

The Anthropic Argument Against the Existence of God

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Abstract If God is morally perfect then He must perform the morally best actions, but creating humans is not the morally best action. If this line of reasoning can be maintained then the mere fact that humans exist contradicts the claim that God exists. This is the ‘anthropic argument’. The anthropic argument, is related to, but distinct from, the traditional argument from evil. The anthropic argument forces us to consider the ‘creation question’: why did God not create other gods rather than humans? That is, if God is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect then why didn’t He create a world populated exclusively by beings that are perfect in the same way that He is—ontological equivalents— rather than choosing to create humans with finite natures and all the suffering that this entails?

Keywords Problem of evil · God · Free will · Plantinga

Chumans, Humans and Gods

Imagine in the year 2100 that a global government issues an edict proclaiming that every child born to a human outside of the capital city will be of a new chimerical species. ‘Chuman’, as this species is known, is created from a human-chimpanzee cross. Chumans are mentally and physically challenged in comparison to humans, and have been genetically altered to have a strong propensity for violent outbursts (a propensity they wish they did not have). Clearly, such an edict would be morally wrong for any number of reasons. Indeed, implementing such a horrendous evil could well eclipse every other evil done by humanity—and this is certainly saying something. Picture the painful collapse of civil society as those born prior to the edict die off, and

I would like to express my thanks to Brian Garrett and two anonymous reviewers who provided extensive and challenging comments on an earlier version of this paper

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only humans remain outside the capital city. For example, without the physical and mental capabilities necessary to master modern agricultural technology, we must imagine that most humans quickly starve, and the world outside the capital falls into unimaginable barbarism, cruelty, and suffering. Let us suppose it is a mystery why the world government insisted on this action. One hypothesis is that they did so to ensure that the capital remained in perpetuity the center of power on the planet. Another hypothesis is that the motivation was to allow for a fuller expression of their benevolence and love: those humans remaining behind the capital walls could make the occasional sojourn into the more barbaric territory to assist and offer their love for humans. In either case, surely we would be inclined to think that if the world government had any concern with doing what is best, they would not have insisted on the creation of humans in the first instance. The world would have been much better if the world government had permitted those outside the capital to have human children.

The parallel with God's creation decision is perhaps apparent: when we think of God as the standard for a perfect being, then, comparatively speaking, it seems that our natures are *at least* as defective in comparison with His nature as humans are in comparison with ours. Accordingly, it seems that God too is morally culpable for creating us with defective natures; defective, that is, in comparison with His nature. So, by analogous reasoning, God should create ontologically equivalent beings—other gods—rather than humans.

Taking these two important theistic assumptions—that God is morally perfect, and God is morally better than us—I will argue, lands us in a contradiction: If God is morally perfect then He must perform the morally best actions, but creating humans is not the morally best action. If this line of reasoning can be maintained, then the mere fact that humans exist contradicts the claim that God exists. This is what we shall refer to as the 'anthropic argument'. The anthropic argument then is related to but distinct from the traditional argument from evil. The traditional argument often invites us to cogitate what we might think of as the 'interventionist question': why does God not intervene in *human history* to stop horrendous acts of evil? The anthropic argument forces us to consider the 'creation question': why did God not create other gods rather than humans? That is, if God is omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect then why didn't He create a world populated exclusively by beings that are perfect in the same way that He is—ontological equivalents—rather than choosing to create humans with finite natures and all the lack of moral goodness that this entails?

The Traditional Argument from Evil and the Anthropic Argument

It will be helpful to begin with a review, in very broad strokes, of some familiar stretches of the traditional argument from evil,¹ and one version of the free-will defense.² The

¹ Contemporary statements of the traditional problem can be found in Mackie (1955) and McClosky (1960)

² In terms of a defense, Plantinga contrasts a full-blown theodicy, an attempt to justify God's ways to humanity, and the weaker position he adopts: the problem of evil requires the philosopher merely to show the possibility of the co-existence of God and evil (1989:192; 1989:27–28). Ultimately, I will concede that Plantinga has achieved this aim, however, I hope to show that a 'co-existence' between God and humans is not possible

purpose of this review is twofold: first, the argument from evil and the anthropic argument share premises, and so it will help to elucidate these shared premises in relation to the more familiar traditional problem of evil. Second, the review will help us when we ask about the differences between the traditional argument from evil and the anthropic argument.

As we have noted, the traditional problem of evil turns on reconciling God's nature with the existence of evil in our world.³ Concerning His nature, the following three claims capture (at least part) of the traditional Christian⁴ view of God:

- (1) God is omnipotent.
- (2) God is omniscient.⁵
- (3) God is morally perfect.⁶

The problem of evil is generated by (1) to (3) in conjunction with the claim that,

- (4) Evil exists.

Reflection on God's nature, in connection with the existence of evil, is said to lead us to the conclusion of an argument from evil:

- (5) Therefore, God does not exist.

To resist (5), theists typically adopt one of two strategies. Either the conclusion is denied by refusing to accept at least one of the premises (1) to (4), or by attempting to show that (5) does not follow as a consequence of (1) to (4). It has been argued, for example, that (4) is false: evil is an illusion. If there is no evil then there is no problem of evil. (Of course there may be other problems with this response, for example, explaining how it *appears* that evil abounds). Other than denying evil, the other possibility here is to invoke some finite concept of God. Some have denied God's omnipotence (Rubenstein 1992; Soelle 1975). Another possibility is advocated by Blumenthal: God 'acts, from time to time, in a manner that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term "abusive"' (1993:247). Which is to say (3) is false: 'God is powerful but not perfect' (Blumenthal 1993:16). We will also not consider here any (neo-) Hegelian type solutions that suggest that God is evolving (or has evolved) from a finite being to an infinite being. Our concern here

³ In this essay I focus almost exclusively on moral evil, evil caused by agents; as opposed to natural evils such as earthquakes and other natural disasters. On this distinction Plantinga writes (1989:166), '[t]he former is evil that results from some human being's going wrong with respect to an action that is morally significant for him; any other evil is natural evil'. Cf. John Hick (1977:12) and Richard Swinburne (1998:4). It is sometimes argued by theists that these phenomena might not be as disparate as they first appear—evil agents like the devil might be responsible for so-called 'natural disasters'. See for example, Augustine (1950), C.S. Lewis (1940:122), and Alvin Plantinga (1974:58)

⁴ Limitations of space and expertise limit the application of the argument to the Christian tradition. However, I suspect the argument has analogous applications in some Judeo and Muslim traditions of theology

⁵ God's omniscience is not always mentioned in connection with the problem of evil (for example, see B. Davies' presentation of the problem (1993:33). It does seem important to mention God's omniscience simply to forestall the objection that evil results from His ignorance concerning the commission of evil

⁶ Most theists do not believe that God's essence is exhausted by this characterization. Richard Swinburne (1977) adds additional predicates: 'without a body', 'a person', 'necessarily necessary', 'eternal', 'omnipresent', etc

is with the strategy that seeks to show consistency; so, we shall assume (with many theists) that premises (1) to (3) are true, ‘perfect being theology’ as it is sometimes termed, and ask whether their truth in conjunction with (4) is sufficient to prove (5).

As is often noted, it is clear that (1) to (4) do not straightforwardly contradict each other in the sense that, say, the claims that ‘it is true that Randy is married’ and ‘it is false that Randy is married’ contradict one another. This is not to say that there is not a logical contradiction lurking here, it is simply that, if there is an inconsistency, it requires some fleshing-out. At minimum we can say that, at least in virtue of their logical form, (1) to (4) do not contradict one another, just as the claims that ‘Randy is a bachelor’ and ‘Randy is a female’ are not contradictory in virtue of their logical form. Of course, in analyzing these claims we discover a contradiction between these two claims about Randy, since if Randy is a female she is not a bachelor. Similarly, the argument from evil might prove that God does not exist if the analysis of (1) to (3) implies that evil cannot exist. In other words, proponents of the argument from evil must show that the claim that ‘God cannot allow any evil’ follows as a logical consequence of (1) to (3) so, the argument from evil requires a (sub) conclusion along the following lines:

(6) There is no morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of evil.⁷

Transparently, there is a contradiction between (6), and (1) to (4); and given that we accept the premises, the conclusion of the argument from evil, (5) ought to be accepted. The difficulty for proponents of the argument from evil is to justify (6). This difficulty can be illustrated by considering a version of the free-will defense.

Essentially, the free-will defense turns on the idea that God cannot make it the case that we possess free will and that no evil exists. Consider first the idea that God might make it the case that no evil exists. One very straightforward means for God to achieve this goal is simply not to create any moral agents. Presumably, if God had chosen this course of action then there would be no evil; but then again there would be no good either (other than God’s own good, of course). A similar point applies if God had decided to make humans without free will. Here again evil is avoided but so is good, since humans cannot be praised or blamed for their actions if they do not possess free will. The free-will defense then says that there is a conceptual link between creating the possibility of performing morally good acts and the possibility of performing morally evil acts. And, as unfortunate as evil is, it seems that avoidance of evil cannot be the overriding desideratum for God; for clearly it would be morally better for God to create a world that was 99.99% good and only 0.01% evil, than for God to create a world without good or evil. That is, if God’s only choice was between creating a world with some mixture of good and evil or not creating moral agents at all, then the former is the morally preferable state of affairs. Of course this is precisely the point of the free-will defense. God desired to create a world with moral goodness. To reach this goal, God had to endow his creatures with free will; for moral goodness presupposes the ability to choose between good and evil, i.e., free will. Once free will is granted, this opens the possibility that moral agents may exercise their free will by choosing evil rather than

⁷ I owe this formulation to Eleanor Stump (1985:398)

good. In effect, the theist's response is that what we can infer from God's moral perfection is not (6) but what we might think of as the 'prime imperative':

- (7) A morally perfect being should⁸ attempt to maximize the likelihood of moral goodness and minimize the likelihood of moral evil in the world.⁹

One application of the prime imperative is to the question of which possible world God should seek to actualize.¹⁰ The idea here is that in creating the world, God would aim to create a world with the best ratio of good to evil. For suppose that God did not aim for the best, but rather, created some world less than the best. If this is so then there is a morally better action that God could have performed, namely, create the morally better world; but if God does not perform the morally best action then He is not morally perfect. As Leibniz famously argues:

Yet God is bound by moral necessity, to make things in such a manner that there can be nothing better: otherwise not only would others have cause to criticize what He makes, but, more than that, He would not himself be satisfied with his work, He would blame himself for its imperfection; and that conflicts with the supreme felicity of the divine nature (1952:253).

According to Leibniz, then, since God is perfectly good, He will create the best possible world. Leibniz argues further that this does not imply that God will create a world without evil, but that God will create a world with the most favorable balance of good to evil.¹¹ Interestingly, there is broad agreement in the history of thought on this matter that, if one grants that God is a perfect being, and that God can create the best possible world, then Leibniz is correct that God will create the best possible world.¹²

⁸ It might be objected that it does not make sense to say that God has any obligations. Thus Kant: 'Hence for the divine will, and in general for a holy will, there are no imperatives: "I ought" is out of place here, because "I will" is already of itself in harmony with the law' (1964:81). Alston (1989) makes a similar point. For present purposes, nothing turns on this way of putting the point. For those who side with Kant in thinking that God does not for this reason have obligations, here and below locutions like 'God has an obligation to do X', or 'God should do X' can be read as 'God will do the right thing, X'

⁹ I introduce the notion of 'likelihood' here in order to avoid discussion about God's foreknowledge. If one believes that God does not know in advance what choice an agent with free will is going to make then He will at best be able to calculate the probability that some action will be performed by free agents. If one believes that God knows the future then, from God's point of view, the probability of every event—including acts originating in the free will of an agent—is either 1.0 or 0

¹⁰ A word about how to understand the possible worlds talk: following Plantinga (1989), we may think of possible worlds as maximal states of affairs. So, below when invoking the idea of 'actualizing a possible world', this refers to the act of causing some maximal state of affairs to obtain. Strictly speaking, possible worlds are not created by God, but we shall ignore this wrinkle and occasionally talk of 'creating possible worlds'

¹¹ It is clear that (7) is broader than Leibniz's view about which world God should create, since (7) refers to any action that God might take, rather than just world-creating actions. This difference need not detain us, for our focus will eventually be the same as Leibniz's, namely, on world creating. (Furthermore, the same reasoning that Leibniz offers for why God should (or will) create the best world seems to apply to any of God's actions: if He does not do the best in every situation He appears to be open to the criticism that He is not perfect)

¹² Those that agree that God must create the best possible world include Resnick (1973:313), Weinstock (1975:37–38), Patterson (1979:2), Basinger (1980:341), Myers (1987:15), Scharader (1988:27), Grover (1988:224), Daniels (1996:21) and Wielenberg (2004:57). We will examine objections to Leibniz's claim below

The connection with the free-will defense is perhaps obvious: by granting humans free will, God was emphasizing the desideratum to maximize moral goodness. The price that has to be paid for this, at least according to the free-will defense, is that humans might choose to do evil, and since humans on occasion choose to do evil, evil exists. If the actual world is a world with evil, the fault does not lie with God, but with humans who choose to commit evil.

Of course, this is only one round of the dialectic. Some have protested the free-will defense on the grounds that it does not adequately address the point that God should have made humans with free will such that we choose always to do good and avoid evil. John Hick, for instance, writes:

That persons could have been created morally perfect and yet free, so that they would always in fact choose rightly, has been argued by critics of the free-will defense in theodicy as Anthony Flew and J. L. Mackie, and argued against by Alvin Plantinga and other upholders of that form of theodicy. On the specific issue defined in the debate between them, it appears to me that the criticism of the freewill defense stands. It appears to me that a perfectly good being, although formally free to sin, would never do so (1981:42–43).

So long as there is no contradiction in the idea of a perfectly good being that is free to sin but never does so, it seems that free will cannot be sufficient to explain the problem of evil. For it seems that God should have created morally perfect beings: if He is omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect then God should have created a world where we are perfectly good—where we are free to sin but never in fact do so.

Some proponents of the free-will defense attempt to circumvent this objection by, in effect, admitting that the mere appeal to free will is not sufficient to show how evil is possible. The idea of free will is supplemented with the claim that in creating humans God may have had no choice but also to create evil. In every possible world where God creates humans, humans commit evil acts, hence, humans suffer from what Plantinga terms ‘trans-world depravity’—every possible world that God can actualize is one where each person created by God will commit at least some moral evil.¹³

Given the possibility of ‘transworld depravity’ it seems that the theist can answer this objection by claiming that the reason God did not make us both morally free and perfectly good is that may be an impossible task for God. So, it is possible that if God wanted to avoid all evil then He would have had to refrain from creating any humans, and if He creates humans then, necessarily, there will be evil.¹⁴

¹³ Plantinga writes: ‘It is possible every creaturely essence—every essence that includes the property of being created by God—suffers from transworld depravity....But if every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then no matter which essences God instantiates, the resulting persons, if free with respect to morally significant actions, would always perform at least some wrong actions. If every essence suffers from transworld depravity, then it is beyond the power of God Himself to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil (1974:53)

¹⁴ Plantinga allows that humans might not commit evil in some possible worlds, but such worlds are not actualizable by God. This often-overlooked point in Plantinga’s argument does not affect our discussion. Furthermore, Plantinga does not commit to saying that humans in fact suffer from transworld depravity, only that it is possible that they do so

Now, this rapid and selective look at the traditional argument from evil, and a version of the free-will defense, is not intended to do justice to either side of this long and complex debate, for clearly we have barely scratched its surface. Rather, the hope is that enough has been said to notice an assumption that is critical for the free will defense, namely:

(8) God has a morally sufficient reason for creating humans.

This assumption was made very early in our presentation of the free-will defense. Notice how we went from the question, ‘Should God make moral agents?’ to talk of human beings. It does not follow from an affirmative answer to the question of whether God should make moral agents that God should make human beings. What is missing is consideration of any form of the question: Which species of moral agents should God make? If God is to obey the imperative to maximize goodness and to minimize evil, that is, to actualize the best possible world, then it seems that God ought not create humans. As we have said, since God is omnipotent it seems He ought to create morally perfect beings, which would mean creating nonhuman moral agents.¹⁵ The most obvious means to do this is to create other gods. In other words, God was faced with at least a trilemma when creating the universe: in addition to the two options noted—creating or refraining from creating human beings with free will—He might have chosen to make additional morally perfect beings like himself.¹⁶ This leads to the anthropic argument, specifically, the very fact that morally imperfect beings like humans exist ought to be seen as good grounds for believing that God does not exist.

Statement of the Anthropic Argument

In this section we will present and provide an initial defense of the anthropic argument. The first thing we should think about is the theist’s understanding of ‘moral natures’. As a rough first approximation, let us suppose that we could somehow rank moral beings on a moral continuum with ‘10’ reserved for the morally perfect, that is, God, and ‘0’ for the perfectly evil (the devil perhaps?). Humans, let us suppose, are ranked at a 5. We are not perfectly good like God, nor are we perfectly evil. Let S represent the set of worlds comprised of beings with morally better agents than humans, that is, S is a composite of all those worlds in which all moral agents score higher on the moral continuum than humans do in the actual world. The basic idea of the anthropic argument is that if God exists then He would create a world with moral agents that rank better than 5 on the moral continuum, and so, since we are 5s, God does not exist. More formally, the argument is as follows:

- (1) God is omnipotent.
- (9) So, it is possible for God to actualize a member of S. (From (1)).

¹⁵ As we shall see below, Plantinga claims that it is possible that every moral creature that God creates suffers from transworld depravity. Here we are investigating the idea that transworld depravity applies only to humans—a claim that Plantinga does not make

¹⁶ We will consider below an objection on behalf of Plantinga that the third horn of the trilemma is not possible

- (2) God is omniscient.
- (10) So, if it is possible for God to actualize a member of S, then God knows that He can actualize a member of S. (From (2) and (9)).
- (11) So, God knows that He can actualize a member of S. (From (9) and (10)).
- (3) God is morally perfect.
- (7) So, a morally perfect being should attempt to maximize the likelihood of moral goodness and minimize the likelihood of moral evil in the world. (From (3)).
- (12) If God knows He can actualize a member of S, then every world in which God exists is a member of S. (From (11) and (7)).
- (13) Therefore, every world in which God exists is a member of S. (From (11) and (12)).
- (14) Therefore, if God exists in the actual world then the actual world is a member of S. (From (13)).
- (15) The actual world is not a member of S.
- (5) Therefore, God does not exist. (From (14) and (15)).

To help focus our discussion, we will concentrate initially on the most straightforward and ambitious form of the argument, which invokes the idea of ‘pure god-type worlds’ (PGW). These worlds are pure in the sense that they have a multiplicity of agents that are God’s ontological equivalents as described in (1) to (3), i.e., a pure god-like possible world is one where (i) there are a number of gods who are omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect, and (ii) there are no moral beings who are not omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect. As we shall see below, PGW are a proper subset of S, that is, there are other candidates for S. Concentrating on PGWs is the most straightforward in the sense that it invites us to think of other beings with the same attributes as God. This version of the argument is the most ambitious in the sense that it asks us to consider the morally best candidates in S.

Let us look in detail at the various steps of the argument. As we noted above, (3) is an assumption of perfect being theology. (1) too is definitionally true given perfect being theology. (9) is to be understood as realizing a maximal state of affairs where all moral agents are God’s ontological equals, that is, a maximal state of affairs where there is a plurality of omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect beings, and no moral beings that lack these properties. Given (1), the truth of (9) appears to follow. There seems to be nothing contradictory in the idea of worlds where there is a plurality of gods that are omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect. Indeed, it seems that God could create a PGW. To say this is to say more than that it is logically possible that there are PGW, for, as some argue, it may not be the case that God can actualize every possible world. However, given God’s omnipotence, it is hard to see what could possibly prevent God from creating a pure god-type world. To say that God cannot create such a world looks to be an admission of a limit on his power, but this contradicts (1). So, (9) enjoys at least some *prima facie* plausibility, and it can be supported by three additional lines of reasoning.

First, every species we have acquaintance with conforms to the principle of same-type procreation: the ability to create type identical instances of themselves. Some species procreate asexually: bacteria and viruses reproduce in this fashion. Others procreate sexually: reptiles, whales, dolphins, bears, and primates. The manner of the

reproduction is not important.¹⁷ What is important is that all can produce same-type identical individuals of themselves. To say that God lacks this power looks to be an admission of his impotency (as it were). And since (9) in effect says that it is possible for God to procreate in this way, it seems we have good reason to suppose that (9) is true. To deny God this power is to deny him the power to procreate in the same way as every other living being.

The idea that God has the ability to create other gods is familiar from the Bible. For example, Jesus claims in a number of places that he is a deity (John 9:36–38; 10:30; Mathew 27:54), and at a number of points moral perfection is attributed to Jesus (Hebrews 4:151; Peter 2:22). This is not the place to depart on Biblical interpretation. Rather, the only point to be made here is that the idea that God can create (or beget) another god who is morally perfect is a common understanding of Jesus as the Son of God. To reject premise (9) then would be to reject an important belief for many believers. In other words, the inference from (1) to (9) seems dialectically conservative, since it seems to be one that many Christian theists are committed to.

Third, the idea God can create multiple gods is endorsed by some theologians who believe we must understand the Christian doctrine of the trinity in this manner, and so again this inference seems dialectically conservative.¹⁸ Richard Swinburne (1989), for instance, makes one of the most spirited defenses of this view, and we will consider some of his views below.

The truth of (10) follows from (2) and (9). If it is possible for God to create a PGW and God is omniscient then He knows that He can create a PGW. Given (9), (10) is perhaps the most straightforward premise of the argument. Finite intelligences may not know the extent of their powers, but surely God knows what He can and cannot do. As we noted above, God's omniscience is sometimes not even mentioned in discussions of the problem of evil. We make this premise explicit here simply to forestall the objection that God might not have realized that making other morally perfect beings was an option. Since we know this, and we are not omniscient, a fortiori God in his omniscience knows that it is possible for Him to create a PGW. Given (9) and (10), (11) follows on *modus ponens* reasoning.

Recall from our discussion of the traditional problem of evil that (7) is said to be an implication of (3). The truth of (12) follows from (7) and (11). From (11) we know that God knows that He can make a PGW. So the question resolves to whether God could ever be morally justified in making a world that was not a PGW. The answer to this must be no. It seems that the only possible reason to introduce a morally imperfect creature into the world is because it serves to bring about some greater good. But what greater good could this possibly be? The most promising candidate would be the greater moral perfection of the world, but the most direct route to this goal would be to create morally perfect beings from the start.¹⁹

One way to reinforce this is to ask what anyone who is concerned with making the world as morally good as possible ought to do. So, imagine you have accepted, from a dying god, world-creating power. 'Creating a world is a weighty

¹⁷ See note 39 for an objection based on the distinction between creating and begetting

¹⁸ A survey of recent reflection on this matter can be found in Tuggy (2003)

¹⁹ But see note 41

responsibility,' you say to yourself, 'which ought to be exercised in the most thoughtful manner.' In this spirit, let us suppose that you approach the task cautiously by starting with some easy stuff: you create billions of galaxies, and trillions of solar systems. In this respect, your universe is not too different from our own. Perhaps you find your universe a tad drab, so you populate some planets with plants and animals. Pleased with the results, you realize that there is no further procrastinating; you must face the weightiest moral question: What kind of moral agents, if any, should populate your world? You hope to construct your world in accordance with the prime imperative: the likelihood of moral goodness ought to be maximized and the likelihood of moral evil minimized. In this situation you understand this as direction to make this the best possible world, morally speaking. Obviously, the simplest thing to do would be to not create any moral agents. You reflect on how tranquil such a world would be. And certainly this would minimize the amount of evil in the world; a world where there are no moral agents is a world where there is no moral evil.²⁰ Of course you quickly dismiss this thought since without moral agents there will be no moral good either. This leads to the insight that you must create at least one moral being if there is to be any good in the world at all. To simplify matters, let us suppose that your choice is between creating a god (an omniscient, omnipotent, and morally perfect being), a human or a chuman. This looks like a very easy choice: clearly the world will be morally better if you create a god. Creating a god means that you will create a morally perfect being. If you create a human then you have opened up the possibility of less than moral perfection, indeed, if the history of humanity is any indication, less than moral perfection is a virtual certainty. It is true that with a single human the possibilities of creating moral evil are greatly reduced, but we need not suppose that the opportunities are negligible. For instance, we might imagine that moral agents have certain obligations to non-moral creatures.²¹ Humans can and do, for example, torture animals for the sheer enjoyment of it. Such torture is evil and, (in many cases at least) these acts do not result in some greater good. Even if, by chance, the human you create does not intentionally cause evil there is still the problem that, given the finite powers of humans, they will have limited abilities to do good, e.g., diverting an asteroid from hitting some planet in order to avert horrendous suffering on behalf of animals is something that is beyond the power of a single human, but not a god. Furthermore, even if a human acts with the best intentions, the finitude of our wisdom means that evil could be caused inadvertently, but this possibility is nullified or greatly reduced where a god is created. This reasoning seems to tell also against the choice of creating a chuman: if you have reason not to create a human because of humankind's stunted capacities, then a fortiori you ought not to create a chuman. Or to put the point the other way, if one reason that you ought to create a human rather than a chuman is the greater moral capacity of the former, then a fortiori one ought to create a god rather than a human. Given these sorts of possibilities, clearly the first moral agent you should create is a god. Next you must decide whether to create a second

²⁰ I am ignoring what some might consider evil states of affairs: suffering by animals not caused by moral agents

²¹ We might also suppose that moral agents have self-regarding duties, so the neglect of these duties in a world with only one moral agent might also be considered evil

moral agent. Here the possibilities for moral goodness open up, because now there is the possibility of moral interactions between moral agents. So when you ask yourself, ‘What should the nature of the second moral agent be?’, clearly again the answer must be that you create a god. And for precisely the same reason: morally perfect agents will not do what is wrong; whereas with humans or chumans there is no guarantee that they will not do what is wrong. Why choose to create a morally imperfect agent if one is hoping to create a world that is as morally good as possible? As long as it makes sense to ask whether you should add additional moral beings, the next being you add must always be a god, otherwise you will fail to create a world that is as good as you can make it. To do any less would be to abrogate one’s responsibility to create the world in accordance with the prime imperative: to maximize the likelihood of good and minimize the likelihood of evil. It is unfathomable then why God or anyone else concerned with maximizing moral goodness and minimizing moral evil would ever choose to create humans rather than gods.

(13) follows from an instance of modus ponens reasoning on (11) and (12). We may understand (13) as follows: For any maximal state of affairs W , if W obtained, God exists and God would cause a maximal state of affairs S to obtain, in which all and only moral agents are God’s ontological equals. Since only one maximal state of affairs can obtain, S and W are identical. (14) follows as a specific instance of the generalization stated in (13), that is, (14) is just a specific instance of (13). Every possible world where God exists is a PGW, and so if God exists in the actual world then the actual world is a PGW. The truth of (15) seems confirmed every day in so many ways. Each one of us knows that we are not omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect. I take it that this premise is so obviously true that it hardly needs any argument: since we are actually not morally perfect it cannot be that we are necessarily morally perfect as is the case with gods. (It is true that some philosophers, for example, Plato, Aristotle and Hegel, thought that at least some humans enjoy a degree of the divine as part of our rational natures, but this is tempered with the claim that we are not purely divine beings). Given (14) and (15), (5) follows. In other words, there is a contradiction in supposing on the one hand, that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect, and on the other, that this world contains moral beings that are not morally perfect.

It is worth noting that the argument does not depend on the claim that there would be no evil in a PGW, although clearly it is hard to see why there would be any evil. After all, what sort of evil would be unavoidable in a world where the only denizens are omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect beings? The answer seems to be none. Nevertheless, if there were any evil in a PGW it would have to be different from what we observe in our universe. For instance, in a world populated by omniscient, omnipotent and morally perfect beings it is inconceivable that they would slaughter one another for the sheer enjoyment of it—an activity in which humans have demonstrated such proclivity.

Six Objections

We can strengthen the case for the anthropic argument by considering six objections.

First, Swinburne has discussed an argument designed to show that there could not be two all-powerful beings.²² If this argument were successful it would undermine (9). The argument may be summarized as follows: Suppose there are two all-powerful gods: god 1 and god 2. If god 1 is all-powerful then He is more powerful than god 2, and if god 2 is all-powerful then He is more powerful than god 1. This leads to an obvious contradiction, which reveals the original supposition, that multiple omnipotent gods might exist, is reduced to absurdity. If it is impossible for two all-powerful gods to exist then clearly it is impossible for God to create a PGW because this entails creating a multiplicity of omnipotent beings.

As Swinburne (1989) argues, the obvious and seemingly completely satisfactory rebuttal to this argument is that god 1 and god 2 might be equally all-powerful. This challenges the crucial claim that if God is all-powerful then He is *more* powerful than every other agent. Why should we think that an all-powerful being must be more powerful than every other agent? One possibility is to argue that an omnipotent being ought to be able to overpower and destroy every other being and an omnipotent being cannot be overpowered by any other being. In this case there cannot be two omnipotent beings, since we would have to assume that the omnipotent beings are, and are not, capable of being destroyed. However, an all-powerful being is not (generally) thought to be less than all-powerful because He cannot bring about logically impossible states of affairs. For example, the old chestnut that says an omnipotent being is a contradiction in terms because if God really were omnipotent then He could create a rock that even He couldn't lift. Often responses to this sort of 'paradox' have relied on the idea that God's power is not limited when we say that He cannot perform logically impossible acts. So, the fact that the addition of god 2 to some universe might in some way circumscribe the powers of god 1 need not count against the idea of a plurality of gods if it can be shown that the limit is a logical one, i.e., to think that a god ought to be able to do more if He is really omnipotent is to think that a god ought to perform the logically impossible.

Perhaps it might be thought that this line of response misses the force of the objection. Imagine a world that starts with a single god, god 1. In this world, god 1 has complete power over all things and creatures. Suppose then that god 1 creates other gods, god 2, god 3 and so on. Let us stipulate that god 1 no longer has complete power over everything in the universe because it is logically impossible for god 1 to overpower other omnipotent beings. But then it seems that god 1 was more powerful before he created other omnipotent beings (previously god 1 enjoyed dominion over everything). In effect, it looks like when an omnipotent being creates other omnipotent beings he is in effect dividing his power, which is to say that he is no longer omnipotent.

In rebuttal, let us concede, for the sake of the argument, that in creating other gods, god 1 has to give up certain powers that he formerly enjoyed, e.g., the power to destroy every being in the universe. It is certainly not clear whether this should

²² Swinburne (1989) does not, however, discuss the question of whether God ought to have created more gods in order to avoid evil. His argument is that God's love requires only three gods, hence the Trinity and no more

count against his omnipotence, since the addition of other gods will mean that god 1 will have the power to perform certain acts that he was unable to formerly, for example, to have the company of peers (e.g., he would have the power to accept an invitation to play tic-tac-toe with another god that he would otherwise lack). So if we think that creating other gods will put constraints on god 1's powers then it seems that creating other gods will also enable additional powers in god 1. In other words, there may be certain trade-offs when attempting to create other omnipotent beings, but it is not clear that these trade-offs will diminish the omnipotence of god 1. Not being able to interact with his peers seems equally as restrictive on god 1's powers as god 1 not being able to overpower every other being. Indeed, if it is possible, then one can easily see the rationale for God trading the power to overpower all in a world without ontological equivalents for the power to interact with peers. So this objection fails.

The second objection invites us to reflect upon the relation between free will and moral perfection as a possible objection to (9). Specifically, we might imagine the objection runs as follows: 'If God is to make other gods that are morally perfect like He is, then these gods must have free will; but if they possess free will then they may choose to do evil, in which case they would not be morally perfect. Therefore, it is impossible for God to create morally perfect beings.' The trouble with this objection is that if it is true, then it proves too much; for it will prove that God cannot be morally perfect and free. In other words, the same objection could be raised against the idea that God is both free and morally perfect: if God is free to choose to do evil then He may not be morally perfect. Theists that believe that God is morally perfect have two choices here.²³ Either the idea that moral perfection is logically incompatible with freedom, or there is no contradiction in holding God to be morally perfect and free to choose to commit evil. If the former, then God should make other gods who are not free (just as God is not free) and morally perfect (just as God is). If the latter, then God should make gods who are free (just as God is) and morally perfect (just as God is). In either case then, if God can be said to be morally perfect there does not appear to be any reason why there could not be a multiplicity of gods who are morally perfect.

The third objection stems from an argument made by Robert Adams that concludes that it is not wrong for God to create a world that is less good than some other world that He might have created. Given this conclusion the theist would have reason to reject (7), for there is at least one circumstance, namely the act of world-creating, where God would not have to act in conformity with the prime imperative. The rejection of (7), in turn, undermines support for (12) and so the argument would fail if this objection could be maintained.

Recall that we said that the prime imperative indicates that God should act just as Leibniz suggests: God should create the best possible world, and this world should include only gods. According to Adams, God is under no such obligation. Part of Adams' argument is an enquiry into what principle might confer upon God such an

²³ William Rowe argues that the assumption that God is free and the assumption that God is not free to perform acts of moral evil both lead to difficulties (1993:223–233). Contra Rowe, I assume that at least one of these alternatives is unproblematic

obligation. He argues that if (what we shall term) principle (A) were true then God would be morally at fault:

- (A) It is wrong to bring into existence, knowingly, a being less excellent than one could have brought into existence (1972:329).

But, says Adams, this principle is false because it is not wrong for human parents to refuse to take a pill that would provide their offspring with superhuman intelligence and happiness. If human parents are not morally culpable for refusing to take such a pill then, on pain of inconsistency, God should not be said to be culpable either. According to Adams, (what we will term (B)) is a more plausible procreation principle:

- (B) It is wrong for human beings to cause, knowingly and voluntarily, the procreation of an offspring of human parents which is notably deficient, by comparison with normal human beings, in mental and physical capacity (1972:330).

Adams argues that consistency demands that if we accept this principle for humans then God too would be obligated not to bring into existence worlds where humans are notably deficient in comparison with normal human beings in mental and physical capacity, but God is under no obligation to bring into existence beings that are more excellent (for (A) is false). Clearly, then, Adams' argument provides a serious challenge to the anthropic argument, since its conclusion denies that God has an obligation to create ontological equivalents.²⁴

In response I suggest that there is a problematic assumption in Adams' argument to the effect that there is no difference between intra and interspecies procreation principles. To see this, consider (B) as applying to intraspecies creation: it tells us how we ought to act during procreation. Imagine (B) rewritten for the intraspecies procreation of God:

- (B*) It is wrong for God to cause, knowingly and voluntarily, the procreation of an offspring of God which is notably deficient, by comparison with God as He normally is, in mental and physical capacity.

Understood as an intraspecies principle, Adams' (B) actually supports the anthropic argument, for it tells us that God has an obligation to create others gods with his normal mental and physical capacity, which is to say, to create godlike offspring. The 'norm' for God is to be as described in (1) to (3) above, so (B*) directs God to create ontological equivalents.²⁵

²⁴ As Rowe points out (2004:80–83), in general there appears to be a serious problem with Adams' argument for he seems to argue for the wrong conclusion. Suppose we grant that God does not violate any duties in creating less than excellent beings. The question is whether this is consistent with the view that God is morally perfect. For Adams does not consider the possibility that an agent might not violate any moral duties, but still fail to act in the best possible manner, that is, some actions might be *superogatory*, and we may wonder whether God, qua morally perfect being, would not perform the superogatory

²⁵ As Rowe points out (2004:80–81), there are problems with Adams' conception of 'normal' that seriously compromise his argument, but we will pass over these problems

So, it is clear that Adams cannot accept (B) simply as an intraspecies directive, but must hold that the intraspecies procreation principle applies in interspecies cases of creation, that is, when one species creates another. In other words, a ‘bridge principle’ like (C) is necessary to make the interspecies point:

- (C) It is permissible for species X to create normal individuals of species Y so long as it is permissible for Ys to create Ys that are not deficient compared with the norm for Y.

(C) in effect says that what is permissible in the intraspecies case is permissible in the interspecies case. But (C) seems subject to counter-examples. Consider again the case of the creation of chumans. If (B) is rewritten in the intraspecies case for chumans then it would direct chumans not to create chumans that are below the norm for chumans. It is difficult to imagine criticizing chumans for procreating in accordance with (B) so rewritten. But it seems wrong for us to infer, using (C), that humans can create chumans on the same basis, that is, that we could create chumans so long as they lived up to the norm of chumans. Most of us, I take it, would say that human parents should not knowingly and voluntarily create a (normal) chuman offspring when they could create a (normal) human. At least part of the reasoning for this seems to be that it is a better world if humans create humans rather than chumans.²⁶ By parallel reasoning, it seems that God should create ontological equivalents, at least in part, because this would lead to a better world. In sum, understood simply as an intraspecies directive, Adams’ (B) directly supports the anthropic argument. Alternatively, if Adams seeks to invoke some ‘bridge principle’ like (C), then the argument relies on a problematic principle.

However, Adams offers an independent argument to the effect that procreation decisions should not be based on considerations of making a morally better world. Adams says, ‘God’s choice of a less excellent world could be accounted for in terms of His grace, which is considered a virtue rather than a defect of character in Judeo-Christian ethics’ (1972:318–9). According to Adams, grace is ‘a disposition to love which is not dependent on the merit of the person loved’ (1972:324). However, as we shall see, the connection between God’s grace and the actualization of a less than best possible world is far from clear.

For instance, an obvious thought on how these are related is as follows: God created humans precisely because they are less than the best possible beings thereby allowing God scope to exercise the virtue of grace. However, Adams explicitly rejects this:

God’s graciousness in creating does not imply that the creatures He has chosen to create must be less excellent than the best possible. It implies, rather, that even if they are the best possible creatures, that is not the ground for His choosing them. And it implies that there is nothing in God’s nature or character which would require Him to act on the principle of choosing the best possible creatures to be the object of His creative powers. (1972:324)

²⁶ Lurking here is the ‘non-identity problem’ (Parfit 1984). I take it that most of us agree with Parfit that ethics requires observance of more than ‘person-affecting’ considerations. For the contrary view, see Heyd (1992)

So, if we think about this in the case of humans deciding at the end of the 21st century whether to create humans or chumans, then, if these humans possess the virtue of grace, there is nothing in their character or nature that would require that they choose to create humans rather than chumans. But surely something has gone wrong with this reasoning. Grace, as Adams defines it, is a disposition to love irrespective of merit. How does this disposition prohibit choosing to create beings who are morally better? At least part of Adams' answer to this question seems to be that grace would prohibit choosing individuals or worlds because of the greater love for an individual or world. Yet, even if we accept this, it still fails to explain the connection between grace and the claim that God cannot be under an obligation to create the best. As Rowe remarks:

God's grace does rule out choosing to create the best world because He loves its inhabitants more than the inhabitants of some lesser world. But it does not rule out God's choosing to create the best world because He prefers to create the best persons, so long as He does not love them more than He loves the inhabitants of lesser worlds. Adams, of course, must be supposing that if God's reason for creating one world rather than another is the fact that the creatures in the first world are much better than the creatures in the second world, it somehow logically follows that God must love the creatures in the first world more than He loves the creatures in the second. But there is nothing in his presentation of the view that God's love for creatures is independent of their merit that yields this result (2004:86–87).

To illustrate Rowe's point, consider the following example. Suppose through some exotic radiation expelled by a supernova light years away, human DNA is altered so that every child born after the year 2100 is a chuman. So, in this variant of the example, the creation of chumans then is not an intentional act. Nevertheless, if human parents exhibit the virtue of grace then they will love the chuman children as much as they would if they had had human children. So, human parents, if they have the virtue of grace, could not prefer to have a human child rather than a chuman *because they would love the human child more*; and similarly, God could not prefer a world of ontological equivalents to a world of humans *because He would love the former more*. Yet, this is consistent with human parents preferring human children on moral grounds (other than love), for example, on the grounds that a world of humans will be a morally better world. Similarly, God choosing to create a world of ontological equivalents is consistent with grace, so long as the moral reason employed is not that of greater love. So, Adams fails to show any conflict between grace and the prime imperative.

The fourth objection is that it is not logically possible to perform the morally best action. If this objection can be sustained then it gives us some reason to reject the prime imperative, that is, (7), which in turn, as we noted, undermines the support for (12). The argument stems from a longstanding challenge to Leibniz's view that God will create the best possible world based on the impossibility of creating the best possible world. To understand the objection, imagine God deciding which possible world to actualize. Suppose, for the sake of the argument, that every world can be ranked in terms of its goodness (we will assume that all values are commensurable and there are no ties), and each world is assigned a number according to its goodness: $W_1, W_2, W_3, \dots, W_n$; such that W_2 is morally better than W_1 , and W_3

morally better than W_2 , and so on. Suppose further that there are an infinite number of worlds. If this is so then it seems that the theist must face the following argument:

- (I) There necessarily exists an essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, essentially perfectly good being who has created a world.
- (II) If an omniscient being creates a world when there is a better world that it could have created, then it is possible that there exists a being morally better than it.
- (III) For any creatable world there is a better creatable world (Rowe 2004:120).²⁷

Rowe maintains that these form an inconsistent set, and given the intuitive plausibility of II and III, theism (i.e., I) should be rejected. The fact that II and III are understood as a priori truths, has led to this being termed the ‘a priori argument for atheism’ (Kraay 2005). In response, theists have at least two options: either reject III or II.²⁸ Leibniz, of course, rejects III, for he maintains there is a best possible world (which is the actual world). For our purposes, the relevant option is the position that accepts III and rejects II. There are a number of different views as to why II might be said to be false, but a common response is this: if there is no best creatable world then whatever world God creates, given II, He is open to the (putative) moral criticism that He did not create a morally better world. So, for example, if God creates world 1323 out of an infinite number of worlds then He is open to the (putative) moral criticism that He did not create a morally better world, e.g., world 1324. However, a (putative) moral criticism that is impossible to avoid, is in fact not a criticism. Exactly how this argument over the truth of II is to be understood is beyond our concern here.²⁹ The important point is that if we accept the rejection of II, then there is at least one instance where God cannot maximize moral goodness and minimize moral evil, namely, in the creation of a world, so the prime imperative is false. In other words, assuming that II is false leads to the rejection of (7).

It may be thought that something has gone wrong with this line of reasoning, since it seems that the anthropic argument from evil and the a priori argument for atheism turn on quite different considerations. The anthropic argument appeals to the idea of morally perfect beings rather than a best possible world. So, while theism may be ambiguous with respect to the question of whether there is a best possible world, theism (as understood here) is not ambiguous with respect to the possibility of the best possible being, for God is said to answer to that description. Given that the questions of whether there is a best possible being and a best possible world are distinct, it looks as if the two arguments are distinct as well. Despite the seemingly plausible nature of this reasoning, the theist can respond as follows: ‘Suppose it is granted (at least for the sake of the argument) that God could create an ontological equal, so God can create a world with two gods. As good as this world is, we can imagine a better world where God creates a world with two ontological equals. But

²⁷ Rowe (2004) discusses some of the history of this argument

²⁸ A third possibility is to say that I, II and III do not form an inconsistent set. Although this possibility seems worthy of consideration given that we are speaking about making inferences from infinite sets, we will not consider it here

²⁹ Rowe (2004) takes up these issues, including a useful review of the contemporary debate. Hasker (2004) and Kraay (2005) offer additional thought on these matters

then the problem of no best possible world reappears, the reason being that for every world W containing n number of Gods, we can imagine a better world containing $n+1$ gods. If making a world with $n+1$ gods is a morally better action, then whatever world God chooses to make, He will be open to the criticism (given II) that He did not make a morally better world, namely a world with $n+1$ gods.’

So, if we follow those theists who say that we ought to reject II, and use this as a basis for rejecting the prime imperative, then this seems to provide a means to defend the creation of a world much like our own, a world with humans and lots of evil. When faced with the criticism that God could have made a world better than our world, the theist may well reply that this criticism assumes the truth of II, which is false. And so the anthropic argument, premised as it is on the prime imperative, fails.

Yet this line of response opens up the worry that if we allow this as God’s exculpation then it proves too much, for it seems to license the creation of any world. Imagine, for example, God created a world with chumans rather than humans. *Prima facie*, it seems that God would be open for moral criticism, just as we would be if we created a world where our descendents were chumans. Yet, it is not clear that such a criticism could be maintained against God, for it appears that the same defense for creating a world of chumans would apply. But this leads to the absurd result that God would be able to act in accordance with a moral standard less strict than what humans might be held to. In fact there would be no limit to how morally depraved the world might be: God could make a world where every innocent soul is born into the (undeserved) horrors of the ninth circle of Dante’s hell with no chance of escape. The temptation to criticize God on the basis that He could have made a morally better world will have no traction, because the point made above may be reiterated: for any world that God may choose to create there is a morally better world, so this putative criticism is not a criticism.

The theist need not accept such an absurd result, for the rejection of II (or a principle like (7) which implies the obligation to create the best possible world) does not force the theist to sanction world-creating anarchy, rather, the theist may say that what follows is that whatever moral principles govern the creation of the world, II cannot be among them (or implied by any of them). In fact, theists have suggested several possible moral constraints on God’s world creating that differ from II. The idea behind such constraints is that they will partition all possible worlds into two categories: worlds that fall below a certain moral threshold that would not be created by God, and worlds that seem *prima facie* good enough to be worthy of consideration of creation by God. Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder suggest that God might partition as follows:

For example, He puts on his left worlds in which some inhabitants live lives that aren’t worth living and on his right worlds in which every inhabitant’s life is worth living; He puts on his left worlds in which some horror fails to serve an outweighing good and on his right worlds in which no horror fails to serve an outweighing good (1994:260).

They invite the reader to make up her own criteria (1994:260). Rowe too allows theists to invoke partitioning principles (2004:95) without much concern as to what these portioning principles might be. The reason that not much concern has been expressed as to the content of these principles is because the debate is not whether

such principles are *necessary*, rather the question is whether acting on such partitioning principles is *sufficient* for a perfect being. In a nutshell, the a priori argument for atheism in effect says this: ‘Take whatever partitioning principles you like, there will still be an infinite set of acceptable worlds, and for every world among these that God might create there is a better world. But if this is the case then there cannot be a morally perfect being’. The Howard-Synders disagree saying that God could use a randomizing device to choose among all those that are partitioned into the acceptable class. The main point for our purposes is that the choice of partitioning principles are not important for the main point of disagreement in the a priori argument for atheism, but partitioning considerations are important for our argument.

The strategy I propose to pursue is to look for a very minimal necessary moral constraint on world creating that God ought to follow. Specifically, the principle in question is the ‘subprime imperative’:

(16) A morally perfect being should attempt to maximize the likelihood of moral goodness and minimize the likelihood of moral evil in the world at least to the extent that an actual human with world creating powers could attempt to maximize moral good and minimize moral evil given five seconds to complete this task.

To understand what the subprime imperative says, image a human given world creating powers³⁰ in this sense: simply uttering the words that characterize a possible world, that world is created. So, if a person with such powers says, ‘Let the universe be a giant candy floss treat the size of the Milky Way’ then the totality of the world would be a world with a single gigantic treat. Obviously, too, we must stipulate that whatever is said must be possible if it is to be created. For example, if Leibniz were assigned this task and he uttered, ‘Let the actual world be the best possible world’ then no world would have been created, because (by assumption) there is no best possible world.

The reason that we should take this principle as necessary is perhaps obvious. It is impossible to see how a morally perfect being could be said to be morally perfect, if the world the perfect being creates is not at least as good as a world created by a human operating under such resource limitations. With greater wisdom and not operating under time restrictions, God should have ample opportunity to improve upon a world created according to the subprime imperative—at minimum, God should make a world that is equal in goodness to that of what a human could do in these circumstances. A being that will not, or cannot, do as good as a human in these circumstances is not a perfect being.

So what sort of world might one create using the 5-second rule? Reflecting on our previous thought experiment which involved taking world creating responsibilities from a dying god, a decent effort would have to be something like the following: ‘Let the world be populated by a googolplex of ontological equivalents to God.’³¹

³⁰ If it is objected that a being with world-creating powers could not be a human then let us suppose that the human works through a proxy: the human directs a god with world-creating powers

³¹ A googolplex is 10^{100} . Of course we could define larger numbers, but this would take more than the 5 seconds allowed. If it is objected that we might define such terms in advance then let us assume that this world-creating task is a ‘surprise quiz’—we do not have time to define such new terms

Such an utterance passes the five second rule: it can be uttered within a 5-second period. Also, (from our previous argument) the directive here does not require the creation of something impossible.

Notice that this thought experiment does not prejudice the issues at dispute in the a priori argument for atheism. For example, it is consistent with the claim that there are an infinite number of morally better worlds, e.g., a proponent of the a priori argument for atheism might argue that a world populated by a googolplex plus one ontological equivalents to God is a morally better world, and a world with a googolplex plus two ontological equivalents is morally better, and so on. Conversely, it is consistent with the claim that it is sufficient for a morally perfect being to create a world with a googolplex of ontological equivalents to God.

The conclusion then of this line of reasoning is that even the extremely low hurdle for moral perfection suggested by the subprime imperative implies that God must create a world with ontological equivalents. Whatever God creates, He should create something at least as good as you or I could given the 5-second rule. Since (16) shows that God must create a member of S, we may safely conclude (12). That is, even if we substitute the weaker subprime imperative (16) for the prime imperative (7), the argument still holds.

The fifth objection turns on the distinction between universes and worlds. We have proceeded thus far on the implicit assumption that in actualizing a possible world God creates a single universe. However, as a number of authors have argued, this assumption seems unwarranted: it seems eminently possible that there are any number of possible worlds that contain multiverses, that is, worlds that are comprised of more than one universe.³² The idea here would be to think of universes as spatiotemporally interrelated causally closed aggregates.³³ With this distinction in mind, consider Kraay's Theistic Multiverse (TM) which contains '...all and only those universes worth creating and sustaining' (2008:9). Applying this to the anthropic argument, the theist might concede (at least for the sake of the argument) that there are morally better universes than the actual universe, but argue that this does not show that our universe is not part of TM. Thus, the theist might argue that God's moral perfection entails that He is under an obligation to create at least one pure god universe (PGU), but this does not show that our universe ought not be included in the TM. In other words, the theist might say that if God had to choose between a PGU and our universe, then, the anthropic argument might succeed. But this is a false dilemma, since it assumes a one-to-one correspondence between possible worlds and universes. God can have a PGU and our universe in one and the same possible world, namely, the TM.

In response, consider again the thought experiment that puts you in charge of world actualizing. This time instead of creating a single universe you create a multiverse. So, think about the first universe (U1) that you add to your multiverse. The same thought process involved in adding moral beings—for each moral being you add to this universe you must decide whether to add a god or a finite being—that originally said you should create a PGW suggests now that U1 ought to be a member of the set of

³² See Kraay (forthcoming) and O'Connor (2008, Chapter 5) for review and argument

³³ Following Kraay (forthcoming) here. For a different understanding of how theists might understand multiverses see Leslie (1989)

PGUs. But of course the same process must be repeated for each universe (U2, U3, U4.....) you create: each act of creation requires that you obey the subprime imperative and put only morally perfect beings in the universe you are creating. That is, for each universe you come to, whether it is U10, U10, 000,000 or U100,000,000,000,000,00, you will need to apply the same reasoning and come to the same result: each universe you create as part of the multiverse must be a member of the set of PGUs.

But it may be remonstrated on behalf of the theist that this argument cannot be right because if God qua multiverse creator is to obey the prime imperative, then God ought to add every universe to the multiverse that has a positive balance of good over evil. Since (let us concede) our universe has more good than evil on balance God ought to include our universe among the universes that He creates. In other words, think of the set of PGUs as ‘SPGU’ and our universe as ‘OU’. If God simply created all and only SPGU then God’s action is morally surpassable: we can imagine an even larger set of morally good universes SPGU+OU. Since God is morally perfect He will always do what is better, and so given the choice, God would create SPGU + OU rather than simply creating SPGU.

This objection has two premises: that OU is morally good because it contains a greater balance of moral goodness versus evil, and that SPGU + OU is larger than SPGU. Even allowing the first premise, we have reason to reject the second. Specifically, the trouble is that the second premise is true only on the assumption that SPGU is finite. For suppose SPGU is infinite, then SPGU is identical in size to SPGU + OU—consider the old saw that infinity plus one equals infinity.³⁴ It seems further that SPGU is infinite. Our instructions for creating the Theistic Multiverse that obeys the subprime imperative are as follows: create a universe of a googolplex of God ontological equivalents for U1, a googolplex plus one of God ontological equivalents for U2, and so on. Constructing the SPGU in this manner ensures that there are an infinite number of members in SPGU, and each universe in SPGU is guaranteed to be unique, if only because it has a different number of deities.

Although I think there are good reasons for believing that God will actualize a world with an infinite number of universes (O’Connor 2008), notice that this argument does not depend on the idea that God must make a multiverse with an infinite number of universes. For suppose God can only create a finite number of universes, then our argument shows that each of these universes ought to be drawn only from SPGU. Conversely, if God can create an infinite number of universes within a single possible world, then He should draw only from SPGU. So, even if our universe is part of a multiverse, our universe cannot be one created by God, because God will draw exclusively from SPGU to create the multiverse.

The sixth objection, based on the idea of transworld depravity, again questions (9). We previously conceded that it is possible that every human suffers from transworld depravity but the objection now asks us to consider Plantinga’s version of the conjecture, which is much more general, namely: every creaturely essence that God might create suffers from transworld depravity (1974:49–53). The importance

³⁴ The elementary proof that positive integers (1,2,3,4.....) do not have one less member than non-negative integers (0,1,2,3.....) is the biinjection mapping: $f(x) = x - 1$. So, if we think of SPGU as analogous to the positive integers and SPGU + OU as analogous to the non-negative integers, we see that the two sets have exactly the same number: they are both countably infinite

of the generalized version is apparent from Plantinga's recent discussion of transworld depravity (TWD):

The whole point of introducing TWD was to show how it could be that it wasn't in God's power to actualize a world containing free creatures who always do what is right; it is possible that the counterfactuals of freedom should fall out in such a way as to preclude God's doing that (2009:182).

So, Plantinga's position, as applied to the PGW suggestion, is that if it is possible that every free creature that God creates will not always do right, then it is possible that if God sets out to create a PGW He would fail. For if a being suffers from transworld depravity then it is not morally perfect. It would take us too far afield to discuss Plantinga's interesting and subtle discussion of these issues.³⁵ There are two points that tell against conceding TWD to Plantinga (although we will concede TWD to Plantinga in the next section).

The first is that Plantinga's view comes at a considerable theological cost. We noted above that one reason to think that God could create a PGW is that He created a son that is morally perfect. So, in denying the possibility of a PGW, Plantinga must deny a premise that runs counter to a significant tradition in Christian theology that holds that moral perfection is part of Jesus' nature. The defender of transworld depravity must deny that God's 'only begotten son' (John 3:16) is morally perfect like his father. To say that Jesus is morally imperfect is a considerable heresy in many Christian traditions, but this is precisely what the defender of a generalized transworld depravity must maintain.³⁶

The second point questions Plantinga's reasoning for TWD, specifically, it seems somewhat ad hoc, or at least seems to leave unexplained the central problem that it seeks to solve. Recall that Plantinga says, 'the whole point of introducing TWD was to show how it could be that it wasn't in God's power to actualize a world containing free creatures who always do what is right...' In this passage Plantinga must mean by 'creatures' moral beings other than God. For suppose 'creature' refers to any moral agent. If this were the correct understanding then, according to the passage above, a world actualized by God where He is the only moral being is one in which God may suffer from TWD. But if God may suffer from TWD then He is not necessarily morally perfect. So, clearly Plantinga does not mean to include God himself within the scope of 'creature'. Thus, TWD is not a completely general thesis in the sense of applying to all moral beings. It applies to all moral beings God can create, *but* not God himself. So, the TWD conjecture must be understood as having two parts:

- (a) 'It could be that it wasn't in God's power to actualize a world containing free creatures who always do what is right'.
- (b) It is possible that God, and God alone, always chooses to do what is right.

In his writings Plantinga spends some effort in explaining why (a) might be true, but says little about (b). What accounts for this fact that God, and God alone might

³⁵ Helpful discussion can be found in DeRose (1991), Howard-Snyder, and J. O'Leary-Hawthorne (1998). See O'Connor (2008: 135–138) for a critique of the associated doctrine of Molinism

³⁶ For those willing to bite the philosophical bullet here and assert Jesus' transworld depravity, I will discuss the idea that Jesus is morally imperfect in the next section

distinguish himself in this way? As far as I can see, Plantinga never offers much in the way of explanation for this remarkable fact. It might be thought that an explanation is suggested by Plantinga's claim, '... it is possible that the counterfactuals of freedom should fall out in such a way as to preclude God's [creating creatures who always do what is right]' (2009:182). As an explanation for why God is the only morally perfect being, this does not sound particularly illuminating. It might be explanatorily illuminating if God lacked freedom. In which case, then, the explanation might be formulated along the lines that the difference between God's moral perfection, and the moral creatures He creates lies in the latter's freedom. As we noted above, this response meets with the objection that if God can be morally perfect and not free then we are left wondering why He would create free creatures. And if God is free and morally perfect then we are left wondering how it is possible that God, and God alone manages to combine freedom with moral perfection. If, as Plantinga assumes, libertarian freedom is necessary for moral action, then the appeal to freedom does not separate our actions and God's. The big differentiator is not freedom per se, but the fact that our counterfactuals of freedom 'fall out' differently. In which case, the appeal to the 'counterfactuals of freedom' does seem to add much explanatory power. What insight is gained from the claim that it is possible that all creatures that God might actualize are morally imperfect because this is the way the counterfactuals of freedom fall out for them, whereas, for God the counterfactuals of freedom fall out such that He always does what is right? After all, appealing to the 'counterfactuals of freedom' adds little to the idea that only God is morally perfect. Indeed, it does not appear to be much more than a restatement of the problem, for it does not appear any more illuminating than saying God is morally perfect and we are not. Why do the counterfactuals of freedom fall out so differently? It would be tempting to say 'because God is morally perfect whereas as all other creatures He can actualize are not' but of course in this case the explanans and explicandum will be one and the same. In other words, we get this circularity:

Question: Why is it possible that God is morally perfect while all the rest of the creatures that He might create are not?

Answer: Because it is possible that the counterfactuals of freedom fall out differently for God and the creatures He might create.

Question: Why is it possible that the counterfactuals of freedom may fall out so differently for God and the creatures He might create?

Answer: Because it is possible that God is morally perfect while all those creatures He might create are not morally perfect.

We will have to leave this point as merely polemical: there are complex issues involving the burden of proof here, that would require another paper entirely to adequately discuss.³⁷ This much seems true: Plantinga's argument would be more compelling if it could explain how it might be possible that the counterfactuals of

³⁷ In addition to the references in note 35 see Rowe (1998), Otte (2009) and Plantinga (2009). In this recent work Plantinga has weakened his notion of TWD, but not in a way that is relevant for our discussion. So for the sake of clarity Plantinga's original formulation of his position is discussed in the text

freedom fall out so differently for God and the moral beings that He might create. For those not persuaded by these points—and given the abbreviated response here, I doubt that many who endorse the TWD will be persuaded—the next section offers a different means to respond to Plantinga, one that concedes TWD.

The Anthropic Argument and Lesser-God Worlds

Our argument has been based on the idea of PGW.³⁸ The argument is (in some ways) more ambitious than it needs to be. PGW are a subset of the GW, which we defined as the set of worlds where the only moral agents are more knowledgeable, powerful and moral than humans. I think it is plausible to think of a continuum between the envisioned moral perfection of God and our own finite moral natures. Along this continuum then are corresponding sets of possible worlds that are better than our own. Let us now turn our attention to Lesser God Worlds (LGW). These are the worlds where god 1 has the characteristics described in (1) to (3) but where every other god (god 2, god 3, etc.) is a lesser god, i.e., who necessarily does not have at least one of the characteristics of omnipotence, omniscience, or moral perfection to the same degree as god 1, but necessarily enjoys a greater degree of omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection than is characteristic of humans. Our argument will be that at least some of the LGW are better worlds than our world and so should be considered members of S.

Consider the set of LGW where the lesser gods do not enjoy god 1's omnipotence but share his omniscience and moral perfection. These worlds are better than our own because every moral agent in these worlds is morally perfect. The utility of the idea of LGW is that it allows us to evade at least one objection raised against PGW: there is a paradox in holding that there may be more than one omnipotent being. Previously we rejected this argument, but suppose the argument against the idea of a multiplicity of omnipotent beings is sound. We can skirt the argument against the multiplicity of ontological equivalents by imagining that there are lesser gods who have similar powers as God except (say) they cannot make a good soufflé, and all that is entailed in not being able to make a good soufflé—this would meet the formal requirement of not enjoying full omnipotence. So, this would meet the objection that there cannot be a multiplicity of omnipotent beings, yet clearly a world with God and lesser gods (gods who can't make a good soufflé and all that is entailed thereby) is better than our own, for every being is a morally perfect being. Again, this is not to say that there will be no evil in a world with a multiplicity of morally perfect beings, but whatever evil there is, it will be radically different than the sorts of evil propagated by morally imperfect beings like humans.

Similarly, we found no reason to suppose that there cannot be a multiplicity of morally perfect beings. But even if it could be shown that there is some paradox in creating more than one morally perfect being, what follows then is that God should

³⁸ Although I believe there is much to be explored in the idea of a theistic multiverse, especially O'Connor's suggestion of a countably infinite multiverse (2008: chapter 5), for the sake of familiarity, unless otherwise noted, I return to the more familiar idiom of possible worlds conceived in terms of one-to-one correspondence with universes

have created penultimate moral beings: necessarily, if x is a penultimate moral being then X is just slightly less than morally perfect. Again, we need not imagine this amounting to much of a concession, for one small moral transgression (e.g., a single practical joke that is slightly cruel, and all that is entailed in committing such an act) in a lifetime of good deeds would be sufficient to meet the standard of ‘less than perfectly good’. So, clearly some LGWs are better than our own world. After all, it would be a morally better world where the worst someone had to suffer was to be the butt of the occasional slightly cruel practical joke than the horrors of the Holocaust or the Gulag Archipelago.

LGWs that might be of special theological relevance are the worlds where the lesser gods have the same nature as Jesus. As noted, it hardly need be said the question of Jesus’ nature is controversial, but Jesus is typically understood to be more godlike than humans because he necessarily possesses a greater degree of omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection than humans in the actual world. So, for anyone who rejects the idea that God can create other gods, but wants to maintain the idea that Jesus possesses a greater degree of these perfections, the idea that Jesus is a lesser god seems natural. Accepting this raises the question of why god did not actualize a world populated exclusively by Jesus-types rather than humans. Surely, such a world would be morally better than our own. It is impossible, for example, that an ontological equivalent to Jesus could be as evil as Hitler or Stalin. Think again about creating a universe: if your only choice was between creating our world—chock-full of humans with a single instance of the Jesus-type (namely Jesus)—or a world full of Jesus-types, clearly the latter would be morally preferable. In the lesser-god formulation of the anthropic argument, then, there is a contradiction between the fact that God should create a world populated exclusively by Jesus-types, and the fact that humans exist.³⁹

With respect to Plantinga’s argument, it can be demonstrated that the LGW formulation of the anthropic argument is completely consistent with Plantinga’s resolution to the problem of evil. To see this let us suppose that Plantinga is correct that it is possible that all moral beings that God can create suffer from transworld depravity (1974:48). One thing that follows is that it is possible that Jesus suffers from transworld depravity. As we noted, for some theists this may be a considerable concession, but the concession need not amount to the idea that Jesus is an ontological equivalent to humans. Traditionally Jesus is understood to be morally better than humans. This claim can be maintained by the theist by saying that even if Jesus failed to do what is right in every situation in which he was morally free to act, nevertheless, morally speaking he is much better than humans. So, even if Jesus does suffer from transworld depravity, he may be much better than humans, morally

³⁹ The argument speaks of ‘creating Jesus’ and ‘Jesus-types’, but this runs counter to the Nicene Creed that informs us Jesus is ‘begotten, not made’. So, to the extent that the argument assumes that God created rather than begot Jesus, theists may reject the argument. In response, it may be noted that just because Jesus was begotten it does not follow that He could not have been created—perhaps there are alternate means to actualize Jesus and Jesus-types. Moreover, even supposing there is some limitation in God’s power to create creatures better than humans, the argument could be rephrased to say ‘begetting’ rather than ‘creating’ Jesus and Jesus-types. True, the argument thus put would require a lot of begetting on God’s part, but would hardly, it seems, be incompatible with God’s omnipotent nature. I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for this objection

speaking. In which case, it would be better for God to create Jesus-types rather than creating humans, that is to create a LGW of Jesus-types, rather than our world with a single Jesus-type and humans.

This point may be reinforced by an analogy. Suppose it was argued that it is possible that God cannot make omniscient nor omnipotent beings, that is, it is possible that any being that He creates will fail to know at least one truth and be powerless at least in one respect. That is, the claim is that it is possible that every being that God can create suffers from transworld fallibility (TWF) and transworld impotence (TWI). Still, there is a yawning chasm between saying that it is possible that every creaturely essence God creates suffers from TWF and TWI and saying that humans are as knowledgeable and as powerful beings as God could create. It seems eminently possible that there could be beings who are more knowledgeable and more powerful than humans, but not as knowledgeable and powerful as God. One could consistently say this without denying that all beings actualized by God may suffer from TWF and TWI. An obvious candidate for such a being is Jesus: Jesus is thought to be more knowledgeable than any human, and more powerful. If the TWF and TWI theses are correct, Jesus is not omnipotent and omniscient despite being much more knowledgeable and much more powerful than any human. So, the TWF and TWI theses would show why there is ignorance and impotence in our world, but not why God created beings who are as ignorant and as powerless as humans. If God sought to create beings who are as knowledgeable and powerful as possible, He should have created Jesus-types. Similarly, it seems eminently possible that these same beings might be more moral than humans even if they too suffer TWD. For example, we mentioned that it is possible that Jesus-type moral beings (if Plantinga is correct) suffer from transworld depravity, but are morally better than humans.

I should hasten to add that, unlike the PGW formulation of the argument, the LGW formulation is not in any way intended as a criticism of Plantinga's argument. His argument is directed at a specific target, namely, the traditional argument from evil: the idea that the God of perfect being theology is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. Plantinga never claims to answer all atheistic reasoning with this argument. I submit, then, one can consistently accept both Plantinga's refutation of the traditional argument from evil, and the anthropic argument against the existence of God.

We should note here a couple of points about the LGW argument. First, the argument does not imply that all LGW are morally better than our own. For example, an LGW where the lesser gods enjoy a moral nature only slightly better than our own, but where the lesser gods enjoy near omnipotence might be worse. For suppose some of the near omnipotent gods used their power to create enormous evil, the quantity of evil generated might considerably outweigh the evil committed by humans. Second, I assume (but will not prove here) that some of the objections considered in connection with PGW may be similarly answered, *mutatis mutandis*, for LGWs. For example, if it is objected that the arguments concerning LGW assume the truth of II, then the arguments in this section can be rewritten, *mutatis mutandis*, using the 5-second rule. So, one might order up a googolplex of morally perfect but not quite all powerful gods, or a googolplex of Jesus-type beings; in order to overcome this objection. Similarly, if one accepts the idea of a multiverse, then God ought to create a multiverse from the set of lesser-god universes.

Conclusion

The vaulting conclusion is this: if our argument is sound then we have shown that there is a contradiction in asserting both that God and humans exist. Since humans exist, God cannot exist. Since it is unlikely that a single journal article is going to persuade many of a conclusion of this magnitude, it is probably more realistic to say that to the extent that philosophical speculation is thought to assist in these matters,⁴⁰ the argument may be seen as an invitation to theists (and others) to further explore the seeming tension between holding that God is morally perfect, and His choice to create beings like us rather than beings more like Him.⁴¹ My guess is that exploring the anthropic argument rather than the traditional problem of evil will prove more enlightening because of this seeming explanatory asymmetry: if we can find an answer to why God created us rather than other gods (or lesser gods), then we will have a good understanding of why evil exists in God's creation. (Even the dimmest student of anthropology knows that the probability of evil existing in and between human societies is fairly high—to put it ever so mildly). Conversely, as I have indicated, arguments such as Plantinga's that seek to demonstrate the logical compatibility of God and evil do not appear to explain the tension highlighted by the anthropic argument.

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⁴⁰ An anonymous reviewer helpfully reminds that there is good reason to wonder about the utility of philosophical reasoning about such matters if, as many theists believe, human reason does not approximate divine reason

⁴¹ I believe that the Irenaean tradition offers some suggestion about how the tension is to be resolved but it comes at a cost not many theists are likely to want to accept: we may some day be morally better than God or Jesus

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