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Against the New Atheism: A Defence of Salvation-Sensitive Exclusivism

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Contents

Abstract

In the last decade, there have been several publications and articles by academics (especially Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris), attacking the rationale behind religious belief through the presupposition of scientism. According to these 'New Atheists,' science has largely buried God, and, therefore, all human knowledge should be viewed through a scientific mind-set. Despite this, in the last half-century, we have arguably witnessed a rejuvenation in Christian thinking, especially in the works of Plantinga and Craig, who continue to argue that belief in God is reasonable. Hence, I intend to assess these two assertions by examining what I take to be the most powerful arguments for and against God's existence: the moral argument, the fine-tuning argument, the problem of pluralism, and the problem of evil. Here I draw on the contemporary literature surrounding matters of theology, ontology, epistemology, and cosmology. In general, I argue for a limited defence of Christian theism called Salvation-Sensitive Exclusivism (SSE). I support this by claiming that the moral and fine-tuning arguments point to the existence of a morally excellent being and designer of the universe. Moreover, I conclude that neither the threat of pluralism nor the presence of evil provide a good reason to reject SSE.

Key words: *Moral Truths. Fine-tuning. Exclusivism. Salvation. Suffering.*

Preface

Since the ‘New Atheists' (most notably Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris came onto the scene a decade ago, the popular appeal of their anti-religious writing has led to an enormous cultural shift in our attitude towards religion and its relationship with science.[1] Traditionally, religion was seen as the only means of answering life’s biggest existential questions, in explaining the existence of the universe, the nature of human beings, how we should act, and where our destiny lies. The New Atheists have challenged this view by arguing that existential questions about our lives and the external world can only be answered through scientific investigation and empirical evidence. The New Atheists have since taken their dissatisfaction with religion to the public arena: slamming religion on university campuses, on the television and radio, as well as in books and articles. The extent of this anti-religious rhetoric is epitomised by the organization of the 2008 Atheist Bus Campaign, which involved running banners across London buses reading ‘There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life!’ This ‘new’ desire to popularise atheism through media outlets is what distinguishes the movement from historical atheism. On the one hand, the classic atheist philosophers (David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, and J. L. Mackie) sought to provide rational arguments against the existence of God in the hope of eliminating God from the intellectual sphere, the New Atheists want to eliminate religion from *all aspects* of

[1] For New Atheist literature see: Dawkins, R. (2006) *The God Delusion*, London: Bantam Books.
Dennett, D. (2007) *Breaking The Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, London: Penguin Books.
Hitchens, C. *God Is Not Great: How Religions Poisons Everything*, London: Atlantic Books.
Harris, S. (2010) *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, New York: Free Press.

society.[1] Religion is therefore depicted as the Zeitgeist of our time, as a popular set of beliefs about the world, which will soon come to be redundant, as our scientific knowledge closes the gap. It is possible to trace the roots of this new atheism back to the rise of *Islamic extremism* and the use of violence in the name of religion, where events like the September 11th attacks in New York, damaged and tarnished the image of organised religion. Thus, the New Atheism can be seen as a reaction to this new form of religious extremism. New Atheism can further be seen as a revival of the *Logical Positivist* movement which dominated the universities of the early 20th century, where it was argued that only sensory evidence could provide us with substantive knowledge about reality. Hence, since religious claims could neither be scientifically tested nor empirically verified, they were considered unintelligible.[2]

Similarly, the chief presupposition behind New Atheist thinking is that of *scientism* - the view that the scientific method is our *only* source of knowledge, and this causes the development of a rift between science and religion. The alleged conflict between religion and science has manifested itself in many different ways; for instance, there is tension over the notion of miracles and what science teaches us. On the one hand, various religious traditions believe that miraculous events do occur and that they 'break' or go contrary to the natural laws of the universe, whereas science teaches us that these physical laws regulate all aspects of the universe, which seems to conflict with the idea of miracles. Another area of friction would be between evolutionary

[1] Prominent atheist literature includes the following publications: Hume, D. (2003) *A Treatise of Human Nature*. New York. Dover Publications. Mackie, L. J. (1982) *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Nietzsche, F. (2008) *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Russell, B. (2004) *Why I am not a Christian*. London and New York: Routledge.

[2] There are various versions of this principle. One criterion would be that a proposition is only meaningful if it is verifiable by the five senses. And another would be that a proposition is only meaningful if it is falsifiable.

theory and belief in God. In the first instance, we have the Darwinian view that biological complexity is the result of gradual modifications over time in biological systems based on their survivability value. By contrast, in religious scriptures, particularly Christian writings, God is said to have created human beings in his image, and this is sometimes taken to mean that human beings have been intelligently designed following the creation story found in the Genesis. In response to this, New Atheists have attempted to understand religion and its claims in a scientific way. For instance, in *Breaking the Spell* (2007), Dennett argues that religious belief is nothing more than a product of our evolutionary heritage and therefore akin to the heritage of Marx, belief in God and the afterlife should be understood as a product of wishful thinking. Similarly, in *The Moral Landscape* (2010), Harris has maintained that we can provide a scientific account of morality without appealing to religion, and so only through science can we determine the foundation for moral values. In both of these examples, we can see the development of a scientific theory of knowledge, one which undermines and rejects religion as intellectually inferior and ultimately a futile attempt by humans to understand the world. Religion has no place in the intellectual circle and the idea that a scientist can be religious reeks of being intellectually irresponsible. For the New Atheists then, we should proceed in our investigations of the world under the constraint of *Methodological Naturalism.* In short, the scientist must put their religious beliefs to one side when they enter the laboratory.

Despite the rise of scientific atheism in the intellectual and public spheres, in the last forty or so years there has also been a resurgence in religious thinking, particularly in the domain of Christian apologetics. Perhaps the most influential thinker in this respect is Alvin Plantinga, who has argued that belief in God remains rational, and reasonable

despite the traditional arguments that are often given against God's existence.[3] In *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974), we find Plantinga's classic *Free Will* Defence, as a response to the logical problem of evil. Moreover, in *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000), the final book of a three-part trilogy on epistemology, Plantinga develops a theory of knowledge which challenges the notions of scientism, while at the same time showing that belief in God does, in fact, have warrant. Another prominent defender of religious faith has been William Lane Craig, and he too has argued that there are good philosophical and scientific reasons for thinking that God exists. For example, in his book *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (1979), Craig reformulates a classic cosmological argument used in Medieval Islamic philosophy. Today this remains one of the popular theistic arguments currently discussed in both the philosophical and scientific literature.

In light of these two contrasting developments, I want to examine whether belief in God remains reasonable; that is to say whether there remains good reasons for believing in God. I intend to do this by examining what I take to be the most popular and persuasive arguments for and against the existence of God: The Moral Argument, The Fine-Tuning Argument, The Problem of Religious Pluralism, and the Problem of Evil. As an important qualification, however, it must be noted that this thesis is written as a response to the popularity of New Atheism, but not as a critique of New Atheistic arguments *per se*. The reason for this is that the majority of the arguments that are used by the New Atheists are not new ones, but rather modern versions of the classic objections to theistic belief. Hence, this thesis can be seen as a reaction to the rise of

[3] There is a lot of disagreement over the exact conditions required for rational belief. However, one condition would be that there are good arguments (that are logically consistent and sound) in support of God's existence. Similarly, a belief is reasonable if we can provide good reasons for accepting it.

this movement, as a reassessment of the credibility of theistic belief in light of recent and historical criticisms of religion. My argument will consist of providing a cumulative case for a limited defence of theism, which I will call *Salvation-Sensitive Exclusivism* (SSE). The cumulative approach for SSE will work in the following way. I will begin by criticising two key atheistic arguments (the problem of evil, and the problem of pluralism), in order to undermine the negative case for God's non-existence. I will defend two significant theistic arguments (the moral argument, the fine-tuning argument) against some important objections, building in this way also a positive case for SSE. However, this is not to say that the arguments offer compelling evidence for the existence of God; the claim is only that, when taken together, they stack up in their cumulative force. For instance, the fine-tuning argument gives us insight into God's immense intellect and his purpose behind creating the universe, and the moral argument emphasises the moral excellence and character of God. The strategy is similar to that of New Atheists, but will be directed into the opposite direction. The defence will be Christianity-orientated, mainly because I am most familiar with this particular religious denomination. But the aim is more general and applicable to all three main monotheistic religions, since the aim will be to provide support for the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing God who created the world. Another limitation of the argument is that, due to the lack of sufficient space, I will not attempt to provide an independent argument for the exclusivity of Christian salvation. This task would undoubtedly involve a detailed examination of New Testament sources and at the very least a defence of the historicity of biblical accounts. The topic of the resurrection remains a contestable area in the literature, and so, instead, I will start with the basic assumption that the teachings of the Bible are accurate at least

concerning the idea of Christian salvation, and from this, I will examine whether this view stands up to certain soteriological objections from critics and sceptics. Overall, I hope to show that theism is a philosophically more powerful view than the new atheists suggest and is a position that can be justified both on philosophical and scientific grounds. Moreover, this thesis will contribute to the current literature by suggesting a limited model (SSE) that subsequently may be developed to acquire a further-reaching theological appeal.[4]

Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the thesis will have four chapters each examining a different argument for or against the existence of God. Section I will concern the problem of evil and the problem of religious pluralism, whereas in Section II, I will examine the moral argument and the fine-tuning argument. As I have mentioned, whereas Section I aims to undermine some of the key arguments of New Atheists against theism, Section II builds up a positive case in support of a particular version of theism (the Salvation-Sensitive version of Exclusivism [SSE], which I defend in this thesis). Moreover, it is important to note that this methodology will involve defending SSE in different ways, in other words, there will be certain goals involved in each particular chapter. For example, since SSE is a limited defence of Christian theism (in the sense that I do not provide an argument for the historicity of the resurrection) Chapters I, III and IV will defend theism more generally, whereas Chapter II (which concerns religious pluralism and Christian salvation) will involve a specific defence of Christian salvation against objections. Collectively then, the ambition is to defend different aspects of SSE in a way that will ultimately converge.

[4] For example, one could modify SSE in a way that makes it consistent with other monotheistic traditions (Islam, Judaism).

In Chapter I, we shall consider perhaps the most powerful argument against God's existence - the problem of evil. I focus on two prominent versions of the argument, Mackie's logical version, and Rowe's evidential version. I firstly show why the logical argument requires a burden of proof that is too great to be feasibly maintained, and, as such, the argument fails. Moreover, concerning the evidential problem, I argue that, as cognitively limited persons, we are in no position to make probability claims about whether God has or does not have sufficient reasons for allowing suffering in the world. As a result, I maintain that the theist can maintain a position of sceptical theism, which is the view that we are not in a good *epistemic* position to know whether God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing natural evil in the world. This view relates to SSE because it is consistent with the theological position I wish to defend, that God is omniscient, and moreover, it also conforms to the idea that humans are cognitively inferior to God. Therefore, given the cognitive differences between God and humans, it's entirely possible that we would not be able to discern God's reasons for permitting suffering, since they could involve a complexity that is beyond our understanding. The overall goal will be to show that both versions of the Problem of Evil are unsuccessful in undermining theism.

The next chapter will focus on the problem of religious pluralism and diversity. I will build on the theistic model of God from Chapter I, by providing a more specific defence of salvation sensitive-exclusivism. I begin by talking about the historical roots of pluralistic thinking and how it poses a problem for SSE. Next, I critique Hick's argument for pluralism and show why it is implausible, and at the same time, defend exclusivism

against traditional objections. Finally, I analyse a problem germane to SSE, the soteriological problem, which aims to show an inconsistency between the Christian doctrine of salvation and God's traditional attributes (omnibenevolence, omnipotence, and omniscience). I address one aspect of the problem, namely that of soteriological luck, and examine whether Craig's Molinist response is successful in resolving this issue. I conclude that Craig's defence is somewhat successful but may require additional philosophical development.

In Section II of the thesis, I will began by briefly relating back to the conclusions that were reached in Section I, namely, that the two anti-theological arguments are unsuccessful in undermining SSE. I will then proceed with the third chapter in looking at the moral argument for God's existence. I start by arguing that on atheism, it is difficult to account for the existence of moral truths, and I then critique a humanist account of objective morality. Moreover, I give a theistic account that would satisfy their ontological foundation, and then defend moral realism against some objection. The objective of this chapter will be to provide a justification for both the reality of moral truths, and the view that God’s existence best accounts for their grounding, rather than atheism. In the final chapter, I shall examine the fine-tuning argument for God’s existence, which has emerged in line with the scientific discovery that our universe possesses certain precise physical configurations that make life possible. Here I contend that given the explanatory possibilities, God provides the best explanation of the fine-tuning data, better than those built starting from physical necessity or chance. Therefore, this gives us further grounds for thinking that SSE is true.

In the conclusion, I summarise the discussion of both sections in light of the recent developments of New Atheism. I argue that the arguments in Section I (The Problem of Evil, and the Problem of Religious Pluralism) are unsuccessful in undermining our belief in SSE. Moreover, I maintain that the arguments in Section II (The Moral Argument and The Fine-Tuning Argument) can be defended against objections, and therefore provide us with evidence in support of SSE. For this reason, I claim that despite the recent rise of New Atheism, there remain good grounds for thinking that SSE is true.

Section One: Arguments against God's existence

Chapter I - The Problem of Evil

"It is safe to say that both sceptic and believer alike share one opinion in common. The question of pain and suffering provides the greatest challenge to belief in God" (2014. p.4).

Ravi Zacharias

Introduction

To begin with, let us start by focusing our attention on Section I. The first chapter on the problem of evil will provide us with the first anti-theological argument against God's existence, and therefore against the tenability of SSE. I will start by explaining the two main versions (the logical and evidential) of the argument, and then proceed to show why they are unsuccessful. In the second part of Section I, we will look at Chapter II of the thesis, on the problem of religious pluralism and Christian salvation.

When one thinks about the enormity of suffering in the world, one often discovered that the problem defies comprehension. The previous century alone was the bloodiest and most agonising on record; two world wars resulted in the deaths of millions of people, and smallpox, tuberculosis, and influenza further ravaged the worldwide population, while millions more still suffered slow, excruciating deaths from starvation. In the philosophy of religion, this issue is called the problem of evil, which concerns the difficulty of reconciling the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God, with evil in the world.[5]

[5] This problem of evil is an objection to the monotheistic conception of God.

In the philosophical literature, two types of arguments have surfaced: the so called logical problem and the evidential problem of evil. The former is a deductive argument which aims to identify an inconsistency between the conjunction of evil and an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God, rendering God's existence logically impossible. By contrast, the evidential argument makes a more modest claim, namely, that the presence of suffering makes God's existence improbable, but *not* impossible. I have chosen to analyse two powerful versions of the problem. The first is J. L. Mackie's logical argument against God in his famous publication *The Miracle of Theism* (1982), and the second, William L. Rowe's evidential argument, from his article "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" (1979). It has occurred to me that both publications have generated a significant amount of interest in philosophical literature; for instance, in the last half-century some of the best-known theodicies (accounts of why God permits evil), which I will go on to discuss, have been written in direct response to these arguments. In the first half of this chapter, I will start by analysing the plausibility of the logical version. To begin with, I maintain that the logical problem of evil presupposes necessary truth statements, which carry such a burden of proof that no sceptic can plausibly bear. Firstly, I argue that Plantinga's free will defence provides part of the solution to the problem of moral evil, and concerning natural evil, God may have morally appropriate reasons for permitting such evil. Thus, so long as these two responses are even possible, God's existence cannot be logically impossible, and so the argument collapses. I then turn my attention to the evidential version of the argument. I begin by identifying the problem that the evidential argument raises for monotheism, and further, introduce the position I wish to defend called sceptical theism (ST hereafter). Moreover, there will be a brief discussion of some of

the implications that one would have to accept. Following this, I argue that William Rowe's evidential argument is implausible because it is based on a false presupposition, namely, that we are cognitively well placed to identify gratuitous evil in the world, and so the inference from evil to God's improbable existence is unjustified. In other words, the atheist cannot justifiably assert that there exist gratuitous evils, which make God's existence unlikely, for our cognitive faculties are not sufficiently capable of enabling such knowledge. Next, I assess the credibility of two modern theodicies by John Hick and Richard Swinburne respectively. I conclude that both theodicies are unsatisfactory and that the theist's best response is maintaining ST, when addressing the presence of gratuitous evil. My overall conclusion is that evil may *undercut* the positive epistemic status of the belief that an all-powerful, all-loving, God exists, but that, despite this, it does not present a conclusive reason to reject that view. Thus, while the problem of evil is still a challenge to belief in God, this challenge is not insurmountable, and so theistic belief remains reasonable.[6]

A Distinction between Suffering and Evil

Now, on the notion of suffering, there are some important observations to consider. Firstly, suffering is quite regularly, and I must say incorrectly, used as a synonym for evil, but this is problematic as not all examples of suffering constitute what we would call evil.[7] For instance, some suffering is biologically useful, like that of pain, which

[6] For the sake of brevity, I will not attempt to provide an account of animal suffering, and so my approach to the problem of evil will regrettably be anthropocentric. However, for two useful discussions of animal suffering see: Hoggard-Creegan, N. (2013) *Animal Suffering & the Problem of Evil.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; Linzey, A. (2009) *Why Animal Suffering Matters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[7] According to privation theory, evil does not exist as a thing, rather, it is the absence of goodness.

warns us of potential bodily trauma or the presence of disease, and there are also different kinds of suffering in the world with different intensities (from mild to severe). As a result, philosophers distinguish between two broad types of evil. The first is known as *moral evil* which is any suffering resulting from immoral human actions (e.g. murder). The historian Idris Chang provides us with an extreme example of moral evil in his documentation of the events of the Nanking Massacre (1937-1938), which involved the torture and death of thousands of innocent civilians by the Japanese army:

> *The Rape of Nanking should be remembered not only for the number of people slaughtered but for the cruel manner in which many met their deaths. Chinese men were used for bayonet practice and decapitation contests. An estimated 20,000 – 80,000 Chinese women were raped… and more diabolical tortures were practised such as hanging people by their tongues on iron hooks or burying people to their waists and watching them get torn apart by German shepherds. So sickening was that spectacle that even the Nazis in the city were horrified, one proclaiming the massacre to be the work of 'bestial machinery'* (Chang, 1998, pp.198-9).

Moral evils are distinguished from *natural evils*. A natural evil is an example of suffering that is not the result of human activity; this would include the existence of diseases, like cancer and dementia, as well as the occurrence of natural disasters, such as flooding and famine. Of course, it is possible for moral and natural evil to become somewhat entwined; for example, an irresponsible human activity can worsen the effects of natural disasters, and so the complex character and nature of suffering, in

general, has contributed to clarifying my usage of the term ‘evil.' Hence, by evil I mean any instance of *gratuitous* suffering; that is, any suffering which seems pointless or unnecessary, and so could have been prevented by an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God.

The Epicurean Paradox

Ever since the Greek philosopher Epicurus posed the problem of reconciling the presence of evil and the existence of God, theologians and philosophers have long wrestled over the difficulty of addressing it.[8] David Hume provides a summary of Epicurus’s famous critique of theism in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779): "Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (1990, p88). We can formulate this passage in the following way,

1. If God is omnipotent, then he can create the world without evil.
2. If God is perfectly good, then his moral perfection would make him desire a world without evil.
3. Evil exists.

Therefore, according to Epicurus, the theist is faced with the choice of denying one of God’s essential attributes, which is deemed theologically unacceptable. The reason is that, from a biblical perspective, two verses seem to indicate the reality of God's power and moral virtue. For instance, in the Book of Job, it is claimed that "The Almighty is

[8] This alleged embarrassment on the part of theologians in explaining evil is well documented by the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire in his satirical work Candide (1759).

beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress" (Job 37:23). And similarly, in the Psalms, we are told of God's all-loving nature: "Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever" (Psalm 136:36). Now one might respond by claiming that God is limited in some way, perhaps he is powerful but not quite omnipotent or morally virtuous but not all-good. However, for this chapter, I am seeking to defend the Christian conception of God, which sees these divine attributes as essential to God's nature; thus, I will proceed by taking it for granted that God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent. Given God's omni-characteristics and the existence of evil, many find it difficult to believe that God exists, and if we think about it, there are many ways in which God could have either prevented or diminished the evils that take place. Surely God could have created a world with far less suffering than the one we inhabit, or, better still, with none. Or perhaps God could have created a world where pain and suffering occurred circumstantially, a simple headache to warn people of their moral duties or suffering that only came to be after a life of longevity and happiness. These are legitimate and important questions that perplex non-believers and believers alike; it's easy to see why the problem of evil is such a difficult obstacle to theistic belief.

The Best of all Possible Worlds

Historically there have been many attempts to address the problem of evil, but one of the most interesting responses is by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (16461716). Leibniz claims that, since God is an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being, he can and will create the best possible world, and, since we live in a world of divine creation, this must be a world of unparalleled perfection. However, the

possibility of there being a best possible world has come under severe scrutiny by some philosophers. For instance, they claim that there can be no best possible world, as it seems true that for any world we take to be the best, we can always think of worlds which would be better *ad infinitum*. The futile nature of this approach is explained well by Peter Forrest:

> "It is plausible that for every possible world there would be a better one. If this is the case, God could not create the best possible world, just as he could not name the greatest integer" (1981, p.52).

For this reason, the best possible world hypothesis appears to be false, and therefore one might argue that God could have created a better possible world, where evil did not exist. Despite this, Leibniz provides us with a brief insight into the kinds of reasons that are given for why God permits evil, and this provides a good foundation for the rest of the chapter. Now before we begin our assessment of the first argument, it is crucial that we are aware of where the burden of proof lies in this discussion. Since the atheist is claiming that God's existence is either logically impossible or highly improbable, then it is up to them to show this to be the case. In other words, the atheist must provide an argument with premises that lead to the conclusion that God does not exist. For that reason, the idea that the theist *must* provide reasons for why God permits evil is only necessary, if a sufficient argument from evil is given. In the same way, a proponent of an argument for God's existence would also share the burden of proof in claiming that there is evidence for God's existence. With this theme in place, it is now time to lend our focus to the first version of the argument – the logical problem of evil.

The Logical Problem of Evil

In the logical argument of evil, the sceptic is claiming that the following two existential quantifiers cannot both be true without contradiction:

1. An all-powerful, all-loving God exists.
2. There exists evil in the world.

There is no apparent contradiction in affirming both propositions, and, therefore, the sceptic must be assuming some additional premises, which would bring out the inconsistency, if it is to be logically impossible for God and evil to coexist. These hidden assumptions might be the following:

A) An omnipotent God can create any world that he wishes including a world with no suffering.
B) An omnibenevolent God would desire to create a world without suffering.

According to the famous atheist philosopher J. L. Mackie, such premises (or similar ones) provide the final jigsaw pieces to a refutation of theism.

> *…If we add the at least initially plausible premises that good is opposed to evil in such a way that a being who is wholly good eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do, then we have a contradiction. A wholly good omnipotent being would eliminate evil completely; if there really are evils, then there cannot be any such being* (1982, p.150).

By combining both the explicit and implicit premises which Mackie suggests, we can present the logical argument as roughly the following:

1. There exists an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, being who created the universe.
   - *An omnipotent being has no limits and so can create a world without evil*
   - *An omnibenevolent being would prefer to create a world without evil.*
2. Evil exists in the world. (contradicting A and B)
3. Therefore, such a being does not exist.

In what sense is God omnipotent?

Before we begin our analysis of this argument, it is important to add a qualification to the term 'omnipotence.' Contrary to what Mackie claims, I do not think we should take omnipotence to mean that God can actualize *any* state of affairs, including logical impossibilities.[9] The reason is that a commitment to God's unlimited power seems to lead to an inconsistent notion of omnipotence, one which is famously known as the *paradox of omnipotence*.[11] The paradox results from the following question: 'Can God create a stone so heavy that he cannot lift it'? If God can create such a stone, then he is not omnipotent, for there exists a stone he cannot lift, and if he cannot, then there exists an action which he cannot perform, so again, he is not omnipotent (Wade Savage, 1967, p.74). These kinds of paradoxes have subsequently helped theologians and philosophers in their goal of carefully clarifying what omnipotence entails in a consistent and non-contradictory manner. Philosophers now hold that, for God to be omnipotent, God should be able to do what is *logically possible,* and so his

[9] In Chapter III (The Moral Argument) I shall further discuss the concept of omnipotence.

inability to create a stone that he cannot lift is logically impossible, which in no way infringes on, or limits his omnipotence (Mavrodes, 1977, p.194).

Now that we have clarified what it means for God to be omnipotent, we must turn our attention back to the all-important question concerning whether premises 1 and 2 are inconsistent with one another. To assess this, we need to know whether the additional assumptions A and B are *necessarily true*. In the field of logic, a proposition can be thought of as necessarily true, if denying it leads to a contradiction; for example, the statements ‘all triangles have three sides’ and ‘all bachelors are unmarried men’ are logical truths; their truth value arises *a priori* from the very concepts themselves. We know from the definition of a triangle that it is a three-sided shape and that a bachelor is an unmarried man. We can distinguish this type of knowledge from empirical or *a posteriori* knowledge, which we accumulate through the five senses. Statements that focus on the possibility, contingency or necessity of events are known as modal claims. Concerning the problem of evil, these are useful concepts that we should bear in mind when contemplating the *possible worlds* that God may have created. A possible world can be defined as a maximal description of reality, or a way reality *could* have been if events had been different. For instance, the statement ‘If Diane had not been in Texas then she would have been in England' is a counterfactual conditional statement, because it describes something that is not the case, but is hypothetically correct. Therefore, if we apply the language of possible worlds to the two implicit assumptions that underpin the logical problem of evil, affirming A and B as necessarily true would mean that they are true in every possible world, which includes the *actual world.* Hence, the statement ‘God and evil coexist’ would be *false* in every possible world, if the logical problem of evil is successful. As previously mentioned, the most

obvious way for the theist to respond to the logical problem of evil is to give up one of God's attributes; perhaps God is powerful but not all-powerful, or he is a being of great moral virtue, but lacks perfect goodness. However, for this chapter, I will seek to maintain the traditional conception of the Christian God, and therefore, focus my attention on other possible responses to the argument.

The necessity of the first assumption

For the theist to be successful, they must show that God and evil are logically compatible, and therefore one would not be required to give a definitive answer on why God permits evil in the world. However, they would need to suggest a *possible* reason for why A and B are not both true. In this way, there would be no inconsistency in affirming the co-existence of evil and God. Now it seems to me that the theist has a good reason for denying both statements; let us begin with the first, which claims it is necessarily true that an omnipotent being can create any world he wishes, and so can create a world without suffering. Alvin Plantinga has famously offered the *Free Will Defence* as a plausible reason for why God permits *moral evil*. According to this view, God allows moral evil to preserve human freedom which he sees as an overriding good; but why should human freedom be so valuable to God? Plantinga suggests the following reason:

> "A world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal than a world containing no free creatures at all" (1974, p.85).

The point Plantinga is making is that human freedom is an intrinsic good which outweighs or overrides any deficiencies that it entails. Therefore, if a person is to be truly free in choosing between A or -A, then God cannot ensure that a free agent will

perform -A, if ultimately, he wishes for A or -A to be genuinely a free choice. From a metaphysical point of view, it is important to acknowledge that Plantinga's defence seems to presuppose a self-determining *libertarian* account of free will, by which the freedom of an action lies in it not being causally determined by any antecedent conditions. Also, a free agent must possess the capacity to reflect on their decisions, weigh up the practical reasons for choosing an outcome, and so exhibit overall rational control when acting upon a decision (Clarke, 2003, pp.15-16). There is insufficient space to go into other competing theories of free will here, and so for the sake of argument, I will assume that this version of libertarian freedom is coherent. Overall then, the free will defence claims that it is logically impossible for God to cause someone to perform a free action.

I will now briefly analyse some of the objections to the free will defence. Firstly, the sceptic might argue that it is at least logically possible for God to create human beings who always freely choose the morally good action, thereby eliminating moral evil. In my opinion, this objection is incompatible with libertarian free will, as a person's actions would be causally determined by God's providential desires; humans would be preprogrammed to act in a particular way like a robot following orders, and surely there is no freedom in that. Therefore, since it is impossible for God to both causally influence us to perform good actions and allow us a choice between A and B, then it follows that an omnipotent being could not create such a world, if he desires it to be a world of free agents. God wants to maintain the logical coherency of free will, and this comes at the expense of moral evil. The sceptic might further reply that God's omnipotence appears to conflict with his desire for free agency. In other words, is it

not a limit on God's omnipotence that he cannot create a world where humans always perform the right action? But this objection is again mistaken, for God's omnipotence deals with the intrinsically possible, and so in no way is this a limit on God's omnipotence or his goodness. Moreover, even if it were logically possible for God to create such a world, for all we know, a world where humans always freely choose the right action might not be feasible for God. For instance, perhaps this possible world would have other deficiencies which outweigh any good that the elimination of moral evil would bring. Overall, the mere *possibility* of these responses being true is sufficient to disprove that it's necessarily true for an omnipotent God to create any world he wants to. Even Mackie acknowledges this as a possible reply: "It is plain that this (the freewill defence) is the only solution to the problem of evil that has any chance of succeeding" (1982, 155). Therefore, it seems to me that we have good reason to doubt the necessity of A, as God wants to create a world with free creatures, and so it is logically possible that moral evil is permitted by God to maintain this outweighing good.

The necessity of the second assumption

I shall now turn my attention to B which states: it is necessarily true that an omnibenevolent God would desire to create a world without suffering. Again, this claim requires such a burden of proof on the part of the sceptic, as they must not only demonstrate that God's existence is doubtful or unlikely, but impossible, given the evil in the world. To begin with, the idea of a perfectly good being allowing his creation to suffer so much evil seems absurd and morally bankrupt, a far cry from the Heavenly Father who allegedly loves all of humanity. In fact, the evil we experience might be a reason to think that a malicious or incompetent God exists, but surely not a being who

excels in moral perfection. As a result, I believe that this reaction has a strong degree of intuitive force behind it. However, as previously mentioned, all that is required of the theist is to give a possible reason for why a loving God would permit evil in the world, and I think that there are such plausible reasons. It seems apparent to me that God may well have morally justifiable reasons for permitting evil, reasons that are overriding in nature. For instance, God might allow evil to achieve a greater moral virtue, which would otherwise be unattainable without the presence of evil. Perhaps there are further overriding deficiencies present in worlds without suffering, which are deemed undesirable by God. The fact of the matter is that it is far from evident that God has no justifiable reason for allowing evil to exist, and so, if these reasons are possible, which I think they are, then B is plausibly false and, therefore, not necessarily true. Interestingly, this alleged failure of the logical problem of evil is well documented by philosophers and even atheists in the philosophical literature. As William P. Alston summarises, “it is now acknowledged on almost all sides that the logical argument is bankrupt” (1991, p.29). Given this, the rest of this chapter will address the evidential problem of evil, which I see as posing a more serious problem for the theist.

The Evidential Problem of Evil

Some of those who accept that there is no logical incompatibility between God and evil have instead argued, that given the presence of evil, God’s existence is improbable. It seems to me that the introduction of the evidential arguments in the philosophical literature is the result of unsatisfactory attempts to reconcile natural evil within a theistic worldview. Accordingly, there exists a prevalent view that Plantinga's free will defence is a good explanation for why moral evil exists in the world. However,

much of the criticism of this theodicy centres on its inability to answer some of the most fundamental questions concerning the nature and quantity of natural evils (Stump, 1983, p.49). In other words, critics argue that the free will defence answers only part of the problem of evil. Because of this, proponents of the evidential argument argue that the sheer intensity of evils and the presence of natural evil itself give us a prima facie argument for the conclusion that atheism is probably true. The crucial question then is the following: does the gratuitous suffering of a child show it to be improbable that there exists an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, God? (Conway, 1988, p.40). Before we can even attempt to answer this important question, it is essential that we first have a grasp of the nature of the argument. Evidential arguments make the more modest claim that God's existence is improbable, rather than impossible, and this is important because it lowers the burden of proof required for the argument to be successful. Also, these arguments are making probability claims about the existence of God, and, as probabilities are dependent on available background information, it is essential that we have an adequate understanding of the probabilistic reasoning involved.10 To achieve this, we must first be aware of the two competing hypotheses that are in contention:

Theistic Hypothesis (TH hereafter) – An omnipotent, omnibenevolent, God exists.

Atheistic Hypothesis (AH hereafter) – No such God exists.

[10] Given the evidential arguments probability claims, one might argue that to adequately assess the likelihood of God's existence all the relevant background evidence must be taken into consideration. Therefore, the theist could concede the improbability of God's existence based solely on suffering, while maintaining that the accumulation of other arguments (the cosmological argument, the moral argument, religious experience, etc.) tips the scale in favour of theism.

I will assume that the presence of diverse types and intensities of natural evil in the world is supposed to lower the probability of TH, in such a way as to make it more probable that AH is true rather than TH. Thus, evil would confirm AH, if it considerably *raised* the probability of AH being true, while at the same time, *significantly* lowering the probability of TH, or vice-versa (Otte, 2000, p.5). What is more, there are many different accounts of probability theory.[11] In my view, the most appropriate version in this particular case is a conditional *epistemic probability*. A discussion of such terms can quickly become highly technical, and there is insufficient space for such a conversation. Therefore, I will work with the assumption that epistemic probability can be thought of as the degree of confidence or positive epistemic status that a proposition has for a person at a given time (Plantinga, 1992, p.84). Consequently, the degree of confidence a person has in believing a proposition to be true can go up and down at any given time. With these preliminary explanations in place, I shall proceed to make my position clear on what I take to be the theists' most reasonable reply to the evidential argument.

Sceptical Theism

As I see it, the success or failure of the evidential argument rests on whether the presence of evil significantly lowers the probability of the TH being true. In asserting that it does reduce the probability of the TH, the religious sceptic is assuming that we *could* know what God's reasons would be for permitting natural evil in the world. This fundamental assumption raises the question of whether we are in an appropriate

[11] In Chapter IV (The Fine-Tuning Argument) I talk about the different accounts of probability.

epistemic position to make this kind of probability claim. In response to this, philosophers have discussed a position known as sceptical theism (ST) (Oppy, 2006, p.289). A proponent of ST starts by emphasising the cognitive differences between God and human beings. On the one hand, as an omniscient being, God can comprehend the full complexity of reality, which would include knowledge concerning the causal intricacy of past, present, and future events.[12] By contrast, human beings are limited in the foresight and intellect because we possess cognitive faculties which are finite. Considering this, when it comes to determining whether the evil we see is gratuitous, we simply are not cognitively situated, and cannot say with any confidence, whether it's improbable that God would have morally sufficient reasons for allowing these evils. Therefore, we cannot make a reasonable value judgement on the suffering that we experience because we really cannot have any confidence in our ability to discern between the suffering which is purposeful and suffering which is pointless. In fact, as Stephen J. Wykstra notes, the likelihood of determining all of the possible reasons that God may have, is akin to the prospect of a one-month-old infant being able to fathom the reason behind why his parents allow him to experience suffering (1984, pp.155-156). It is often the case that many examples of natural evil are entwined with moral evils or human activity, such as earthquakes and tsunamis. In these particular situations, it is often quite difficult to say that certain natural disasters occur without some human influence. When we attempt to contemplate the many chains of causal events which follow from a situation, such a chain defies human comprehension, and so it seems a hopeless endeavour to think that we can have any

[12] I am aware that not all philosophers and theologians subscribe to God's omniscience entailing divine foreknowledge of all future events.

confidence in asserting that God has no morally justifiable reasons for permitting natural evils in the world. Ravi Zacharias also observes the futile nature of such an exercise when he writes: “Why is it that we finite, self-serving, time-constrained, so often-wrong human beings think we have all the wisdom needed in which to castigate God and hold him before the bar of our wisdom within our timetable?” (Zacharias, 2014, p.9). What is more, ST is also compatible with the particular Christian position I seek to defend, as there is essential teaching in the Christian religion which supports the high probability that we are cognitively incapable of grasping the true purpose of many evils. For instance, the Christian religion teaches us that there are profound differences between human beings and God, and so we should not at all be surprised that we fail to grasp the point of many of the world's evils. I think this is important because it means that, if the atheist is to claim that God could have prevented gratuitous suffering, the atheist would be presupposing that we can know God’s reasons for permitting evil but without the necessary independent evidence (Fitzpatrick, 1981, p.27). Thus, the atheist would need to give us an independent argument for why we should think that our cognitive faculties are up to the task of identifying what God’s purposes would be. In light of this, it is time for us to analyse an evidential argument.

Rowe’s Evidential Argument

Perhaps the most influential version of the evidential problem of evil has been formulated by William L. Rowe as follows:

1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

2) An omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering if it could unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
3) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. (1979, pp.127-8).

The first premise claims that an omnipotent God is logically able to prevent great evil without compromising any outweighing goods that he might desire to preserve. Moreover, the second premise asserts that a perfectly good God would want to avoid intense evils, so long as by doing so, no greater good would be lost, or no greater evil gained. Therefore, since there are examples of intense gratuitous suffering in the world, God must not exist. Firstly, it is important to notice the language used by Rowe in his argument, particularly the phrase ‘intense suffering.' This phrasing is significant because Rowe is not saying that *all* the evil we experience conflicts with the existence of God; for instance, a certain degree of pain in organisms serves the purpose of warning them of danger or internal disease. Rather it is the intensity and pointless nature of certain evils present in the world, which are seen to be perfectly preventable, if a monotheistic God existed. In my view, the most controversial statement in the argument is undoubtedly the first premise, since Rowe is assuming that God has no justifiable reason for permitting great evils in the world. Rowe proceeds by giving an example of the kind of gratuitous evil he has in mind; he asks us to imagine a fawn that is unfortunately trapped in a forest fire. Because of this, the fawn suffers terrible burns, which after a few days, finally claim the animal’s life. Rowe argues that, in this instance, God could have easily prevented the fawn's agonising final day. For example, he could have made it that the fawn instantly died from its injuries and thus prevented it from enduring a slow and painful death. As Rowe concludes,

> *[s]o far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For there does not appear to be any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse* (1979, p.130).

Hence, the fact that such instances of unnecessary suffering occur in the world provides us with strong evidential support for the AH. Now by 'pointless' Rowe means that there are evils that appear to serve no divine purpose in God's providential plan for the world, and so the crux of his evidential argument rests on the following assumption.

> *1) There exist instances of intense gratuitous evils in the world.*

Since it seems to be the case that pointless suffering exists, the key question is whether we are warranted in inferring from this that God's existence is improbable. More precisely, are we justified in deducing from appearance to reality that because some instances of evil *seem* pointless, they *are* such? The issue then is whether (1) is plausibly true or false. On the one hand, if (1) is plausible, then we appear to have a strong reason for doubting the TH, but if (1) can be shown to be improbable, then the evidential argument loses much of its force. It seems to me that Rowe cannot sustain such an argument, because, as I previously explained, we are not in an appropriate position epistemically to make such strong metaphysical claims. For all we know, the evils we observe may well play an integral part of God's providential plan for humanity, in attaining some future good that we are utterly unaware of at present.

In the field of chaos theory scientists commonly talk about a phenomenon known as 'the butterfly effect,' which is the claim that even a fractional change in initial

conditions, like that of a flapping butterfly, may lead to a dramatic alteration in future causal behaviour (Hilborn, 2004, p.425). If we apply this notion to Rowe's example of the fawn, then it's possible that the purpose of the animal's terrible suffering might not surface for generations. It seems impossible then for Rowe to justify and sustain (1), namely, that there is no divine purpose behind the suffering we experience in the world. Only an omniscient being like God would possess the cognitive capacity necessary to grasp the complex causal connection between evil and its purpose. Also, it is important to state that, from our ignorance to the reason behind evil's existence, it certainly does not follow that God probably does not have a reason, or that his existence is unlikely. One might compare the evidential arguments' unjustified conclusion to an everyday example. Suppose that I go camping in America and want to make sure that there are no sand-flies present in my tent. These sand flies are tiny insects that feed on human blood, and their bite commonly leaves the host with red spots which can be itchy. Now since it is in my interest to try and avoid these flies, I thoroughly check my tent for their whereabouts and find nothing. But from my failure to find any sand flies I'm not justified in concluding that there probably aren't any such insects there since even if they were there, it is unlikely that I would be able to see them. Similarly, just because we cannot see what God's reasons are for permitting evil, it doesn't follow that he has no such explanation. As Fitzpatrick puts it: "[t]he theist's own conception of the nature of God, and of the severely limited extent of human knowledge of his divine nature, should lead him to conclude that such breakdowns are not to be despaired at, but are to be expected" (1981, p.38). Hence, we just lack the information necessary to understand why suffering exists. Despite the brief nature of this discussion, I think we have good grounds for thinking that Rowe's

evidential argument is unsound. Firstly, as Plantinga argues, it presupposes a line of reasoning (1) that is implausible; and secondly, the theist's inability to know God's reason for permitting evil does nothing on its *own* to undermine one's rational rights in holding on to the theistic belief (1974, p.10).

Two further responses to the Evidential Argument

Ever since the publication of Rowe's evidential argument several other attempts have been made to justify the existence of evil; the two specific examples I will analyse here are Hick's 'Soul-Making Theodicy' and Swinburne's Knowledge Argument. The justification behind their inclusion lies in the fact that both responses are sophisticated in nature, in that they attempt to answer many of the questions which are intimately connected to the problem of evil – such as its implications for moral epistemology. One of the most interesting things about Hick's and Swinburne's responses is how different they are in their approach. On the one hand, Hick claims that suffering is necessary to develop moral character through a gradual process called soul-making. In contrast to Hick, Swinburne argues that evil is necessary for the attainment of inferential knowledge. Or put more precisely, the thought is that, if humans are to be free, they must have the opportunity to inflict harm or good, which provides us with a responsibility to learn from evil outcomes in the hope of preventing them in the future. I conclude that neither response is an acceptable solution to the evidential problem of evil for varied reasons which will become apparent.

In arguably his most famous article *Soul-Making and Suffering* (1990) John Hick argues that evil is a necessary component in the spiritual life of humans; in other words, evil is an essential part of what he calls the 'soul-making process.' This view is

heavily influenced by the work of Saint Irenaeus, (130-202 AD), a Christian theologian and philosopher, first credited with maintaining that evil leads to moral growth. However, what does Hick mean by the soul-making process? Like Saint Irenaeus, Hick takes biblical inspiration from the Old Testament especially the following verse: "Then God said, let us make mankind in our own image, in our own likeness" (Genesis, 1:26). Hick understands this to mean that human beings share some important similarities with God, namely the fact that they are conscious intelligent beings, who are capable of moral autonomy. However, in contrast to God's perfect and infallible nature, humans are also morally flawed and fundamentally imperfect. Therefore, it is for this reason that experiencing intense suffering throughout one's life is necessary to facilitate moral development; we learn to be responsible, self-directing individuals, who are worthy of being in the image of a perfected God (1990, pp.168-9). However, this claim raises the obvious response: why didn't God just create perfect humans in the first place? William P. Alston makes this point succinctly: "God could just create us with the kind of character needed for fellowship with Himself, thereby rendering the hardships and suffering unnecessary" (2007, p.40). Hick responds to this by arguing that a gradually perfected moral development resulting from an arduous process, is intrinsically more valuable than a perfect morality which is pre-programmed into human beings. Moreover, God cannot replicate this process since it depends on freedom of the will to decide between good and evil, and the subsequent desire to strive towards moral perfection. Thus, as Hick summarises, "I suggest, then… that human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral efforts has value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process" (1990, p.169). In my view, when we look at specific examples of suffering in

the world, then this seems to render the soul-making theory to be implausible. Now it might be that in certain isolated scenarios soul-making could be used to explain a terrible situation; for instance, when a person goes through an agonising fight with cancer, it makes them a stronger individual, they often possess moral qualities, such as bravery. However, it is also the case that many people cannot handle such terrible events and fall into moral disrepute, they never recover from the emotional and physical trauma. Hence, it is rather optimistic to think that *all* the evil we experience leads to moral growth, and this can be shown when we observe the uneven distribution and gratuitous nature of certain evil experiences in the world. For example, many millions starve to death, and such a tragedy seems to be purely destructive. A child who dies from lack of food doesn't learn anything purposeful or achieve moral growth from that experience. They only experience what it is like to live daily with malnutrition. I ask you, then, where is the soul-making in all of this? Moreover, the possibility of other people learning from the suffering of a starving child seems absurd and frankly immoral, as Lars Svendsen alludes to: "Irenaeanists may assert that we learn generosity from other people's suffering, but in my opinion the argument is untenable. Personal edification cannot justify the suffering of others" (2010, p.55). In addition to this, there is no explanation for the amount of evil in the world or the degree of suffering we see; consider the magnitude of the 2004 Boxing Day earthquake which triggered a tsunami so great that it claimed the lives of over 250,000 people. Are we supposed to believe that these types of events are necessary for humans to have virtues, like sympathy or bravery? It is clear that such events are not required for people to develop such moral traits, and in this particular case; there is no moral development, just gratuitous death. Mark Maller also emphasises this point:

> *Theists claim that human lives are richer for the suffering they endure, but even assuming that is true, it still cannot justify every slaughtered person and all human anguish throughout time. The victims and survivors of the Holocaust were in no way better for the hardship they endured* (2009, p.4).

In conclusion, then, I believe that Hick's soul-making theodicy is an inadequate response to the evidential problem of evil for two main reasons. Firstly, even though some good can come out of suffering, there are numerous cases where, on Hick's account, suffering is, in fact, in opposition to moral or spiritual development, and serves no purposeful function, which is exactly what the evidential argument from evil maintains. What's more, the intensity of evil remains unjustified on Hick's account of soul-making, as intense evils often destroy a person's life, without any benefit at all. In his influential book, *The Existence of God* (1979), Richard Swinburne gives a different reason for why evil exists, arguing that evil is necessary since it provides us with *knowledge* on how to inflict evil and the means to averting it (1979, p.202). Swinburne starts his discussion by acknowledging the difficulty natural evil poses for theism and assesses some of the responses that have been given. For example, many have thought that God would have good reason in permitting the occurrence of evil, if it serves some biological purpose. However, as he rightly points out, the sheer intensity of many of suffering appears to be unnecessary, and, in fact, only an evil God would allow the degree and quantity of evil we see in the world. Swinburne also briefly considers the theological claim that evil is a punishment for human sin, but clearly, this cannot be an adequate response, for often the punishment does not fit the crime. For example, there are cases where new-born children suffer immensely without explanation. Hence, Swinburne argues that the presence of evil is necessary for us to

know how to bring about good and evil. His argument is summarised in the following passage:

> *…If men are to have the opportunity to bring about evils for themselves or others by actions or negligence or to prevent their occurrence, and if all knowledge of the future is obtained by normal induction… then there must be serious natural evils occurring to men or animals* (1979, p.211).

Swinburne's point is that human beings accumulate knowledge through inductive reasoning, they learn new things by experiencing them and can use this information for good ends, and so, by encountering the different manifestations of evil, we are then in an appropriate position to respond to any future occurrence. For instance, to know the dangers of exposure to radium someone must have come to die from radiation poisoning, as before this point in history no one would have been aware of such a danger. In this case, we have the knowledge to warn people of the hazards of radiation exposure. With natural evils, Swinburne thinks that they provide humans with moral responsibility for one another, with the ability to use our knowledge of past events for good ends or evil ones, such is the ultimate value of human freedom. In general, if we think about it, the whole of human historical knowledge is built on this process of induction; scientific disciplines (biology, physics, psychology, etc.) are furnished through a lengthy process of observations and experimentation and many accidental discoveries, and so this claim seems to be quite uncontroversial. However, the claim that evil provides us with an inferential knowledge that could not have been obtained otherwise, certainly is not evident. Eleonore Stump has criticised this view by pointing out that Swinburne's argument would only explain the necessity of suffering on a temporary basis; in other words, evil would only be justified until the point humans

recognise the dangers of bringing about a situation (1983, p.53). In my view, Stump's criticism is well founded because if we take the example of asbestos inhalation, once it has been sufficiently established that asbestos is dangerous, it will remain inexplicable why the suffering of that sort continues to persist into the future. What is more, David O'Connor has suggested another possible way in which God could prevent suffering but not at the expense of providing human beings with moral knowledge:

> *Swinburne appears to overstate the dependence of moral choice upon experience of natural evil… It's not logically impossible that human beings should become equipped with knowledge of the good and evil another way, say, innately (1983, p.66).*

Nevertheless, I contend that this method would not be open to God, for it would appear to conflict with libertarian free will. If God were to place innate ideas in human minds, then these notions of right and wrong would not be a product of one's rational thinking, and so God would seem to be causally determining a person to believe or think in a certain way. However, I do believe that there is a knock-down objection to Swinburne's argument which is this: there are certain counter cases of evil, which show that we can learn important things about the world *without* experiencing them. If we take a natural evil like Legionnaire's Disease, it seems to me that, in principle, one wouldn't need to suffer it to prevent it from happening. All that would be required is an appropriate amount of scientific testing and a sufficient understanding of human biology, since this would enable us to foresee the bacterial dangers of drinking contaminated water. Moreover, warning about the risks of infection through dirty water would encourage the authorities to follow the necessary health and safety regulations

when maintaining their water systems. Therefore, these evils and the like provide a counterexample to Swinburne's argument, as God's reason for permitting natural evil would be undermined, and such evils would be left unexplained. Perhaps Swinburne might reply by saying that we can only have knowledge of evils like smallpox through actual cases of patients who have suffered or died from it, but this I think is false. The advancement of the scientific method and the technological innovations in studying microorganisms makes it entirely possible that we can test for the dangers lurking behind exposure to certain bacteria, and so we could likely prevent such exposures before they occur. This observation shows that the divinely-inspired existence of evil is not necessary for us to be aware of potential evils and how to prevent them since through scientific experiments we can foresee and prevent evils using natural experimentation. Overall then, I think Swinburne's argument fails to account for the existence of evil because it is based on the false assumption that we can *only* attain knowledge about evils and how to prevent them through the process of suffering.

The Emotional Problem of Evil

No matter how sophisticated a response philosophers and theologians give to the problem of evil, it is unlikely that the emotional burden of evil will be overcome through mere argumentation. Philosophical responses to the problem of evil often fail to connect with people’s everyday life experiences; they transcend people’s feelings and emotions, leaving such an approach unhelpful at best. For example, it is doubtful that any theodicy would offer much comfort to a family who is grieving the loss of their child or loved one. Emotional phrases such as "only a cruel God would allow my baby to die" or "I cannot accept that God would allow such cruelty in the world" only emphasises the extent to which evil makes us suspicious towards God's existence.

Therefore, in my view, philosophical responses to the problem of evil only deal with what we might 'think' about the suffering we experience, but not how we 'feel' about it. In a YouTube video which has been viewed over seven million times, the atheist Stephen Fry is asked how he would respond if confronted by God at the 'pearly gates.' He gives the following trenchant response:

> *I'll say bone cancer in children, what's that about? How dare you. How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that's not our fault? It's not right. It's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain? [When asked about going to heaven] No, but I wouldn't want to. I wouldn't want to get in on his terms. They're wrong. The God who created this universe, if he created this universe, is quite clearly a maniac, an utter maniac, totally selfish. We have to spend our lives on our knees thanking him. What kind of God would do that? Yes, the world is very splendid, but it also has in it insects whose whole life cycle is to burrow into the eyes of children and make them blind. Why? Why did you do that to us? It is simply not acceptable. Atheism is not just about not believing there's a God. On the assumption there is one, what kind of God is he? It's perfectly apparent that he is monstrous, utterly monstrous, and deserves no respect. (Fry, The Telegraph, 31st January 2015).*

The full quotation is worthwhile because it captures the distrust and anger that many people have towards a God who would allow such misery to exist in the world. However, it is crucial to distinguish between good philosophical arguments from evil and emotional outbursts. To begin with, Fry asks why God would allow the presence of bone cancer in children, and then quickly disregards any possibility of God having

a sufficient reason; the conclusion that God does not exist comes from nowhere, and there is no intellectual element present. Fry does not provide an actual argument for God's non-existence and instead chooses to initiate a semantic attack on God's character resulting in a series of child-like name calling. Now if Fry were to ask an inquisitive question like ‘what reasons could God have for permitting the evil in the world' then this would warrant a grave and honest answer. However, Fry's use of phrases like ‘Why should I respect a capricious mean-minded, stupid God?' and ‘It's perfectly apparent that he is monstrous, utterly monstrous, and deserves no respect' immediately ends the discussion. He just assumes that God could not have any good reason for permitting evil, without even entertaining the possibility. Even if God did have a good reason for allowing bone cancer in children Fry would not want to know. Clearly, from the perspective of sheer force of language, the emotional reaction to evil can be compelling and lead the theist to question their belief in God. But I don't think this should materialise, for the theist must see through the emotional problem of evil and concentrate on the philosophical or intellectual question of whether God can have morally appropriate reasons for permitting pain and suffering. To this latter question, I think ST is a philosophically cogent response to the problem of evil, which at the very least undercuts the atheist's argument from evil, and arguably softens the issue of evil as an intellectual problem.Overall, the question remains on how we are to approach the emotional problem of evil. Since this purely emotive reaction to the problem of evil is so pervasive in societies and popular books concerning religion and constitutes for many the biggest obstacle to belief in God, it is crucial that I say a few words on how we overcome the problem. Firstly, for those who study at an academic institution, it is critical that lecturers make a distinction between the intellectual problem of reconciling

the existence of God and evil, and the emotional problem concerning people's resentment towards a God who allows so much suffering. This separation helps when dealing with potential objections to the existence of God since we can discern whether they are based on intellectual grounds or based on sentiment. Moreover, such an approach would lead to greater clarification on what is required for a good philosophical argument. However, for many individuals who are suffering or watching others suffer, pointing to arguments and evidence is not the answer here. We cannot accept that say a child slowly dying from leukaemia could in anyway have a greater purpose or be justified. Thus, even though the position of ST is tenable and in my opinion likely to be true, many accept that because we fail to identify a reason for suffering then there isn't or cannot be one. This frustration results, I think, from the idea that scepticism leaves us in the dark and with no answers for why so much evil permeates our world. Therefore, clearly on an emotional level, a different approach is required focusing on the root of the person's psychology. Loving and compassionate support towards an individual who is experiencing pain and suffering may help to alleviate the impact of suffering; a counsellor can also empathise with the individual and give them the opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings in a private environment. On a human level, voicing one's support and sympathy through words and actions can be invaluable when going through times of hardship and sadness. From a Christian perspective, there are passages in the Bible which provide hope that their suffering or that of a loved one is not pointless but part of God's providential plan for humanity. Romans 4:25 tells of the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross for our sins, the punishment he allowed himself to bear for the good of humanity. This profound statement emphasises not only the extent to which God was prepared to

suffer for humankind but also the fact that he suffers when we suffer. Moreover, according to Christianity, we must realise that the true purpose of human existence is not necessarily human happiness, but rather the development of a personal relationship with God (Craig, 2008, p.70). Thus, suffering may enable us to have a richer knowledge of God. The Christian doctrine of salvation further tells us that life does not end at the grave but rather is eternal. Therefore, God has a strong reason for providing an afterlife to humans, in the form of compensating them for the suffering they have experienced.

Concluding Remarks

I have tried to show that both versions of the problem of evil are unsuccessful and that theistic belief remains reasonable. In the first section, I assessed the plausibility of the logical problem of evil and subsequently argued that the burden of proof that the atheist must shoulder is too great, by showing that the two assumptions behind the argument are not necessarily true. In the first instance, I argued that Plantinga's free will defence is successful in accounting for the moral evil in the world, and thus moral evil and God are logically compatible. Moreover, so long as it is even *possible* that God has morally justifiable reasons for allowing natural evil, then both assumptions are false, and the logical argument breaks down. In the second section, I turned to Rowe's most potent evidential formulation. In addressing this argument, I suggested the most plausible response for the theist is a position of epistemic scepticism regarding gratuitous suffering. Hence, given our limited intelligence and foresight, Rowe and others cannot sustain the claim that it is improbable that God would have good reasons for permitting evil. I went on to focus on two modern responses to the

evidential argument and showed why they are not acceptable solutions. Hick's soulmaking theodicy fails to account for instances of suffering in children, and there also exist counter-examples where evil leads to moral disrepute rather than moral development. What's more, the notion that suffering is required to attain moral traits is false, and so many instances of evil are left unexplained and without justification. Similarly, Swinburne's theodicy is unsuccessful in accounting for the *continued* existence of natural evil in the world, since moral knowledge would only require natural evil on a temporary basis rather than the continual suffering we experience. Also, knowledge gained by scientific testing shows that the existence of evil is not necessary for us to know about evil or how to prevent it. From a Christian perspective, I finished by providing some suggestions for dealing with the emotional problem which arises when we experience suffering, and emphasised the need for greater clarification in the literature, on matters of correctly formulating intellectual arguments from evil. Even though the presence of evil may make us suspicious or dubious towards a God who would allow such vast amounts of evil, we should not expect to know God's reason for allowing evil; from an intellectual perspective, natural evils may well serve a fundamental purpose in God's providential plan. To conclude, although evil may well provide the biggest obstacle to theistic belief, for the reasons I have given, it shouldn't be an insoluble intellectual problem, but one which should be confronted on an emotional level.

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Chapter II – The Problem of Religious Diversity

The essence of all religions is one. Only their approaches are different.
Mahatma Ghandi.

Introduction

Through the gradual globalisation of the world we have become increasingly aware of religious diversity. Even though religions generally believe that a divine reality exists, they strongly disagree on the nature of the divine. In the monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism), the divine embodies a personal creator of the universe, namely, God, whereas in the Hindu tradition we find the polytheistic belief that multiple Gods exist in harmony. However, this is not merely a disagreement over the number of Gods that are thought to exist, for in nontheistic faiths like certain schools of Buddhism, one rejects the notion of a creator altogether; instead, there is a commitment towards an impersonal understanding of reality. As we can see, just on the nature of the divine alone, there are quite different ideas, yet this disagreement is not limited to the divine, but can also be found in other areas of theological concern, such as human destiny. Christians, for instance, believe that salvation is possible through Christ alone, whereas Muslims deny this, for the Quran claims that Allah is the source of salvation, and warns us against belief in other false Gods. Overall, it seems obvious that the beliefs systems which underpin these various worldviews are fundamentally in conflict; in other words, these claims are mutually exclusive and cannot all be true. If the monotheistic conception of the divine is true, then the nontheistic and polytheistic accounts cannot *also* be true. And if the Christian conception of salvation is true, then the Muslim conception must be false. Hence, in each case we are left with a particular conception of the divine reality and human

salvation. Since these popular world religions are mutually exclusive, this raises two important questions; firstly, how should a religious follower respond to the fact that many religious traditions reject their own view of reality? Moreover, what is the destiny of other equally dedicated believers who disagree with a specific conception of salvation? In the philosophy of religion, recent discussions have been laid bare on the phenomenon of religious diversity, with a wide range of reactions and responses. The central difficulty posed by the existence of diverse faiths is that there is no standard by which we can adjudicate between conflicting truths claims. As David S. Nah summarises, "…[a]ll religious knowledge is historically and culturally limited, making it impossible to evaluate the truth claims of other religions on the basis of any one religion" (2012, p.22). In response to the diversity of religion experience, three wideranging positions have appeared in the literature – that of *exclusivism, pluralism,* and *inclusivism*. The exclusivist continues to maintain that their own religion is true, whereas, the pluralist, broadly speaking, argues that all religions are in some sense valid ways of perceiving ultimate reality. Finally, inclusivism represents an intermediate position; the inclusivist argues that although one religion is superior, other religions do capture elements of the truth in some form or another.[13]

This debate has culminated in a multi-faceted discussion of the implications of religious diversity. For instance, one may ask if we are *epistemically justified* in holding that one religion is true. After all, as Amir Dastmalchian remarks: "[r]eflecting on the fact of religious diversity can make a person with religious convictions lose confidence in his religious convictions, or in any religious beliefs whatsoever" (2013, p.2). There

[13] Gavin D'Costa distinguishes between two main types of Christian salvific inclusivism – *structuralism* and *restrictivism*. See: D'Costa, G. (2009) *Christianity and the World Religions*. Oxford: Blackwell.

is the further worry of whether it is morally permissible to denounce other faiths; here I am talking about the issue of *religious tolerance*. It is not possible to adequately address all these issues in one essay, and for that reason, I will focus on two key concerns. The first is a general question: considering religious diversity and pluralism, is exclusivism a tenable position? This will involve an analysis of Hick's famous argument for pluralism, which attempts to show that all religions are valid ways of attaining salvation and knowledge of ultimate reality. I qualify 'ultimate reality' to describe anything divine that is thought to exist beyond our world, whether that be God or something similarly worthy of worship. Initially, I emphasise some of the benefits of adopting pluralism in terms of furnishing tolerance and greater understanding of other religious traditions, but I go on to conclude that Hick's argument for pluralism remains implausible. However, I do not intend to refute Hick's pluralism (Hick's argument may still be sound) or provide an argument for why it is false; rather, I contend that there are issues which collectively make pluralism implausible. In the second section, I go on to defend exclusivism against some traditional objections, such as there being something arrogant or immoral with holding an exclusivist position.

In the closing section, I address the second question - if exclusivism is tenable, then what about Christian exclusivism?[14] I attempt to achieve this by situating it within the context of the soteriological problem, which I take to be the most serious objection against the Christian doctrine of salvation. This issue is significant because it raises all sorts of philosophical and theological questions about God's nature and the fate of humanity. Finally, I examine a response to the soteriological problem, that of William

[14] In terms of clarity, by the term 'Christian exclusivism' I am referring *solely* to the doctrine of salvation.

Lane Craig's Molinist theodicy, which can be found in his article "*No Other Name"* (1989) and later in *The Only Wise God* (1999). Since Craig's solution presupposes that God has *Middle Knowledge (MK)* I will say something about the plausibility of MK as well. Overall, I conclude that a Molinist approach to the soteriological problem remains a fruitful avenue of consideration for the Christian exclusivist. However, I suggest that there is a real concern for the explanatory adequacy of Craig's defence, which, if left unanswered, would jeopardise the coherency of the Molinist position. I therefore encourage further philosophical and theological discussion of the Molinist position in conjunction with the soteriological problem. Above all, the two questions I address are both pertinent to the debate over religious diversity/pluralism, as well as crucial to the acceptability of SSE, the limited defence of theism that I wish to defend in this thesis, since, at the very least, SSE requires that Christian exclusivism is tenable if it is to remain a defensible position. Some philosophers may also consider the problem of religious diversity to be the most serious obstacle to theistic belief, even greater than that of the problem of evil.

In the last half-century, religious pluralism has become a popular philosophical position to take with respect to religious difference.[15] Championed by philosophers like John Hick (1922-2012), pluralists acknowledge religious difference, but argue that all religions are on epistemic parity when it comes to providing us with knowledge of reality (Byrne, 1982, p.220). Pluralism can therefore be a reactionary position, an attempt to both understand and appreciate the diversity of religious experiences, whilst at the same time, preserving these claims as veridical. The roots of pluralistic thinking

[15] Some philosophers think that religious diversity is a *prima facie* argument for *atheism,* or for religious scepticism. Whereas others have stressed the inherent subjectivity of religious experience.

can be traced back to two theological observations. That the world religions seem to share a common core belief in the divine, and that no one religious tradition appears to be superior in its ability to transform people's lives. In addition, Alister E. McGrath has argued that pluralism is a response to *Postmodernism*, which, along with the collapse of pre-Enlightenment thinking, called into question if there could even be a criterion for truth, [16] and this doubt encouraged alternative meanings and interpretations of religious language (1992, pp.364-5).

In my own experiences, I often came across students who had certain intuitions about religious claims and the notion of truth. Some would say, for instance, that "all religions are true", and others still would carefully point out to me that "what's true for you might not be true for me". These two claims are relevant and important because they help us to distinguish pluralism from *relativism*. Let us then briefly examine these claims and the assumptions they rest upon. The claim that all religions are true assumes and that no one religion holds exclusivity over matters of truth, and so other religions are also a source of truth. This is what pluralism says. The second claim that 'what's true for you might not be true for me' is the view of the relativist. According to relativism, truth must be evaluated based on a particular mode of thinking, and this is further contingent on historical, geographical, and sociological factors. If we take the example of the different truth claims made by a Muslim brought up in Indonesia and a Christian born in America, the relativist would argue that they are true relative to their respective cultural frameworks. Moreover, neither of these claims is truer than the other. Yet, pluralism and relativism are *not* the same thing, since the pluralist maintains that truth

[16] Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was one of the pioneers of the Postmodernist movement, and through notable ideas such as Deconstruction, cast doubt on many of our intellectual worldviews including the notion of truth or certainty.

does exist in many religions, whereas the relativist denies that truth exists objective instead, something is true relative to a certain time, place, and culture. If pluralism leads to relativism it becomes self-undermining, because the pluralist does not want to say that truth is relative and only to be judged through a particular religious worldview.

It is worth noting that there are several practical and theological advantages to religious pluralism. The most obvious attractive aspect is that, above all, it seems to make sense, as Timothy O'Connor states: "For many people… there is a general air of plausibility to pluralism in matters of religion" (1999, p.166). Therefore, one might claim that, although religions disagree with one another over the exact nature of divine reality, they do share the view that such a reality exists, that there is something beyond reality as we know it. Hence, it does seem to be possible and perhaps, for many, even very plausible, that different religions perceive ultimate reality from alternative perspectives. Secondly, pluralism encourages an intellectual dialogue between world religions, and this can provide us with a greater insight and deeper understanding of the diversity and breadth of religious practices. Moreover, an appreciation of other religions helps to instil much-needed tolerance in a world which is often beset by religious turmoil and extremism. Thus, the pluralist approach arguably has the practical advantage of furnishing harmony in the face of indifference, by rejecting notions of superiority and inferiority, which are often associated with exclusivism (Byrne, 1982, p.235).

Hick's Pluralistic Account

One of the most famous arguments for pluralism has been developed by the Christian philosopher John Hick. The most complete development of his pluralistic theory is found in *An Interpretation of Religion* (1989). Hick starts by observing that we live in a world that is religiously debatable, for instance, the world's major religions all seem to be *equally* successful ways of producing (at least some) persons who are spiritually and morally excellent, and thus no religion appears to be more efficacious in transforming human lives. What's more, followers of these religions all appear equally compelled to think that their religion is true, and share the same sort of religious devotion and commitment. Finally, there seems to be no definitive argument that would wholly convince a person of faith to convert to another conflicting religion. Therefore, we are left with a situation in which no one religion seems to be obviously superior in being intellectually, philosophically or theologically more convincing. On the contrary, if one religion were superior in its truth claims, we would *expect* there to be a significant amount of additional evidence in support of a consensus regarding one religion, and this is not the case. Rather than maintaining a position of exclusivism or claiming that all religions are false, Hick's central idea is that all the major world religions are equally valid in being effective ways to soteriological and ethical enlightenment, and therefore every religion is on epistemic parity. Apart from the idea that many religions can be valid, Hick further emphasises how different religious experiences converge on the same ultimate reality:

> *I want to explore the pluralistic hypothesis that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human; and*

> *that within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological 'spaces' within which, or 'ways' along with, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfilment (2004, p.240).*

There is a lot to unpack in this passage. Firstly, Hick is claiming that the different religious views we observe should be seen as alternative ways of experiencing what he calls 'The Real'. In other words, different religious experiences constitute legitimate ways of responding to the Real. With respect to the monotheistic traditions, the Real manifests itself in the form of different Gods (the heavenly Father, Allah, the God of Judaism, on) whilst in nontheistic religions the Real is experienced as the Absolute or an impersonality reality. Why, we might ask, is the Real experienced in such ontologically distinct ways? Hick thinks that the reason can be found if we reflect upon the influences behind religious experience. From an anthropological and historical standpoint, special emphasis is placed on the evolution of human culture as crucial in influencing different modes of authentic religious thinking (1984, p.220). The famous story of the blind men and the elephant symbolises this view. In the narrative, we are told about three people who are unknowingly touching the same elephant but come to different experiential conclusions. The first man feels the elephant's leg and reasons that it's a large pillar, the second feels the elephant's tail and thinks it's a rope, while the third feels the elephant's trunk and thinks it is a thick tree branch (Trigg, 2014, p.54). The moral of the story is that different phenomenological experiences can be equally valid, for they can each capture part of the truth. Hence, although religions

may be inherently different from one another, this is merely the result of the development of various modes of human thinking.

The second notion we can draw from this passage is Hick's view on the goal of the major world religions. According to Hick, the goal of these religions is the 'transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centeredness', and this is achieved through the gradual alteration of one's mindset, from a self-serving attitude to one of moral and spiritual enlightenment in accord with the divine. By self-centeredness Hick is referring to the selfish desires that beset human beings, the fact that our own lives become the centrepiece of significance, and through one's own awareness of the Real and its salvific message, Hick claims that a religious person's psychology dramatically changes, for they come to see the value of their own lives in the context of the transcendental reality. Moreover, by focusing on the major world religions Hick seems to assume that religions can be ranked, presumably based on their salvific and spiritual efficacy.

Finally, it is important to stress Hick's view on the ontological nature of Real. He asserts that the ultimate nature of the Real is ontologically separate from the sense of the Real in religious experience, and this is done by making a Kantian distinction between the *phenomenal* Real as experienced in human consciousness, and the *noumenal* Real, or the Real as it exists in of itself. Hick believes that human beings lack the cognitive understanding necessary to experience the noumenal character of the Real, and therefore, it is *ineffable* since we cannot ascribe any positive properties to it, including traditional theistic properties like power, goodness, and personhood. If Hick is right in affirming that the Real is trans-categorical, how then should we balance this with the rich religious images of God and the Absolute that are worshipped? The

answer seems to be that we can only experience the phenomenal nature of the Real through human conceptualisation; in short, our sensory organs take in information and interpret it in ways that make it intelligible to the human mind. Yet, when it comes to the noumenal nature of the Real, none of our concepts are explanatorily adequate in their ability to discern it (Rowe, 1999, p.145). It's important to stress, however, that this limitation does not thereby affect the authenticity of one's religious experience of the Real, for Hick still thinks that we are in contact with its phenomenal nature. However, this does imply that when we experience the phenomenal manifestations of the Real in the form of various Gods and the Absolute, and take these manifestations to be the true nature of the divine, we are mistaken, because the descriptive language we use (e.g. God is good, the Absolute is impersonal) cannot be literally true, but is rather mythological. Based on this view, Hick concludes that the noumenal Real is the ultimate mystery (2004, p.349). Concerning the notion that the Real is ultimately beyond concepts, Rowe has argued that is must at the very least possess very general concepts, like that of being something we can refer to. Hick would acknowledge this, but qualify that the noumenal Real possesses no *substantive* attributes that are applicable to our conceptual schemas. Now that we are familiar with the key aspects of Hick's pluralism, I will briefly emphasise some concerns which seem to make his view implausible.

Reasons to doubt Hick's approach

Hick attempts to provide both a radical and comprehensive account of religious diversity, and so this naturally lends itself to intrigue and further questions. One such query surrounds the relationship between the phenomenal and noumenal Real. More specifically, if we affirm that the noumenal is devoid of substantive properties then the

objector might infer that Hick's theory cannot account for the causal connection between the phenomenal and noumenal. The problem with this objection is that firstly, the claim that Hick doesn't specify the causal connection, does not in of itself show that such a connection does not exist. Moreover, given Hick's Kantian distinction, this difficulty is to be expected since we are cognitively limited in our understanding of how religious belief projects itself to the divine reality. Finally, Hick might be able to provide an account of the causal connection, in which 'cause' is to be understood differently than in scientific accounts. Another difficulty concerns the explanatory scope of Hick's theory in relation to existential questions. Hick is willing to concede that all our human endeavours, in trying to understand and conceptualise the true nature of divine reality, are pointless and literally false assertions. Hence, Hick stresses that human language takes on a mythological character when we speak of the divine as personal, spiritual, and the like. But if this is the case, what motivation is there for the religious practitioner to adopt the vacuous Real over the rich conceptual theistic or nontheistic account of the divine that they have become accustomed to believing to be true? This query misses the point. Both the theistic and nontheistic accounts are humanistic manifestations of the noumenal Real, and not two different positions to take with respect to divine reality. Therefore, the argument assumes that Hick's view is false to begin with. Finally, some philosophers have criticised Hick's use of the Real since it departs too drastically from traditional conceptions of the Divine, as Robert McKim writes:

> "His entirely ineffable Real more closely resembles an emptiness that is ineffable and beyond the scope of human concepts than it resembles a loving or compassionate God" (2001, p.116).

I don't share McKim's view that the notion of ineffability is necessarily problematic, after all, there are various theological views that take God's nature to be unknown. For instance, in Neoplatonism there is a defence of the Apophatic tradition known as *Negative Theology* (Carbine, 2015, p.104). According to this theological thinking, we cannot say what the divine is but only what it is not. Thus, we can employ negative assertions like 'the divine is not a creature' or 'the divine is not physical' but ultimately, we are cognitively closed to its ultimate nature. It is not my business to assess the overall credibility of negative theology, however, it appears to be respectable theological position in the sense that it allows us to at least reason about God's nature, and I think this does provide us with a kind of knowledge, knowledge of the ontological configurations that the divine cannot resemble. So far, the objections I have discussed against Hick's pluralism appear to be lacking in substance and understanding. Nevertheless, let me emphasise two concerns for Hick's pluralistic hypothesis that I take to be problematic. To begin with, when Hick claims that the Real is ultimately ineffable he is not making a particularly strong claim. After all, he is merely acknowledging that we cannot know everything about the divine reality, for there are some things that are beyond our comprehension and understanding. The religious practitioner would quite likely agree with this claim, for if we think about the ontological differences between humans and the divine reality, this cognitive limitation is to be expected. However, Hick doesn't stop here, the Real is not merely somewhat difficult to comprehend, but *completely beyond* human investigation. We cannot say anything about it; we cannot even say that the Real is either personal or nonpersonal for this would falsely suppose that these concepts apply to the Real in the first place. In my view, this lends itself to the following objection made by Plantinga against the

coherence of the noumenal Real. If we suppose that the Real is completely devoid of substantive concepts, then how can we know that it exists in relation to religious experience? For example, Hick claims that the Real is completely distinct from the properties that religious practitioners attribute to the divine - that of goodness, power, holiness, and creation (Plantinga, 2000, p.58). Therefore, why should we think that the Real is specially connected to religious belief rather than other forms of human practices like war? Of course, Hick might be right in thinking that religious experiences are all in contact with the Real, but the point is that if the Real possesses no positive properties, then there seems to be a question mark over why it is *only* through religion that we come to experience it. Secondly, what positive reason is there for thinking that the noumenal Real exists? It seems to me that one must proceed from the assumption that each of the major world religious are on epistemic parity with respect to their salvific and spiritual efficacy, and that therefore, these experiences are equally valid manifestations of the Real. But why should one concede this? Hick doesn't provide any *argument* in support of the conclusion that no religion is closer to the truth than another, and so why should we accept this? Given this assumption, why then should the exclusivist, who has fulfilled their intellectual diligence, honestly assessed all available evidence, and concluded that they believe p rather than -p, listen to Hick?

Overall, Hick's account provides us with a positive call for religious tolerance, and he should be credited for his effort to avoid religious imperialism. Nevertheless, regarding the plausibility of the hypothesis, it is difficult to see why we should find the pluralist view persuasive.

Is Exclusivism Tenable?

Even if one takes pluralism to be unconvincing, why should we believe that religious exclusivists know any better? To this, I want to briefly respond, by assessing some of the chief objections against religious exclusivism. While it is often thought that the problem of evil poses the greatest obstacle to theistic belief, many people, including myself, take the problem posed by religious pluralism, as arguably more pressing for the religious person. Firstly, there are concerns about whether it is even possible for one religion to be true. To illustrate, when we look for instance at the similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam, then this issue can be recognised. One fundamental aspect that they agree on is the monotheistic conception of God, but when it comes to matters of salvation, there is significant disagreement: On the one hand, the Bible clearly states that salvation can only be achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, whereas in the Quran, there are passages (especially (4:156-8) that seem to deny Jesus's crucifixion and that he was God incarnate. Instead, the Muslim is instructed to believe that Jesus was raised in bodily form to heaven by God, and that Jesus was a prophet (Watt, 1991, p.21). Moreover, contrary to Christian salvific teachings, the only way to be rewarded with paradise for the Muslim is by undertaking good works in the hope of attaining Allah's grace. Considering the evident religious disagreement that surrounds fundamental existential questions, it is unsurprising that some come to conclude that religious views must be culturally conditioned, humanistic traditions that ultimately misunderstand reality. Moreover, these conflicting views are not only to be found in discussions of human destiny, but are prevalent in a wide range of topics, like the nature of God, and our relationship to him. With this in mind, I want to provide a brief defence of exclusivism

against some of the most popular objections towards it, namely the religious relativist objection and the charge of arrogance. Overall, I argue that these objections are unsuccessful and so exclusivism remains a respectable position.

It is often said by the pluralist or sceptic that exclusivism must be false because one's religious beliefs are largely determined by historical, geographical, and sociological considerations. In other words, if you were born in North America you would most likely be a Christian or a Jew, whereas if you were born in Indonesia, you would probably be a follower of Islam. What's more, an individual's early belief-producing years is characterised and largely determined by parental factors and friendship groups. These observations indicate that how one comes to hold a particular religious belief is highly dependent on external factors, rather than on rational and reflective deliberation. It is often the case that young children are indoctrinated by their parents into adopting a specific religious worldview and in their infancy there just is no possibility of assessing the credibility of these theological claims. Therefore, many go on in their adult years to accept such views without question. The suggestion then is that what you ultimately hold to be true is not entirely under your control and that this in some way invalidates one's religious view. Or perhaps the source of these beliefs is intellectually suspicious or unreliable. My response to this cultural observation is to say - so what? The fact of the matter is that such considerations and the like do not influence the *truth value* of a religious claim. This notion is known in the philosophical literature as the *genetic fallacy*, which is where one attempts to invalidate a belief by showing how one came to hold that view. Such an effort is fallacious for it could well be that a person who is brought up a Hindu by their parents and continues to hold that belief throughout their life, goes on to hold a correct opinion. Thus, although it is

accurate that our system of beliefs is heavily shaped by parental and cultural factors, this fact alone does not invalidate a religious belief. Philosophers like Alvin Plantinga have further maintained that this argument is an example of a “philosophical tar baby”. Plantinga writes:

> *Pluralism isn't and hasn't been widely popular in the world at large. If the pluralist had been born in Madagascar or medieval France, he probably wouldn't have been a pluralist. Does it follow that he shouldn't be a pluralist or that his pluralistic beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief-producing process? (1995, pp.187-8).*

Plantinga concludes that the answer is no for how one comes to hold a belief is irrelevant to whether it is true or not; a person could come to hold a true belief about the world through a snippet in the newspaper or by reading an academic article. Consequently, if this argument were correct, then it would commit the logical fallacy of being self-refuting. A statement is self-refuting when it is false and contributes to falsifying itself through self-reference (White, 1989, p.84). For example, if one utters ‘I cannot speak a word of English’ or claims that ‘There is no such thing as truth’, they are both self-refuting for when we apply the implications of these assertions to themselves they are false. In the first instance, the person knows at least seven words in English, and in the latter case, the speaker is making a truth claim that his statement forbids. Overall then, since the objection is both false and self-referentially incoherent, I think we have substantial grounds for dismissing it.

In addition, some scholars have argued that holding an exclusivist view in the light of religious diversity is arrogant, as Kelly James Clark concedes, “The pressures of religious diversity are clear: to maintain that one’s own religious beliefs are true and,

therefore, that all religious competitors are false smacks of arrogance and intolerance" (1997, pp.1-2). This accusation might also be lodged by the pluralist who takes exclusivism to be a self-assured or self-serving position. Before we assess the plausibility of this claim, we need to better understand how the objection arises.

Let us take the example of the Christian exclusivist who believes that the following two claims are true. (A) That there exists an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, being, who created the world and shares a special relationship with humankind. And (B) that human salvation is a genuine possibility, but only through the knowledge of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice and resurrection. It is quite obvious that many people would reject either or both (A) and (B) and instead postulate comparable claims about the divine and salvation, or entirely different ones altogether. For example, the non-theistic practitioner would reject (A) and (B), whereas the follower of Islam would agree with the Christian on (A) but deny (B). Moreover, a person could deny (A) and (B) but believe that something does exist beyond the natural world, something which is responsible for the existence of the world, and the source of human salvation. There is also, of course, the person who denies both (A) and (B) on atheistic grounds. As we can see, the exclusivist happens to hold a particular position with respect to the nature of God and human salvation, and so the question is whether there is anything self serving or arrogant about this attitude. Firstly, let us assume that to be philosophically arrogant is to hold an unjustified sense of superiority regarding one's own beliefs. In holding a particular position with respect to (A) and (B), the exclusivist is denying any positions that are contrary to that of (A) and (B), and consequently they believe that anyone who denies (A) and (B) are ignorant to what is true. But from this can we charge the exclusivist of being arrogant? If we answer with yes then this seems to

lead to a moral dilemma, for if we assume that the seriousness of religious disagreement is founded on the basis that there is no *existing* argument which would be sufficient as to persuade the exclusivist to withhold their belief or deny (A) and (B), then what more can they do in this situation but believe as they do? Perhaps the objector wants to say that the exclusivist is not taking the plausibility and importance of other religious views into consideration, and is therefore, being arrogant in maintaining that only their religion is right. But is this true?

Suppose a person proceeds on a path of intense soul-searching in the hope of finding spiritual development and intellectual fulfilment, and ventures through life with the mentality that they will follow the truth wherever it leads them. Moreover, they develop an attitude of pursuing every difficult question into the ground until they reach spiritual contentment. And suppose further that said person does extensive research on alternative views which challenge their own worldview, and they conclude that no present argument would persuade them otherwise. In my view, said person would not be philosophically arrogant for in their heart they have come to the conclusion that they bear witness to the truth. Hence, they cannot avoid believing *p* rather than *-p* without being contrary to their own intellectual and religious convictions. The same can be said for any other religious position with respect to (A) and (B), including the view we discussed earlier, religious pluralism. The pluralist also holds a particular attitude, that of denying (A) and (B) and any substantive claims that is contrary to pluralism. Given this, isn't the pluralist then guilty of being arrogant and self-serving? In the same way as the exclusivist, the pluralist holds that although other religious claims seem to be genuine, meaningful, and eternally significance to their supporters, they are ultimately false views about reality, and *only* pluralism right. Peter Van

Inwagen has in fact argued that *pluralism is reducible to an exclusivist position* for just as the Christian exclusivist disagrees with the Muslim, the pluralist also rejects said view (1997, p.300). In going back to the initial objection, should we think that the exclusivist is arrogant? It seems to me that we shouldn't, because I do not see how a person can be deemed arrogant merely for disbelieving what another person takes to be true. Not only is this unavoidable in the philosophy of religion or any other field of enquiry, it is also unavoidable in life in general; curiosity is part of what makes us human in reflecting about the nature of reality and reaching certain conclusions that we deem truthful. If the objection goes through, then one could argue that the accusation of arrogance is a double-edged sword, for it appears to be applicable to all religious traditions that hold their belief to be right and opposing views to be false.

In my opinion, the exclusivist can remain assured when faced with the standard objections to their position. Firstly, in regard to the origin of religious belief, although one's religious affiliation can often be a product of accidental circumstances like that of culture and upbringing, this does nothing to show in itself that one's religious belief is false or even unjustified. Secondly, the accusation of arrogance on the part of the exclusivist is quite strange since if we consider that there exists no current argument that would persuade an exclusivist or non-exclusivist to abandon their positions, then the non-exclusivist is also guilty of the same arrogant approach, as they too reject any religious view that conflicts with their own. Overall, I think the exclusivist position is respectable and can be defended against common objections.

Christian Salvific Exclusivism

If we grant that exclusivism is a tenable position then what are we to make of the credibility of *specific* exclusivist claims that concern human destiny? In this closing section, I want to focus on the Christian response to salvation. This subject is worthy of discussion because it has generated a significant debate in the contemporary literature, over whether God provides an equal opportunity of salvation to *all* historical persons. Consequently, some philosophers like Himma (2002) have since concluded that this gives us a moral reason for accepting soteriological pluralism. Another justification for focusing on this issue is the great theological insight it brings to other related topics, like that of divine revelation, divine omniscience, and post-mortem existence. Finally, the topic has often been neglected in the philosophical literature and so is worthy of further examination (Myers, 2003, p.408). Firstly, when thinking about human salvation it is important to distinguish between two different views - *soteriological pluralism* and *soteriological exclusivism*. The former says that salvation is possible in all religions, whereas the latter position rejects this, claiming that salvation is only possible through one religion. The doctrine of salvation is exclusivist, since according to biblical teachings, salvation can *only* be achieved through belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are several passages in the Bible which support this claim - For example, in (Acts 4:12) Peter and John proclaim: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name (Jesus Christ) under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." What is more, when Thomas asks Jesus about his claims of divinity he replies, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). These passages support the view that redemption is only possible through the divinity of Christ. What then does

the Bible say about the fate of nonbelievers? In (Matthew 25:46) we learn that rejecting Christ seals a person's damnation: "Then they [the unbeliever] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life". In a way then, if a person freely chooses to reject God they seal their own fate. Finally, in (John 6:40) it is said that God's grace is universally accessible to all persons no matter their historical, cultural, or sociologically situation may be; *everyone* can benefit from the salvific power of the gospel (Demarest, 1997, p.142).

If we accept the overall picture of Christian exclusivism then this leads to some difficult questions. First of all, human awareness of the gospel seems to be a matter of historical chance in being born at a certain time and place where Christianity is prevalent; this applies to very few people in human history. For example, most of the world's overall population has lived and died prior to the resurrection happening, and there are still one billion people alive today who are yet to hear the name Jesus Christ (Nah, 2013, p.11). Upon our acknowledgment of these facts, that there are many people who have been lost through no fault of their own, the natural progression might be to conclude that this is contrary to God's grace and loving nature. Therefore, Christian salvation may be thought to be highly unjust, or immoral. However, it would be too quick to dismiss Christian salvation without first examining a properly formulated argument against it.

The Soteriological Problem

In the philosophical literature on Christian salvation, concerns over its acceptability has led to the *Soteriological Problem.* David P. Hunt makes a crucial distinction between *two* general aspects of the problem - *The problem of post-mortem suffering*

and *the problem of comparative justice* (1991, p.6). We can think of the first problem as being a soteriological version of the argument from evil. Generally, the problem of evil demands an explanation for why there is suffering in our earthly existence, but for the person who is damned in rejecting God, their suffering does not end at the grave; in fact, those who reject Christ are faced with the prospect of *eternal* suffering. In contrast, the second aspect has to with the fact that the path to salvation seems narrow and this raises moral concerns for it seems that God has not given sufficient grace to all persons. In chapter four of this dissertation I covered in detail two versions of the problem of evil, so we will focus our *sole attention* on the issue of comparative justice. In his article *Jesus and the World Religions*, John Hick provides us with an example of this soteriological concern[17]. He writes:

> *If Jesus was literally God incarnate, and if it is by his death alone that men can be saved, and by their response to him alone that they can appropriate that salvation, then the only doorway to eternal life is Christian faith. It would follow from this that the large majority of the human race so far have not been saved (1977, p.22).*

Given the broad nature of this topic we need to get a handle on the logical structure of the argument and its various assumptions. One way of describing the problem would be as a *logical* inconsistency between an all-loving, all-powerful, God, and those who have been lost without having the opportunity to respond to Christ. Such an argument might be stated in the following way:

[17] Hick was clearly aware of this moral objection to Christian exclusivism and this is one of the reasons why he defends soteriological pluralism.

The Soteriological Problem

1) There exists an all-loving, all-powerful, God.

2) Most of humanity has never heard the gospel and has been lost.

As we can see, this formulation clearly includes the two statements that are traditionally said to be in conflict with one another, but there is no explicit contradiction between affirming these two statements. Therefore, we might add the following implicit assumptions:

A) An all-loving God would desire that all persons hear the gospel B) An all-powerful God can create any logically possible world

If we take into consideration these two assumptions, then there does look to be an implicit inconsistency in affirming (1) and (2). This is because in a similar fashion to the problem of evil, if God desires that all persons hear the gospel and it is within God's power to create a world where everyone hears it, then it remains inexplicable why (2) occurs. Obviously, a response to this problem is *essential* for any defence of Christian exclusivist, nevertheless, before turning our attention to Craig's response to the soteriological problem, we must first analyse its key presupposition.

God's Middle Knowledge and Craig's Response

According to Craig, when one affirms that there is an inconsistency between (1) and (2) this presupposes that God has Middle Knowledge (MK) Therefore, we must first understand this concept and then see how it is used by Craig. One of the most influential thinkers with regard to God's knowledge is the sixteenth century Spanish Jesuit priest Luis de Molina (1535-1600), who argued that God's omniscience entails

having ‘scientia media’ or *MK.*[18] Traditionally, MK lies in between God’s *natural knowledge* (that of necessary truths and metaphysical possibilities) and his *free knowledge* (knowledge of his divine will and everything which is determined by it), and this collectively describes his divine omniscience (Adams, 1977, p.109). Therefore, according to Molina, God doesn’t just have knowledge of what *will* happen, which usually typifies accounts of omniscience, but he also knows what *would* happen in any given situation. If we apply this to human activity, God has prior knowledge of all *counterfactuals of creaturely freedom* (CCF), and this means that he knows how a person *would* freely act in any possible situation. An example of a CCF would be the following - ‘if Bert *wasn’t* a philosopher, then he *would* have been a firefighter’. In this example, the antecedent (the first portion of a hypothetical statement) is false and the consequent describes a hypothetical state of affairs that would occur if the antecedent was in fact true. From a scriptural standpoint, MK seems to have biblical support and this can be found especially in the Psalms, where it is said: "Our Lord is great, vast in power; His understanding is infinite" (Psalms 147:5). This passage suggests that God’s omniscience entails knowledge of everything that might be known, including all truths and possibilities.

It is also important to observe that there are several advantages in ascribing MK to God. To begin with, MK provides us with a greater understanding of how God could possess Divine Foreknowledge (DF). DF is God’s knowledge of all future contingent events, and MK can be used as an explanatory mechanism for how God knows the future, since MK entails pre-volitional knowledge of all possible scenarios. In this way,

[18] For an excellent discussion of Middle Knowledge see: Craig, William. (1999) *The Only Wise God*. Wipf and Stock Publishers, pp.127-152.

God can use his MK to assess all possibilities and subsequently knows which of these will obtain in history. A further advantage to accepting MK is the benefit it can bring in neutralising certain theological inconsistencies. One such example would be the alleged conflict between God's providence and human freedom. On the one hand, God has desires and an ultimate plan for the world, but if all human events are in line with God's will, then this seems to deny us significant freedom. MK provides a possible solution in this respect, for this would allow for creaturely freedom since God isn't causally responsible for human actions.[19] Therefore, MK explains how God *could* have foreknowledge of future events (Craig, 1999, p.133). Finally, as we shall now examine, Christians have also adopted God's MK as a means to solving various soteriological issues which arise when we think about human salvation.

Now that we have an understanding of MK it is important to see why Craig takes it to be relevant to the soteriological problem. According to Craig, the soteriological problem presents the difficulty of reconciling an omniscient, all-loving, all-power God, with the eternal damnation of uninformed people.[20] Why then does Craig think that God's MK is relevant to problem? The reason is that proponents of soteriological arguments have misidentified where the problem actually lies. For instance, it is usually thought that the problem concerns soteriological luck, the fact that many persons have been lost throughout history through historical, and geographical misfortune. In his article "No Other Name" (1989) Craig seeks to show why this

[19] Other critics, like Zimmerman (2009), have rejected MK, because it seems to give God too much control. The thought would be that since he knows all possible free choices this then negatively impact on free will (Perszyk in "Molinism: A Contemporary Debate", 2011, p.10).

[20] Contrary to Himma (2002) and Hunt (1991), Craig does not see God as being morally culpable for the fate of those who freely reject Christ.

construal of the problem is mistaken, by distinguishing between two possible ways in which people may benefit from Christ's sacrifice. The most obvious way is directly through God's *Special Revelation* in knowledge of the gospel, but Craig also thinks that salvation is possible through God's *General Revelation.* We can explain this notion through the following illustration – suppose we consider the period of American history before the European missionary effort in America, and its population of Native American tribesmen. These people had never heard of Jesus Christ or his salvific message (Axtell, 2000, p.324). Despite this, the indigenous societies that populated North America were undoubtedly deeply religious persons who believed in the existence of many different spiritual entities who sustained harmony in the world. Since it is true that such persons believed in a particular conception of divine reality, and that God is fair in his judgement, Craig thinks that these Native American tribes could benefit from God's general revelation in nature and conscious. In this instance, God has made his existence known through the beauty of the natural world and through the sense of the divine that these people are experiencing. Therefore, it is entirely possible for one to benefit from Christ's sacrificial gift without being consciously aware of it. G. W. F. Hegel also defended this idea, and spoke of God's spirit as being prevalent in the human ego (Berkouwer, 1983, p.12). According to Craig, we can account for those who do not hear the gospel by referring to God's general revelation, and subsequently, everyone is judged on the information that is *available* to them. But if we are to assume that this satisfies the traditional construal of the problem (the alleged incompatibility between God and the damnation of uninformed persons), then how are we to understand the soteriological problem?

A Counterfactual Crisis?

In Craig's view, what is problematic is the fate of those who reject God's general revelation but *would have accepted* his special revelation:

> *…granted that God has accorded sufficient grace to all persons for their salvation, still some persons who in fact freely reject God's grace might complain that they would have responded affirmatively to His initiatives if only they had been accorded greater or more congruent grace (1995, p.120).*

Since this concern seems to presuppose that God has MK, that he is aware of how free agents would act in all possible scenarios, the problem should be understood in counterfactual terms. Therefore, the objector is saying that if God possess all the relevant perfections (goodness, power, and knowledge of CCFs), then it would be immoral for God to create persons in situation X (where they freely reject general revelation and are lost) when he could have created them in situation Y (where they come to accept the gospel and are saved). This problem assumes then that God has knowledge of all *true* CCFs, since if CCFs are all false or lack a truth value, then this objection is not applicable to God because he doesn't know all possibilities. Overall, if we accept MK, the issue we just described would be another example of comparative injustice, for God has not given sufficient grace to all, for there are persons who may have responded differently if they had been put in an alternative set of circumstances. How does Craig respond to this allegation of wrongdoing? His response again involves MK; God in all his providential wisdom knows the soteriological profile (whether person *p* responses to Christ in situation x or y, or in neither) of every free agent, and therefore, human history is ordered in such a way that everyone has a chance to respond, whether it be in the actual world or in some possible world (Hunt, 1991, p.24).

In other words, God in his providence knows all possibilities which are contrary to fact, and so with this knowledge in mind, has actualized a world according to his divine plan of salvation. Consequently, only those people who *would* have responded to Christ in some possible world are born at a time where the gospel is preached, and therefore God does not create any persons who would reject Christ in every possible world, as they suffer from what he calls *Transworld Damnation*. In this way, those persons who are damned are the result of their actual or virtual rejection of Christ's gift of salvation (Myers, 2003, p.411). No one is lost through matters of historical or geographical misfortune, and so luck is not a factor when judging a person's actual or counterfactual soteriological profile. (Hartman, 2014, pp.18-19). But does God's MK not lead to further problems? For if God already knows that some persons will freely reject Christ in all possible worlds, then God is judging them on their counterfactual profile (how they would freely act in all possible scenarios), and so their destiny is solely based on the truth of CCF.

But why should we think that these counterfactuals have the property of being true? This is not merely a curious question, but a relevant one, since the assumption that they can be true is *crucial* to Craig's account of moral responsibility. For if a person's counterfactual profile can be examined based on *true virtual state of affairs*, then Craig thinks that a person can be deemed morally blameworthy for rejecting Christ. However, if CF's are *false* then the statement concerning what *p* would freely do in x, y, and z is also false, and said person would not be morally blameworthy. Yet if most CCFs will never obtain in the actual world then how can they be true?

This notion has culminated in a strong debate over whether counterfactuals can be true, and there is much to be said on this topic. [21] Robert Adams (1977) and William Hasker (1989) have become the most prominent supporters of the so called 'grounding objection', that there can be such thing as truth CCFs. As Hasker writes: "…true counterfactuals of freedom do not exist; all such propositions are without exception false" (2011, p.25). Hasker thinks that there is no basis for affirming the truth of CCFs, because they are hypothetical and not actual state of affairs. Hence, there is nothing in reality which could make them true. It is important to realise that this objection is making a radical claim, and this would require further argument and the formulation of a coherent truth-maker theory. In fact, one could write an entire thesis on the debate over the truth value of counterfactual. Therefore, since there is insufficient space, I do not wish to speculate over whether the truth value of CF statements does or does not require a grounding, as this remains unclear in the literature. Instead I will provide a brief reason for thinking that they are true. When we think about our everyday lives, knowledge of CCFs does seem to be something that we take ourselves to have. For example, I take the following to be true - If I were to give my mother a choice between watching Gardner's World or a James Bond film, then she would pick the gardening program. The reason I know this is because I know enough about her (that she is a keen gardener and that she can't stand James Bond movies) to sensibly conclude that she would freely choose gardener's world every time. Thus, it does appear to be possible that we can have counterfactual knowledge. Now the kind of CF knowledge I might claim to have is entirely limited by my cognitive

[21] The key issue in debates concerning Middle knowledge is whether counterfactuals of creaturely freedom can actually be true. For further reading see: Adams, Robert. (1977) "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil". *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 14, pp.109-117.

faculties, but for a being of God's wisdom, knowing the entire category of CCFs seems to be entirely possible. Overall, I think it remains possible that there can be true CCFs, so we have *prima facie* justification in holding to a Molinist perspective. Moreover, since we have grounds for thinking that CCF are true, then it seems that God can justifiably condemn those who would virtually reject him in every counterfactual scenario.

To a certain extent, Craig's response to the soteriological problem seems to be a promising defence of Christian salvation. For example, God's MK is an effective way of removing the problem of soteriological luck, because God in his providence, has ordered human history so that no one is lost through historical accident. Everyone is given a chance to respond to Christ's message, whether it be in a virtual scenario or an actual one. Additionally, in human experience is does seem correct to think that counterfactual statements can be true, and therefore, since they virtually reflect what would occur in actual situations, then *p* does seem to be morally culpable for rejecting Christ. Nevertheless, there remains a significant obstacle for Craig defence, one which seems to prevent it from being a thorough defence. David P. Hunt (1991) has argued that Craig's defence leaves premortem existence unexplained. To illustrate, suppose we accept that prior to creation God knows all true CCF and so he has complete knowledge of how any free creature would respect in any given scenario. And suppose further that when God in his providence creates a particular world he knows who will and won't accept him. If this is true, then Hunt thinks that our pre-mortem existence is redundant, for a God with MK could simply bypass pre-mortem existence and actualize those who accept him into an immediate heavenly state. Of course, if God doesn't have MK then he is unaware of how persons will respond to his revelation.

Therefore, the premortem existence of free agents is necessary for God to judge earthly actions. Yet if we ascribe MK to God then premortem existence seems to be entirely pointless, for persons have already been pre-judged by their counterfactual profiles. What's more, Hunt thinks this creates problems for accounting for both premortem and post-mortem suffering:

> "If premortem existence is unnecessary, so is all of the premortem evil that the traditional theodicies have attempted to justify – and so is post-mortem evil, which is infinitely greater" (1991, p.18).

I do think this is a significant objection to Craig's theodicy, for if God does have MK, then it remains inexplicable and puzzling to why God would instantiate premortem beings in the first place. Nevertheless, one way in which the theist might respond would be to emphasise the possible metaphysical or moral value that God places on pre-mortem existence. Moreover, as Craig has suggested, it's possible that a premortem world immersed in evil might be the optimal scenario for maximal soteriological success. In other words, God in his infinite wisdom reasons that only in such a grief-stricken world would the greatest number of persons freely accept Christ. Of course, these suggestions would need further development and argumentation to constitute a robust response to Hunt's objection, but they do appear to be promising and worthy of further discussion in the forthcoming soteriological literature.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter involved an assessment of two important issues which threaten the tenability of SSE. The first concerned how a proponent of SSE should respond to the emergence of pluralistic thinking and here I argued that although pluralism will

continue to be a lingering worry for the exclusivist, this shouldn't be reason to reject exclusivism. With respect Hick's pluralist account, I maintained that his distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal Real is problematic, for if the noumenal Real is devoid of tangible attributes, then it is not clear why it manifests itself uniquely in religion rather than other human enterprise. Secondly, since Hick provides no argument in support of the presupposition underlying the noumenal Real, that all religious are equally efficacious in providing us with knowledge of the divine and human salvation, then the exclusivist needn't accept this. Therefore, without a positive reason for postulating a noumenal Real, we have no reason for thinking that it exists. In the second part of this chapter, I considered some of the principal objections to exclusivism and showed why they fail to provide much of an argument against the tenability of exclusivism. Finally, in the concluding section, we addressed the second question of whether Craig's Molinist defence is successful in responding to the soteriological problem which affects Christian salvation. We focused on a particular aspect of the problem involving soteriological luck and I subsequently claimed that Craig's defence provides a viable resolution to the problem. What's more, a proponent of the Molinist account can plausibly take CCF to be true, and so this relieves doubts over the moral culpability of virtual persons. However, it remains debatable whether Craig's defence explains why pre-mortem existence is necessary, and despite offering two possible reasons for why God may desire pre-mortem existence, these reasons would have to developed further. Overall, the Molinist account presents us with encouraging response to the second aspect of the soteriological problem, but one must remain tentative to the idea of it providing a complete account.

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Section Two: Arguments for God's existence

Chapter III - The Moral Argument

If there is no God, then all things are permitted.[22]

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Introduction

In Section I, we have seen that the theist has some strong responses to important objections raised by two key arguments against the existence of God. In this third chapter, I want to begin to present the case for SSE by defending a moral argument for God's existence. If successful, the argument in this chapter will start building a positive case in support of SSE, a case which will supplement the negative, indirect account provided in Chapters 1 and 2. Moreover, if the moral argument works, then we will come to have greater insight into the moral nature and character of God, which is consistent with the general purpose of this thesis. As a whole, this chapter will analyse the realist/anti-realist debate in ethics from the perspective of the theist purpose of my thesis. I begin by examining a version of the moral argument by William Lane Craig (2008).[25] Moreover, I show why atheism struggles to account for the existence of moral truths. I then provide a justification of moral realism and a theistic account of moral truths, where God's nature provides a grounding for moral value, and

[22] This statement is from Dostoyevsky's work *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the passage entitled "The Grand Inquisitor," Ivan Karamazov claims that without God as the lawgiver for our moral obligations there would be no objective moral duties. See: Dostoyevsky, F. (2003) *The Brothers Karamazov.* London. Penguin, pp.322-345. [25] My reason for focusing on Craig's version of the moral argument is that I am especially interested in the topic of moral ontology, or the grounding of our moral principles, and this is also Craig's focus. Moral ontology is both fundamental to the nature of morality and has wider implications for normative ethics.

God's commands constitute our moral duties. This approach will also include an analysis of Robert Adams's Modified Command Theory (1987), and a response to some objections.[23] Overall, I conclude that God's existence is necessary for the existence of objective moral values and duties.

As rational beings, we can critically reflect on our behaviour and make moral claims. In fact, we do this all the time; we judge some things to be right and others to be wrong, and some things to be good and others to be bad. One might wonder whether 'right and wrong,' 'good and evil' are not just synonyms for each other, but this would be a mistake. Instead, moral philosophers make a distinction between moral values and moral duties. In general terms, moral values relate to somethings moral worth, or its 'goodness' and 'badness.' For instance, a person might claim that equality is a good thing and that discrimination is bad. By contrast, moral duties are to do with the rightness and wrongness of an action. Hence, when someone claims that 'child abuse is wrong', this person is saying that we are morally compelled to act according to certain moral principles. Another way of distinguishing between values and duties is by thinking about the nature of moral values. Suppose that my mother tells me that it would be good for me to pursue a career in philosophy, but my father thinks that it would be equally good for me to become a doctor. I cannot choose both occupations, and I am not morally compelled to pick one career over another, so just because an action is good, it does not mean that we must perform it. Hence, whereas

[23] Adams has been one of the main contemporary defenders of divine command theory. One reason I analyse Adams's theory is because it attempts to avoid some of the objections that are thought to be germane to all divine command theories. Two such examples, would be the Euthyphro dilemma which is said to undermine the relationship between God and morality, and the concern that such a view would allow for the possibility that God could command evil acts.

rightness/wrongness indicates an obligation to do/refrain from doing an action, goodness/badness point only to a reason for/against that which is good/bad. There are various questions we might ask about the nature of morality. Some of these include explaining the origin of our moral beliefs, the meaning of our ethical terms (like good and bad), the motivation behind our moral behaviour, and how we should respond to moral disagreements. While these are all significant questions, this chapter will focus on another important topic, namely, whether moral truths exist in the world, and if so, what their ontological status is. As Paul Kurtz notes, once we agree that there are moral standards (principles or values), which can be known, the question of the nature of their existence becomes crucial: "The central question about moral and ethical principles concerns their ontological foundation" (2008, p.95). There are two main positions concerning the nature of morality. The moral realist argues that there are moral truths and that their truth value is independent of human opinion. We can better explain this view with an example. Suppose a person claims that ‘the ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian War was objectively wrong.' What this person is asserting is that, even if the group brainwashed the rest of the population into thinking that their actions were morally right, it would still be the case that they were wrong. This might be viewed as a radical claim, but, if we think about it, most people hold that the truth of certain moral claims transcends the contingent view of the majority. That most people thought in the ancient times that it was justified to hold slaves does not make holding slaves morally right. Overall, the realist wants to say that moral values and duties are subject-independent properties of things. By contrast, the moral relativist claims that there are no objective moral truths; we cannot say that a moral claim is objectively right or wrong because what is true is relative to a specific time,

place, and culture. For example, at one time, many of the world's cultures thought that black people were racially inferior and slavery was justified, whereas much of our cultures today equate this view with moral perversion, and see racial equality as something that all societies should practice. However, for the cultural relativist, since there is no objective standard to decide between rightness and wrongness, morality is based on what a society's culture tells us is so. In this way, cultural relativism can be seen as a form of moral relativism, because, on this view, moral values and duties vary among persons of different cultures.

In the history of moral philosophy, there has been a multiplicity of different ethical theories. For example there are non-religious accounts, such as Mill's utilitarianism, Aristotle's virtue ethics and arguably Kant's duty-based moral theory.[24] Despite these approaches, the foundation for our moral values and duties has been in many cases associated with the existence of God, and so, I want to firstly focus on the theistic background of morality.[25] In Christian thinking, God is the '*Summum Bonum'* or highest good, and responsible for the source of all moral value. Moreover, God's majesty and divine commands ground our ethical duties. There have been many different *moral arguments* which try to show that morality points to the existence of God. One such argument is given by Kant who argues that practical reason motivates us to strive for the highest good, and that this goal is only possible if we postulate the existence of God, and an immortal soul (Muyskens, 1974, p.425). However, the version we shall focus on here starts from the existence of moral truths in the world,

[24] There is an on-going debate at least for Kant as to whether his moral theory presupposes religion or not. The background of Aristotle's virtue ethics also seems to be religion; thus on some accounts, Aristotle's most important virtue is the intellectual one of contemplation, which he considers more appropriate for gods, than for human beings

[25] I will assess the plausibility of accounting for moral truths on a naturalist world view in due course.

and from this, infers the existence of a moral lawgiver who is the locus of moral goodness. Craig gives a version of this argument in his book *Reasonable Faith,* and the argument is presented in the following way:

The Moral Argument

Premise 1 *– If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.*

Premise 2 *– Objective values and duties do exist.*

Conclusion *– Therefore, God exists.*

To begin with, it is worth noting that Craig's argument is a deductively valid argument and therefore if the premises are true, then the conclusion would also be true. Moreover, it is crucial that we understand what question this argument concerns. For Craig, the issue is not whether one has to *believe* in God to be a morally good person, as many non-religious people lead perfectly decent lives. Moreover, this argument is *not concerned* with what moral philosophers call *moral epistemology* or the way in which we come to know moral principles. For Craig, it is still an open question how we come to know moral values and duties. It could be that we begin to grasp them at a point in the evolutionary story when human beings reach some degree of rationality, or perhaps moral values and duties are the results of societal conditioning. Rather, the argument is concerned with the *ontological foundation* for our moral attitudes. With this in mind, we must now assess both an atheistic and theistic account of our moral values and duties. I argue that an atheistic account fails to provide a basis for moral truths, whereas we can account for moral truths on a theistic model.

An Assessment of Premise One

An Atheistic Account and Moral Values and Duties

The first premise of the moral argument claims that if God does not exist, then there are no moral truths. Hence, on an atheistic worldview, the premise denies that there can be an objective distinction between right and wrong, good and evil. What reason do we have for thinking this to be the case? An argument of this kind can be given if we sketch out the assumptions behind atheism by following it to its logical conclusion. The atheist holds to the view of naturalism, according to which, only natural forces operate in the external world. Usually, this also entails that evolutionary theory (in some form) concerning the origin of life is correct. Human beings are therefore the product of millions of years of gradual genetic modifications, in which genes that have survivability value have been perpetuated through reproduction. If evolution is indeed true, then it seems to provide a biological account of our moral values and duties. On this view, the formational character of our moral beliefs about the world can be explained by natural selection (the mechanism behind evolution), which has hardwired certain moral principles into our psychological makeup, to stimulate adaptive behaviour and reproductive success (Linville, 2009, p.393). Consequently, what we take to be right and wrong, good and evil is based on socio-biological conditioning. The sense of moral obligation one feels towards protecting another person or the feeling of horror that one experiences when seeing a brutal murder is such, because natural selection has deemed these responses to have survivability value, and installed this behaviour into our genetic makeup. Of course, one rejects such an account of morality because it conflicts with our moral sensibilities. We really think that there is an objective distinction between morally praiseworthy and blameworthy

actions, but if there is no God who grounds our morality, then this becomes an illusion of the human condition; we live our lives as if there are moral truths but such facts about the world do not exist. As the biologist Michael Ruse writes, "[o]bjective morality is a kind of collective illusion that we all believe in, in order to function socially together" (1984, p.10). Ruse continues, "Morality, therefore, rests ultimately on the biases of the human mind, these biases being an adaptive function of the evolutionary process" (Ibid, p.12). I think this provides a strong evolutionary argument against the possibility of moral truths given atheism, for our system of morality is contingent on the evolutionary process. Moral values, such as acceptance, and kindness, and moral duties like 'it is wrong to murder an innocent person' are ethically encouraged because they form useful rules to live by, they help to furnish a functional society that works to promote human flourishing. Therefore, David Hume's moral assessment seems to be correct when he states that "...vice and virtue may be compared to sounds, colours, heat, and cold, which modern philosophy says are not qualities in objects but perceptions in the mind" (Hume, 2003, p.334). Overall, the evolutionary account undermines the notion of moral truths, since our belief in the objectivity of morality is an illusion and a powerful one for aiding human survival. It would be premature to infer from this alone that there *cannot* be moral truths given the fact of atheism, and moreover, it would be naive to assume that this is the default position of *all* atheist moral philosophers. While it is true that prominent atheists like Mackie, Russell, and Nietzsche, rejected the idea of moral realism, other more recent thinkers have claimed that atheism *can* give an objective foundation for morality.[26] Assuming this, I want to

[26] Shelly Kagan is an example of an atheist moral philosopher who is committed to the objectivity of morality. See: Kagan, S. (1989) *The Limits of Morality,* Oxford University Press.

focus on a recent secular account by Sam Harris in his book *The Moral Landscape (2010)*.[27] Harris tries to provide a *scientific* foundation for our moral values and duties based on humanistic grounds, in our mutual concern for fellow human beings and other conscious animals. Consequently, Harris claims that "[m]eaning, values, morality, and the good life must relate to facts about the well-being of conscious creatures" (Harris, 2010, p.4). For example, if we take moral values there are moral truths to be known, and they are facts about the well-being of conscious beings. Social equality for example is a good thing, because it helps to build a fair and just society in which people can flourish, and give us freedom to reach our goals. By contrast, the reason racism is wrong is that it encourages discrimination and persecution towards individual members of the human population, which in turn affects their happiness and puts them at risk of harm. In responding to this view of moral values, I think the atheist and theist would agree that the flourishing of conscious creatures like ourselves is a good thing. However, that is not the question that we are concerned with; the question is: on what *grounds* or *basis* can the atheist say that human well-being is *objectively* good? Harris has to say that people are valuable, because they are self-conscious beings, but this seems to resort to speciesism. For why think, on a naturalistic view, that human life has intrinsic moral worth as opposed to other species like that of dogs and cats? Of course the atheist can say that human beings have intrinsic moral worth, because they have formulated their ethical principles on the basis of human flourishing, but this would come at the expense of accounting for the objectivity of this claim. In other words, if naturalism is true, our moral values can be explained in socio-

[27] I'm not looking at other secular accounts of morality such as Moral Platonism and Social Contract theory for the following reasons. Plato's ethical theory has a theistic background and so it's not easy to make sense of Plato's approach. Moreover, Social Contract Theory is known to have significant difficulties in providing a natural account of moral truths.

biological terms, and so it is difficult to see how our morality can be anything more than certain rules and principles that have been created by human beings. Moreover, if there is no theistic basis on which we can objectively adjudicate between right and wrong, good and evil, then this seems to lead to *moral relativism.* According to this view, what is morally good and bad, right, and wrong, is true within a moral framework, and, therefore, no moral framework is privileged over another (Harman, 1995, p.5). If moral relativism is, in fact, true, then there are no moral facts in the world. For instance, this would mean that the murder of an innocent child is only morally wrong within a moral framework, and similarly, the self-sacrifice of members of the NY fire department on 9/11 is morally praiseworthy on the same grounds. Taken to its logical conclusion, we cannot say that the extermination of much of the Jewish population by the Nazis at Auschwitz is objectively wrong since according to the moral framework of the Nazi Regime, such actions were morally right. Hence, there is no fact of the matter when it comes to moral values and duties, for no one moral system is any more correct than the other. But, if relativism is correct, which on the atheistic view seems correct, then Harris's account of morality becomes trivial. What humans take to be flourishing is open to moral interpretation. For example, in a society where rape is culturally accepted and equated with human flourishing then one would take it to be morally permissible to fulfil their sexual desires, and there is no independent basis in which we can say that this action is immoral. Diverse cultures have each developed their own set of moral values and duties, and have varied conceptions of the good and the evil, the right and the wrong. If all our moral values and duties are relative, then we can no more condemn the murderer as we can praise the organ donor.

A further issue with Harris' account is its questionable scientific approach to morality. G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) famously exposed the so-called "Naturalistic Fallacy" or the attempt to derive a moral 'ought statement' from an 'is statement,' and this seems to be symptomatic of Harris's approach. On the one hand, science provides us with a rich understanding of how the universe operates, according to certain physical laws, and it also attempts to describe these physical laws based on scientific hypotheses and observations. However, it seems implausible to think that science can say what *ought to be the case*, as Peter Railton explains: "The objectivity of ethics, it seems, would have to be different from the objectivity of science. Morality gives practical guidance – it purports to say not how things are, but how they ought to be, or how it would be good for them to be" (2003, xi). Hence, on Harris' account, there does not seem to be an objective foundation for our moral duties, since why should one be morally obligated to respect the conscious wellbeing of other sentient creatures rather than act in self-interest? Without an imperative or moral law which holds us accountable for our actions, it is not clear that Harris's account provides us with moral accountability. Overall, on the basis of the humanist account, ethics seem to be nothing more than a human construct reducible to a matter of taste and opinion, agreed upon and proclaimed to be binding and objective, but without foundation.

An Assessment of Premise Two

The second premise of the moral argument claims that moral truths do exist, but what reason do we have for thinking this to be the case? The justification Craig gives in defence of this is our moral phenomenology. Every day we regularly apprehend an objective difference between right and wrong, good and evil. For instance, we do not see the contrast between loving a child and raping a child as purely a subjective one;

rather we view the latter as morally wicked. It seems to me that Craig is right in thinking that moral realism is true, because an honest reflection of one's behaviour and actions reveals a belief in moral truths. Moral distinctions are not merely a matter of taste or attitude, but certain things experientially turn out to be morally right and morally wrong. For instance, do we think that the ancient ritualistic practice of child-sacrifice was a morally relative or indifferent act? Or, like in the eyes of the moral nihilist, do we think that the Indian practice of Suttee (which involved burning a Hindu widow on top of her husband's funeral pyre) was a morally indifferent act? The moral anti-realist would have to construct a powerful argument to trump our experience.[28] Of course, it could be said that this view is equally vulnerable to the strong objections I brought against the atheistic view, that all morality is culturally relative and that our moral beliefs are a product of socio-biological conditioning. Given this, I will now discuss both of these arguments and show why they fail to undermine our belief in moral truths.

The Challenge of Moral Relativism

In his stimulating book, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong,* J.L Mackie argues that moral truths are an illusion of human consciousness, and therefore we must create our morality. His approach consists in first accepting the illusion of objective moral properties: "Moral scepticism must take the form of an error theory, admitting that belief in objective values is built into ordinary moral thought and language, but holding that this ingrained belief is false" (1990, pp.48-9). Mackie analyses many issues concerning what he calls ‘second-order moral views', which relate to the question of

[28] J.L.Mackie even concedes that belief in objective moral values is a common view; “Objectivism about values is not only a feature of the philosophical tradition. It also has a firm basis in ordinary thought and even in the meanings of moral terms” (1990, p.33)

what morality is, but our focus will be on what he calls 'the argument from relativity.' This is the most obvious objection one may hold against moral truths. Mackie's thought is this: what one person finds to be morally right or wrong is an opinion that is relative to a way of thinking, it is an attempt at furnishing a set of moral principles which form part of an ethical framework. The problem is why we should privilege one moral system over another. Secondly, if objective values and duties do exist, then why is moral disagreement even possible?[29] If moral truths did exist then it seems that most people would be aware of them, and so given the extent of ethical disputes we see, moral relativism is the most plausible inference. This objection is a concerning one and should be taken seriously by both the moral realist and antirealist respectively, as Linda Zagzebski states: "Moral pluralism is a challenge to every kind of moral theory, whether or not it is religiously based" (2005, p.361). However, before we begin to analyse this objection, it is vital to reconstruct what the moral sceptic is claiming:

An Argument from Moral Relativism

Premise 1 – If objective moral values and duties exist, then they should be intuitive and universally accepted by all societies.

Premise 2 – *What is considered moral throughout the world seems to be relative to time, place, and culture.*

Conclusion – *Therefore, objective moral values and duties do not exist.*

At first glance, premise one seems to be a reasonable understanding of how objective moral values and obligations would reveal themselves in human beings. However, I

[29] For example, some cultures encourage the practice of cannibalism, and others find it repulsive. Some societies treat women as second-class citizens, and other see gender equality as essential to a just and fair society.

believe that the moral realist can deny the first premise of the argument. What we need to appreciate here is that human beings are fallible creatures that regularly make errors of judgements, and this sometimes results in irrational behaviour. We all struggle to live up to our expectations and responsibilities from time to time. For example, a trivial but relevant example is dieting. I know for instance that if I want to lose weight, then I ought not to eat the piece of chocolate cake in the fridge, yet, despite this, I still repeatedly do, because self-interest overwhelms the guilt I feel from making a bad choice. If we accept that human beings readily make both bad choices and do not live up their responsibilities, then it is not difficult to see why moral difference permeates human thinking and behaviour. And this is only one possible way to explain why moral values and duties are not universally accepted.[30] Therefore, the first premise is too contrived and naïve in its assessment of how people would respond, if moral truths existed. We should not think our fallible nature shows that moral truths do not exist, or that they are impossible to grasp; it may well be the case that a certain degree of rational thinking is required to apprehend the objectivity of morality. Overall, I think we are justified in dismissing the first premise of the argument.

The second premise of the argument is a claim about the moral diversity that we experience. Firstly, no one disputes the fact that we live in a world of diverse cultures that have different conceptions of morality, and one cannot deny that human morality has evolved throughout history. But the key question is whether moral diversity undermines the existence of moral truths. Put more precisely, does *religious difference* entail ethical relativism*?* According to Gilbert Harman, it does: "Moral relativism is a

[30] Another possibility is that moral truths are difficult to know – for instance, in Plato's account, knowing the Forms requires systematic and lengthy training, of which only some are capable.

plausible inference from the most plausible account of existing moral diversity" (Gilbert, 1977, p.63). Let me say a few points in response to this claim. Firstly, there is no explicit incompatibility between the existence of moral truths and a world immersed in moral difference, and so it still could be the case that there are moral truths. What the critic must be arguing then is that there is an *implicit* incompatibility. The thought would be that the sheer extent of moral diversity in the world is so great that it undermines the possibility of moral truths existing. However, could it not be said that moral error and disagreement actually presupposes the objective nature of morality, since if morality was merely a matter of opinion, then one could not fail to do the right thing, as everything would be morally indifferent. Therefore, it seems to me that although many people's moral outlooks are different, most people do believe in moral truths even if they disagree on what they are. For instance, suppose the government has just passed a law legalising the beheading of Muslim women; a hardened anti-realist might reply that whether the action is right or wrong is just a matter of opinion and hence, for all we know, the law might be morally right. But, if this law involved members of his or her family, then surely the person would be horrified and fiercely criticise such an act as horribly unjust and barbaric. It is this sort of response which confirms of our belief in moral truths. We appreciate the quality of justice as an excellent thing and condemn the brutal beheading of innocent people as morally bankrupt. Moreover, we believe that it is morally obligatory for the government to protect innocent people from being killed. What I am in fact arguing here then is that it seems like living a life of moral subjectivism is virtually unliveable. We cannot honestly avoid the belief that moral truths exist since we regularly commend or condemn certain actions as really wrong. The second key point I want to make is that

despite the apparent moral diversity we observe, I think there are in fact underlying fundamental principles which unite people. Take for instance the quality of freedom: in the Western world women's choice to dress how they want is celebrated as a policy of liberation; at the same time, in the Muslim world, in places like Saudi Arabia, women's freedom might well be strongly curtailed by religious views. Nevertheless, women's rights to things like education and property ownership is steadily on the increase and women's freedom is now considered to be a good (Kelly, 2010, pp.2-3). Thus, in both societies, we value freedom as a wonderful thing, but the difference is the extent to which freedom is conceived of and expressed.

I hope to have given a reasonable defence of the reality of objective moral truths, against the charge that moral relativism makes them untenable. As we have seen, premise one is too contrived and naïve a view of moral truths, since the condition of universality is unreasonably restrictive. The second premise is also problematic for two reasons: firstly, it does not follow from moral difference that moral relativism is true, and, secondly, I think our moral experience provides us with powerful evidence of moral truths. We cannot live a life of moral subjectivism, since we all firmly believe that there is a real moral difference between love, equality, and freedom, on the one hand, and, on the other, rape, murder, and slavery. Finally, despite the significant amount of moral diversity that we see in different societies, I think there are underlying moral principles which we all value but express differently.

Socio-Biological Concerns

A critic of the moral argument might argue that, like the atheistic account, the theistic view is also vulnerable to the claim that our morality is socio-biologically engineered.

As we have seen previously, according to Ruse, moral values and obligations are merely offshoots from our evolutionary heritage, and their existence and prevalence can be explained in biological and sociological terms, as an adaptive quality that further helps us to function as a society. In the *Darwinian Paradigm,* Ruse concludes:

> *I appreciate that when somebody says, 'love thy neighbour as thyself,' they think they are referring above and beyond themselves… Nevertheless, to a Darwinian evolutionist, it can be seen that such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction and has no being with or without this (1989, p.277).*

The theist may feel the full force of Ruse's damning assessment of the possibility of moral truths; however, I do not think such a concerned reaction is necessary, as Ruse commits an elementary mistake in logic. His evolutionary objection to moral realism is guilty of what philosophers call the *genetic fallacy*. According to this, when somebody tries to invalidate a person's belief by showing how he or she came to hold that belief, the attempt cannot succeed. For instance, the following example does not follow 'your belief in gender equality is invalid, because the reason you believe in equality is that you live in a liberal country.' I think it is clear to see that, in this case, an account of the origin of one's moral beliefs has no bearing on the actual *truth* value of those beliefs. Therefore, it may well be true that how we come to *know* morality is a mixture of evolutionary and societal pressures, but this does nothing to show that objective moral truths are non-existent. Moreover, the theist rejects the view that our moral values and duties are invented and so could hold that humans gradually come to discover moral truths over time.

Given this, the critic might accept that evolution does not undermine our belief in moral truths, but maintain that it does present us with a defeater for our moral experience. According to this objection, if our moral experience is a product of an evolutionary process, then it leaves us unwarranted in trusting it. This line of reasoning reminds me of Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument in *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000). Here, Plantinga argues that one is not justified in believing in both naturalism and evolution, since, given the thought that evolution is not concerned with the production of true beliefs but with adaptive ones, we have a defeater for our belief in the reliability of our cognitive faculties. And, so, we have a defeater for our entire system of beliefs. In our case, the evolutionist might hold that since our moral beliefs are a product of random evolutionary engineering (which is not geared towards truth), then we have no confidence in them being reliable, and so we should reject them. This is a serious objection, if cogent, because it would lead to total moral scepticism. How then should the theist respond to this claim? Well if theism is true, then we would have plausible grounds for thinking that a benevolent God would guide the evolutionary process in such a way as to *guarantee* that humans develop reliable cognitive faculties that are capable of apprehending moral truths. For example, from a Christian perspective, human beings have been created in the image of God, and therefore God desires that we have knowledge of the world and of his existence. To think otherwise would be to assume that the evolutionary process is blind, which is what the atheist is committed to. Now, based on this, I am not arguing that our cognitive faculties are infallible or immune to error; it may, for instance, be that moral growth is needed in one's life to apprehend moral truths. Instead, if theism is true, we can be confident that theistic

evolution would lead to cognitive faculties that consistently produce more true beliefs than false ones. Overall, then, the naturalist's arguments fail, and, therefore, we remain justified in believing what our moral experience tells us. The only thing that these objections would show is that our perception of moral truths is a gradual and often fallible process. However, this would do nothing to show that our moral experience of ethical truths is false or unjustified.

A Theistic Account of Moral Values and Duties

According to the Christian doctrine, God is the greatest conceivable being, and such a perfect entity has maximal properties like being all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good. Hence, God's moral nature is usually understood to mean that he is morally perfect, and so the property of supreme goodness is an essential part of his nature. Moreover, his good-making properties of being loving and just are expressions of his morally excellent character. Therefore, if a being did not have such properties, it would not be God; just as it is part of a square's nature to have four sides, it is part of God's nature to be morally perfect. As William Alston explains,

> *[w]e can think of God himself, the individual being, as the supreme standard of goodness… Lovingness is good not because of the Platonic existence of a general principle or fact to the effect that lovingness is good, but because God, the supreme standard of goodness, is loving. Goodness supervenes on every feature of God, not because some general principles are true but just because they are features of God (2002, p.291-2).*

For Alston then, lovingness is a feature of God's perfect nature. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a proponent of this version of the moral argument is not concerned with the issue that Alston is discussing, namely, that of *moral semantics* or what our moral values like goodness and evil mean; rather they are interested in the grounding of our moral values. It might then be asked why God needs to be morally perfect in the first case, and we can answer this by going back to the concept of God. Since God is the greatest conceivable being, he cannot be morally flawed, for this is a deficiency, and it is greater to be morally perfect than to be morally imperfect. According to this view, virtues such as honesty, kindness, compassion, and fairness are expressions of God's nature, and, since God is the standard of goodness, he is the source and foundation of all moral value. Concerning our moral duties, religious accounts try to provide a meta-ethical explanation of our obligations through a divine command theory (DCT), in which what is right and wrong is dependent on God's commands. Hence, DCT attempts to ground our moral duties in God's will, while at the same time, answering the normative question of how we should act. A famous DCT is given by Robert Adams in his book *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1987).

> *I could say that by 'X is ethically wrong' I mean 'X is contrary to the commands of a loving God' (i.e., there is a loving God and X is contrary to His commands) and by 'X is ethically permitted' I mean 'X is in accord with the commands of a loving God' (i.e., There is a loving God and X is not contrary to his commands'*) (Adams, 1987, p.100).

According to Adams, whether an action is morally right or wrong, is dependent on whether a loving God commands it or forbids it. But this also leaves open a third action, a *morally indifferent* action, one which God neither commands nor forbids, but allows. A morally indifferent action would be an action where it makes no moral difference whether it happens or not. It is useful to offer an example of the two scenarios Adams has in mind.

1. If God commands that Sylvia and Martin keep their promises, then it is required that they keep their promises
2. If God commands that Diane does not torture innocent people, then it is forbidden for Diane to torture innocent people (Quinn, 1978, p.28).

Also, it is important to note that the reason something is right and wrong is not merely because of God's commands, it is also because it *conflicts with his perfect goodness*, and so the idea that God would command murder goes contrary to God's omnibenevolence. Overall, DCT attempts to offer a foundation for the objectivity of moral duties, as well as an account of the normative nature of our moral claims, or why we ought to act in a particular way. Before we turn to objections, it is important to note some of the strengths of this approach to ethics. Firstly, if DCT is correct, then we have a genuine basis for moral duties, which transcends moral subjectivism and moral culturalism. What is morally right and wrong does not become arbitrary based on personal preference, as it lies in the unwavering will of a morally perfect God. Moreover, the notion that moral duties are binding falls in line with our inclination that moral claims are *distinct* from matters of taste and personal preference. In other

words, we do not take the statement ‘it is wrong to murder an innocent person' to be a matter of opinion, like the view that ‘mint-chocolate ice cream is better than vanilla.' Instead, it makes sense to think that, if a moral duty is obligatory, then it must require a moral law, and that a moral law requires a moral lawgiver. Since God is the transcendental moral standard by which all our actions are judged, this presents us with an account of moral realism. In recent times, it is fair to say that DCT has become a minority position within moral philosophy, mainly because it is thought to be vulnerable to some strong objections. I will focus on two common objections to DCTs; the first issue is the so-called *Euthyphro Dilemma,* which questions the nature of the relationship between God and morality, and the second issue involves the claim that God's perfect goodness undermines his omnipotence, because what God can command is limited by his morally perfect nature. I try to show that the theist can respond to both problems.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

The most famous and ancient of questions about morality and God is the Euthyphro Dilemma. First found in Plato’s dialogue *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks Euthyphro the question of what makes something pious: "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods? (Plato, 2002, p.12). However, for our analysis, it is helpful to rephrase the language to make it more relevant to DCT. Therefore, the dilemma can be formulated in the following way,

(1) Does God command an action because it is good?

(2) Or is an action good because God commands it?

Neither answer seems to be satisfactory; if the theist replies by accepting (1), then moral goodness is independent of God, which the theist rejects. Conversely, if one rejects (1) and accepts (2), then morality becomes entirely arbitrary, as God could command any action as morally good such as rape and murder.[31] This dilemma has been widely thought to constitute a hammer blow to theistic accounts of morality. The reason the difficulty appears to be so severe is that the divine command theorist believes that our moral duties are dependent on God's commands, but, if a coherent account of this dependence cannot be given, then we have no reason to accept a theistic account of moral duties.

Regrettably, there is insufficient room to provide a detailed analysis of the Euthyphro dilemma. Nevertheless, I do want to briefly examine the philosophical and theological implications of accepting (1) and (2), as well as say something about a possible resolution to the problem. In my view, the first horn of the dilemma is unacceptable for the theist because of its metaphysical consequences. For instance, it would mean that what is good is independent of God's will, and this would lead to an unintelligible foundation for goodness. Moral values would just exist inexplicably as abstract objects, and if these values were, in fact, moral truths about the world then their existence would seem to be necessary, they would be uncreated entities, which would undermine various principles of Christian thinking. Firstly, God is said to have divine sovereignty, which means that God is free to create any world that he wishes. As a result, God is not bound by any physical or logical laws, for he is the creator of the laws of nature, and the laws of logic reflect his thinking. However, if the moral law

[31] Of course, one could just bite the bullet so to speak and accept that, if God commanded murder, then we would be morally obligated to kill, but most philosophers and theologians see this as theologically unacceptable.

exists apart from God, then what is right and wrong is independent of God's will, and this would compromise both his omnipotence (he could not will anything contrary to the moral standard) and his freedom (God is dependent on the moral standard). Secondly, (1) is incompatible with the notion that God is the greatest conceivable being, since it would be greater to constitute the moral law rather than to conform to it. Finally, and most obviously, if moral truths exist independently of God, then God would not be the source of morality, moral truths would exist in some Platonic manner, and so DCT would be false. Overall, (1), is an unsatisfactory choice for the theist.[32] What then would be the implication of accepting (2)? Well, it would mean that God could will any action to be morally good including actions that we see as evil. For instance, if God were to command that *p* murders an innocent person, then it would be morally obligatory for *p* to do this, which not only goes against our ethical intuitions but further reduces morality to arbitrariness. Furthermore, if (2) were true, then it would make it very difficult to account for the objectivity of moral duties, since if they are based on God's will, then it is entirely conceivable that they could have been different. God could have willed child abuse to be morally good, rather than morally bad for instance. T. J. Mawson has further argued that it would be implausible for us to have moral knowledge of such truths, since, if God were free to will anything as right and wrong, then there would be no overriding reason for favouring either scenario. (2008, p.26). Hence, for all we know, our conception of morality could be different from God's, which again, would undermine the objectivity of morality.

[32] Richard Joyce has argued that the theist can, in fact, accept the first answer to the question, while at the same time, avoiding the independence problem. See: Joyce, C. (2002) "Theistic Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma" *Journal of Religious Ethics*. 30:1, pp.49-75.

One way of escaping the dilemma would be to suggest an alternative to (1) and (2) that preserves God as the source of our moral duties and removes the charge of arbitrariness. If God is the greatest conceivable being, like the theist argues, then he is not only morally perfect, but is also the moral standard for all our actions. Therefore, Craig has argued that we can ground goodness in God's morally perfect *nature*. We can say that God's commands are an expression of his perfect nature; in other words, God wills something because God *is* good (Craig, 2010, p.135). The critic might respond by asking why God is good, and this question would be relevant, if the moral argument centred on *moral semantics* or the meaning of our moral terms, but remember that the discussion concerns the ontological status of our moral values and duties. The relevant question is: 'why is God's nature the standard of moral goodness?', and, to this, the theist can reply that being the standard of moral goodness is essential to God's maximal greatness. In my view, this gives us a good account of how morality finds its objective foundation in God, since it avoids the other two problematic scenarios, namely, (1) and (2). God is the source of all morality, and it is his moral nature, which is loving and just, that is the standard for adjudicating between right and wrong.

Could God Command Something Terrible?

Nevertheless, there is still the question of whether God could command evil actions, and, if not, whether this would undermine his omnipotence. Wes Morriston has argued along these lines:

> *I believe that quite a strong case can be made for saying that omnipotence entails the ability to command X… What an essentially good God could not do*

is choose to exercise this power. Given His essential goodness, such a choice is impossible for Him. (Morriston, 2009, p.251).

In my view, the theist could argue that although it seems *logically possible* that God could will genocide, it turns out to be logically impossible for God to will this. God is morally perfect and therefore 'too good'; in other words, there is no possible world in which God commands genocide, since it is contrary to his morally perfect nature. Consequently, asking whether a loving God can do this is like asking somebody whether they can draw a square circle - both are logically impossible. As Adams himself summarises, "…[t]he believer's concept of ethical wrongness, therefore, breaks down if one tries to apply it to the unthinkable case in which God commands cruelty for its own sake" (1987, p.107). Therefore, the claim that God cannot choose to command something terrible is no more a limitation on his omnipotence, than his inability to create a square circle.[33] Since God's commands are an expression of his perfect moral nature, it is logically impossible for him to command genocide. Perhaps it might be questioned why we should adopt a Thomistic view of omnipotence; after all, surely a being of maximal power would be able to perform any tasks, including logically impossible ones. The reason why omnipotence must be understood in the former way is that a logically impossible task is not a genuine task that can be performed. Nevertheless, the sceptic might further reply by asking why we should think that God's nature *necessitates* the moral value of an action. The theist can only respond to this question by saying that this is part of what the concept of a maximally

[33] Historically, not all thinkers have understood omnipotence to entail only performing the logically possible. For example, Rene Descartes thought that God could perform logically impossible tasks, such as squaring a circle or making 1+1=3.

great being entails.[34] God is essentially loving, generous, kind, and so on and so forth, meaning that God could not will something evil, because it would contradict his nature. Overall, I have not tried to show the *truth* of DCT, but merely to defend it as a plausible account of objective moral values and duties. I claimed that although (1) and (2) are genuinely unsatisfactory accounts of the God's relationship to morality, Craig provides the theist with a third plausible option, which I then defended against possible responses. Overall, I believe we have good reason to think that God can be the objective foundation for morality.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has centred on the ontological foundation for our moral values and duties. I began by assessing Craig's moral argument for the existence of God, and proceeded to defend the view that it is difficult to account for moral truths on an atheistic worldview. On an atheistic worldview, it seems that our moral values and duties are nothing more than human constructs, and can, therefore, be explained naturalistically as the product of socio-biological conditioning. Given this, secular moral accounts lead to moral relativism, because there is no way of independently adjudicating between different moral frameworks. By contrast, on the theistic view, moral truths are not contingent on human invention, but are discoverable. Finally, I offered a defence of both our belief in moral truths and how theism can account for their foundation. This involved a response to traditional objections to DCT, for which I maintained that DCT avoids the Euthyphro Dilemma, because there is an alternative open to the theist;

[34] For an excellent discussion of God's nature see: Hill, D. J. (2005) *Divinity and Maximal Greatness*. London and New York: Routledge.

namely, that God's nature constitutes moral goodness, and that his moral commands are an expression of his perfect character. Overall, then, morality is not a matter of taste, but an objective feature of reality, and one which finds its ontological foundation through the existence of God.

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Chapter IV – The Fine-Tuning Argument

"Through my scientific work, I have come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing, that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact" (Davis, 1992, p.16).

Introduction

When looking at the stars on a cloudless night, I have often been amazed at the wonder and beauty of the evening sky. Similarly, the fact that the laws of nature (e.g. gravity) operate with precise regularity time after time strikes me as startling and in need of an explanation. The following question arises here: why does the universe exhibit such remarkable instances of apparent design? Since the dawn of philosophical enquiry, many philosophers (Aristotle, Aquinas, and Descartes, to name a few) have concluded that these observations and the like are evidence for the existence of God.[35] Consequently, this has led to the emergence of the teleological or design argument which is a group of different arguments that all attempt to infer the existence of a designer who brought the universe into being. Proponents of the argument allude to certain cosmological features, such as the regularity of the laws of nature, examples of irreducible complexity in biology, and the fine-tuning of the physical parameters of the universe for life. Arguments from design have their historical roots in scripture. For example, in the Christian Bible God is the omnipotent (all-powerful) designer of the world: "Ever since the creation of the world His eternal

[35] For a good explanation of Aquinas's philosophy see: Kenny, A. (2008) *Five Ways: St Thomas Aquinas: Volume V*, Routledge. For Descartes' design argument see the 'Third Meditation' in: Cottingham, J. (eds.) (1996) *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press. And for a modern perspective on the design argument: Swinburne, R. (2004) *The Existence of God*, Oxford University Press.

power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Romans 1:19-21). Moreover, God is said to be the curator of all the reality outside of himself.[36] In this chapter, I want to focus on a version of the fine-tuning argument defended by William Lane Craig. My reason for choosing Craig's version is due to others having problems in either their clarity or the method used when assigning probabilities to a fine-tuned universe. For example, Richard Swinburne's fine-tuning argument (1979) is reliant on a Bayesian probability theory, which is highly complicated and in my view unnecessary. Therefore, Craig's version is superior because it starts by clearly and concisely listing the three live explanatory possibilities (chance, physical necessity, and design) for the fine-tuning of the universe, and from there, giving us reason to doubt the plausibility of chance and physical necessity.

Before we begin, it is crucial to explain the nature of design arguments through a few examples. Unlike *a priori* arguments, such as the ontological argument, which deduce God's necessary existence from the very concept of God, design arguments are *a posteriori in* their reasoning; they focus on empirical evidence (sensory experience) in support of intelligent design. In other design arguments different argumentative methods are also used; for instance, some versions claim that the universe is analogous in design to complex physical items, while others argue that God's existence follows from an inference to the best explanation, which is a technique widely used in scientific discourse.

[36] A further attribute traditionally ascribed to God is that he exists necessarily rather than contingently, which is to say that God is uncreated and eternal in his existence.

Different versions of the design argument

Based on my research of the history of the design argument, some of the most influential arguments are by Paley (1803), Behe (1996), and Dembski (1998).[37] William Paley's watchmaker argument is often conceived of as an argument from analogy; suppose that walking upon a heath we come across a watch and naturally wonder how it came to be there. Paley argues that just like the watch, where we would sensibly conclude that it had a designer (due to its complexity and functionality), products of nature, such as rocks, trees, and human beings, also show similar design features. As Paley goes on to conclude, "[f]or every indicator of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature" (2009, p.19). Even though Darwin's theory of evolution is thought to refute Paley's argument, because it explains how biological complexity could gradually develop over millions of years without the need of divine creation, his argument still is highly influential and worthy of discussion, because it provides us with many of the characteristics typical of modern design arguments. In his book *Darwin's Black Box,* Michael Behe offers another contemporary version of the design argument built on the notion that advancements in biochemistry give us good reason to doubt the explanatory power of evolutionary theory. Behe gives several biochemical examples (one being the immune system) which he claims are *irreducibly complex*. An intricate system is irreducibly complex when any absence of one of its parts would lead to it being unable to function (2006, p.47). Therefore, he argues that the theory of evolution cannot account for the emergence of irreducibly complex systems, and so this is

[37] For an informative book on the history of the Design Argument see: Jantzen C. Benjamin (2014) *An Introduction to Design Argument*. Cambridge University Press. Especially chapters 7, 8, and 9.

evidence of an intelligent designer. William A. Dembski has run a similar argument in *The Design Inference,* in which he deduces from scientific evidence to intelligent design. He distinguishes between two types of complexity: *irreducible complexity* and *cumulative complexity*. Dembski defines irreducible complexity in the same way as Behe, and gives the example of a mousetrap as an irreducibly complex object; in this case, if any part of the mousetrap were to be removed (spring, platform, hold-down bar, etc.) this would lead to a complete loss of function. In contrast, cumulative complexity is complex in the sense that it gradually becomes intricate over time, without losing its overall function (1999, p.147). Overall, Dembski determines that design is a more plausible explanation for the origin of life than an evolutionary theory since irreducibly complex systems could not have arisen purely from a cumulative process. Collectively these examples illustrate the twists and turns of the teleological argument, but so far, we have only focused on cases which try to explain the *origin of biological complexity* in the universe, however, this I believe, is not the strongest avenue for the theist.

The Discovery of a Fine-tuned Universe

In the last fifty years, physicists have made the astonishing discovery that the existence of life is dependent on certain *fine-tuned* physical constants and conditions which constitute and permeate the fabric of the universe. Robin Collins helpfully defines the term fine-tuning as “[t]he claim that the laws and values of the constants of physics… must be set in a seemingly very precise way for the universe to support life” (2009, p.204). The accuracy involved is echoed by the British physicist Paul Davis, who states: "In the case of living organisms, their existence seems to depend on a

number of fortuitous coincidences that some scientists and philosophers have hailed as nothing short of astonishing" (1993, p.195).

To continue further, I must explain some of the terminology used when talking about fine-tuning. Firstly, we must be aware that the laws of physics govern the universe, such as Newton's law of gravity (along with electromagnetism, the strong and weak force, etc.), which regulates the physical attraction between two objects. Furthermore, the law of gravity is a physical constant which when expressed as a mathematical symbol involves an unchangeable quantity (G). Another term we need to be aware of is *initial conditions*, which is a series of boundary conditions that the laws of nature operate under. Collectively then, we can conceive of a universe where G works under different initial conditions, which in turn would produce a world that is radically unlike the one we inhabit. However, we shouldn't conceive of a world with *different laws of nature*. The reason being that talk of different laws to the ones we have is speculation. We have no idea about what universes would be possible, or how they would work, under laws of nature which are different from ours. The simple reason for this would be that we are only aware of the laws that govern our universe, and so our scientific theories are built around the laws we observe. Therefore, for the argument, I will present, we are only interested in initial conditions which operate under the *same* laws of nature we find in the universe.

So far, we have defined some of the key terms used by thinkers when referring to the fine-tuning of the universe, but what evidence is there of this fine-tuning? I will now highlight some of the evidence that scientists give in support of the contention that the universe is fine-tuned. The physicist Roger Penrose has calculated that the odds of

the initial low-entropy state of the early universe obtaining by chance alone is one part in 10 to the power of 10^{123}, which is ten followed by one hundred and twenty-three zeros, a truly incomprehensible number (1989, p.445). Another example is the gravitational force, which, for life to occur, must be fine-tuned to a one part in 10^{40}, which is a staggering delicacy (Collins, 1999, p.67). For this chapter, I will assume that the scientific evidence for fine-tuning is strong.[38] Given this an important question arises: if the possibility of life is on a razor-like edge of finely balanced initial conditions, then what explains this fine-tuning? According to these examples, it is vastly more probable that the universe would have life-prohibiting initial conditions, and so this seems to cry out for an explanation. In the contemporary literature, there are three live explanatory alternatives: physical necessity, chance, or intelligent design. I aim to assess the plausibility of each of these possibilities and to conclude based on where I think the evidence leads. In Section I we saw that the arguments against God's existence are unsuccessful, and moreover, that SSE remains a tenable position. In the previous chapter on the moral argument, I continued with the positive case for SEE. Consequently, in line with the ultimate ambition of this thesis, I will argue that the fine-tuning evidence points to a creator and designer of the universe, which is consistent with SSE.

[38] Further examples of the fine-tuning evidence are in the following texts: Hawking, S. (1989*) A Brief History of Time - From Big Bang to Black Holes*, Bantam Books. - Rees, Martin. (2001) *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces that Shape the Universe*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

The Fine-Tuning Argument

Premise 1 – The fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life is either due to physical necessity, chance, or design.[39]

Premise 2 – The fine-tuning is not due to either physical necessity or chance.

Conclusion - Therefore, it is due to design (2008, p.161).

Before we analyse the argument above I want to introduce the terminology I will be using for the two positions on the fine-tuning argument. A defender of the *theological design hypothesis* (TDH hereafter) claims that an all-loving, all-wise, and all-powerful God created this universe with the desire of bringing about the existence of intelligent life. By contrast, a supporter of the *atheistic hypothesis* (AH) denies that the fine-tuning of the universe requires a supernatural explanation, and so defends a naturalistic explanation. The first thing to mention is that the fine-tuning argument is an inductive or probabilistic argument for a designer of the universe. This way of argumentation is widespread in scientific discourse, where the more evidence there is in support of an argument or hypothesis, the greater the inductive force that argument possesses. For example, the theory of gravity has strong evidence for its existence, and so we have good reasons for thinking it to be correct; however, such a theory is still provisional and subject to further revision, because evidence could come about that makes the theory less plausible or even untenable. This notion is also true in the case of the finetuning argument since the argument does not try to prove the TDH but merely claims it to be more probable than the AH. The objective of my thesis as a whole has

[39] This list of explanations of the fine-tuning data does appear to be exhaustive, but this is not to say that another possibility may be put forward in the future. However, these are the three credible alternatives discussed and debated in the literature.

been to provide a cumulative case for SSE. Even though the fine-tuning argument does not prove that the designer of the universe is God, it does however accentuate some of the properties (e.g. intellect, power, rationality, consciousness) that this designer would have to possess, which are consistent with SSE. As a side note, in the final section of this chapter, I will attempt to provide some reasons for thinking that God would want to create a universe with intelligent life. Thirdly, by focusing on the very fabric of the universe, the fine-tuning argument sensibly avoids the delicate matter of biological complexity and whether it is the result of an evolutionary process or intelligent design.[40] A defender of the fine-tuning argument can happily accept that evolutionary theory is probably correct while going on to point out that the very *possibility* of this process depends on a delicate balance of fine-tuned initial physical conditions. Finally, I also wish to dispel a common misconception about the term 'finetuning' which might well be supposed. Contrary to what one might think, the term finetuning is a *neutral* term used by physicists and does not mean intelligent design; if this were the case, the fine-tuning argument would be circular and thus fallacious.

Before analysing the evidence in support of the premises of the argument, it is crucial that we understand the various assumptions made by Craig, and how the argument's conclusion follows from the two premises (1) and (2). Firstly, (1) talks about *intelligent life* thereby drawing our attention away from simple organisms to more complex ones like ourselves. By the term 'intelligent life,' I assume that Craig means any sentient being that can take in energy, metabolise it, and reproduce, which seems to be a good

[40] Some philosophers and theologians (e.g. Francisco J. Ayala adopt a position known as *Theistic Evolution,* which is the view that the evolutionary process is guided by the divine will of God.

definition, one which covers any intelligent life that might exist elsewhere in the universe. (1) also lists the three explanations for the fine-tuning, and I can think of no other possible explanation beyond these alternatives. With regards to these three live options, it seems unlikely that one could *show* that these alternatives exhaust the field of potential accounts. Thus, it would be up to the reader to suggest another explanatory option which explains the fine-tuning data; until then, chance, physical necessity, and design, remain the three live possibilities. Furthermore, in contrast to (1) which is largely indisputable, (2) is undoubtedly the most controversial proposition of the entire argument. It asserts that fine-tuning cannot be reasonably attributed to either physical necessity or chance, and so by the process of elimination the conclusion logically follows from the premises. Overall, for the argument to work, the theist must primarily defend (2) from objections. On the other hand, the atheist or sceptic must deny one of the premises. Some of the most successful ways in which they might do this include: (O1) rejecting (1) and the notion of fine-tuning altogether; (O2) - casting scepticism on the probability claims of the argument; (O3) - denying (2) by providing a naturalistic explanation for the fine-tuning; or (O4) - questioning the inference from fine-tuning to a designer. These four various kinds of objections can be grouped in the following way – evidential objections (O1), probabilistic objections (O2), scientific objections (O3), and explanatory objections (O4). The first objection seeks to shed scepticism on the adequacy of the fine-tuning evidence, and the second argues that we are not able to assign probabilities to the likelihood of our fine-tuned universe. The third focuses on scientific explanations that are considered superior to the design hypothesis, and the final one questions the explanatory power of invoking a designer of the universe. One of the supporters of (O1) has been theoretical

physicist Stephen Weinberg who writes, “I am not impressed with these supposed instances of fine-tuning" (October 21, 1999, Issue, The New York Review of Books). For Weinberg, it is questionable whether the essential elements for life (e.g. carbon, hydrogen) were, in fact, present during the early stages of the universe. Despite this sceptical attitude towards the fine-tuning evidence, the scientific community has reached somewhat of a consensus that fine-tuning is a scientific fact and therefore here to stay; hence, the real controversy is not over *whether* the universe is fine-tuned for intelligent life, but *why* it is. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, I will *not* focus on these types of objections, but the latter three since they are highly contested. Proponents of (O2), like Mark Colyvan et al. (2005), have sought to show that our concepts of probability do not apply in the case of fine-tuning. He and others argue that their usage is fallacious when applied to the fine-tuning argument since we cannot justifiably make the probability claims about the data; in other words, we cannot assess to what extent a fine-tuned universe is likely or unlikely. However, for those academics who accept the reality of a highly improbable fine-tuned universe, but are sceptical of the design hypothesis, many have tried to explain the fine-tuning as a natural phenomenon (O3). For example, the emergence of quantum theory in the 20th century has led scientists, such as Stephen Hawking and Sean Carroll, to defend the view that fine-tuning can be explained by the so-called multiverse hypothesis. By contrast, thinkers like John Barrow and Frank Tipler have argued that no added explanation is needed for the finetuning; all we can say on the matter is that the laws of nature must be a certain way for life to exist in the cosmos (1988. p.16). The final objection (O4), is more of a criticism of design arguments in general and is found in David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). Here Hume claims that

the teleological argument leaves the complexity of God's mind in need of as much explanation as the universe does. This point is made through the character Philo, who claims, "If reason be not alike mute with regard to all questions concerning cause and effect… a mental world or universe of ideas requires a cause as much as does a material world or universe of objects" (Hume, 2007, p.37). In recent times, this classic objection to theism has been popularised by Richard Dawkins in his highly influential book *The God Delusion (2006)*, and so, because of its popularity in current debates on science and religion, I wish to focus on his contemporary criticism of arguments that infer a designer of the universe. To summarise, the rest of this chapter will involve me assessing these various objections and responses to the fine-tuning argument, to decide how successful they are.

Physical Necessity

According to the first possibility given in the fine-tuning argument, that of physical necessity, the initial conditions must be the way they are, and therefore could not have been otherwise. Remember that the initial conditions are those to which laws apply to lead to further conditions. The problem with this claim is that there seems to be no reason to think this to be true. If we take the laws of nature and the initial conditions, then it seems obvious that these initial conditions are not physically necessary, rather they are arbitrary numbers which could have taken on any number of different values. For instance, it is possible to imagine a universe very different from the one observed, and this universe would not have the same initial conditions as our world. In *The Mind of God,* Davis further reiterates this point:

> *There is nothing in present ideas about laws of initial conditions remotely to suggest that their consistency with the laws physics would imply uniqueness… It seems, then, that the physical universe does not have to be the way it is: it could have been otherwise (1993, p.169).*

The view is also supported by Craig who maintains that "there is no reason to think that showing every constant and quantity to be physically necessary is anything more than a pipedream" (2008, p.164). Despite this, there have been ideas put forward in support of this necessity, such as postulating the existence of a more fundamental law which would remove the improbability of the fine-tuning. However, even if we were to put the speculation behind this idea to one side, this suggestion seems to just push the uncertainty of fine-tuning back to the fundamental law itself. The reason for this is that, based on the empirical evidence, it becomes even more improbable that there exists an ultimate law which just so happens to be the right life-permitting law. Since I believe that there are much more effective non-theistic responses to the fine-tuning argument, I wish to devote more focus to other suggestions, such as the prospect of fine-tuning being explained by chance. This will be the focus of the next sub-section.

Fine-Tuning and Chance

The second alternative claims that the fine-tuning of the universe is best explained through the result of a fortuitous occurrence. According to this hypothesis, even though it is much more likely for the world to be life-prohibiting, we are just fortunate that (out of all the possible configurations the initial conditions could take) the universe we live in turns out to be life-permitting. In a nutshell, it is an accident that the constants and initial conditions happen to fall into a life-permitting zone. However, it's incredibly

unlikely for this to be the case; as we have seen, the initial conditions and the physical laws are such, that if they were altered even slightly, it would be impossible for life to exist in the universe. What the proponent of chance is asking us to accept is that all of the available fine-tuning evidence is a matter of coincidence.

The problem with this view is that it's incredibly unlikely for one example of fine-tuning to pertain, let alone for all of them to be such; yet this is what is required for life to exist in the universe. For example, usually a die that returns six each time you throw it indicates intentional tampering with it, and similarly, with the fine-tuning evidence, the delicacy involved seems like too much of coincidence. The probability that the physical conditions of the universe would take on life-permitting quantities by chance alone, is vanishingly small, and so the fine-tuning evidence cannot reasonably be explained by chance, but calls out for a further explanation. Moreover, we usually understand chance as not constraining a particular happening; in other words, something happens by chance when it would be equally probable that it did not happen. In which case, explaining the fine-tuning (which has a very low probability of happening) by chance is not really an explanation, but seems to contradict the assumption that the fine-tuning is not very probable. Overall then, it doesn't seem plausible to think that chance can explain the fine-tuning evidence.

Nevertheless, one fundamental question arises from this: can we even meaningfully assign probabilities to the fine-tuning? To engage with this question, we must first have a general understanding of probability theory, and then see if it can be applied to the fine-tuning of the universe. Apart from different theory-based interpretations of probability, one way to visually illustrate the improbability involved in fine-tuning would be to conceptualise it through a thought experiment. An example of this is given by

the physicist John Barrow who begins by asking us to put a red dot on a piece of white paper. This dot is the life-permitting universe that we inhabit. We are now told to fractionally adjust the initial conditions and quantities we find in the fabric of our universe, which would produce an entirely different world. Let a blue dot stand for any universe with these life-prohibiting initial conditions; now if we were to repeat this process countless times over we would find a horde of blue dots and a tiny number of red dots. Also, it is important to stress that these universes need not exist for us to claim that our life-permitting universe is highly improbable; what is crucial is that there exists a multitude of logically possible life-prohibiting universes which make our finetuned universe exceedingly rare. It is in this sense that Barrow thinks we can say that the fine-tuned universe is extremely improbable. This very idea is however problematic since it assumes that there is a clear distinction between worlds which are red (lifepermitting) and blue (life-prohibiting). However, cosmologists talk about a multitude of physical possibilities, and so, given the limits of current physical cosmology, it is difficult to make a clear distinction between life-permitting and life-prohibiting universes. Therefore, it is difficult to see how we can have much confidence in assigning probabilities to the fine-tuning in this way.

Despite this, there are other conceptions of probability, such as frequency-based probability. According to this view, an event's probability is determined by the frequency with which the event has occurred in the past (2006, p.408). An example of this would be the flipping of coin which has a 50:50 chance of landing on either head or tail. This account of probability theory, however, is incompatible with the claims of the fine-tuning argument, since this universe is all we have, and so we cannot assign

a probability based on the frequency of previous examples of fine-tuned universes. Robin Collins suggests another account of probability which is consistent with the finetuning claims - *conditional epistemic probability.* Collins defines this in the following way: "The degree to which Proposition B, in and of itself, supports or leads one to expect A to be true" (2009, p.206). This notion of probability heavily emphasises one's subjective degree of belief (based on the available evidence) in the truth of a given proposition. In the case of the fine-tuning argument, one could claim that the TDH is more likely to be true than the AH because, given the improbability of the fine-tuning evidence, one would *expect* the universe to be life-prohibiting. On this view, the probability is relativized which is problematic for anyone who subscribes to an objective account of probability. The reason being that different people will naturally assign very different probabilities to a given outcome, and so, we lack an objective reference point (Pargetter, 1988, p.555). A defender of the fine-tuning argument need not subscribe to objective theories of probability, as they can claim that the probability of the TDH is greater than that of the AH, based on the available scientific evidence. This view is also supported by Monton when he states that, "there is no requirement in the fine-tuning argument that its claims about probability be understood as objective claims about nature" (2006, p.409). Overall, I think epistemic probability provides us with a legitimate way of making probability claims about fine-tuning, and so the sceptic cannot evade the conclusion of the fine-tuning argument on issues
relating to probability.

The Multiverse Hypothesis

There have been other significant objections to the fine-tuning argument which do not focus on probability claims; instead, opponents have responded to the fine-tuning

argument in three other main ways. Some physicists, like Stephen Hawking, have strenuously denied that fine-tuning needs a theistic explanation; John Barrow and Frank Tipler have objected to the idea that fine-tuning needs an explanation, and Richard Dawkins has further claimed that the theistic account fails as an explanation, because it immediately raises the problem of explaining the designer. In this section, I will analyse these responses and show that they are unsuccessful in their attempts to undermine the TDH.[41]

Ever since the emergence of quantum theory, physicists have frequently discussed the possibility of a multiverse (Hawking & Mlodinow, 2010, pp.174-5). Moreover, there are certain interpretations of quantum mechanics (e.g. the many worlds interpretation) which predicts a multiverse. This hypothesis would entail the existence of an infinite number of distinct universes, each with their own randomly ordered initial conditions. Therefore, *if* the multiverse exists (and all possible configurations exist), then is not at all improbable or surprising that there are life-permitting universes like our own. Moreover, the multiverse gives a natural explanation of fine-tuning, and so points in favour of the AH over the TDH. The problem with this hypothesis is that it is flawed in an at least three ways. Firstly, as Bernard Carr alludes to, "the idea is highly speculative and, from both a cosmological and a particle physics perspective, the reality of a multiverse is currently untestable" (2010, p.14). As postulating the multiverse is highly speculative, and there is no way of acquiring empirical evidence on parallel universes that might exist, such a hypothesis appears to be unscientific.[42]

[41] Victor Stenger has also defended what he calls the 'Monkey God' objection. Stenger constructs a computer program (named Monkey God) in which he claims to show that life could arise through random chance alone. For a full assessment of the argument see: Stenger, J. V. (2011) *Fallacy of Fine-Tuning: Why the Universe is not designed for us*, Prometheus.

[42] Not all philosophers understand the scientific character of a theory as given by it being falsifiable; the speculative nature of a theory can be explained in many ways, including the fact that it would not be falsifiable.

Collins illustrates this through an example. Imagine archaeologists discover dinosaur bones and sensibly take this discovery to be evidence of dinosaurs existing in the distant past. The dinosaur sceptic might robustly deny this by claiming that they came out of thin air, that there, in fact, exists a yet to be discovered set of physical laws and a mechanism for generating dinosaur bones (1999, pp.60-61). Although the multiverse hypothesis is not as an extreme extrapolation as Collins's example, I do think the theory similarly infers that there exists a multitude of universes, but without experiential justification. This is not to say that quantum physics does not make the multiverse hypothesis *initially* plausible; however, I believe that the theory suffers from further significant flaws which outweigh this plausibility, and therefore, make the hypothesis implausible as an explanation of the fine-tuning. For instance, even if we were to accept such a spectacular addition to our metaphysics, it seems to me that the multiverse itself does nothing to remove the problem of accounting for the fine-tuning evidence. The reason is that if the multiverse exists, then, there must be a mechanism which generates multiverses in the first place, and this mechanism would very likely need fine-tuning itself. For like a bread machine which requires substantial design and certain ingredients (water, flours, and yeast) to produce bread, the multiverse generator would also require such measures to enable it to produce life-permitting universes (Collins, 2007, p.464). Therefore, the highly unlikely occurrence of finetuning remains unexplained on a naturalistic account, even if we invoke the existence of a multiverse.

One further criterion would concern a theory being supported by substantial amounts of independent evidence, rather than being reliant on one example.

Who designed the Designer?

In the *God Delusion,* Dawkins presents a sweeping critique of many of the arguments for the existence of God. However, I want to briefly focus on his criticism of the design argument. According to Dawkins: "…Design is not a real alternative at all because it raises an even bigger problem than it solves: who designed the designer?" (2006, p.122) Before we begin to analyse his objection it is helpful to clarify two key assumptions. Firstly, he assumes that to claim that the TDH is the best explanation of the universe, we must also explain the designer of the universe. Secondly, Dawkins must think that God is at least as complex as his creation, and therefore, his complexity warrants an explanation. To begin with, let me say something about the first assumption. The idea that one needs to provide an account of explanation, to recognise that explanation as the best explanation is false. Suppose, for instance, that archaeologists are excavating and discover a sharp piece of flint attached to a wooden pole. It seems to me that they are perfectly justified in inferring that it is a product of intelligent design, even though they have no other knowledge of its designer. Therefore, in a similar fashion, we can recognise the TDH as the best explanation without explaining the explanation. Regarding the second assumption, this naturally raises all sorts of questions about what is needed for a good explanation of empirical data, as well as what the criteria must be. Peter Lipton offers this important account: "Better explanations explain more types of phenomena and explain them with greater precision… or simplify our overall picture of the world" (Lipton, 2000, p.190). Lipton's claim that a better explanation should clarify our overall image ties in with Dawkins second critical assumption concerning God's immense complexity. Therefore, it seems to me that this notion holds a certain degree of plausibility through our everyday

experience. For example, to create a computer (involving lots of different complex components), one must have good knowledge of computers and understand the elements involved and how they are put together. As a result, there must be more organised complexity present to produce a complex object like a computer. Despite this, it might be surprising to hear that since the 13th century, philosophers like Thomas Aquinas have argued for divine simplicity concerning God's nature, going against the conventional understanding of God as a highly complex entity. The notion of divine simplicity is a complicated one which we need not go into here. But what I will say is that, whether one sees God as complex, will depend on how one conceives of God's essential properties (e.g. his omniscience). For example, one may conceive of God as an all-knowing being, with different complex parts that represent his cognitive faculties. However, other thinkers might argue that God is simple in the sense that he is an immaterial mind; a mind that might well entertain complex ideas, but one that isn't made up of complex parts. Apart from the fact that one can adopt a view of divine simplicity concerning God's nature, even if we were to concede that God is a complex being, Alvin Plantinga goes on to note that Dawkins's argument would run into a further problem: "…More remarkable, perhaps, is that according to Dawkins' own definition of complexity, God is not complex" ("The Dawkins Confusion," *Christianity Today*, March 2007). The definition Plantinga is referring to appears in *The Blind Watchmaker (1986)*, a book which defends the theory of evolution through natural selection. Here Dawkins defines complexity in the following way: "A complex thing is something whose constituent parts are arranged in a way that is unlikely to have arisen by chance alone" (1987, p.16). In my view, God cannot be complex under this definition, since he is an immaterial being who has no constituent parts. Therefore, both key assumptions which

make up Dawkins' objection to the design argument are plausibly false. We need not explain the explanation of a given hypothesis to recognise it as the best explanation, and God need not be conceived of as a complex being, but quite conceivably as a pure, immaterial mind, who entertains complex ideas.

A Product of Intelligent Design?

So far, I have argued that the first two possibilities (physical necessity and chance) are not very plausible explanations of the fine-tuning of the universe. Moreover, in the previous section, I dealt with some of the most forceful arguments against the design hypothesis and showed them to be unsuccessful. I now want to conclude by presenting a positive case for thinking that the designer is the Christian God. As we have seen, without a delicate balance of constants and initial conditions, life (and in our case, conscious life) could not exist. The emphasis on our conscious or mental life is crucial, because it gives us good reason to think it probable that God is behind the fine-tuning. The first reason for thinking that God would want to create a universe that is fine-tuned follows from his essential properties. God is an omnibenevolent being (perfectly good), and therefore he would desire to create conscious life as an expression of his love for humanity.[43] Secondly, an omnipotent God also can create any universe that he so wishes and a universe teeming with conscious life is surely better than a universe without conscious life. This idea has been defended by Richard Swinburne, who claims that God would create a world with conscious beings since the enjoyment of sentient beings is of essential value to a God (2004, p.115). Moreover, God would want conscious people to have an exciting mental life, to have beliefs, to have satisfactory desires, and from a Christian perspective, to have a relationship with

[43] This notion has biblical support: “I [God] have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3).

him. Completely apart from these theological considerations, the TDH is a superior explanation than the AH because it draws on our experience of a world of designed objects. Minds can create complex objects such as computers or mobile phones, and so based on this we may infer from natural experience (evidence of design pointing to a designer) that there exists an unembodied mind of supreme intelligence, which finetuned the universe. By contrast, the AH retreats to a multiverse theory that has a minimal basis in experience. Overall, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a thorough defence of why God would want to create a world with conscious life, and so I merely stress the plausibility of thinking that God would desire to actualise a universe that is life-permitting rather than life-prohibiting. Overall, I hope to have shown that the fine-tuning argument can withstand the various alleged problems which have been formulated against it, whereas the AH suffers from fatal problems which make it inferior to the TDH. To conclude, I think we have enough philosophical, experiential, and scientific reasons for favouring the TDH over the AH, and therefore, the fine-tuning argument remains a sound and persuasive argument for the existence of God.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have looked at the three live possibilities for explaining the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life. I showed why we should think it highly implausible for scientists to discover that *all* the initial conditions must be the way they are. Moreover, the suggestion that a more fundamental law exists is not only speculation, but just pushes the problem back one step further. We also saw that an objection to the fine-tuning argument on probability grounds can be nullified if we adopt an epistemic concept of probability rather than a frequency-based one. I then responded

to some of the most prominent objections to the fine-tuning argument and the design argument in general. The first of these was the multiverse hypothesis, which is arguably unscientific, but the most serious flaw is that the hypothesis does *not* solve the problem of fine-tuning since the mechanism involved in generating multiverses must also be plausibly fine-tuned itself; therefore, these problems render the theory to be explanatorily inadequate. Finally, Dawkins' diagnosis of the chief problem with design arguments is also flawed on two accounts. Overall, with the rejection of necessity and chance as plausible explanations, God remains the best explanation for the fine-tuning of the universe

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Overall Conclusion

In taking into consideration the rise of New Atheism, the central objective of this thesis has been an attempt to construct a cumulative argument in favour of SSE, which challenges the views that science holds a monopoly over our answers to existential questions, and that science points to God's nonexistence. This undertaking involved a detailed examination of four prevalent arguments in the philosophical and theological literature, and I argued that we have both good philosophical and scientific reasons for thinking that SSE is true.

In Section I, I dealt with the tenability of SSE when confronted with two prominent objections to theism. In the first chapter, I distinguished between the two versions of the problem of evil. I discussed the burden of proof involved in holding to the view that God and suffering are logically incompatible, I went on to show that evil and the existence of God are logically compatible. Concerning the evidential version of the problem, I suggested that a proponent of SSE should adopt a position of scepticism when accounting for gratuitous suffering in the world. I pointed out that such a view is entirely consistent with SSE, and successfully neutralises the argument, for its entirely possible that we are not cognitively situated to understand why God allows such evils in the world. The next chapter involved a response to the existence of religious diversity and the pluralistic account. I concluded that Hick's argument for pluralism is dubious, especially his idea of a noumenal Real devoid of tangible properties. Moreover, I defended the tenability of exclusivism against the charge of arrogance. The chapter concluded with a critical examination of Christian salvation and whether it can be defended against the soteriological problem of comparative justice. Here I

urged one to consider Craig's Molinist account since, in my view, it provides a good response to the problem. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that Molinism remains a highly contested theological doctrine in contemporary literature. However, if Molinism is, in fact, coherent, it presents us with a rich account of God's omniscience, one that may provide a solution to traditional conflicts like that regarding God's providence and human freedom. Consequently, I claimed that the doctrine of Middle Knowledge should be further analysed in greater detail, especially the truth value of counterfactuals which remains hotly disputed among philosophers of religion.

In Section II we began by looking at the nature of moral claims and addressed both realist and anti-realist accounts of morality. I argued that our moral experience indicates that moral realism is true, and I explained why secular accounts of moral realism lead to moral relativism. I then defended a theistic account of moral truths against possible objections and showed why it remains the only plausible basis for objective moral values and duties. In the final chapter, we examined how one should best explain the discovery that our universe is fine-tuned for life. I framed the discussion as a debate between the atheistic hypothesis and the theistic hypothesis and sought to examine the plausibility of both accounts. For practical purposes, I suggested adopting Collins's epistemic account, where the probability is understood as the degree of confidence one has in the available evidence. This led to a discussion of the three current explanations (necessity, chance, or design) for the finel-tuning. Here I showed why the first two options are implausible, and with it, concluded that the design remains the most plausible account of the fine-tuning evidence. In other words,

I concluded that the available scientific evidence and philosophical arguments are in favour of the theistic hypothesis

Overall, I have argued for the failure of objections against SSE and maintained that there are good reasons for thinking that SSE is true. The implications of this conclusion are important to acknowledge. Firstly, given its coherency, SSE provides us with a metaphysical grounding for objective moral values and duties, one which is consistent with our moral experience. What is more, the fine-tuning arguments points to the existence of an intelligent designer of the cosmos who actualised the world in such a way as to allow life to flourish. Finally, since there are further positive reasons for thinking that a Molinist approach is explanatorily adequate in response to the soteriological problem, the theist can remain quietly confident that the doctrine of salvation is a coherent account of human destiny. Since the guiding ambition behind this thesis has been to show that there remain good grounds for thinking that SSE is true, the theist should not fear the recent scientistic turn of New Atheism. On the contrary, we have seen that SSE can provide an answer to the profound existential questions which have long been thought to require scientific or naturalistic explanations. Despite this, it is important to see beyond the negativity of New Atheism and to see the possible benefits of its emergence. For instance, one should accept this greater scrutiny of religion as a good thing, for it allows us to reassess all evidence and defend what we believe with greater vigour. In my view, the New Atheists are mistaken in thinking that science has caused the death of God, on the contrary, God remains very much alive in the contemporary picture.