, 'Felix Culpa' means happy/blessed fault/fall. In other words, humanity's "fall" into sin is, all things considered, a good thing since it results in incarnation and atonement.

[2]   Alvin Plantinga, "Superlapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'", in Peter van Inwagen (ed.), *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Eerdmans Press, 2004), 1–25.

[3]   See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Plantinga On 'Felix Culpa': Analysis and Critique", *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008): 123–140; Kevin Diller, "Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good

paper wishes to explore new territory by arguing that *FCT* cannot be true because there must be limits to the value of atonement. This conclusion is reached in the following manner.

While the deontic status of at least some actions depends upon the consequences of those actions, the existence of atonement depends upon the deontic status of at least one action. If atonement is assumed to be unsurpassable in value, then, under certain circumstances, such a two-way dependence yields a contradiction. The lesson to be gleamed is that atonement cannot be unsurpassable in value, or surpass the value of at least some possible states of affairs in which someone freely does the right thing for the right reasons. After presenting this argument, this paper concludes by discussing some implications for Molinism and evidential arguments from moral evil.

THE FELIX CULPA THEODICY

Let's define moral evil in theological terms: it is an evil that results from an agent freely performing a sinful action. Now consider the following two types of worlds:

> A **No Evil** world is one in which free (creaturely) agents exist, at least some of these creatures freely perform morally right actions, and none of them freely perform sinful actions. Moreover, there is no evil whatsoever.

> A **Moral Evil** world is one in which at least one (creaturely) agent freely performs at least one sinful action.[4]

With these two types of worlds in mind, Plantinga's *FCT* may be characterized as follows:

World? Questions for Alvin Plantinga's *Felix Culpa* Theodicy", *Faith and Philosophy* 25 (2008): 87–101; Hud Hudson, "*Felix Culpa!*" in Trent Dougherty and Jerry Walls (eds), *Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). This paper sidesteps concerns with the Christian concept of atonement as raised in David Lewis, "Do We Believe in Penal Substitution?" *Philosophical Papers* 26 (1997): 203–209.

4   This paper remains agnostic as to whether we should consider an action or attitude that is outside of the volitional control of an agent to be sinful. See Robert Merrihew Adams, "Involuntary Sins", *Philosophical Review* 94 (1985): 3–31.

The **Felix Culpa Theodicy** (*FCT*) God has most reason, all things considered, to prefer a *Moral Evil* world that contains incarnation and atonement, rather than a *No Evil* world because the following two claims are true:

The **Strong Value Assumption** (*SVA*) Any world W that contains incarnation and atonement is such that any other type of world is worse than W.[5]

Necessary Moral Evil (*NME*) Moral evil is a necessary condition for incarnation and atonement.[6]

Plantinga suggests that the *SVA* can be replaced with either of the following two assumptions:

The **Moderate Value Assumption** (*MVA*) For any pair of worlds W and W*, such that:

- In W there are creatures that always freely perform morally right actions, and there is no incarnation and atonement.

- In W* the same (and only the same) creatures that exist in W exist in this world, and at least some of those creatures sometimes freely perform sinful actions, and such actions result in incarnation and atonement.

W* is a better world than W.[7]

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5   Plantinga's description of *SVA* has been simplified. Here is the full quote by Plantinga:
   "[A]ny world with incarnation and atonement is of infinite value by virtue of containing two goods of infinite value: the existence of God and incarnation and atonement. 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" ("Superlapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'", 9).

6   Plantinga says that "a necessary condition of Atonement is sin and evil" ("Superlapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'", 10–11), although he seems to suggest in other places that sin is also a necessary condition for incarnation since he seems to treat these goods as inseparable (Adams, "Plantinga On 'Felix Culpa'", 131; Diller, "Are Sin and Evil Necessary for a Really Good World?", 91–92). While it appears that incarnation can exist without atonement (or sin), this paper assumes for the sake of argument that incarnation and atonement are in fact inseparable goods, and that both require sin.

7   Plantinga's description of *MVA* has been simplified. Here is the full quote by Plantinga:
   "Contrast two kinds of possible worlds. In the first kind, there are free creatures who always do only what is right, who live in love and harmony with God and each other,

The **Weak Value Assumption** (*WVA*) Among worlds of great value, some of them include incarnation and atonement.[8]

As Marilyn McCord Adams notes, *WVA* is consistent with the hypothesis that a world in which all creatures freely refrain from sinning is better than a world in which all of those creatures freely sin and incarnation and atonement occur.[9] So, it appears that *WVA* is too weak for *FCT* to count as a successful theodicy. After all, if the *FCT* proponent accepts *WVA* and rejects the other two assumptions, then God prefers less than the best.[10] While this paper will continue to assume that *FCT* is committed to *SVA*, the forthcoming argument may similarly apply to a version of *FCT* that is only committed to *MVA* (see footnote 21).[11]

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and do so, let's add, through all eternity. Now for each of these worlds W of this kind, there is a world W* of the second kind. In W* God creates the very same creatures as in W; but in W* these free creatures rebel against him, fall into sin and wickedness, turn their backs upon God. In W*, however, God graciously provides a means of salvation by way of incarnation and atonement. My claim is that for any such worlds W and W*, W* is a better world than W" ("Superlapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa'", 9).

8   Ibid., 10.

9   "Plantinga On 'Felix Culpa'", 126–127.

10   The present discussion assumes that all worlds are comparable in value. For a challenge to this assumption, see e.g. Klaas J. Kraay, "Incommensurability, Incomparability, and God's Choice of a World", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69 (2011): 91–102.

11   *MVA* is consistent with the hypothesis that there is some good beyond our ken that is greater than the combined goods of incarnation and atonement, and that this good is incompatible with the existence of creatures (or at least free creatures). Call this hypothesis '*H*'. If *H* is true, then God apparently prefers less than the best, which is once again an unacceptable result. So, in order for *FCT* to be a successful theodicy, it must reject *H* since it must reject the claim that God prefers less than the best. A skeptical theist apparently cannot consistently deny *H*, as argued by Hud Hudson, "Felix Culpa!" in Trent Dougherty and Jerry Walls (eds.), *Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming). After all, the skeptical theist's central point is that we should not be overly confident in our evaluative judgments for the following reason: there may be goods and evils beyond our ken, and there may be various entailment relations between goods and evils that are similarly beyond our ken (cf. Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil", *Noûs* 35 (2001): 278–296). Plantinga appears to endorse a version of skeptical theism given his agnosticism about the following principle in Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley, *Knowledge of God* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 173:

(C1) If A is an action that, judged by known rightmaking and wrongmaking properties, is prima facie very seriously wrong, then the probability that action A is morally wrong,

Notice that the above formulation of *FCT* crucially depends upon how we define a sinful action, as well as how we view the relationship between a sinful action and various normative concepts. There appear to be three ways in which we may characterize a sinful action:

(a) An agent S's ϕ–ing is sinful *iff* S's ϕ–ing is objectively morally wrong.

(b) An agent S's ϕ–ing is sinful *iff* S is blameworthy for ϕ–ing.

(c) An agent S's ϕ–ing is sinful *iff* S is blameworthy for ϕ–ing and S's ϕ–ing is objectively morally wrong.

Some of these accounts are consistent with one another. To illustrate, according to the Objective View of blameworthiness, necessarily, if S is blameworthy for ϕ–ing, then it was objectively morally wrong for S to ϕ.[12] So, if one accepts the Objective View and (b), then one is rationally committed to (c).[13] But, to repeat, this paper remains neutral about which of the above accounts of a sinful action is correct.[14, 15]

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all relevant rightmaking and wrongmaking properties considered, both known and unknown, is greater than one half.

Whether skeptical theism warrants an agnostic stance towards (C_1) is an issue that cannot be resolved here.

12   Cf. Ishtiyaque Haji, *Moral Appraisability: Puzzles, Proposals and Perplexities* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 141.

13   For an argument against the Objective View, see e.g. Justin Capes, "Blameworthiness Without Wrongdoing", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (2012): 417–437.

14   A reviewer suggests that, within the Judeo-Christian tradition, atonement is also necessary for unintentional sin. This is a case in which one sins by performing an action that is an unavoidable part of achieving a greater good. Perhaps Sophie's infamous choice is sinful even though it was an unavoidable part of achieving a greater good — the greater good of not sacrificing both children. One concern with this account of a sinful action is that God has apparently performed numerous sinful actions since many of God's actions (including God's omissions) involve harming other individuals, even if for the sake of a greater good. This paper assumes, however, that it is necessarily false that God performs sinful actions, whether intentional or unintentional. The theist could attempt to explain why such an account of a sinful action doesn't apply to God's activity in light of some features that are unique to God. This strategy cannot be fully evaluated here.

15   This paper implicitly assumes that all actions are either objectively morally right or objectively morally wrong. However, for various reasons this position is not unanimously endorsed. See Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Alastair Norcross, "The Scalar Approach to Utilitarianism", in Henry West (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's*

THE ARGUMENT

In order for the argument to work on any of the three accounts of a sinful action, we must first take a closer look at blameworthiness. Offering necessary and sufficient conditions for blameworthiness is no easy task. For example, there is the controversial issue of whether blameworthiness requires a dual power to either do something or refrain from doing it, or whether blameworthiness only requires some sort of "one-way" power, such as being reasons-responsive.[16] For our purposes, we can set aside the highly contentious control condition for blameworthiness.[17] Instead, this paper will focus on the epistemic condition.

Many uphold the view that an agent is blameworthy for ϕ–ing only if she *believed* that ϕ–ing was objectively morally wrong. This view is not entirely uncontroversial, however, since some defend the position that psychopaths can be blameworthy for their actions,[18] or that one can be blameworthy for an action that is due to a morally reprehensible belief that is the result of motivated irrationality.[19] So, in order to avoid this controversy, this paper only upholds a weak claim concerning jointly *sufficient* conditions for blameworthiness:

Utilitarianism (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006): 217–232; John Hacker-Wright, "Virtue Ethics Without Right Action: Anscombe, Foot, and Contemporary Virtue Ethics", *Journal of Value Inquiry* 44: (2010): 209–224.

16   Cf. John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

17   Although the present discussion takes for granted the truth of libertarianism, we cannot assume that blameworthiness requires the ability to do otherwise. This is because there are incompatibilists who reject the Principle of Alternative Possibilities on the basis of Frankfurt-style cases. See, e.g., Eleonore Stump, "Libertarian Freedom and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities", in Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard Snyder (eds.), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1996): 73–88; Derk Pereboom, *Living Without Free Will* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1-22; David Hunt, "Moral Responsibility and Unavoidable Action", *Philosophical Studies* 97 (2005): 195–227.

18   See, e.g., Patricia S. Greenspan, "Responsible Psychopaths", *Philosophical Psychology* 16 (2003): 417–429; Matthew Talbert, "Blame and Responsiveness to Moral Reasons: Are Psychopaths Blameworthy?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 89 (2008): 516–535.

19   Cf. Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 103.

BLAME An agent S who ϕ–s is blameworthy for ϕ–ing if the following conditions obtain:

i. S satisfies the control condition for moral responsibility (whatever exactly that amounts to).

ii. S nonculpably believes that S can either ϕ or refrain from ϕ–ing.

iii. S nonculpably believes truly that ϕ–ing is objectively morally wrong.

iv. S nonculpably believes truly that refraining from ϕ–ing is not objectively morally wrong.

If some further condition needs to be supplemented to *BLAME*, one is at liberty to add it in since doing so will arguably not affect the forthcoming argument. Now, in order to see how *BLAME* poses a challenge for *FCT*, we need to consider two cases. The first one is fairly ordinary:

> **iPod 1** Diego picks up an iPod that fell out of the back pocket of the person walking in front of him. Diego nonculpably believes that he can either keep the iPod or give it back. Additionally, Diego nonculpably believes truly that keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong, and that returning it to the owner is not objectively morally wrong. Moreover, Diego satisfies the control condition for moral responsibility.

According to *BLAME*, if Diego keeps the iPod, then he is blameworthy for doing so. Now consider a variant of this case that brings *FCT* into focus:

> **iPod 2** Ida finds herself in the same situation that Diego finds himself in as described in *iPod 1*, but with the following modifications. Ida knows the following: No one else ever has or will perform a sinful action, and Ida has never performed a sinful action. Moreover, after she decides to either keep the iPod or give it back, Ida will unfortunately die as a result of an unexpected heart failure one minute later. So, whether Ida performs a sinful action in the next moment will determine whether there is any sin at all in Ida's world since this is the last opportunity for Ida to perform a sinful action. Ida satisfies the control condition for moral responsibility. So Ida satisfies condition (i) of BLAME. Ida also nonculpably believes

that she can either keep the iPod or give it back to the owner. So Ida satisfies condition (ii) of BLAME. Between the acts of keeping the iPod and returning it, whichever act is in fact objectively morally wrong, Ida nonculpably believes (*de re*) that that act is objectively morally wrong. And whichever act is in fact not objectively morally wrong, Ida nonculpably believes (*de re*) that that act is not objectively morally wrong. So Ida satisfies conditions (iii) and (iv) of BLAME. Ida performs the action that she knows is in fact objectively morally wrong. So, given *BLAME*, Ida is blameworthy for performing one of these actions (and Ida knows this). Since Ida knowingly performs a sinful action, and Ida knows that *FCT* is true, Ida thus knows that her sinful action will result in incarnation and atonement because (as a matter of stipulation) she knows that all other requirements for incarnation and atonement will be satisfied if she performs a sinful action.

Although *iPod 2* doesn't specify which action is in fact objectively morally wrong, the following is nevertheless true:

(1) If keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong, then Ida keeps the iPod.

Since Ida performs an objectively morally wrong action for which she is blameworthy, it is dialectically permissible to stipulate that Ida performs a sinful action on any of the three aforementioned accounts of a sinful action. So the following is true:

(2) If Ida keeps the iPod, then Ida's keeping the iPod is sinful.

It follows from premises (1) and (2) that:

(3) If keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong, then Ida's keeping the iPod is sinful.

Since *iPod 2* says that Ida knows that *FCT* is true, and since knowledge is factive, *iPod 2* assumes that *FCT* is true. Now, recall that a component of *FCT*, *Necessary Moral Evil* (*NME*), says that atonement and incarnation require a sinful action. So, since *iPod 2* says that all *other* requirements for incarnation and atonement will be satisfied, the following is true:

(4) If Ida's keeping the iPod is sinful, then Ida's keeping the iPod results in atonement and incarnation.

It follows from premises (3) and (4) that:

(5) If keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong, then Ida's keeping the iPod results in atonement and incarnation.

The problem for *FCT* now begins to emerge. If keeping the iPod results in atonement and incarnation then keeping the iPod cannot be objectively morally wrong on any remotely plausible normative ethical theory for the following reason. It would not be objectively morally wrong to keep the iPod if doing so resulted in the great good of eradicating global poverty. To the contrary, one would have an objective moral obligation to keep the iPod in such circumstances. Moreover, according to the *Strong Value Assumption* (*SVA*) atonement (and incarnation) are apparently even greater goods than the good of eradicating global poverty. So, *a fortiori*, it would not be objectively morally wrong to keep the iPod if doing so resulted in incarnation and atonement.[20] So it follows from *SVA* that:

(6) If Ida's keeping the iPod results in incarnation and atonement, then it's not the case that Ida's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong.[21]

It follows from premises (5) and (6) that:

(7) If Ida's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong, then it's not the case that Ida's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong.

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20 Some normative ethical theories maintain that certain types of actions (such as torture) are necessarily objectively morally wrong, irrespective of the consequences of such an action. Even so, no remotely plausible normative ethical theory maintains that *all* types of actions are either necessarily objectively morally right or wrong respectively. See Douglas W. Portmore, "Consequentializing", *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2009): 329–347. So in order to construct the intended argument against *FCT*, all we need to do is pick out a type of action that one will not consider to be necessarily objectively morally wrong, such as the act of keeping someone's iPod. If you think that this type of action is necessarily objectively morally wrong, then pick instead a type of action that will accomplish the same desired result.

21 If the *FCT* proponent were to replace *SVA* with *MVA*, then incarnation and atonement may not be goods of infinite value. Nevertheless, *MVA* implies that these goods are of such a great value that it would be better, all things considered, if Ida were to perform a sinful action. So premise (6) also follows from *MVA*.

Notice that by replacing the act of *keeping* the iPod with *returning* it to the owner throughout this entire line of reasoning, we can similarly establish the following conclusion:

(8) If Ida's returning the iPod is objectively morally wrong, then it's not the case that Ida's returning the iPod is objectively morally wrong.

Given the truth of (7) and (8), we can show that *iPod 2* yields a contradiction, and thus is impossible. For any world W, if proposition P is true in W, then the following material conditional is false in W: 'if P, then not-P'. Now suppose that 'K' refers to the proposition, 'Ida's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong', and that 'R' refers to the proposition, 'Ida's returning the iPod is objectively morally wrong'. K is true *iff* R is false. If K is true, then (7) is false. If R is true, then (8) is false. So whether K is true or R is true, we arrive at a contradiction.

Since *iPod 2* results in a contradiction, *iPod 2* is impossible. This paper contends that the best explanation for why *iPod 2* is impossible is that it assumes the truth of *FCT*. The argument may be formalized as follows:

(9) If (7) and (8), then *iPod 2* is impossible.

(10) *iPod 2* is impossible. [(7), (8), (9)]

(11) If (10), then *FCT* is (necessarily) false.

(12) *FCT* is (necessarily) false. [(10), (11)]

Premise (11) is the crucial one in this argument. The thought behind this premise is that, with the exception of *FCT*, there are no controversial normative or metaphysical assumptions at play in *iPod 2*, or in the argument that led to (7) and (8). So, since we need an explanation for *why iPod 2* is impossible, the best explanation is that *FCT* is (necessarily) false.

Notice that if *FCT* were *possibly* true, then we wouldn't have an explanation for why *iPod 2* is impossible. Moreover, since *SVA* and *NME* are either necessary truths or necessary falsehoods, and since *FCT* concerns God's rea-

sons for preferring the actuality of the best type of world, it is safe to assume that *FCT* is either necessarily true or necessarily false anyway.[22]

Can the *FCT* proponent explain the impossibility of *iPod 2* in some other manner? Let's take another look at the assumptions that led to (7) and (8). There doesn't appear to be any plausible account of a sinful action that is incompatible with (a)–(c). So, the assumption that the disjunction of (a)–(c) is true seems safe. Next, *BLAME* offers merely sufficient conditions for blameworthiness while simultaneously sidestepping the ongoing debate about the control condition for moral responsibility. So *BLAME* also seems reasonable. Moreover, as previously indicated, even if one thinks that some condition must be added to *BLAME*, we could simply stipulate that Ida also satisfies that condition in *iPod 2*. So, revising *BLAME* would arguably not allow one to escape (7) or (8). In that case, it does appear that the only assumption in *iPod 2* that can plausibly be given up is the truth of *FCT* itself. Nevertheless, we do not yet have a sufficient grasp as to *why* the truth of *FCT* in *iPod 2* leads to a contradiction.

Recall that, according to *FCT*, whether some action results in incarnation and atonement depends upon the deontic status of that action. More specifically, whether an action results in incarnation and atonement depends upon whether that action is sinful. Under certain circumstances, whether an action is sinful can depend upon whether that action is objectively morally wrong, regardless of which account of a sinful action one adopts, as shown above with respect to *iPod 2*. However, according to any remotely plausible normative ethical theory, the deontic status of at least some actions depends upon the consequences of those actions.

So, under the right circumstances (such as *iPod 2*), an impossible two-way dependence obtains which results in a contradiction: on the one hand, whether Ida's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong depends upon the consequences of that action. But on the other hand, according to *FCT*, the consequences of Ida's keeping the iPod depend upon whether that action is objectively morally wrong; and similarly for the act of returning the iPod. So, the culprit that leads to a contradiction in *iPod 2* is the assumption that *FCT* is true. In order to demonstrate this point further, let's inspect a non-theological case that is structurally similar to *iPod 2*.

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22   I am assuming that, unlike God's reasons for actions, God's reasons for preferring a certain possibility don't depend upon God's abilities, or upon which worlds are feasible for God.

iPod 3 Jill finds herself in the same situation that Diego finds him-self in as described in *iPod 1*, but with the following modifications: Jill knows that there is a powerful agent, Bob, who will make millions of people infinitely happy if and only if Jill performs an objectively mor-ally wrong action in the next moment, and such happiness will not be outweighed by any bad states of affairs that result from Jill's action.

Just like *iPod 2*, *iPod 3* appears to be impossible, and for similar reasons. On the one hand, whether Jill's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong depends upon the consequences of that action. On the other hand, the consequences of Jill's keeping the iPod depend upon whether that action is objectively morally wrong. So, just like *iPod 2*, *iPod 3* is impossible because it leads to an impossible two-way dependence that results in a contradiction. The source of this contra-diction is the following stipulation: Jill's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong *iff* that action results in an outcome that would render that action ob-jectively morally right (viz. the outcome of millions of people enjoying infinite happiness). Similarly, the source of the contradiction in *iPod 2* is *FCT* since it implies the following: Ida's keeping the iPod is objectively morally wrong *iff* that action results in an outcome that would render that action objectively morally right (viz. the outcome of incarnation and atonement).

Regardless of the extent to which incarnation and atonement are great goods, they cannot play the impossible role of depending upon the existence of an objectively morally wrong action if refraining from performing this ac-tion would result in a much worse outcome (viz. the absence of incarnation and atonement). So, it is precisely the assumption that atonement and incar-nation are unsurpassable goods that precludes the possibility of these goods depending upon at least one objectively morally wrong action. I now turn to the final section that discusses some implications for Molinism and eviden-tial arguments from moral evil.

MOLINISM AND MORAL EVIL

In order to connect the argument's conclusions with broader issues con-cerning theism and evil, it will be useful to first summarize Plantinga's re-sponse to Mackie's logical problem of evil.

In defense of the logical problem of evil, J.L. Mackie argued that God and evil cannot coexist because the following is true:

> (*) "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".[23]

Plantinga (1974: ch. 9) developed the *Free Will Defense* (*FWD*) in order to show that (*) is false, and that God and evil can in fact coexist. Plantinga's *FWD* employs a Molinist framework, such that logically prior to God's decision to weakly actualize[24] some world, there are contingently true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (*CCFs*), where such freedom is understood in accordance with libertarianism.[25]

Since the truth-values of these *CCFs* are beyond God's control, there are limits to what an omnipotent being can do. God can only weakly actualize the *feasible* worlds. A world *w* is feasible (for God) *iff* the creaturely world-type that is in fact true is true in *w*. A creaturely world-type is an exhaustive set of *CCFs*. So a creaturely world-type is true *iff* all of the *CCFs* that are members of this world-type are true (Flint 1998: 46–54). Since God cannot control which creaturely world-type is in fact true, God must choose a world in which the true creaturely world-type is also true in that world.

A world containing creatures that sometimes act freely is more valuable, all other things being equal, to a world in which there are no free creatures (Plantinga 1974: 166). Hence, it is possibly true that the *best* world God can weakly actualize is one that contains at least some moral evil. So God and evil *can* in fact coexist, and thus (*) is false.[26] Given this summary of how

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23   J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", *Mind* 64 (1955): 200–212, 201.

24   God strongly actualizes only what God causes to occur, whereas God weakly actualizes only what God does not cause, but permits to occur. See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974), 173.

25   According to libertarianism, free will and moral responsibility exist, and both are incompatible with causal determinism, the view that a complete state of the world at any time, in conjunction with the laws of nature, are compatible with only one possible future.

26   For critical discussions of *FWD*, see Richard Otte, "Transworld Depravity and Unobtainable Worlds", *Philosophy and Phenomenlogical Research* 78 (2009): 165–177; Michael Almeida, "The Logical Problem of Evil Regained", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 36 (2012): 163–176; Alexander Pruss, "A Counterexample to Plantinga's Free Will Defense", *Faith and Philosophy* 29 (2012): 400–415; Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Logical Problem of Evil: Mackie and Plant-

Molinism is supposed to refute the logical problem of evil, we can now turn
to certain implications for the relationship between Molinism and evidential
arguments from moral evil.

As Josh Rasmussen has argued,[27] within the Molinist framework, an *infin-
ity* of possible persons renders it (at least) very probable that the pattern of
true *CCF*s is such that there are many (if not infinitely many) feasible *No Evil*
worlds.[28] If that's right, then a Molinist such as Plantinga needs an explanation
for God's permission of moral evil that does not resort to the claim that there
probably aren't any feasible *No Evil* worlds. In other words, in order to ad-
equately respond to evidential arguments from moral evil,[29] there appears to
be significant pressure upon the Molinist to maintain the following position:

> **Reason** God has most reason, all things considered, to weakly actualize a
> *Moral Evil* world rather than a *No Evil* world.[30]

FCT provides one way to motivate *Reason*. Plantinga's endorsement of *FCT*
thus plays a larger role in his work in philosophy of religion than one might
otherwise think. But if the previous argument is sound, then Plantinga will
need to motivate *Reason* in some other manner. Moreover, it appears that
one can generalize from the argument against *FCT* to any theodicy that says
that some good *G* of great value (finite or infinite) depends upon an objec-
tively morally wrong action *A*. After all, if *A* is objectively morally wrong,
then it cannot be the case that *G* counterfactually depends upon *A*, such that

inga", in Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard-Snyder (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to
the Problem of Evil* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 19–33. See also Plantinga's defense of *FWD* in
"Transworld Depravity, Transworld Sanctity, and Uncooperative Essences", *Philosophy and
Phenomenlogical Research* 78 (2009): 178–191.

27   Josh Rasmussen, "On Creating Worlds Without Evil—Given Divine Counterfactual
Knowledge", *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 457–470

28   Rasmussen's argument is even stronger than this. He claims that if the number of possible
persons is infinite, then the probability that all *No Evil* worlds are not feasible is zero.

29   See, e.g., William Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy", *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 119–132;
Bruce Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil", *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 121–139.

30   Notice that *Reason* is consistent with the claim that God has most reason, all things con-
sidered, to *prefer* the actuality of a *No Evil* world. As previously noted, I am assuming that
God's reasons for *action* depend upon which worlds God is able to bring about, i.e. which
worlds are feasible, whereas which worlds God has most reason to *prefer* to be actual, all things
considered, does not depend upon which worlds happen to be feasible for God.

performing *A* would result in a much better outcome than the outcome of refraining from performing *A*.

There may be (at least) one way for the Molinist to motivate *Reason* that remains unscathed by the considerations we've reached so far, *even if* there are many feasible *No Evil* worlds. Suppose that there is a feasible world in which every possible person exists, enjoys a good life, and only one of these persons, Monty, commits exactly one sinful action, such as breaking a promise, and suppose that this action is sinful at least partly because this action is objectively morally wrong. Call this world '*Break*'.[31] If *Break* is feasible, then *Reason* looks quite plausible, even if there are many feasible *No Evil* worlds. After all, while God can weakly actualize a *No Evil* world in which, e.g., one billion people exist, God presumably has more reason to weakly actualize a world in which *all* possible people exist, even if it includes exactly one sinful action.[32] The same point holds for other feasible *Moral Evil* worlds in which all possible persons exist, and the level of goodness in such worlds surpasses the level of goodness that is present in all feasible *No Evil* worlds. Call this the *All Possible People Theodicy* (*APPT*).[33]

Since *APPT* appears to refute the logical problem of evil by demonstrating that *Reason* is possibly true, it is unclear as to whether *APPT* demonstrates that *Reason* is probably true for the following reason. When we consider all of the worlds that contain all possible free creatures, the majority of these worlds contain more than one sinful action. The prior probability that a world like *Break* is feasible thus appears to be low. Similarly, the prior probability that there is a feasible world containing all possible people (or even a large finite number of people) in which only a few sinful actions occur appears to be low, although not as low as the feasibility of *Break*. Consequently, it is far from obvious that there is a high prior probability that the best feasible world is a *Moral Evil* world that contains all possible free creatures, especially

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31   No matter which of the three accounts of a sinful action we adopt, we can specify *Break* in such a manner that Monty's action is sinful at least partly because it is objectively morally wrong, just as we saw with respect to Ida's sinful action in *iPod 2*.

32   Since there is at least one sinful action in *Break*, *Break* could also include the goods of atonement and incarnation, which in turn would provide God with further reason to actualize *Break* rather than a *No Evil* world.

33   I am grateful to a reviewer for making this suggestion.

once we take into account the high prior probability of feasible *No Evil* worlds that do not contain all possible people. Moreover, putting prior probabilities aside, we can rule out the feasibility of worlds like *Break* in which only one (or even a few) sinful actions occur since the actual world clearly contains many sinful actions. The *APPT* proponent must thus claim that although the actual world contains many sinful actions, the infinite number of people in the actual world renders the value of the actual world higher than the value of all of the feasible *No Evil* worlds. Since this claim is contentious, it is an open question as to whether *APPT* demonstrates that *Reason* is probably true.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One might remain suspicious of the argument against *FCT* since it appeals to *iPod 2* — a case that is both bizarre and rare across logical space. But why think that bizarre and rare worlds cannot teach us important philosophical lessons? Since it is dialectically permissible to appeal to Gettier cases in order to critique the *JTB* theory of truth, why would it be dialectically impermissible to appeal to a case like *iPod 2* in order to critique *FCT*? However bizarre or rare, *iPod 2* shows us that neither atonement nor any other good that depends upon an objectively morally wrong action can be unsurpassable in value. This is because a good *G* cannot counterfactually depend upon an objectively morally wrong action *A*, such that performing *A* would result in a much better outcome than not performing *A*.

We have also seen that Plantinga's commitment to *FCT* plays a significant role in his work in philosophy of religion. Since there is a high probability that there are feasible *No Evil* worlds (as Rasmussen has argued), and since the actual world is a *Moral Evil* world,[34] the Molinist must endorse *Reason*, which says that God has most reason, all things considered, to actualize a *Moral Evil* world, rather than a *No Evil* world. Subscribing to *FCT* is one way to motivate *Reason*. Another way is to subscribe to *APPT*, the view that the best feasible world is a *Moral Evil* world because it contains all possible free creatures. But, as we have seen, it is an open question as to whether *APPT* shows that the best feasible world is a *Moral Evil* world containing all possible

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34   The actual world is a *Moral Evil* world *if* we have free will.

free creatures, rather than a *No Evil* world that does not contain all possible free creatures.[35]

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WHY DO KOREAN CLIENTS SPONSOR SHAMANIC HEALING RITUALS?

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Abstract. Various scholars have suggested that the main function of Korean shamanic rituals is the change of the participants' feelings. I elaborate what these scholars potentially mean by "function", challenge what I take to be their core claim, and argue that at least in the case of Korean shamanic *healing* rituals their sponsorship has rather to be explained based on the clients' ostensible motivational and belief states. Korean clients sponsor such rituals because they want their beloved ones to be healed and because they believe that the shamanic ritual can potentially accomplish such healing. I underpin this thesis by two representative actual Korean shamanic healing rituals.

Why do people pay shamans to perform rituals for them? There is no exclusive answer to this question. Not only do different clients have different reasons for engaging in shamanic rituals, but also one and the same client may have several reasons for doing so. Nevertheless, many scholars have tried to come up with a general account of the nature of rituals and declared that the main function of shamanic rituals is to transform the feelings of the participants (Lévi-Strauss 1963a and 1963b; Scheff 1977; S. N. Kim 1989: 276-278; Rhi 1993: 259-261; Bruno 2002; Walraven 2009: 75). But do clients of shamans sponsor shamanic rituals primarily in order to change their feelings? I argue that at least in the case of South Korean shamanic *healing* rituals, they do not. I claim that in the case of Korean shamanic healing rituals, the clients' sponsorship is explained by their desire to cure their beloved ones, and the belief that the shamanic ritual can potentially accomplish such cure. This claim constitutes the core claim of this paper and is called the *Instrumental Thesis* here.

Before I introduce the Instrumental Thesis I will define what I mean by "ritual", and briefly describe what a Korean *kut* is. Then I suggest why Korean clients make use of the services of shamans, and corroborate my Instrumen-

tal Thesis by means of two actual Korean shamanic rituals. In the following
section, I present an alternative explanation of the sponsorship of shamanic
rituals. As mentioned above, various scholars have suggested that the main
function of Korean shamanic rituals is the change of the participating clients'
feelings. These scholars do not clarify what they mean by "function" and how
function is related to the clients' reasons. I elaborate on two possible inter-
pretations of "function" and make explicit what I take to be the core claim of
these scholars, namely that (Korean) shaman clients sponsor rituals because
they want, consciously or unconsciously, their own feelings and/or attitudes
to be changed for the better. This claim is called the *Transformation Thesis*. I
continue by explaining why the Instrumental Thesis and the Transformation
Thesis are incompatible, and why we have no reason to assume that some
inconspicuous benefits rather than the clients' ostensible goals are what ex-
plains why they engage in shamanic healing rituals. At the end, I respond to
potential objections to the Instrumental Thesis. In particular, I defend that
we are justified in ascribing the relevant desires and means-end beliefs to the
shaman clients in my two examples.

RITUAL AND KUT

Since the authors cited above often speak of the function of *rituals*, I will first
define how I use "ritual", and expose in what way Korean *kut* can be classified
as a ritual. Based on Catherine M. Bell's and Stanley J. Tambiah's definitions,
I will take a ritual to be an act or series of acts which are performed regularly
and in a precise manner, which are considered to be identical to or at least
in accordance with cultural precedents, and in which formal expressions are
used as well as symbols that represent something holy.[1] What are examples
of rituals? Even though the boundary between ritual and non-ritual is blurry
and there are borderline cases whose status is contested, scholars seem to
agree that church services, baptism, weddings, funerals, animal sacrifices,
healing rituals, rain dances, and rites of passage constitute paradigm cases

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1   For a more elaborate discussion of defining rituals see Bell (1997:138-169) and Tambiah
(2003: 230-232).

of rituals.[2] Besides these, greetings, placing flowers on a grave, kneeling to pray, sports events, military parades, and many other activities have been described as rituals or "ritual-like" (Bell 1997: 138-139; Clack 1999: 109).

A Korean *kut* can be called a ritual, since a *kut* typically exhibits all the features mentioned in the definition above. Broadly speaking, a *kut* consists in formalized actions that are mindfully performed, are performed regularly[3], appeal to some tradition[4], and involve the invocation of supernatural, holy spirits. Of course, this account of what a *kut* consists in is idealized, and precludes neither that Korean shamanic rituals are personalized in order to fit the needs of the clients (Walraven 2002: 94-96, 101; 2009: 58) nor that certain rules may be violated without rendering the ritual invalid (Bruno 2002: 84-90).[5] Accordingly, anthropologist Jane Atkinson emphasizes that we should not think of a shamanic ritual as a strict observance of prearranged rules, but rather as a flexible, creative interaction with spirits and clients (Atkinson 1989: 14-15).

An unabbreviated *kut* usually consists of twelve sessions in which twelve shamanic deities appear. Each session begins with the summoning of a particular shamanic deity. Once the *mudang*, i.e., the shaman[6] gets possessed by

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2   Bell and Tambiah do not provide a common pool of paradigmatic cases though. For their considerations see Bell (1997: 93-94) and Tambiah (2003: 227).

3   Regular both in the sense of being performed often throughout the year and in the sense that one and the same client is prompted to hold (preventive) rituals on a regular basis. For instance, Chongho Kim quotes an informant who complains that the shaman who performs *kuts* for her asks people to hold a *kut* each time the shaman meets them, pointing out that something bad might happen if they neglect worshipping the spirits (Kim 2003: 120-121).

4   There is no *one* Korean tradition which prescribes how to perform a shamanic ritual, but various regional traditions.

5   For example, anthropologist Antonetta Lucia Bruno describes an initiation ritual which is accepted as valid even though it corresponds neither in its number nor in its structure to the "traditional" initiation ritual (Bruno 2002: 91ff.).

6   "*Mudang*" (or "*manshin*") is the Korean expression for shamans in central and northern South Korea. Some scholars distinguish up to four Korean shaman types (Howard 1998a: 5-6), but *mudang,* with their ability to tell fortunes by means of their divine power obtained through possession, have been the subject of most ethnological research. Actually there is an ongoing debate about whether *mudang* count as shamans. While some scholars believe that classifying them as spirit-mediums might be more appropriate (Kim 2003: 32), I opine that we can label them shamans if we stick to the inclusive definitions of shamans suggested by William P. Lebra quoted in Youngsook Kim Harvey (1979: 4), Stephen Beyer (Webb 2013: 62) or Andrei Znamenski (2007). For example, Znamenski defines a shaman as "a spiritual practitioner who, in

the gods, he or she — by proxy — gives oracle to the participants. At the end, the gods are sent away. During the ritual singing, speaking, silence, and dance are used to bridge gaps between two phases, to indicate that a new phase begins, or to inform the audience that the *mudang* has taken on a different identity (Bruno 2002: 37-39). Tongshik Ryu, a Korean theologian, classifies *kut* based on the immediate object of the ritual.[7] He distinguishes four kinds of *kut*: blessing-prayer rituals, sickness-relief rituals, dead soul rituals with their subcategories, and initiation rituals (Ryu 2012: 441-442). The first kind is a precautionary measure. Here the participants ask for a long life, wealth, glory, and peace by offering sacrifices to the ancestral spirits and gods (Ibid., 469, 518). The second kind is a means to cure all kinds of psychosomatic afflictions. Typically this is a client's final option after all avenues of (Western and Eastern) medical treatment have been exhausted. Sickness-relief rituals corresponds to what I call healing rituals in this paper. In the third kind of *kut* a ritual is performed in order to alleviate a dead ancestor's grudge or wrath or both, and to send him or her off to the underworld in which the spirit supposedly will not have any negative impact on his or her living descendants any longer (Kim 1989: 257). In the initiation rite neophytes possessed by one or more spirits officially accept their (temporal) possession, determine the

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the course of a ritual session, using a drum, a rattle, hallucinogens, or other devices, enters an altered state (sometimes also called a trance) in order to establish contact with spiritual forces in the other world. The goal of this spiritual encounter is to secure the help of spiritual beings that populate this otherworldly reality to resolve a problem, cure a patient, correct a misfortune, or predict the future." (2007: viii) Accepting Znamenski's definition has the advantage of bypassing the issue whether *mudang* enter the state of ecstasy — understood as the shaman's journey to the realms of the spirits, which is, according to Mircea Eliade, one essential criterion of shamanism (Eliade 1972: 499, 375) — and therefore count as shamans proper or not. For more details, see Howard 1998b; Rhi 1993; Hamayon 1993; Walraven 2009; Ryu 2012: 412. In Znamenski's definition "trance" stands for an altered state of consciousness, but the definition does not constraint *how* shamans establish contact with spirits from another world. The definition emphasizes the *goal* of the encounter — an encounter that mostly occurs during a ritual. It thus fits well with my hypothesis that at least some shamanic rituals are performed to solve problems like diseases.

7   In her 2009 book anthropologist Laurel Kendall makes more or less the same distinction, when she compares two Korean *kut* she has observed. Even though she does not incorporate the initiation *kut*, Kendall (2009: 34) distinguishes between *kut* for good fortune *(chaesu kut)*, *kut* for affliction *(uhuan kut)*, and *kut* to send off ancestors *(chinogi kut)* which correspond to the first three kinds of *kut* in Ryu's classification.

spirits' identity, and acknowledge their role as *mudang*. Of course, this is just one way to classify *kut*, and actual *kut* will exhibit features of more than one of these four kinds. But it will hopefully convey what "*kut*" stands for to readers who are unfamiliar with Korean shamanic rituals.

THE INSTRUMENTAL THESIS

Now that we clarified some significant concepts, we can investigate why Korean clients make use of the services of shamans. In contrast to approaches that rely on the reasons shamans give for the performance of certain rituals, this paper focuses on the perspective of the clients. Sponsoring and participating in a shamanic ritual is an intentional action, and intentional actions are usually explained by motivating reasons, i.e., motivational states (or pro attitudes) such as desires or goals, in combination with means-end beliefs (Smith 1994: 94-96). Agents act in a certain way because they desire something and believe that they can achieve it by acting in a certain way.

The core claim of this paper is that Korean clients sponsor shamanic *healing* rituals because they want their beloved ones to be healed and because they believe that the shamanic ritual can potentially accomplish such healing. I will call this claim the *Instrumental Thesis*. In order to corroborate this claim, I will provide evidence that the clients really have such goals and the relevant means-end beliefs. I start with the motivational states of Korean shamanic sponsors.

Reviewing two books written by Korean shamans Shim Chin-song (1995) and Cho Cha-ryong (1996), Boudewijn Walraven, specialist in Korean studies, summarizes the problems of Korean citizens which motivate them to consult shamans.

> Parents whose children had strayed from home, small entrepreneurs faced with declining profits, wives of adulterous husbands, ailing elderly people afraid of death, desperate investors worried about stagnation on the real estate market, a mother who wanted her daughter to pass the admission examination for a College of Pharmacy and her son that for the Science Senior High School, were all among their clients asking for help. (Walraven 2001: 338-339)

The clients' desires are straightforward. They want the shaman to find their children, bring financial success, chase away a spouse's lover, cure their ailments, comfort them, make a child pass an exam, etc. Do they also *believe* that a *kut* is an adequate means to attain these desires? Since we can infer what people believe only based on what they say and do, I will illustrate that some Korean clients have such an instrumental belief with the help of two examples I take from Chongho Kim's 2003 book *Korean Shamanism: the Cultural Paradox*. This Korean anthropologist conducted the fieldwork for this book mainly from 1994 to 1995 mostly in Soy, a rural area in South Korea. The first case refers to a ritual Chongho Kim (henceforth: C. Kim) observes in 1994. In a harsh way a shaman tries to drive out a spirit that is supposed to be responsible for the mental disorder of an older Korean woman. The ritual is sponsored by the patient's daughter. C. Kim does not mention her name, but for the sake of convenience let's call the daughter Miss Shin. After the ritual, Miss Shin tells C. Kim that she has already sponsored several rituals in order to heal her mother's "madness", all of which have been of no avail. She concedes that she has doubts about the efficacy of shamanic rituals. Nevertheless she has paid for another one, considering it her last chance to cure her mother.

> My mother has been suffering from madness for nearly eight years. Her madness began when my family had a big financial problem, which caused my father to disappear. I still have no idea where he is. Since that time, my mother has been treated numerous times by psychiatrists, but it has all been in vain. I could not help becoming involved in this *kut*, like a drowning person clutching at a straw. What else can I do? Because of my mother's illness, I have even had to postpone my marriage. My brother cannot lead a happy life, either. Do you believe in shamanic healing? You may, as you're an anthropologist. But, it's hard for me. Before this *kut*, I had already tried some *kuts* in the hope of having my mother recover. Probably this is the fourth or the fifth. The previous ones were all fruitless. There was no improvement in my mother's illness. I felt deceived although I had not expected much. However, I decided to hold a *kut* once more because the head shaman for this *kut* is the most famous in Korea.[...]Have you ever seen any patient she [, i.e., the shaman] has cured? I really wish to trust her ability and really hope that my mother will be cured by this *kut*. How do you explain the efficacy of *kut* as an anthropologist? Is it like the placebo effect in psychology? When I took anthropology courses at university, the idea of symbolism sounded plausible to me. However, I'm sorry to say it in this way, but I did not see anything very

sensible to me at the *kut*. To my eyes, the shamans were just performing a little play. Do you think that their little play will really work? I hope so, but, frankly speaking, I doubt it. (C. Kim 2003: 81)

What Miss Shin says to C. Kim after the ritual reveals a lot about her desires and beliefs. Miss Shin spends a lot of money for another ritual even though she doubts its efficacy. Is her action irrational? I do not think so. Her action would have been irrational if she did not believe that it can change her mother's condition. But doubt is not disbelief. Note that Miss Shin does not deny the efficacy of shamanic rituals in general. For when she states that she tries one more *kut* because this time it will be performed by "the most famous [shaman] in Korea" she implicitly assumes that the failure of the previous rituals have been due to the insufficient skills of the previous practitioners, not due to the inefficacy of shaman rituals themselves. Despite her doubts, she *hopes* that the ritual will help her mother. She explicitly says that she hopes that her mother will recover. And hope that a person S will recover by means of the ritual entails the *belief* that S *can* recover by means of the ritual. Miss Shin probably believes that it is unlikely that the ritual will help her mother, but that does not mean that she does not believe it is possible. Compare Miss Shin with somebody who bought a lottery ticket and hopes to win. The ticket holder may think that it is very unlikely that he wins, but he surely believes that it is *possible* for him to win. Likewise, Miss Shin certainly believes that it is possible that her mother is cured of her mental disorder by means of the ritual. Accordingly, Miss Shin can hardly be said to disbelieve that the ritual can help her mother. Moreover, she indirectly expresses the wish that her mother will be cured by asking C. Kim whether he has ever seen any patient who has been cured by this famous shaman. Miss Shin also expresses her motivation by implicitly stating that the previous rituals were fruitless *because* her mother did not recover. From all this we can infer under which condition she would consider the ritual to be successful: the cure of her mother's mental disorder. All this demonstrates that Miss Shin wants her mother to be cured, and that Miss Shin believes that the shamanic ritual might achieve this goal.

Let's have a look at the other example. A female informant tells C. Kim that her husband — called Mirim's father — got sick after he has attended the funeral of a friend who had died in an accident in 1983. At first, her husband simply cannot digest well, but later his whole body swells. In spite of hospi-

talization for two months in various hospitals, his condition worsens. The physicians tell Mirim's mother that the swelling is due to kidney problems, but the fact that her husband feels guilty because his friend had the accident after both had got drunk together, and the fact that his friend's body was very swollen when he died, make her think that there are also other forces at work. Nonetheless, Mirim's mother does not consider going to a shaman. It is only when the medical expenses become so high that she has to spend all of their savings and even to sell some of their land that she agrees to perform a ritual by a shaman who has been consulted by her sister-in-law. Mirim's mother describes what happens next.

> The shaman advised us to have two sorts of ritual treatments (*cheobang*). One was for the spirits surrounding my house and the other for the spirit of my husband's friend. There were four people in these rituals: the shaman, my sister-in-law, mother-in-law and me. I went back to my place only for these rituals. We held a *kut* ritual, called 'Ritual Pressing Down Household Spirits' (*antaek kut*). It took place in the absence of my husband. And also we had a small ritual to send Sangdo's Father's [i.e., the dead friend's] spirit off.[...]The shaman told me that my husband should be able to be discharged from the hospital three days afterwards. But I didn't believe what she told me. It was unbelievable! How could my husband get well in three days! He had swollen up so much that he looked like a pig!
>
> However I was really surprised at his appearance when I went back to hospital. The swelling had gone! He was so different that I almost couldn't recognize him. The nurses working in the ward said that they hadn't provided any special treatment. What a surprise! He had no significant problems any more in the blood tests. He was discharged and was able to come back home on the exact day that the shaman had predicted. (C. Kim 2003: 176)

Mirim's mother's surprise indicates that she did not expect the shamanic ritual to work, at least not so fast. However, like in Miss Shin's case, being skeptical is not identical to disbelieving that the ritual can help her husband. Mirim's mother hopes that the ritual works, and obviously desires so. Both cases thus militate in favor of an instrumental interpretation of this kind of *kut*. The clients have a sick relative they want to be healed, and regard *kut* as a potentially useful way to achieve this. We thus have a desire and a corresponding means-end belief that together explain why at least these two clients make use of shamanic services. This explanation is corroborated by the fact that, like other healing rituals, these two kut have been sponsored *after*

traditional medical *means* have failed to solve the problem. This strongly suggests that the clients consider the kut to be another (potential) *means* to cure the person in question, no matter how improbable this means may be.

Some scholars may complain that healing rituals are not as prevalent in shamanic societies as they used to be, and therefore do not constitute a representative form of shamanic ritual in general, but here I merely claim that the Instrumental Thesis best explains *some* cases of shamanic rituals, namely *all* (Korean) shamanic *healing* rituals. And since authors like Scheff (1977), S. N. Kim (1989) and Walraven (2009) claim that the main function of *all* shamanic rituals is the transformation of emotions and/or attitudes, presenting *some* counterexamples is sufficent to falsify their thesis.

Moreover, even if, for instance, anthropologist Laurel Kendall's observations in the 1990s in South Korea can be generalized and the main object of *kut* indeed is business success rather than the cure of an illness, this does not — as Kendall herself states — constitute a radical change in the function of the shamanic ritual.[8] In either case the ritual is considered a means to bring about a desired state: curing a patient's illness or bringing about economic changes in one's favor.[9] But I do not intend to make the strong claim that the Instrumental Thesis also best explains why Korean clients' sponsor economic-related rituals, and restricts its scope to Korean shamanic healing rituals.

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8   "A few decades ago, sudden and often inexplicable illness posed the most dire threat to the integrity and continuity of the rural family. Today, entrepreneurs' households are vulnerable to human fallibility, to bad debts, thieving employees, and fraud, and to the fluctuations of the overheated market. A system of religious practices oriented toward the health, harmony, and prosperity of the small family farm has been adapted to a world in which these concerns still apply but where the fate of the family, for good and ill, is seen as dangling on volatile external forces in a moment of intense opportunity and danger. The shaman's perception that in the past, shamanic rituals were usually held in response to life-threatening illness whereas now most *kuts* are held in the hope of riches makes perfect sense in light of the medical options and economic possibilities of the 1990s. This is a matter of calibration, not a radical transformation." (Kendall 1996: 522)

9   "As we have seen, the religious practices of Korean petite bourgeoisie, no less than those of the peasants, miners, and proletarians described in other places, are *a means of* apprehending, of attempting to exert some control over the seemingly arbitrary motions of the political economy." (Kendall 1996: 522; italics added)

THE TRANSFORMATION THESIS

As mentioned at the very beginning, some scholars suggest an alternative explanation of the clients' sponsorship. They argue that the main function of rituals is the change of the participating clients' feelings — something I call the *Transformation Thesis*. I will enumerate some instances of this hypothesis in order to illustrate it and to demonstrate its prevalence. According to Antonetta L. Bruno, specialist in Korean studies, "the ritual is efficacious for the client[...]because of the transformation in the realm of emotions which occurs in the client" (Bruno 2002: 9).[10] Walraven agrees. Even though he does not exclude that *kut* might be an interaction with supernatural entities (Walraven 2002: 91, fn. 2), he believes that the main object of a *kut* is the psychological transformation of the client.

> The clients should be liberated from worries and given confidence that they are able to face future challenges.[...]For shamans and the clients, too, this is the criterion for a good, effective *kut*, even if the ostensible aim is something less easily achieved: pregnancy, success in business, or the passing of an examination etc. (Ibid., 92)

Walraven here implicitly distinguishes between *ostensible* and *real* aims of shamanic rituals. For example, a mother *ostensibly* wants a ritual to help her child to pass an exam, but what she *really* wants is, say, to reassure herself that she has done everything possible to boost her child's odds.

One particular kind of the Transformation Thesis is the abreaction thesis held *inter alia* by the Jungian scholar Bou-Young Rhi and by anthropologist Seong Nae Kim. Rhi regards *kut* as "a certain type of modern psychotherapy, a sort of psychodrama" (Rhi 1993: 259), a means to abreact emotions that Koreans are unable to express in everyday life due to the Confucian norm of saving face. In the session in which the *mudang* is possessed by the soul of a dead family member, "highly affect laden dialogues between the living and the dead are exchanged *discharging* thereby the guilt, hostility, frustrations and regret of the clients as well as of the *mudang*" (ibid.; emphasis added).

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10   Bruno also writes that the "efficacy of a ritual is judged by the relaxation of emotional tension at the end" (Bruno 2002: 160).

Rhi's interpretation is surely influenced by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss (1963b) has construed *Guna* shamans as psychoanalysts who resolve suppressed conflicts by giving expression to them in a setting where they are allowed to become manifest.[11] Regarding a shamanic ritual for complicated child delivery, the French anthropologist argued that the shaman's narratives give expression to physiological processes that otherwise remain unintelligible and thereby enable the expectant mother to categorize and thus order what she experiences which, in itself, is said to have a good physiological effect. In other words, the shaman transforms the woman's psychosomatic state by construing the woman's states in certain culturally acknowledged ways (Lévi-Strauss 1963b: 198). Besides this power of symbols, Lévi-Strauss suggested that two things are crucial for the efficacy of the shamanic ritual: the abreaction the ritual provides for the shaman, the patient and the public, as well as the community's attribution of certain powers to the shaman (Lévi-Strauss 1963a: 180-183).[12]

Lévi-Strauss's thesis regarding the effectiveness of symbols is echoed by S.-N. Kim who states that the Korean shaman is "untying a knotted grudge or freeing one from evil spirits by the narration of origin myths of particular shamanic figures — in a word, abreaction" (S. N. Kim 1989: 276). S.-N. Kim stresses that shamans on Jeju Island, the island south of the Korean mainland, sometimes laugh just in that part of the ritual in which the dead — via the shaman — lament their tragic deaths. She construes this apparently inappropriate behavior as a means to pull the audience out of the collective sense of tragedy and fear into a light-minded attitude of hope and joy, and states that "[t]his may be the foremost goal of the healing rite" (ibid., 278).

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11   "In both cases [i.e. shamanism and psychoanalysis] the purpose is to bring to a conscious level conflicts and resistances which have remained unconscious, owing either to their repression by other psychological forces or — in the case of childbirth — to their own specific nature, which is not psychic but organic or even simply mechanical. In both cases also, the conflicts and resistances are resolved, not because of the knowledge, real or alleged, which the sick woman progressively acquires of them, but because this knowledge makes possible a specific experience, in the course of which conflicts materialize in an order and on a level permitting their free development and leading to their resolution. This vital experience is called *abreaction* in psychoanalysis." (Lévi-Strauss, 1963b, p. 198)

12   Lévi-Strauss's theses have been criticized inter alia by Atkinson (1987: 343-346, and 354, n. 6) who argues that these theses are implausible if applied to *mabolong*, an Indonesian shamanic ritual of the Wana of Sulawesi.

I do not deny that shamanic rituals *can* have such relieving effects, and that this thesis can explain why *some kuts* are performed, but the Transformation Thesis does not explain why clients sponsor rituals such as those two mentioned above. But before I substantiate my criticism, we should note that the Transformation Thesis can be interpreted in two very different ways.

FUNCTION AS A CAUSAL MECHANISM

The thesis that the main function of the shamanic healing rituals is a change of the clients' feelings can be taken as a *causal* explanation of *how* healing rituals work. Given that the belief that ritual actions can have physical effects such as the cure of an illness, thriving business or a change in weather conflicts with what we learn in science books, many scholars have discarded such non-empirical beliefs as superstitious and false.[13] But since healing rituals sometimes do achieve their empirical goals, these scholars must provide another explanation. The Transformation Thesis might be construed as an attempt to explain the empirical effects of healing rituals in a naturalistic, psychosomatic way.

For example, the anthropologist William Sax together with psychologists Jan Weinhold and Jochen Schweitzer analyzed healing rituals in Garhwali (North India) and claim that healing basically works "by reconstituting socially dysfunctional relationships" (ibid., 62).[14] At the end of the article, they elaborate on this claim.

> [R]ituals are efficacious primarily because they create and define social relationships. One of the clearest examples of this is a public ritual in which a certain image of society is represented, defined, and embodied. By participating in such rituals, people give implicit assent to this representation.[...] Something very similar to this is happening in the forms of ritual healing we have discussed in this essay. Disrupted or dysfunctional family relationships

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13   This position is held *inter alia* by early twentieth century anthropologist James G. Frazer. He takes the instrumental explanations of the natives' magical activities at face value and holds that practices like rain dances are based on the *false* belief that people can produce rain in this way (Frazer 1954: 11-12, 53, 62-65).

14   The authors indicate that the *ultimate* cause of the ritual healing (in Garhwali) might be the local deities (Sax et al. 2010: 73), but they do not dwell on that point, and mostly emphasize the psychosocial mechanism mentioned in the long quote.

are identified and then publicly and ritually re-configured. The participants are invited to acknowledge conflicts present and past, and to reconcile with each other. (ibid., 74)

Sax et al. hence suggest that there are psychological mechanisms that change the clients' feelings and attitude and thereby enable even the cure of bodily afflictions.[15] Is this what Bruno, Walraven, et al. claim in the case of Korean healing rituals?

First of all, note that if we interpret the Transformation Thesis in this way, the Transformation Thesis and my instrumental explanation are not mutually exclusive. Advocates of the Transformation Thesis may accept that Korean clients sponsor shamanic rituals based on the motivational states and means-end beliefs I outlined above. For the clients can and probably will be totally unaware of the supposed underlying mechanisms, and are likely to misattribute the success of the ritual to non-empirical factors like spirits. Due to their ignorance, the social and psychological mechanisms actually responsible for the success of the ritual are not part of the clients' means-end beliefs and consequently do not constitute the clients' reasons for their actions. I will illustrate this by a more secular example.

A man called Karl lately abstains from eating muffins, potato chips, donuts, etc. When a friend asks him why he has changed his diet, Karl answers that he wants to lose weight and believes that

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15   A thesis by the anthropologist Victor Turner can be interpreted in a similar way. Turner construes the *Isoma* ritual, a ritual to overcome the (temporal) infertility of women in the Ndembu tribe of Zambia, as solving not so much a biological, but rather a *normative* conflict for Ndembu wives; namely the conflict between the duty to be a good wife and to reside with or near her husband's parents (due to the norm of patrilocal residence) on the one hand, and the duty to produce children that move to and live in her matrilineal village (due to the norm of matrilineal descent) on the other hand (Turner 1969: 12-13). Turner indicates that the *Isoma* ritual might be efficient, first, because the woman is reminded "where her and her children's ultimate loyalties lie" (ibid., 13), second, because, given the limited biological knowledge, the ritual practitioners as well as the participants *believe* that the ritual works, and third, because the woman makes the experience that she is important. Her state being expressed in symbols of cosmic processes of life and death and the efforts the community members make reassure her that she is cared about (ibid., 43). Like Sax et al. Turner's analysis is plausibly construed as an explanation of the (mental) mechanisms that are responsible for the success of the ritual — explaining *how* the ritual works, rather than *why* humans participate in it.

(A) we lose weight by abstaining from eating food which contains a lot of saturated fat.

But let's assume that (A) is false, and that scientists now rather believe that

(B) we lose weight by abstaining from eating food which contains a lot of carbohydrates.

For the sake of the argument, let's further assume that Karl was unable to recognize that his diet belief is false, because muffins, potato chips, and donuts contain not only a lot of saturated fat, but also a lot of carbohydrates. By abstaining from eating them (and not replacing them with other high-carbohydrate food), Karl effectively loses weight. My point is that even though (B) explains why Karl loses weight, it would be wrong to claim that it explains why Karl lately abstains from eating muffins, potato chips, and donuts. Karl refrains from eating such food *not because* he believes that he can lose weight by abstaining from eating food which contains a lot of carbohydrates. He does it for a different reason.

If we take the Transformation Thesis to be a *causal* explanation of *how* healing rituals work, it might explain why shamanic rituals (sometimes) work and thereby explain why clients do not abandon their (supposedly) false beliefs, but it does not explain why they act the way they do. In order to understand why they sponsor shamanic rituals, we need to refer to the motivational states and the means-end beliefs of the relevant subjects. Authors who aim at explaining the causal mechanisms that make healing rituals (sometimes) achieve their explicit goals might agree, and state that they simply answer a different question than mine. *I* ask for the *clients' goals* and have to refer to their subjective intentions, whereas they ask for the (social and psychological) *mechanisms* that scientifically explain why healing rituals (sometimes) work.

If Walraven et al. have wanted to make this point, then arguing with them would be pointless. But even though this might be what Rhi has in mind, Bruno, Walraven and S.-N. Kim surely do not want to make causal claims. S.-N. Kim explicitly speaks of the change of the clients' feelings as "the foremost *goal* of the healing rite" (S. N. Kim 1989: 278, italics added). Walraven states that even the clients hold that the liberation from worries and the creation of confidence is what makes a *kut* a good and successful one (Walraven

2002: 92). Bruno likewise states that "the ritual is efficacious *for the client*[...] because of the transformation in the realm of emotions which occurs *in the client*" (Bruno 2002: 9; italics added). Walraven's and Bruno's statements entail that a shamanic healing ritual can be judged to have been a success even if the ill person for whom the healing ritual is explicitly performed does *not* recover. Walraven accordingly claims that "the actual benefits of ritual are not necessarily the aims it ostensibly claims to achieve, and that there are *other* unspoken yet positive effects which explain why rituals continue to be performed" (ibid., 91). Evidently Walraven's thesis does not consist in the causal claim that the ostensible aims are realized by a change of the clients' feelings. Rather, he maintains that what the customers want — consciously or unconsciously — is the realization of aims that differ from the ostensible ones.

FUNCTION AS PURPOSE OR GOAL

I therefore conclude that at least S.-N. Kim's, Bruno's and Walraven's statements have to be interpreted as providing alternative reasons for the clients to sponsor shamanic healing rituals. When these authors speak of the function of the ritual, they thus mean its purpose or goal. In Walraven's case, this is very plausible because his statements immediately follow his critique of the Dutch Indologist and philosopher Frits Staal who has made the controversial claim that rituals are "pure activity, without meaning or goal" (Staal 1979: 9). According to Staal, rituals are done neither to achieve nor to express a certain thing. They are done for their own sake. [16] Walraven denies this, at least for Korean *kut*, and goes on to suggest that inconspicuous benefits explain why rituals are still performed.

To sum up, the Transformation Thesis consists in the claim that (Korean) clients sponsor shamanic rituals because they want, consciously or unconsciously, their own feelings and/or attitudes to be changed for the better. They want the ritual to relieve them from their worries, frustration, feelings of guilt, and/or from being low-spirited, and create an attitude of confidence,

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16 Staal does not deny "that ritual creates a bond between the participants, reinforces solidarity, boosts morale and constitutes a link with the ancestors" (Staal 1979:11), but he maintains that such "side-effects" can at best explain the *preservation* of rituals, not their *origin*.

hope and joy. Like the Instrumental Thesis, and unlike the causal explanation above, the Transformation Thesis refers to the clients' motivational states and their means-end beliefs, although these states and beliefs are, according to the Transformation Thesis, implicit ones.

DEFENDING THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE INSTRUMENTAL AND THE TRANSFORMATION THESIS

Still, despite the difference between the Transformation Thesis and the Instrumental Thesis, the reader might think that they do not exclude each other. For one and the same agent can have several desires to sponsor a ritual, both conscious and unconscious. A specialist in Korean studies such as Song-Chul Kim, for example, argues that Korean Confucian ancestral rituals are performed for several reasons. According to Song-Chul Kim, these rituals are motivated by the "descendants' concern for the well-being of their deceased ancestors, but also by real-world social goals such as solidifying agnatic cohesion among descendants of the same lineage and asserting the *yangban* [, that is, noble] status of the lineage" (2014: 89), as well as by the duty of filial piety (ibid., 90).

I do not deny that rituals can be sponsored for several reasons. But note that advocates of the Transformation Thesis propose not just one reason among others, but the *crucial*, or *primary* reason for the sponsorship of shamanic rituals. They claim to know "the *foremost* goal of the healing rite," "the criterion for[...][an] *effective kut*," or the *real*, as opposed to ostensible, aims of shamanic rituals. And it looks as if there can be only one foremost goal. If the *foremost* goal of a ritual is the transformation from anxiety and worries to hope and joy, then the cure of a patient can be a secondary goal, but not another foremost goal. And it is the foremost or primary reason that explains an intentional action. Secondary reasons are secondary, i.e., the subject would have performed the same action even if he lacked them.

Skeptical readers might object that sometimes more than one goal or desire explain why someone acts in a certain way. Imagine a philosopher who flies to a conference in the United States. We might claim that what explains the flight are his desires to present his paper, receive feedback, and get in touch with his peers. These desires might be regarded as the man's immediate

goals, and might or might not be subsumed under the desire to promote his career. Let us assume that they indeed can be subsumed under this desire. Does the latter alone explain the man's flight to the United States? Not necessarily. Suppose he is reluctant to fly because he tries to avoid actions that contribute to global warming, and that his career ambitions alone do not suffice to make him participate in the conference. But because his sister lives there, not far away from the city the conference takes place, and because he has not seen her for some time, he decides to take the flight so that he can attend the conference as well as visit his sister. If none of these reasons alone had made him take the flight, then surely we cannot claim that there is just one exclusive, foremost goal that explains his action.

Now, do we have the same situation in our examples of sponsoring rituals? The advocates of the Transformation Thesis might accept that the clients have the desires and beliefs I outlined above, but insist that there are other desires which are likewise important. Can we not permit, for instance, that Miss Shin wants to cure her mother, and at the same time consciously or unconsciously, desires to discharge the guilt, hostility, and frustrations (possibly) formed during interactions with her "mad" mother? We *can* imagine that Miss Shin has both desires. But I doubt that both desires are required to motivate her sponsorship of the healing ritual. Unlike the flight case from above, we have no indication that Miss Shin's desire to cure her mother is insufficient to make her sponsor the ritual. And if this desire does suffice to motivate her to sponsor the ritual, then we do not need to refer to any other desires in order to explain her sponsorship.[17]

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS TO THE INSTRUMENTAL THESIS

Proponents of the Transformation Thesis might challenge the antecedent of the conditional in the last paragraph. They might either deny that the ostensible aim of the ritual is what (sufficiently) motivates Miss Shin or Mirim's mother to sponsor a shamanic ritual, or deny that these clients have the means-end beliefs I ascribed to them. I will first deal with the former option.

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17   Even though I focus on desires in this paragraph, I still presuppose that only a combination of desires and corresponding means-end beliefs can explain intentional actions.

One might claim that, for example, Mirim's mother's aim to cure her husband's symptoms is not what *really* motivated her to sponsor the ritual. My opponents could claim that Mirim's mother's real aim was to get reassured that she has done everything possible to cure her husband, or to be able to express her existential anxieties, or something to that effect.

I do not deny that there are cases in which shamanic rituals are sponsored for different reasons than the explicit ones.[18] But in our two cases we have no evidence that our two clients' ostensible aims are not their real ones. It is evident that in both cases the ritual's object is the cure of the *patient*. Consequently, Miss Shin's and Mirim's mother's criterion for an effective, i.e., successful *kut* is, *pace* Walraven and Bruno, not the liberation from *their* worries and provision of confidence, but the cure of their ill *relatives*. After all, Miss

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18   For instance, Bruno observed a *kut* in which a shy and quiet client became talkative and relaxed after she had spoken with her deceased mother who had possessed the shaman. What the client said to Bruno after the ritual indicates that the sponsoring of the ritual had been motivated by the wish to be relieved from things the client had not been able to tell her mother in her lifetime. "During the ritual the mother [via the possessed shaman] talked to her and said that she pitied her for being alone now that her husband was with another woman, and she emphatically mentioned the abortion that she forced her to have long ago, because she thought that her daughter was too young to have a child. Hearing these words the client cried and assured her mother that she was all right, that she did not feel any grievance, and that the mother should rest in peace. They both embraced and later the client confessed to me that she had wanted to say these things to her mother for a long time while she was still alive." (Bruno 2002: 160) Another example is a *kut* observed by C. Kim in 1995. A peasant widow, Chisun's grandmother, sponsored a *kut* explicitly in order to cure a back pain that was diagnosed as the result of a disc problem. But C. Kim disbelieves that she did the ritual in order to treat a physical problem, and offer two other reasons for the sponsorship. First, the client used the possibility to speak in the name of her dead husband (when possessed by his spirit) in order to influence her misbehaving adult son. During possession his mother used the authority of his deceased father to reprimand the son who was on the verge of having another extramarital affair, thus wasting lots of money on a lover and risking his marriage. Scolding him in the name of his father had the advantage of not endangering their own relationship. Second, the ritual also functioned as an outlet for the resentment the client had for her mother-in-law. After having been exploited and ill-treated by her parents-in-law for several decades, Chisun's grandmother was able to express the hostility she felt for her mother-in-law — something she would not have dared in everyday life, as she was expected to dutifully care for her mother-in-law, no matter how the latter had previously behaved (Kim 2003: 118-124). The ritual — to which Chisun's grandmother invited many neighbors — allowed her to protest against such Confucian norms, and to gain her neighbors' and relatives' support when publicly expressing her longing for joy and freedom.

Shin describes all previous rituals as fruitless because *her mother's* condition has not changed, not because *Miss Shin's own* condition has not changed. And Mirim's mother too would presumably not have described the ritual for her husband as effective if her husband had not gotten better, even if the ritual had provided her with an occasion to express her anxieties and to lament about her financial crisis.

I thus take it that it is unreasonable to deny that our two clients' sponsoring can be explained by goals that differ from the ostensible ones. But what about the second option? Maybe Miss Shin and Mirim's mother do not have the respective means-end beliefs. Maybe they do not really believe that the shamanic ritual can cure their relatives. Is this a valid objection to the Instrumental Thesis?

Well, there are indeed cases in which we have reason to doubt that the subjects believe what they assert. We are especially skeptical where beliefs collide with what we learn in science books. For instance, if a person states that he performs a certain dance in order to make it rain, we will be skeptical, given that meteorology never mentions dancing as a possible cause of rain. Now, the fact that rain dances are performed at the beginning of the rainy season, and not during the dry season, led some authors to assume that those involved do not really believe that the dancing (alone) will cause it to rain (Wittgenstein 1993: 137). Do we likewise have some evidence that Miss Shin or Mirim's mother do not really believe that the ritual (alone) might cure their relatives? I do not think so. As I argued above, despite their doubts what they say and do implies that they believe in the possibility of a cure. The burden of proof is on the side of my opponents. They would have to demonstrate that our two clients do not really hold the ostensible means-end belief.

Moreover, why would clients pay around USD$5,000, the income of six months for many Koreans (C. Kim 2003: 170), for something they consider useless with regard to the ostensible aim? One possibility is that the clients believe that they can achieve other goals than the ostensible one by means of the ritual, but we have already ruled this possibility out in our two cases. Another possibility is that the clients do it just out of tradition. They do not do it in order to achieve something but because in their community this is considered suitable in such cases. One might thus think that the sponsorship of a shamanic ritual is like the sponsorship of a funeral. In Europe, a funeral

is usually costly, most of which is spent not for indispensable services concerning the disposal of a dead body, but for an aesthetic coffin, embalming, memorial service, a plot of ground, and flowers (Oliver 1979: 978). And even though some bereaved think the latter is unnecessary, they might spend more than they want simply because they believe that this is what is expected from them. Abstaining from optional services might harm their reputation, and earn them the title of an impious curmudgeon. Avoiding such accusation might motivate them to spend more money than they personally think necessary. Do we have similar normative expectations in our two cases? Do Miss Shin and Mirim's mother sponsor the ritual because they believe that this is what people expect from them? I do not think so. Miss Shin never mentions such a motif. And Mirim's mother tells Kim that she took the service of a shaman because her sister-in-law has convincingly argued that her husband's illness does not stem from physical problems, and because the shaman was able to describe her husband's appearance and character even though she has never seen him (C. Kim 2003: 175-176). Moreover, neither Miss Shin nor Mirim's mother would suffer any reputation loss had they not sponsored the shamanic rituals. Quite the opposite is the case. According to C. Kim, most Koreans try to avoid contact with the shamanic world so that most shamanic rituals are held in secret, i.e., only in the presence of the shaman and the clients who are directly involved (ibid., 84). C. Kim suggests that this is due to the shameful and hurting stories that come up during shamanic rituals (ibid., 98, 190) as well as due to the fear of risking accidents, mental illness, and possession as a result of being in contact with the shamanic world (ibid., 172, 180-181, 188-189). If this is true, it can hardly be assumed that Miss Shin and Mirim's mother sponsored their shamanic ritual because they felt social pressure to do so.

I conclude that proponents of the Transformation Thesis are unable to rebut our instrumental explanation as to why Korean clients sponsor shamanic healing rituals, and offer a more plausible one. We have no good reason to be suspicious of the statements made by clients like Miss Shin or Mirim's mother, and to assume that they sponsor rituals for hidden reasons. Of course, it would be desirable to provide more cases in order to corroborate my thesis, but discussing more cases would go beyond the possibilities of an article. Still, since Miss Shin's and Mirim's mother sponsoring are typical examples

of (contemporary) Korean shamanic healing rituals, I believe that the burden to find examples of Korean shamanic healing rituals which have to be explained according to the Transformation Thesis lies on the shoulders of my opponents.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have argued that there are forms of *kut* that are considered tools for empirical goals. It is the desire for the fulfilment of these empirical goals, together with the respective means-end beliefs, and not some alternative benefits or underlying mechanisms, that explain why Korean clients sponsor shamanic healing rituals. The cases of Shin's mother and Mirim's father have shown that we have no reason to doubt the clients' ostensible desires and means-end beliefs. And since these motivational states and beliefs suffice to explain their sponsorship, the benefits mentioned by the Transformation Thesis can be neglected in the explanation.

Why would anybody deny that shamanic rituals are best explained by appealing to instrumental beliefs? In my view, this is due to the variety of activities that are subsumed under the concepts of ritual and shamanic ritual (see the section "Ritual and *kut*" above). There is no such thing as *the* ritual, but a diversity of activities that have been called this way. Among these activities there are many that do not seem to achieve anything useful, but are performed merely out of commitment to a certain tradition. And Frits Staal is probably right that people engage in some of these activities simply for the sake of the activity itself. But it is a mistake to generalize and claim that no ritual is performed in order to accomplish a goal. I suspect that it is against the background of the assumption that rituals do *not* achieve anything, much less the empirical goals they were explicitly performed for, that scholars came up inter alia with the Transformation Thesis. Presupposing that the participants do not act irrationally, scholars like Walraven or S.-N. Kim might have asked themselves what good (other than the explicit goals) shamanic rituals provide. Which problems do they solve? Inconspicuous psychological or social benefits might have seemed to provide an alternative explanation why humans sponsor shamanic rituals. Such a functionalist approach can sometimes be very fruitful, but runs the risk of confounding a secondary reason

for a phenomenon with the primary one. I think that this is what has happened when we try to apply the Transformation Thesis to cases of shamanic healing rituals. Even though such rituals might transform the feelings of the participants, this is usually not the reason why it has been performed. As I have illustrated by two actual cases, shamanic healing rituals are performed because the sponsors hope to attain their ostensible goal, viz. the cure of their beloved ones.

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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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Klaas Kraay (ed.), *God and the Multiverse: Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2015. 247 pp.

This many-authored book consists of welcome attempts to explore ways in which the multiverse hypothesis bears on familiar questions in contemporary philosophy of religion, and generates new ones. The fine-tuning argument for the existence of God is not discussed. All the chapters are competent and interesting. Some of them are philosophically adventurous, while expressing appropriate modesty about the epistemic status of their conclusions.

The volume begins with a useful Introduction by the editor and two interesting chapters by philosophically literate physicists; the other authors are all philosophers. The first paper, Robert B. Mann's *Puzzled by Particularity* is a refreshing presentation of theoretical issues and options that are well-known from the literature on the fine-tuning argument, using the occasional unfamiliar and interesting example (such as the one concerning quantum mechanics, on page 30). In the second chapter, Don N. Page begins with quantum-mechanical considerations favouring the 'Everett multiverse.' He then argues that there is an even simpler explanation of how things are: the actual world is *the best possible world*, in virtue of its maximizing the net intrinsic value of conscious sentient experiences. This explanation sits within a larger hypothesis which includes the existence of a Creator who 'experiences enormous value' in his appreciation of the mathematical elegance of the universe, thereby offsetting the disvalue of the large amount of known suffering and unhappiness. Such a Creator, Page suggests, would be inclined to create the Everett multiverse.

The next three chapters develop or defend multiverse hypotheses involving God. Peter Forrest's Chapter 3 is *The Multiverse: Separate Worlds, Branching, or Hyperspace? And what Implications Are There for Theism?* This is a thought-provoking paper, abounding in arguments whose presentation is

often very condensed. Forrest sketches technical accounts of the structure of space-time, probability, and free agency and uses them as the basis for an innovative, speculative account of multiverse creation by God.

In Chapter 4, Jason L. Megill argues for 'a weak version of modal realism,' namely, the conclusion that there are multiple (i.e., at least two) possible worlds that contain entities that are concrete in the same way that the entities in the actual world are concrete. He infers that there is a multiverse, and briefly discusses the view (held by some other contributors to this book) that we live in the best of all possible multiverses. Readers strongly inclined to doubt one or more of Megill's premises may find the paper a stimulant to further thought about possible worlds.

Donald A. Turner's Chapter 5 is *Revisiting the Many-Universes Solution to the Problem of Evil.* Let a *simple possible world* be a possible world in which there is just one universe. In 2003, Turner had argued that God ought to actualize whichever complex possible world contains universes corresponding to every simple possible world above some cut-off line -- e.g., having a favourable balance of good over evil. Turner now responds to objections offered elsewhere by Bradley Monton, Michael Almeida, and Klaas Kraay. Many of his replies succeed in disposing of the objections they address; the replies seem weakest on pp.121-122, when Turner is responding to Almeida's objection about God's lack of freedom, and on pp.123-124, when he is responding to Kraay's objection concerning the cut-off line.

The next three chapters raise objections either to the truth of multiverse hypotheses involving God, or else to arguments for their truth. In his detailed, well-argued Chapter 6, Michael Schrynemakers addresses Kraay's 2010 defense of the view that God would actualize the greatest possible world God could actualize given free creaturely choices and other undetermined events, and that this world would correspond to a multiverse instantiating all and only those candidate universes passing some objective threshold of value. Schrynemakers argues that Kraay's defence is largely unsuccessful. He then comments on the way multiverse hypotheses affect discussion of gratuitous evil: one must consider the multiverse-wide perspective in order to judge either that there could have been a better trade-off between global goods G and evils E, or else that instead of trade-off involving <G, E> it would have been better to have a trade-off between an alternative pair <G*, E*>.

In Chapter 7, *Best Worlds and Multiverses,* Michael Almeida assumes that, for some specific (but unspecified) positive number N, it is necessarily true that there is a possible world that includes every possible universe whose overall value is N or greater. He raises an interesting objection to the thesis (M2) that *it is necessary that God actualizes such a world.* It would, Almeida says, be the best possible world. He argues, however, that a contradiction can be derived from the conjunction of M2 with The*re is a best possible world*, and that it is M2 that we should reject. Some premises of his argument seem insecure; these include an implicit assumption about the relationship that holds in general between the moral status of agents' actions in a universe and the overall value of the universe.

Jeremy Gwiazda, in his chapter *On Multiverses and Infinite Numbers,* relies on Abraham Robinson's nonstandard model of the reals in which infinite numbers behave much more like finite numbers than does any case of Cantor's infinite. Gwiazda infers that if there are infinitely many universes, there is some infinite natural number of universes. This view bears on the role of simplicity in fine-tuning arguments for theism. Gwiazda argues that set-ups involving an infinite number of entities are not, other things being equal, simpler or less in need of explanation than those involving an infinite number of entities. (If there are M universes, and M is an infinite integer, then why are there M rather than M+1 not M+1 universes? If M is even, why is there an even number of them?) The one-universe view has greater prior probability than one postulating a larger specific number of universes, whether the number is finite or infinite. Provided that theism can be shown to be very simple, Gwiazda's view on infinite numbers favours theism over rival hypotheses involving a multiverse the multiverse, other things being equal.

The volume now shifts its focus to pantheist positions involving a multiverse. In Chapter 8, Yujin Nagasawa explores the thesis the God is identical with the totality of all universes. He concentrates on a specific version which postulates a multiverse consisting of all metaphysically possible universes: they are all actual, though causally and spatiotemporally isolated from one another. The resulting pantheist doctrine affirms that God is the being than which none greater can be thought -- where greatness is to be understood not in terms of degree of great-making properties such as power but in terms of the scope of what the entity includes as part of its own being. Since the

multiverse contains all possible forms of knowledge, power and benevolence, God is 'in at least one sense' omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent. Similarly, the doctrine mimics various other features of traditional theism, though it excludes God's being an agent with free will. Nagasawa points that the foregoing pantheist position implies that there is much more widespread evil, and evil of much greater intensity, than is entailed by traditional theism. So he considers whether pantheists could adopt a different version of multiverse pantheism, one which says that God is the multiverse comprising all and only those universes that are worthy of creation and sustenance. He responds that this alternative version has its own major problems.

John Leslie, in his boldly speculative paper *God and Many Universes*, begins with a lucid account of the scientific case for a great many universes, and discusses how many universes, and what kinds of universe, a theistic God would be likely to create. In the main part of the paper, Leslie expounds and discusses a doctrine advanced in his book *Infinite Minds* (OUP 2001), namely that reality a cosmos consists entirely of infinitely many infinite minds, whose thought patterns include (but are not confined to) the patterns of actual universes that never exist any actual universe anywhere else. Why would any such infinite array of infinite minds exist? Leslie answers that it may be a necessary truth that (N) *the ethical need for some unbeatably good situation is creatively powerful and sufficient to explain the situation's existence*. He does not in this chapter argue directly either for the truth of N or the existence of the infinite array of infinite minds.

God and the Multiverse ends with two chapters on the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, as it might be adapted with a multiverse in mind. In Chapter 11, Robin Collins begins by stating a proposition (V) *There are many other races of vulnerable embodied conscious agents (VECAs) that are causally isolated (pre-mortem) from humans and from each other*, and arguing that it is probable relative to V that there are many races of 'fallen' VECAs. Given this lemma, and also the premise that God the Son became incarnate in our world (i.e., on Earth), Collins then offers a probabilistic argument in favour of the hypothesis God the Son becomes incarnate in most races of fallen VECAs. The paper then surveys some major accounts of the metaphysics of Christ's incarnation with respect to whether they are compatible with multiple incarnations. Col-

lins argues that most of them are, though the kenotic view runs into serious difficulties.

In the final chapter, Timothy O'Connor and Philip Woodward start with a philosophical-cum-theological reason for supposing that there is a multiverse: God's resolving to create a multiverse would enable God to eliminate or reduce arbitrariness in his more specific creative choices. O'Connor and Woodward maintain that if God has created a multiverse then it would be almost certainly be one containing many different species of 'divine image-bearing' creatures. If he has done so, they argue, one would expect non-human incarnations. They sketch their own distinctive metaphysics of God's human incarnation, and explain how one individual divine person can be simultaneously located on different planets, in virtue of having more than one body. Nevertheless, they have Christian theological doubts about multiple incarnations.

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Jean-Luc Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*. Trans. by Stephen E. Lewis. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016. xviii + 137 pp.

How would (specifically religious) revelation be possible? This question presents something of a limit test for contemporary phenomenology. If revelation is given, *as such*, then under what conditions could such givenness occur? Moreover, if such conditions could be specified, then would that challenge the very status of the revelation *as revelation*? Jean-Luc Marion takes up these difficult questions in his 2014 Gifford Lectures, published by Oxford University Press as *Givenness and Revelation*. After a helpful foreword by Ramona Fotiade and David Jasper, which does a nice job of situating the present work in relation to Marion's overall phenomenological methodology and his theological orientation, Marion begins the introduction by admitting that the book itself should rightly be approached with some surprise. Regarding the very title of the text, Marion admits:

> At first glance, nothing seems to join an apparently old and steadfastly theological notion together with a philosophical concept drawn from the most

recent phenomenology. However, if we wanted to consider better their re-
spective features, the two terms could instead converge—especially if we re-
frain from masking the formal difficulties of each. (1)

In general terms, then, Marion sets out to challenge, or destabilize, the
legitimacy of reason as the framework in which all revelation would have to
be understood. Accordingly, Marion takes as one of his starting points that
failure of the "desire to make Christianity reasonable" (3). Such an "episte-
mological interpretation" of revelation misses, he claims, the key religious
dimension of the revelation itself as finding its authority elsewhere. In this
sense, revelation is necessarily an interruption, not only of one's expectation
(hence the surprise announced in the book's title), but also of one's sense of
self. Not only does revelation require a reevaluation of reason, and hence a
distinction between a worldly logic and a logic of the Kingdom of God (46),
but also a reconceiving of intentionality (as well as selfhood) such that in-
tentionality is not that which proceeds from subjective agency, but instead
constitutes the religious person as called or gifted by God via the revelation
received as such (see 56-57). To conceive of revelation on the terms of human
reason is to reduce God to an idol of our own conceptual making. When we
recognize this idolatry and stand in light of revelation as it calls to us, we be-
come "witnesses" to the truth that is given to us by God (52-53).

Marion recognizes that overcoming idolatry risks coming at the cost of
making God absolutely incomprehensible. Here, we might want to push back
just a bit against Marion's ease with such incomprehensibility. Moving from
a reductive kataphatic conception to an excessively apophatic conception
presents problems for a phenomenological approach to the theological truth
revealed in the first place. Indeed, if revelation is to have any phenomenal
meaning, then it has to do exactly that: reveal something to someone. Yet, it
is not clear that absolute incomprehensibility could reveal anything at all. If
God is to speak to us, then somehow we have to be able to hear that speaking.
Nonetheless, when faced with the reductive temptations in both directions, it
is crucial to avoid all egoistic pretention to conclusiveness in both philosophy
and also, especially, in theology. As Marion notes—highlighting the phenom-
enological obstacle that revelation presents—"what is at issue when the issue
is God either remains incomprehensible by definition, or is degraded into an
idol" (116).

How then can "the question of God avoid sinking into idolatry" while maintaining some positive meaning that would be available as the content of revelation itself? Marion suggests that what is required is that the question of God must remain a question (117). The content of the revelation of God is neither a refutation of the atheist's objection, nor a proof of the theistic apologist's claims, but instead amounts to a transformative eschewal of the question of existence as tantamount to the question of God. "The biblical Revelation of God," Marion writes, ". . . does not come to give an answer (without proof) to the question of the existence of God. Instead, it comes to transform our idolatrous and therefore in this sense insignificant debates . . . into a serious test" (117). Continuing on, he explains that "faith does not enter in as an obscure replacement for the light of understanding, but in order to bring the understanding to decide to will or not to will to accept the coming of God who gives himself in and as the event of Jesus" (117).

Importantly these passages from the conclusion to *Givenness and Revelation* highlight something about the entire text: *it is deeply theological.* I have argued elsewhere that Marion is usually careful to distinguish between phenomenological possibility (and the conditional arguments that are offered in relation to such possibility), and theological actuality (and the scriptural/revelational authorities taken as evidence therein). In this book, Marion consistently deploys scripture as evidence for the claims he is making about the conditions attending to specifically Christian revelation. Indeed, one of the objections that could be raised to Marion's account of revelation is that it is too exclusively framed in relation to Christianity. This is not a problem if the book is considered an instance of phenomenological Christian theology, but it is something to interrogate considering that, in the introduction, Marion more broadly refers to his focus as "the revealed character of religion" (1).

A phenomenological consideration of the stakes of such revealed character of religion as, itself, an historical phenomenon, is an important and widely discussed matter of phenomenological debate. Indeed, from Ricoeur to Henry, and from Derrida to Chrétien, new phenomenological approaches to the idea of the phenomenon we have historically called "religion" focus on the key question of whether revelation can count as a constitutive aspect of worldly phenomena. Put a bit more technically, and expressed as a question, we might ask: can phenomena be given such that they would be excessive,

as such, of all intentional horizonality? Is the "event" of such a religious phe-
nomenon something that can be countenanced within phenomenology itself,
as philosophy? This question does not seem to admit of a positive answer. As
Marion himself claims, "the event leaves us speechless and with no way out,
because in the event we are deprived of every signification that would make
it conceivable, which is to say possible (in the metaphysical sense), and it
imposes on us an actuality which, having never been possible or thinkable in
advance, merits precisely the title of impossible" (50).

Given the centrality, and decidedly philosophical orientation, of such
phenomenological concerns about the very idea of religious revelation (i.e.,
of a religious phenomenon to be presented, as such), Marion's seemingly im-
mediate understanding of "religious revelation" as *Christian* revelation and
"religious phenomena" as the *Christ* event are perhaps rightly considered as
problematic even within phenomenological philosophy of religion. Accord-
ingly, Marion seems to deepen the worry of many critics of the so-called
theological turn in phenomenology that phenomenological considerations
of religion just are theological defenses of particular religious truth claims.
If this is the case, then justified worries might emerge that Marion's critique
of the epistemological interpretation of revelation (chapter one), his engage-
ment with Augustine and William of Saint-Thierry (chapter 2), his discus-
sion of Christ as the saturated phenomenon (chapter 3), and his account of
the trinity as the logic of manifestation operating in revelation (chapter 4),
all amount to a self-protective attempt to close off phenomenological Chris-
tian theology from rational philosophical critique. Indeed, if the first move in
one's argument is that the rest of your argument can't be understood accord-
ing to the "worldly wisdom" of rationality, then the "wisdom of God" that is
subsequently defended is unlikely to be very compelling to those not already
convinced of the actuality of that revelation itself.

I mention this worry not as a critique of the importance of Marion's text.
Indeed, this book is perhaps the clearest presentation of his basic phenom-
enological approach to Christian theology that has yet become available. That
fact alone should make it required reading for anyone working on Marion's
thought. Moreover, I fully expect that this book will be of extreme value to
historical theologians who are looking for phenomenological resources for
their work. Rather, I mention the worry because I think that, in a time of in-

creasingly blurry lines between professional philosophy and theology (both in continental and also in analytic philosophical traditions), it is increasingly important to do the meta-philosophical work of understanding the audience and the aims of a text as implicated in the evidentiary authorities operative within that text. That said, I find Marion's book to be at its best when I read it as offering an enriched conception of what it means, *for me*, to live as a Christian, rather than as offering an account of what religious revelation means, *for anyone*, who identifies as a phenomenological philosopher.

The main thesis that runs throughout *Givenness and Revelation*, and that shows up at various points within it, is that we overcome the epistemological interpretation of revelation, move from worldly logic to Kingdom logic, as well as from conscious intentionality to counter-intentionality, and are maximally likely to be open to being transformed by Christian revelation, when we shift from God as rational postulate to God as person, and from an egoistic concern with knowledge to a humbled embrace of love. "The clearly non-epistemological intention of revelation," Marion suggests, "aims to manifest God in person; God's intention is not so much to make himself known as to make himself *re*cognized, to communicate himself, to enable men to enter into a communication that puts them in communion with him" (27; see also 29, 43, 45, 71, 91). This is a compelling theological vision worthy of serious consideration.

After reading Marion's book, I have a much easier time appropriating it in my religious existence than in my philosophical work. Indeed, I am a personalist open theist. As such, I am deeply sympathetic to Marion's account of God and the phenomenological approach to Christian theology that illuminates the existential ramifications of such an account. Ultimately, then, I find *Givenness and Revelation* to be a profound challenge to the complacency and egoistic idolatry of those Christians who would approach Christian theology (and God!) from the perspective that forces revelation to occur within the conceptual frames of human rationality as located in specific politico-cultural contexts. As an American who has been increasingly disappointed in much of the Christian community in light of the Trump election, Marion's book not only calls for a reassessment of one's theological doctrine, but also stands as an invitation to confession and contrition for having so often fallen prey to the idolatry of certainty. Even if legitimate objections might be subsequently

raised to it, we all need to hear the rule that Marion claims "remains inviola-ble": "If one believes he understands God, it isn't God" (116).

Despite wanting to give a copy of *Givenness and Revelation* to every pas-tor in my country, I am not sure that I would give it to my non-Christian philosophical colleagues. This is not necessarily a problem, but it just de-pends on what one expects a text to do. Not all books can do everything and what Marion does in *Givenness and Revelation* is much needed indeed in contemporary theology as a guide for Christian life and social practice. It is a clearly written, exceptionally historically astute, and a deeply theologically motivated book, but if one is not already convinced of either the truth of Christian revelation, or at least of the legitimacy of blurring the lines between theology and philosophy, then this book is likely not only to be "surprising" regarding its focus, as Marion indicates in the introduction, but also frustrat-ingly confessional regarding its conclusions.

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Paul K. Moser, *The God Relationship. The Ethics for Inquiry about the Divine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 358 pp.

In his three most recent books (*The Elusive God, The Evidence for God and the Severity of God*), Paul K. Moser has sought to re-orientate and cri-tique a discipline which, he thinks, is often neglectful of the existential and ethical challenges of religious faith. As Moser sees it, the vast majority of academic philosophical and theological work engages with religious issues in a purely intellectual manner, ignoring the importance of the ethical and voli-tional challenges of a life of faith. The overarching aim of these recent works has been to connect issues of religious epistemology to questions concern-ing a person's redemptive relationship with God. According to Moser, God's elusiveness in the world is a result of his will for all human beings to be re-deemed and reconciled to him, a purpose which would not be achievable by providing only undeniable evidence that God exists (or, 'spectator evidence' in Moser's terms). Hence, for Moser, our evidence for God must be informed

by the human volition and questions concerning a person's willingness to engage in what he calls 'Gethsemane struggle'; a wresting and submission to the divine purpose.

The God Relationship is Moser's most recent contribution to this discussion. Here, he takes aim at our 'inquiry about the divine', a label which would suitably include the majority of recent work in analytic theology and philosophy of religion. Moser's argues that all divine inquiry must be informed by the interpersonal nature of human-divine relationships (4-5). Unlike scientific inquiry, of which the object of study is static, immovable and inert, the object of divine inquiry is a person with a will and specific purposes for human-beings. More specifically, Moser contends, the Christian God seeks a relationship of mutual *agápē* with human beings, or, to use a phrase that is adopted throughout, God desires a '*koinonia*' relationship with human beings (7). A *koinonia* relationship, as Moser defines it, involves 'cooporation, amity, harmony, peace, fellowship, sincere communication, kindness, mercy, empathy and sympathy as compassion' (7). In order for such a relationship to occur, however, human beings must engage in the restoration of the divine image, and hence, a *koinonia* relationship with God must be curative for the human heart and will. Moser's central claim, therefore, is that a focus on the interpersonal aims of a God worthy of worship can inform the ethics of our inquiry about God.

Moser begins by considering the implications of *koinonia* relationships for our understanding of the concept of faith. He argues that faith cannot be reduced simply to a belief in God (70); it also involves the attitudes of trust and commitment to God (70), as well as a 'cooperative self-entrustment, toward God's will, call promise, or good news' (95). At the heart of Moser's account of faith is the claim that the human-God *koinonia* relationship must be curative for humans (96). Faith is not a matter of merely believing that something is the case; it requires acting responsively to the will of God through the process of imitating God. Faith is thus a 'responsive intentional action rather than one something merely reflective or emotional' (113). Because of this, Moser thinks that all divine inquiry must be guided by certain normative principles. He argues that in responsibly inquiring about God, a person ought to consider her own moral standing in relation to God (88), she ought

to conform to God's perfect will (88) and she ought to seek out evidence of God's perfect goodness (88).

Next, Moser turns to consider the implications of the *koinonia* relationship for our understanding of religious evidence and argumentation. He argues that in light of God's purposes in seeking a mutual loving relationship with human beings, we must acknowledge that 'belief *that* a conclusion is true cannot supply faith *in God*' (122). In contrast to this, Moser argues, '[r]esponsible human seeking of God, as suggested, would be active, and not merely reflective, intellectual or emotional. It would require the exercise of one's will in actions of various sorts, including the action of gathering available evidence regarding God.' (113).

What Moser advocates instead of a kind of intellectualist argumentism is the subject of Chapter 4. Here, Moser seeks to give an account of how wisdom and philosophy should be realigned in light of God's purposes. He argues that '[f]rom a Christian point of view, speculative philosophy goes awry in not giving a primary, irreplaceable role to God's self-manifesting the divine moral character, including righteous love, particularly in the message of Christ crucified' (223-4). However, philosophical inquiry is not to be disposed of entirely, according to Moser, but rather, it must be reformed and realigned to reflect the redemptive purposes of God. For Moser, if we take seriously the implications of God's will, then we cannot engage in philosophy for philosophy's sake and intellectual argument cannot easily be dissociated from personal questions regarding the thinker's relationship to God. Moser suggests that

> [i]n Christ-shaped inquiry, including philosophy, a key question is: *How* are we to pursue the questions (including philosophical questions) that attract our attention? ...Will we pursue the questions to the neglect or the disadvantage of other people? Will we thereby exclude ourselves form the divine love commands? *How* we pursue questions is not an ethically neutral matter, as if God would not care.' (230)

Finally, in Chapter 5, Moser sketches a more detailed account of what he takes to be responsible divine inquiry. Here, he draws on the ethics of companionship to help elucidate the ethics of our inquiry about God. On such a model, the agent engaged in divine inquiry must be regarded as a 'responsible' and 'self accountable' agent who is capable of relating personally to God (265).

In other words, questions regarding a person's submission to God's will, her desire for 'redemptive companionship' with God (283) and her seeking to receive the challenge of God's Spirit are central to the ethics of divine inquiry. As Moser puts it, such enquiry 'is volitional, and not merely intellectual because it concerns the direction of our wills, and not just our beliefs' (283).

Any reader of Søren Kierkegaard will not be able to miss the Kierkegaardian influence on Moser's work. The epigraph quotes Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus, and the title itself is borrowed from Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Despite this, this is not a book about Kierkegaard's religious philosophy, and Kierkegaard is only specifically mentioned in a handful of places. Yet, Kierkegaard's thought and his contribution to what Moser calls 'the ethics of divine inquiry' pervades every page of the discussion—from Moser's insights on the nature of faith, to the relationship between faith and reason, and the importance of imitation and ethical, existential challenge in the life of the believer. Arguably, Moser's work is more aligned with Kierkegaard's aims to 'reintroduce Christianity to Christendom' (or, perhaps, to 'reintroduce Christianity to theology' in Moser's case), than the majority of contemporary Kierkegaard scholarship.

Moser is deeply critical of contemporary philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, yet, despite his criticism, he appears to be disengaged with the specifics of what those who write in this tradition have to say. Frustratingly, Moser repeatedly refers to philosophy and theology as if it were one homogenous discipline that wholeheartedly neglects the importance of Christ-centred faith. Unlike Moser's astute critique of the key positions in contemporary religious epistemology in *The Evidence for God*, the vast majority of Moser's objections to contemporary philosophy and theology here are aimless. Other than a cursory take-down of some of William Lane Craig's theistic arguments in Chapter 3, Moser seldom mentions an example of the kind of philosophy and theology he is critiquing. One wonders whether this is because he finds little of value to engage with amongst the nameless philosophers and theologians. However, Moser's critique of speculative divine inquiry would be all the more compelling if he were prepared to engage with specific examples of what he takes to be 'irresponsible' engagement with God.

An example will help to illustrate this point. Whilst I am sympathetic to Moser's critique of natural theology and the inadequacy of apologetic argu-

ments, what he says regarding this issue has some obvious retorts from its main proponents. If anyone is an example of defending the school of 'argumentism' (Moser's phrase, not mine), then it is surely Richard Swinburne. And yet, even Swinburne admits that belief in the truth of a conclusion stops short of faith in God. In *Faith and Reason*, Swinburne writes that Christian faith requires a kind of trust, 'of acting on the assumption that God will provide for one what one wants or needs. If there is a God, the aim of rendering proper worship and obedience to God' (2005, 195). Similarly, William Lane Craig, one of the few writers who Moser directly refers to, notes that faith involves a volitional element: 'I think of faith as trusting something I know to be true' (Veritas Forum, 2012). For both Swinburne and Craig, faith requires not only a belief *that* God exists but also an attitude of trust and the intentional exercise of one's will in putting this attitude into practice. Admittedly, both Swinburne's and Craig's accounts of faith looks different to the account given by Moser, and much of Moser's critique of natural theology, if correct, would be fatal to what both have written. However, even thinkers who exemplify the disciplines Moser is critiquing recognise that faith is more than a belief *that* a conclusion is true. And so, if this is the case it is not clear why Moser works so hard to debunk the concept of faith as a merely propositional belief.

The questions that Moser poses regarding the ethics of our inquiry about the divine, are essential questions for the nameless 'philosophers and theologians' who are frequently alluded to, to take seriously. In a discipline that often has a hard time shaking off the worries of triviality and irrelevance, Moser makes a case for a way of engaging in philosophical theology which engages with personal, ethical and existential questions of the highest importance. Whilst this is not a picture of faith which sits neatly in the academy alongside existing philosophical work, it is drawn carefully from Scripture and its importance is never in question. Just as Kierkegaard did before him, Moser's challenge to philosophy and theology will no doubt irritate and offend those who seek to speculate about the divine in a way which is detached from the challenge of living in relationship with God. However, given the account of faith that is presented here, this is surely the greatest praise that can be bestowed on Moser's work.