

ORA VERSION

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An Agreeable Answer to a Pro-theism/Anti-theism Question

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Abstract

In this chapter, I address some difficulties that stand in the way of reaching an answer that will be agreeable across the Theist/Atheist divide to a particular Pro-theism/Anti-theism question, the question I call 'the' comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question. Really, one might say, 'the' comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question is two questions, one for the theist and one for the atheist. For the theist: would God's not existing have been better or worse than is His existing? For the atheist: would God's existing have been better or worse than is His not existing? Assuming that theist and atheist alike should agree that the issue of whether or not there's a God concerns a metaphysical necessity and thus that each should think of themselves as involved in counter-possible reasoning when addressing their variant of 'the' comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question, I shall argue that the difficulties they face in reaching an agreement on its answer, whilst not insignificant, can be overcome, at least to an extent. I shall tentatively suggest that an answer that I shall call 'Weak Pro-Theism' emerges as one that is agreeable across the Theist/Atheist divide, agreeable as what I shall call the 'lower epistemic bound' to 'the' correct answer to 'the' comparative question. More specifically, the theist should answer his variant of the question by saying that it would have been somewhat worse (or at least no better) were God not to have existed. The atheist should answer his variant by saying that it would have been somewhat better (or at least no worse) were God to have existed. I shall argue that arguments for a stronger Pro-theistic conclusion to this question largely wait on a resolution to the Theism/Atheism question.

Introduction

Many philosophers have argued for Theism and many others have argued for Atheism. Yet, whilst many have addressed this, which we may call the 'Theism/Atheism' question, few philosophers have addressed any of the family of closely-related (but logically distinct) questions which we may call the 'Pro-theism/Anti-theism' questions.¹ I wish to address one of these questions now, the one that I shall call the comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question. The comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question is difficult to state in a way that will be acceptable to both theist and atheist alike as it is about the difference in value between the actual world and the nearest world in which 'God exists' has the opposite truth value to that which it has in the actual world; and theists and atheists obviously disagree about what truth value 'God exists' has in the actual world and, only slightly-less obviously, they

¹ Some philosophers who have engaged with Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism questions are G. Kahane, in his 'Should We Want God to Exist?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2011, 82 and in his 'The Value Question in Metaphysics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2012, 85; and K. Kraay and C. Dragos in their 'On Preferring God's Non-Existence', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2013, 43.

disagree about the nature of the right comparator world, that is to say the world a comparison with which is needed in order to answer the question. Really, one might thus say, ‘the’ comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question is two questions, one for the theist and one for the atheist. For the theist: would God’s not existing have been better or worse than is His existing? For the atheist: would God’s existing have been better or worse than is His not existing? Kraay and Dragos define Pro-theism as the view that ‘it would be far better if God exists than if he does not’;² Anti-theism, as the view that it would be far worse if God exists than if he does not;² and they distinguish various sub-views within each. Taking my terminological lead from them, in this paper, I want to argue for the acceptability of a particular answer to the comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question, an answer that I think (just) deserves the name ‘Pro-theism’ even though it doesn’t fit Kraay and Dragos’s definition. This is the view that, as one will think of it if one is a theist, it is somewhat better overall or at least no worse that God exists than it would have been if He had not existed or, as one will think of it if one is an atheist, that it would have been somewhat better overall or at least no worse had God existed than it is, given that He does not exist. We may call this view, ‘Weak Pro-theism’.

It will be seen immediately that Weak Pro-Theism is the weakest view that could possibly count as nevertheless on the pro-theistic side of this debate although if the way it comes out as true is by its being no better or worse whether or not God exists, Weak Pro-Theism is really marking the border between Pro-Theism and Anti-Theism and thus a name such as ‘Neutralism’ would better specify it. Why then do I set my ambitions so low? The short answer is that – as I shall, I hope, establish – only Weak Pro-Theism can commend itself to theists and atheists alike as the answer to this Pro-theism/Anti-theism question. In that sense then, I am arguing for Weak Pro-Theism as the epistemic lower-bound on the correct answer to the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question pending resolution of the Theism/Atheism question. Thus Weak Pro-Theism as defined is the agreeable answer spoken of in my title. In my conclusion, I will push the boat out just a little bit further, arguing that if my – only hesitatingly-endorsed - arguments against certain contenders for being comparator worlds are right, Weak Pro-Theism will come out true in a non-neutralist way. That is, as the theist will put it, it is not just no worse that God exists than it would have been had he not existed, but better (albeit only mildly better). As the atheist will put it, it is not just no better that God doesn’t exist than it would have been if He had existed, but worse (indeed quite a bit worse).

Before making this case, I need to explain why I am not taking either of two paths, each of which appear easier and each of which appears to lead to a much grander destination.

Firstly, one might suggest the following as a way to a stronger pro-theistic conclusion. Question for the Theist: Given that we exist and Theism is true, how much value is there in the world? Answer from the Theist: The universe and our *ante-mortem* lives contain a certain amount, but – in addition to that - a large amount of value is added impersonally by the mere existence of God and, for us personally, by the sort of *post-mortem* lives that God will give us. Question for the Atheist: Given that we exist and Atheism is true, how much value is there in the world? Answer from the Atheist: The same certain amount that the universe and

² K. Kraay and C. Dragos, ‘On Preferring God’s Non-Existence’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2013, 43: 157-178, 158.

our *ante-mortem* lives contain according to the theist and nothing else.³ Comparative question for both: So, which of you is evaluating reality as higher than the other? Answer from both: Theism, and by quite a bit.

The crucial point to make here is that this isn't a way to answer the comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question. The question I'm addressing is not, 'How much better does Theism say the world is than Atheism says it is?' Although that is in itself controversial, I presume that the answer to that question may be addressed in this way and that it does come out as 'Quite a bit'. And that is, it seems to me, speaking to one of the family of Pro-theism/Anti-theism questions. But it's not speaking to the *comparative* question as I have defined it. The issue I am addressing is rather, for the theist, how much better or worse would it have been had Theism been false? And, for the atheist, how much better or worse would it have been had Theism been true? And, as already indicated, I'm interested in exploring whether or not we can reach agreement on the answer to this question across the theist/atheist divide.

Second, there is what I shall call 'the easy way' to travel to the answer to my question that Kraay and Dragos call Wide Impersonal Pro-Theism and it is noted by them. Roughly, it goes like this: God is by definition a being of supreme value and thus worlds with Him in them thereby have a value-adding entity that swamps out any disvalues; therefore, every Godly world is better than every ungodly one just in virtue of every Godly world containing God and every ungodly world not doing so. I do not take the easy way for the following reasons, a defence – rather than articulation of which – would take me beyond the scope of this paper.

I hold to something akin to what Parfit calls the Full Comparative Requirement⁴ for assessing things as being good or bad for people, *viz.* that if something's going to be good for a given person, it has to be the case that he or she would have been worse off had it not obtained (and for something to be bad, that he or she would have been better off had it not obtained). That makes any person's actually existing neither good, nor bad for him or her. And, that being so, I don't count God's existence as a good for Him – His existing doesn't make Him better off than He'd have been had He not existed. (Nor would His non-existence be bad for Him.) I am somewhat diffident with respect to a person-affecting requirement on value *per se*, *viz.* the requirement that things can only be good or bad if there is actually someone for whom they are good or bad. On balance, I reject such a requirement, but I'm hesitant about accepting arguments that need it to be false, as does the easy way if one accepts my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement. As I nevertheless do – albeit hesitatingly – reject a person-affecting requirement on value, so I do – hesitatingly – think of it as impersonally good that God exists – even though (given my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement) it is not good for Him that He do so. I do – hesitatingly – think that it would have been good that God existed even if He had chosen not to create any other people, and thus His existence have been good for no one. There is then, I would say, this much truth in the easy way. But, whilst I do on balance reject a person-affecting requirement on value, I do think that impersonal values (i.e. non-person-affecting ones) just aren't that significant when personal values (i.e. person-affecting ones) are in play, that personal values are trumping over impersonal ones; and that bars the easy way to me.

³ I am of course ignoring in all this those atheists who think things such as that some trans-dimensional natural being will give us each a pleasant immortality.

⁴ D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, OUP (1984), 488.

So, consider two worlds, A and B, that are almost exactly alike and each of which is much like the actual world. In each, there is an Earth, with people like us on it. The only difference between the two is as follows. In world A, an object with considerable impersonal value – perhaps a supremely beautiful crystal formation – exists on a planet beyond the light cone of any inhabited planet (e.g. its Earth) and, on its Earth, a certain person suffers without respite from a migraine headache for an hour, a not-inconsiderable personal disvalue. In world B, that object fails to exist and the person fails to have the headache. I evaluate World B as lexically better than world A. Similarly, it seems to me, the mere fact that God exists may be said to add great – even supreme, in its own terms – impersonal value to a world, but if can't be said – in addition – to add personal value, then that's not saying much; if the fact that God exists makes it worse for people generally (this 'if' is, I of course think [defending as I am Weak Pro-Theism], a *per impossibile* 'if'), it must thereby make it worse overall. That being so, I'm going to focus on what personal difference God makes to the value of the world for us – individually and collectively. I'll mention the impersonal difference as I pass, but not put much weight on it.

I shall be taking Theism to be the thesis that there exists a being with the properties ascribed to God by traditional Perfect Being Theology. Someone who believes that God exists then, I shall be taking it, simply believes that there is an eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, creator of everything other than Himself; and so on.⁵ And I shall assume throughout my presentation that this God, if He does exist, exists of metaphysical necessity (and, if He does not exist, then He does not exist of metaphysical necessity).⁶

In an earlier paper⁷, I argued that the only way to ground judgments that it would be better or worse were situations which obtain of metaphysical necessity to have been different is to

⁵ See, for example, the first part of my *Belief in God*, OUP (2005) for a description of these standard properties.

⁶ These definitional moves actually have more implications than they may seem to have at first sight. My way of understanding Theism brackets off what would otherwise be possibilities in the following way. (Allow me to assume that God exists for ease of presentation.) Later on, I shall argue that the nearest thing in conceptual space to God is a being that has properties that are as similar as possible (without being identical) to those that God actually has; I call such a being 'God minus'. (I go into this in more detail in due course, but the rough idea is that God minus would fail by the narrowest of margins to be perfect; perhaps he might be ignorant of one insignificant truth, say.) Had I thought of 'God' as a logically proper name, picking out – assuming as I am here that He exists – a being that has these properties, then it would have been logically possible that there be another being who was qualitatively identical to God differing simply in having a differing haecceity (assuming haecceities are logically possible). A consideration of worlds containing that being doing the actual God's 'job' then would have had to take the place of my discussion of worlds containing God minus closely approximating in his doings God's job; and the argument would be affected accordingly. I am grateful to Brian Leftow and Martin Pickup for pointing this out to me. Fortunately, how the overall argument would be affected were one to understand Theism and 'God' in this alternative way can be easily seen:– it would make the case for something stronger than Weak Pro-theism even harder to make than I contend that it is in the main text, as it would threaten to come out true that if there hadn't been this God, there'd have been another one, equally as good (on the assumption that a difference in haecceity is of logical necessity the smallest difference possible between two beings).

The issue of God's existence (or non-existence) being metaphysically necessary is also important as we'll see; though it seems to me that similar issues would play out in a similar fashion were one to think that the issue of whether or not there's a God is a contingent one, thinking of it as non-contingent is standard and throws the issues into sharper relief.

⁷ T. J. Mawson, 'On Determining How Important it is Whether or Not there is a God', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 2012, 4: 95-105. This was a development of an argument I presented first in a paper called 'Is Whether or Not There is a God Worth Thinking About?', which appeared in D. Bradshaw (ed.), *Ethics and the Challenge of Secularism*, Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2013, 5-19. (In both these papers I use the terms 'personally' and 'impersonally' with different meanings from those they have in this

portray metaphysically possible worlds as a proper subset of logically possible worlds. On this picture, we have the actual world as our centre of focus, naturally enough. Around it in logical space, we have metaphysically possible worlds (which are also, of course, logically possible). And then we cross a significant boundary, into a ‘doughnut’ of worlds that are logically possible yet metaphysically impossible. Comparative value judgements of a merely counterfactual sort – Would it have been better had Hitler died in his crib? – involve comparisons between worlds all of which are in the centre of this doughnut. Comparative value judgements of a counterpossible sort (where the sort of possibility ‘countered’ is metaphysical in nature) – Would it have been better had I used a time machine in order to kill Hitler in his crib?⁸ – involve comparisons between worlds that are in the centre of the doughnut and worlds which are in the doughnut itself. Only by thinking of the modal landscape in this way can we make both metaphysically possible and metaphysically impossible worlds available to us in logical space for evaluative comparison and thus only by thinking in this way can we say of some metaphysical necessities that it would be better, not worse, were they otherwise and say of others that it would be worse, not better. (Thinking this way means that we do not need to say of every metaphysical necessity that it would be *both* better *and* worse were it otherwise – we avoid the counterintuitive consequences of the Lewis/Stalnaker semantics for counterpossibles, *viz.* that they’re all true.⁹)

Rather than repeat the general arguments of my earlier paper in favour of the method, I shall start by giving an illustration of it at work on another – it seems to me, far easier – issue. Then I shall go on to apply the method more fully to the God issue.

Personally, as already indicated, I think that time-travel of the sort one usually sees depicted in science-fiction stories is a metaphysical impossibility (because backwards causation is metaphysically impossible), but I believe that careful science-fiction writers can nevertheless write logically consistent stories which involve it. One day it occurs to me to reflect on whether or not it would be better for me personally were I to have access to a time machine of the sort I regard as metaphysically impossible – to keep things simple, were I to have access to such a time machine but nobody else to do so. I am reminded as I reflect of a scene that occurs in the film ‘Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure’.

Our heroes arrive at a police station where various historical figures who they have brought forward in time to assist them in passing a history exam (‘report’) have been incarcerated by Ted’s father, the local policeman. If only they could use Ted’s father’s keys to release them, muses Bill. Ted reports that, sadly, his father lost his keys a couple of days ago. (In an earlier

paper.) The argument of the original paper was summarized and challenged by Michael Rota in his ‘Whether or not there’s a God is worth thinking about’ (transl. by Kirill Karpov), in *Philosophy of Religion: An Almanac* 2012-2013. Ed. by Vladimir K. Shokhin. Moscow: Nauka - Vostochnaya Literatura, 2013. pp. 179-185. With a few uninteresting caveats, I now accept Rota’s arguments.

⁸ This is an example, of course, only on the assumption that time travel is metaphysically impossible but not logically impossible. If you don’t happen to so grade it, you could consider arriving at a hotel late at night and being told that all the rooms are occupied, the last one being taken only ten minutes before you arrived. Counterfactual question: would it have been better for you had you arrived fifteen minutes earlier? Counterpossible question: would it have been better for you had this been Hilbert’s Hotel?

⁹ Well, I say this, but it’s far from clear that we will avoid all problems. For example, I would incline to think that some counter-possibles with *logically* impossible antecedents are informatively true and some false, and the method won’t allow us to see how that could be the case. (If pi had been 3, then my maths homework would have been a lot easier.)

scene in the film, the father had even accused Ted of stealing them.) The following exchange then takes place:-

Bill: "If only we could go back in time to when he had them and steal 'em then."

Ted: "Well, why can't we?"

Bill: "'Cause we don't have time!"

Ted: "We could do it after the report."

Bill: "Good thinking, dude! After the report we'll travel back to two days ago; steal your dad's keys; and leave them here."

Ted: "Where?"

Bill: "Don't know. How about behind that sign? [Indicates sign] That way when we get here now, they'll be waiting for us. [Bends down; pokes behind sign; hand emerges with keys] See!"

Ted: "Whoa! So after the report, we can't forget to do this otherwise it won't happen. ... But it did happen! So it was me who stole my dad's keys."

Bill: "That's exactly it, Ted!"

It seems to me obvious that it would be great for me if I were able to pull off tricks like this (at least presuming nobody else is able to do so). As I look into the nearest world in logical space in which I have a time machine and nobody else does, I find that I'm clearly better off there than I am here; I never lose anything important (in the sense that if I do 'lose' something I care about enough, I go back in time to when I had it and safely secure it somewhere for my later self to find; I 'do a Bill and Ted'). That being so, I can reach a well-grounded judgment that it's relatively bad for me, personally, that I don't have a time machine. I can also consider the more general issue of how things would work out for persons other than myself were I to have access to a time machine and nobody else to do so. And, only slightly more hesitatingly, I conclude that it would be better for them too – my own good nature and sense ensure that, as well as purely-self-interested 'Bill and Teds', I'd perform quite a few generally beneficent 'Bill and Teds' too. At my most bold, I find that I can even assess with tolerable confidence the value of such a world entirely impersonally: aesthetically, a world with causal loops has certain elegant aetiological structures that add value, independent of their effects on people; there is something about the original Bill and Ted story that pleases aesthetically.

Similarly then, the suggestion goes, if one is a theist being asked whether it would be better or worse personally were God not to exist, one may look into what one judges to be the nearest world in logical space in which there is no God and seek to see of oneself and others in that world whether or not one is better off and these others are better off. If one finds that one is better off, one should conclude that it would be better for one were there not to be a God; if one finds that one is not better off, that it would not be better for one were there not to be a God. The same goes for the others. And the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for an atheist who is asked to assess how much better or worse it would be for him or her and for others were there to be a God. And indeed the same can be made to go for more impersonal judgements of value too: theist and atheist can assess how much better or worse the world

would be impersonally were whichever of Theism and Atheism they believe to be actually true to have been false. So, anyway, that's the methodological suggestion. Assuming it's basically right, let's turn to see how it plays out.

First, I shall consider the comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism question from the theistic point of view – my own, as it happens. Then I shall turn to consider it from the atheistic point of view. We shall see that what theists and atheists are justified from their respective starting points in thinking of as the relevant comparator worlds differ (and within each camp there is scope for division about what the relevant comparator world is); some candidates for comparator worlds support stronger pro-theistic conclusions than Weak Pro-Theism. (Only very implausible candidates support anti-theistic conclusions.) To that extent then, the precise answer to the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question waits on resolving the Theism/Atheism question and some other issues, issues I shall draw to our attention as we pass them. In that sense then, as I indicated earlier, what I want to be seen to be doing in this paper is establishing Weak Pro-Theism as an epistemic lower-bound to the correct answer to the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question, pending resolution of the Theism/Atheism debate and these other issues.

Considering the God issue as a theist, one thing I might be tempted to say is that in the closest world in which God doesn't exist, nothing else exists either because it's a metaphysical necessity that there's a God; it's a metaphysical necessity that every substantial thing that's not God depends on God for its existence; and these two metaphysical necessities are logically discrete. If all that is right, as I journey from the centre outwards along the Theism/Atheism axis¹⁰ and into the metaphysically impossible doughnut, I 'void' the metaphysical necessity that is God but, having done so, I am left with the metaphysical necessity that everything substantial that's non-God depends on God for its existence, and so the nearest world in which there's no God has nothing else in it either; it is complete nothingness. (Perhaps abstracta still exist – I shall ignore them.) Let us call this world 'Nothingness'.

If, as a theist, one were attracted to the view that standards of value logically depend for their existence on God, then one would say that there wouldn't be any value at all in Nothingness – for good or bad. So, Nothingness would then have to be judged an un-evaluable world. This then indicates the first (at least somewhat controversial) assumption that one must make as a theist to use the method. One mustn't hold, for example, to a Divine Command Theory as a logical necessity. One must hold that one of the 'right' value theories is true – 'right' by reference to the criterion of keeping a standard of evaluation intact as one crosses the boundary into the doughnut whilst travelling on this axis or one must allow at least that some

¹⁰ That is to say, whilst travelling from the actual world at the centre along the axis which, if Theism is true, makes the first world one comes to within the doughnut the one where Theism is false but everything else is as close as it can be – in logical consistency, Theism having been knocked out – to the actual world. If Atheism is true, then in travelling along the Theism/Atheism axis (or – as atheists might prefer to call it - the Atheism/Theism axis), the first world one comes to within the metaphysically impossible doughnut is one where Atheism is false but everything else is as close as it can be – in logical consistency – to the actual world. In this sense of 'axis', there are innumerable axes along which one may travel out from the actual world and into the metaphysically impossible doughnut (innumerable presuming we cannot enumerate metaphysical necessities).

theory of value (different from the one that is actually right but that nevertheless broadly mirrors the ‘outputs’ of the theory that is actually right) is true in the relevant closest world. This adds a complication worthy of further consideration, but I should move on as it doesn’t affect my own line of argument. If one held to a person-affecting requirement on value as a logical necessity, such that nothing could, of logical necessity, be good or bad unless there was someone for whom it was good or bad, then again one would have to say that Nothingness would have no value in it, for good or bad. Again, Nothingness would have to be judged to be an un-evaluatable world.¹¹ I don’t hold to a Divine Command Theory (let alone to one as a logical necessity; in fact I think that Platonism is true of logical necessity) and, as already indicated, I – hesitatingly – reject the problematic person-affecting view; it certainly doesn’t seem to me to be a logical necessity. So, I can in principle proceed further. I can in principle proceed further, but I might in practice get stalled at this point. If, even with all this in place, I just failed to form a judgment of the value of this metaphysically impossible world as compared to the actual world, that would be the end of the matter for me. But in fact I am able to form the necessary evaluative judgment of Nothingness.

As I look into Nothingness, I judge it to be worse impersonally than the actual world for the easy reason: it doesn’t have God – a being of great impersonal value – in it, whereas the actual world does. As I have already said, I don’t think that saying that alone is saying much, but *it is saying something*. So, if I think of the first world within the doughnut as Nothingness, my hesitating conclusion is that because Nothingness is worse impersonally than the something that we have, we should say it’d be worse were God not exist, even though it wouldn’t be worse personally - for me or anyone else - if He were not to exist. As I’m not in fact as confident about the necessary judgments in the God case as I am in the case of considering myself alone having access to a time machine, so, via this route, I myself would hold only more-hesitatingly that it would be worse impersonally, but not personally, were Atheism true.

So far then, getting to a pro-theistic conclusion has required a number of controversial assumptions and then, finally, an unusual value judgement - Nothingness is worse than the something we actually have; and not everyone shares these assumptions or makes this judgment. One of these assumptions – that standards of value don’t logically depend on God such that they drop out simultaneously with Him dropping out as one crosses into the doughnut (or that some other similar standard would take over of logical necessity) – is essential if the method is to work. But another of these assumptions is only required due to the need to evaluate Nothingness given my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement – the falsity of a person-affecting view of value. It would be nice then if we could show that a route that requires one to evaluate Nothingness (rather than more-easily-evaluatable somethings) is not one that the theist would be well advised to take, as we could thereby bypass these issues and perhaps justify a stronger pro-theistic conclusion. One way in which one might hope to do this is by showing that it is a *logical* necessity that if there’s a God, then

¹¹ Or, more precisely, it would have to be so judged if one added-in my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement on assessing harms and benefits accruing to persons; without that addition, then, for example, one’s not existing in Nothingness could potentially be counted as a harm (or indeed a benefit) for oneself. Brian Leftow has put pressure on the Full Comparative Requirement by raising the following point in discussion: ‘From a you-world, you can see that there’s less value for you there [in a world without you] (none). So, why doesn’t it make sense to say that it’s worse for you?’ I have never been to Australia; so, as I look to Australia, I can see that there’s less value for me there than there is where I am, Great Britain. But it doesn’t seem to me that the right thing to say in the light of that is that Australia is worse for me than Great Britain. In the main text later, I do talk about what might follow if one was not as committed to the Full Comparative Requirement as I am.

everything non-God depends on God. Then ‘both’ of these necessities will drop out at once as one crosses the border. I think that this can in fact be shown, through reflection on God’s essential properties of omnipotence and being the creator of everything other than Himself.

As I reflect on what the classical theistic notion of God entails, it seems to me that it entails of logical necessity (through two of God’s essential properties, His omnipotence and His being the creator of everything other than Himself) that anything substantial that’s non-God depends on God. It depends on God both in the sense of depending on Him for its initial existence and character – He is the ultimate creator of everything other than Himself – and in the sense of depending on Him for its continued existence and character – even if, in creating certain creatures, He gives them some ‘existential inertia’, as we may put it, it must nevertheless be the case that, in virtue of His omnipotence, He retains the capacity to annihilate or change them thereafter; He cannot have made any creatures metaphysically necessary. These properties – ultimate creatorhood, as I have elsewhere called it¹², and omnipotence – *taken together* then make it a logical necessity that in any world in which there’s a God, anything non-God depends on God in the fullest sense of depends.¹³ The ‘two’ necessities are in this way logically linked.¹⁴

If then we do suppose these ‘two’ metaphysical necessities to be logically linked in this way, in travelling into the doughnut along the Theism/Atheism axis, the first world one comes to is going to be one in which ‘both’ the metaphysical necessity that there’s a God ‘and’ the metaphysical necessity that anything that’s non-God depends on God for its existence are voided – there isn’t even a logically possible world where the first is voided and the second is not. On such a presumption, what should one then think about the nature of the first world?

¹² T. J. Mawson, *Belief in God*, OUP, 2005, 71

¹³ It would not be the fullest sense of depends either if it was simply that God must refrain from destroying it, nor if it was simply that it depended on God for its initial existence and character. But see following note for how the divine properties of ultimate creatorhood and omnipotence taken together generate the fullest sort of dependency.

¹⁴ One might suggest that one would have been able to block this linking argument if it had been premised on considerations arising from omnipotence alone. One might assert that whilst God’s omnipotence entails that anything non-God depends on God in the sense of depending on His permitting it to exist with the character that it has, it’s logically possible for something to depend on Him in this sense whilst not depending on Him in the sense of requiring Him for its having its initial existence and character (and if a part of this something’s character is its having a certain existential inertia, then it won’t depend on Him in the sense of requiring of Him that He act to sustain it, just that He omit from acting so as to annihilate it). If that’s right, then, if one was considering omnipotence alone, one might be tempted to say that there is a logically possible world in which two beings are co-eternal, God and an angel; God did not bring this angel into existence, yet – in that God could annihilate that angel or change that angel’s character at any stage – He remains omnipotent over it. However, when one brings the property of ‘ultimate creatorhood’ into the picture too, one can see that this is ruled out as a possibility, and the property of being the ultimate creator of everything other than Himself is as essential to the theistic concept of God as is omnipotence.

One might suggest that one would have been able to block this linking argument if it had been premised on considerations arising from ultimate creatorhood alone; one might assert that whilst God’s ultimate creatorhood entails that anything non-God depends on God for its initial existence and character, God could have given something a character such that it continued to exist of metaphysical necessity – such an object would be one which not only did not require His continued sustaining action to persist, but which not even He could destroy. But that, of course, would be repugnant to His omnipotence, which – I am taking it – is equally an essential part of the theistic picture of God.

The world must be as close as is logically possible to the actual world given the voiding(s) mentioned. I find it no easy task to say with confidence what that world is like, but I do have some intuitions.

First, it seems to me that we should think of this world as containing a simulacrum of our physical universe. To assert that one would do better by saying that nothing that actually needs God happens in this closest world as there's *ex hypothesi* no God there to make it happen - i.e. to assert that the nearest world is Nothingness once more - seems to assert as closer a world that is far more different from the actual than is a world with a simulacrum. Nothingness just is vastly different from any something, *a fortiori* from the actual something. The first view of this simulacrum I wish to consider is one in which the Big Bang; the sustaining of the laws of nature; and anything that's happened in the actual universe as a result of miraculous intervention, have happened as a result of chance. So, in all properties (other than aetiological ones, obviously), this world is exactly the same as the actual; its history is exactly the same (or as close as it can be in logical consistency with there being no God), as is its present and future; and so we are there, thinking the same thoughts as we are thinking in the actual world. Given that in this world chance does all the things God does in the actual world, as well as the simulacrum of our earthly lives, there is also a simulacrum of our afterlives. Personally, I incline to think that Universalism, the thesis that everyone gets to Heaven, follows of logical necessity from Theism and the fact that God's created beings like us¹⁵, but many theists would disagree with me about that and so we'll need to consider how that would affect things as and when we come to it. Let's call this – somewhat underspecified then - world 'Simulacrum minus God'.

That there are persons in Simulacrum minus God means that, unlike when evaluating Nothingness, we don't need to rely on the assumption of the falsity of a person-affecting requirement on value in order to evaluate it and that these persons are us means that concerns about the Full Comparative Requirement become moot. And then, finally, that all these persons (minus God again, obviously) are doing exactly the same things and enjoying or enduring the same experiences and fates as we do in the actual world means that one might suggest that we can easily judge that things are no better or worse for anyone in Simulacrum minus God than they are in the actual world (or, if they are worse for anyone, they are only worse for God and that would require bringing in a denial of my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement). However, to conclude that things are no worse for us in Simulacrum minus God would be too quick.

In Simulacrum minus God – most acutely in the afterlife section of it – our worship is everlastingly directed towards a non-existent God. This fact about Simulacrum minus God is sufficient, I take it, to make its heaven – let's call it 'ersatz heaven' - worse for us than real Heaven. We are deceived about what it is we are worshipping. Of course, in Simulacrum minus God we don't realize that it's worse – the ersatz heaven in Simulacrum minus God is phenomenologically identical to the real Heaven. But that ignorance of our everlastingly worshipping a God who doesn't exist doesn't make ersatz heaven anything other than worse for us than real Heaven. Simulacrum minus God then is worse for each of us personally. (It is also worse impersonally, of course, through the non-existence of God; an item of great impersonal value has been lost in crossing the border. But that is the easy result.)

¹⁵ See my *Belief in God*, OUP (2005), p 86f.

As I have said, I think that Universalism follows of logical necessity from Theism and the fact that we exist; some theists differ; they think that not everyone who actually exists will be even as well off as are those in ersatz heaven; according to them, some go to Hell and thus in Simulacrum minus God some go to ersatz hell. It seems to me that ersatz hell would be worse than real Hell. At least in real Hell, *ex hypothesi*, one has been sent there after having been judged to be worthy of it by God; in ersatz Hell, one would have been sent there as a result of chance. This difference again seems to me to make it worse. And the same goes for purgatory and so forth. All in all then, it seems to me pretty clear that Simulacrum minus God is at least somewhat worse for each of us personally (and, for the easy reason, worse impersonally). It's personally worse, but – I would say – only mildly worse. But is Simulacrum minus God the right comparator?

The qualitative similarity at the superficial level between Simulacrum minus God and the actual world is what I have so far suggested could be argued to make it closest to the actual world. But there are other contenders for closest world, even if we suppose Theism and the voidings of it and the necessity that everything non-God depends on God to be simultaneous in travelling into the doughnut. The reason for calling Simulacrum minus God as closest is that, given that one's knocked out God in travelling into the doughnut along this axis, one (arguably) does best to secure similarity by having anything God is in fact causally responsible for – plausibly the Big Bang; the sustaining of the laws of nature; miracles and our fates in the afterlife – happen anyway (otherwise there'd be needless difference) but happen without Him; hence the appeal to chance (i.e. uncausedness, i.e. nothing) to fill God's role. But there is great plausibility in the assertion that one would do best, not by using chance but by using another substantial entity – the best candidate would have to be one that was as close to God in properties as is conceptually possible whilst remaining distinct, 'God minus' we might call him¹⁶ - to play God's causal role in this nearest world. After all, 'chance' doing something is just another way of saying that nothing is causing that thing and it is hard not to have sympathy for the view that a world in which the Big Bang had no cause; the laws of nature continue to operate without anything sustaining them; various happenings that in the actual world were miracles – Jesus raising from the dead, say – happen without causes; and then, all by chance, we have an everlasting afterlife of just the phenomenological sort God arranges for us in the actual world, whilst superficially identical to the actual world, is in fact vastly different below the surface – aetiologically - and these below-the-surface aetiological differences should count for more when it comes for determining closeness. In travelling to Simulacrum minus God one has voided God and a host of causal relationships; in travelling to Simulacrum minus God plus God minus, one has voided only one property of one entity. So, one might argue, it's Simulacrum minus God plus God minus that one should call as closest. Let me explore then this alternative line of thinking a bit more. A hope – as always – is that we might find we can get to the same weak pro-theistic conclusion via different routes.

The line of thinking that we're now exploring then is that things that don't happen by chance in the actual world won't happen by chance in the nearest world within the doughnut along

¹⁶ So, God minus might fail to know the most insignificant of truths but in other respects be like God; he is the smallest extent possible short of a Perfect Being. One could deny the coherence of God minus; perhaps it is not logically possible that there be a smallest margin by which one might fall short of perfection, rather as it is not possible that there be a smallest margin by which a number might fall short of another. If one thinks so, then this would be a reason to stick with Simulacrum minus God as the comparator.

the Theism/Atheism axis. This line of thinking might take one in either of two directions: thinking that in the nearest world they won't happen at all or thinking that in the nearest world they'll still happen but be caused by the thing that's as close to God as can be in properties whilst not being God – God minus, as we have dubbed him.

Firstly then, one might be led to think that perhaps it would, after all, be better to think of the first world one comes to as Nothingness, because even if in the first world one comes to when entering the doughnut along this axis it's not a metaphysical necessity that anything that's non-God depends on God, it's still the case that things like universes coming into existence and laws continuing to operate don't happen by chance; it's not there a necessity that they don't happen by chance, but it's still true there that they don't happen by chance. Nothingness then is the first world after all. If travelling by this route, then we can revert to the earlier discussion; I've already evaluated Nothingness and – hesitatingly - found it to be worse impersonally or at least – less hesitatingly – no better personally. Sadly then, travelling by this route we will not have avoided having to evaluate Nothingness and the reasons for hesitation that having to do that brings (or at least brings me, given my only-hesitating rejection of a person-affecting requirement on value and belief in my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement). A stronger form of pro-theistic conclusion than Weak Pro-Theism cannot thereby be justified.

Secondly, one might be taken by this line of thinking to conclude that perhaps it would, after all, be better to think of the first world one comes to within the doughnut as having in it an entity that's as close to God as can be in its properties without being God – God minus - playing the same causal role as God plays in the actual world. If so, one will think of the nearest world as Simulacrum minus God plus God minus. This world is very similar, but – I think – clearly (if only mildly) worse impersonally than the actual world in that the supreme being in it is God minus, who then is by definition at least somewhat worse than God¹⁷ – a mild variant of the 'easy' conclusion. In addition, although God minus has been introduced under the description of causing everything God actually causes (insofar as is logically consistent with God not causing it), in the ersatz heaven that he arranges for us, we'd be inadvertently worshiping God minus, not – as we suppose (and as things will be in the actual world) – God and that make things personally worse for each of us too. But in Simulacrum minus God plus God minus, we'd at least be worshiping something – God minus – and worshipping something that is at least somewhat worship-worthy. That seems to me to make Simulacrum minus God plus God minus better for us than Simulacrum minus God. And the same goes for the variants of Theism which don't embrace Universalism – the ersatz Hell that some are consigned to by chance in Simulacrum minus God only has people in it who are consigned there by God minus and being consigned there by God minus seems to me clearly better than being consigned there by chance.

That then, it seems to me, is the way it would play out if one gave-in to any feeling of sympathy for thinking that a world where chance fills the role vacated by God would be more distant than a world in which either it remains unfilled or God minus fills it.

¹⁷ Remember always, we have ruled out that the difference between the actual world and the closest in the doughnut might be one of bare identity by our specification of how Theism and 'God' are to be understood; the nearest world in which Theism is false is one in which no being has the full suite of properties that Perfect Being Theology says God has.

I hope to have shown then that, however these things play out, my weak pro-theistic conclusion is warranted from a theistic starting point. It would be worse were Atheism true impersonally, for the easy reason that God, a being of great impersonal value who actually exists, wouldn't exist were Atheism true; but, for reasons given at the outset, that doesn't count for much. What counts for more is the fact that it would 'probably' – in the sense that one can get to this conclusion on more combinations of assumptions than not (but not on all combinations) - be worse were Atheism true for each of us personally. I have not been able to eliminate all routes by which the theist will find himself or herself called upon to evaluate Nothingness, but – nevertheless – I have done something to indicate how, on certain presumptions, Nothingness is not the right comparator – the right comparator is either Simulacrum minus God or Simulacrum minus God plus God minus, each of which are much-less-problematically evaluable and much-less-problematically evaluable as at least somewhat (even if only mildly) worse for us personally. But, obviously, even if Nothingness is the right comparator and is only problematically evaluable as worse, it is non-problematically evaluable as no better than the actual world. Therefore, Weak Pro-Theism is justified.¹⁸ Let's turn now to consider the issue from an atheistic perspective.

Things are of course going to appear somewhat different to the atheist. But let's consider the sort of atheist for whom they're going to appear as little different as possible. Let us assume then that the atheist we are considering accepts the general account of the metaphysically possible as a proper subset of the logically possible and accepts one of the 'right' value theories, right by reference to the criterion of keeping a common standard of evaluation (or at least one that is sufficiently close) in place as we first journey into the doughnut along the Theism/Atheism axis or, as he or she may prefer to call it, the Atheism/Theism axis.

What should the atheist say about the first Godly world he or she comes to, after crossing the border into the metaphysically impossible doughnut along the Atheism/Theism axis, as he or she might put it? I previously discussed different attitudes that one might take towards the logical discreteness of the (putative, as the atheist will insist) metaphysical necessities that there's a God and that everything that's non-God depends on God for its existence. For the atheist, as for the theist, this makes a difference as we shall see.

The first issue I shall address is whether or not the atheist should think of the first world he or she comes to within the doughnut as containing a simulacrum of our universe. Obviously, a case can be made for thinking that the first world contains a simulacrum of our universe as its doing so keeps that world, superficially at least, as close as possible to the actual. Given what I've already said, it will come as no surprise that I am convinced by this case. If the atheist keeps discrete the necessities of God's existence and everything that's non-God depending on God, then the first logically possible Godly world that he or she comes to will be one in which a simulacrum of our physical universe (all that there is, I take it, on Atheism) and also

¹⁸ I cannot myself get to anything stronger, tied as I am by my commitment to my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement; any theists loosed of such a commitment may be able to posit our not existing in Nothingness as a harm, even a great harm, that we're relatively a lot better off having avoided. From such a starting point, a stronger pro-theistic conclusion could be warranted *iff* Nothingness were in fact the right comparator, which I've argued, in any case, it is not.

God exists and yet, as there's no metaphysical necessity that the physical simulacrum that's in it depend on God and as the actual physical universe doesn't depend on God, the physical simulacrum that exists in it doesn't depend on God either. In the first world then, God stands oddly devoid of work to do when it comes to the starting of universes and the sustaining of laws of nature.

Alternatively, an atheist who considers the relevant 'two' metaphysical necessities to be logically connected in that if there's a God, then, of logical necessity, anything non-God depends on God, and who does not regard under-the-surface aetiological differences as making that much difference, might think a simulacrum of our universe exists in the nearest world, but that it is linked to God in the conventional theistic way; in this world, God does the sorts of things theists characteristically say He does with respect to the physical world – e.g. He starts it off and sustains it. Again then, there's a physical simulacrum and a God.

The lack of dependence or dependence of a physical simulacrum on God doesn't seem to me to matter, value-wise, or at least matter much.¹⁹ So I think that – sweeping some minor issues aside - we can actually lump both these worlds together for purposes of evaluation. That's what I'll do. But simulacra-plus-God worlds, as we may call them, are not the only contenders for comparator worlds.

As earlier, one might think that it's not superficial similarities, but rather the under-the-surface aetiological properties that are more cogent in determining which world is closest. The atheist thinks of the actual world as having God-independent physical stuff in it. In the nearest world in which there is a God, then, if there is a logical necessity linking God's existence to the necessity that everything that's non-God depends on God, any stuff that existed would have to be God-dependent physical stuff. But a world with God-dependent physical stuff and God would be different from the actual world in two significant ways – there'd be God-dependent physical stuff and God – not just one – there'd be God (but still no God-dependent physical stuff). If so, then perhaps the atheist should think of the first world within the doughnut as God and nothing else, no simulacrum of our universe then. We could call this world 'Just God'.

How then to evaluate simulacra-plus-God worlds and Just God relative to the actual world as it is seen by the atheist? Turning to the simulacra-plus-God worlds first, it seems to me that the atheist may use the easy reason to judge any simulacrum-plus-God world as better impersonally, even if I'm right that that alone will not be much. In addition, and more weightily, it seems to me that the atheist should judge of these worlds that they are somewhat worse for them personally in one respect (not, *n.b.*, overall) than the actual in that in them atheists are mistaken about a matter of metaphysics which they get right in the actual world. That seems to me to do something to make simulacra plus God worlds somewhat worse for atheists personally.²⁰ But it also seems clearly to make these worlds not a great deal worse

¹⁹ Theists get to be right about what God is doing in the simulacrum with the causally active God, which makes it better for them, but – by the same token – atheists get to be wrong in thinking that God's not doing anything, which makes it worse for them. Weighing these pros and cons against one another is the sort of issue I'm sweeping aside in the main text at this point. I return to a variant of the issue in a moment in the main text.

²⁰ By the same token, atheists should judge such worlds to be better on this count for theists personally. Some weighing will then need to be undertaken to work out whether or not they are net better or worse on this count inter-personally.

and the badness of mere wrongness about the Theism/Atheism question is swamped out by another factor - Heaven.

As already indicated, I think it is a logical necessity that if God and we exist, God gives us all an afterlife in Heaven. If that's right, then – of logical necessity – as soon as we have God and a physical simulacrum in a world, we have Heaven for all of us in that world too. And the fact that the atheist should thus say that we have a heavenly afterlife in the first Godly world we come to makes it easy for him or her to evaluate that world as significantly better for each of us than the actual world as it is pictured by the atheist (where, I take it, we don't – any of us – get to Heaven). And it seems to me obvious that Heaven for the atheist swamps out the badness of his or her having picked the wrong side on the Theism/Atheism question in his or her earthly life. So simulacra-plus-God worlds are to be judged a lot better than the actual world by the atheist. We might even imagine that the atheist will want to rename them now that he or she has drawn the implication that each contains a Heaven, 'Simulacra-plus-God-and-therefore-plus-Heaven worlds'.

It is hard to say what the atheist should in consistency conclude if he or she thinks that I'm wrong in logically tying a heavenly afterlife for all of us in physical simulacra to God's existence in this way. It depends, obviously, on what, if anything, he or she thinks *does* follow from our having *ante-mortem* lives in physical simulacra plus the existence of God – follow of logical necessity - about God's giving us *post-mortem* lives (and of what sort) in those simulacra. If nothing follows, then it seems as if the atheist should conclude that the first world we come to within the doughnut is one where we have just a physical simulacrum plus God - no afterlife at all (as we don't have an afterlife in the actual world, he or she will presumably assert). If so, then there's not the sort of swamping that I suppose. It would hence be mildly worse for atheists personally if Theism were true (in virtue of it being mildly worse to be wrong rather than right about an issue in metaphysics).²¹ If the atheist thinks that it follows of logical necessity from there being a God that He'll send everyone to Hell, then he or she in consistency will think that there's a personal swamping of a small bad thing for him or her (that he or she backed the wrong answer on the Theism/Atheism debate) with a huge personal bad thing for him or her and everyone else. A strong anti-theistic conclusion would be warranted for such atheists. But that *that* would follow of logical necessity seems to me very implausible. What's much more plausible is that it's entailed by the concept of God that God will give each person the sort of afterlife that is best for him or her. I infer 'Heaven for all' from that; but an atheist who thinks that leap too great to be called logically valid can still conclude that it would be personally good for everyone were Theism true (as long as some sort of afterlife is best for everyone and getting the sort of afterlife that's best for one is always better for one than having been wrong about an issue in metaphysics is bad for one). It seems then that Weak Pro-Theism, even if nothing stronger, should commend itself to any atheist who considers a simulacrum-plus-God world to be the closest within the doughnut along the relevant axis.

How to evaluate Just God? Similar issues arise as arise for the theist in evaluating Nothingness – none of us are in Just God to benefit or be harmed (if we assume my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement) by not existing. So (if we do assume this), Just God is

²¹ Again, by the same token, they should judge it mildly better for theists. And again some weighing off would need to be done to determine whether it's net better or worse inter-personally on this count.

neither better, nor worse, for any of us personally. Is it better or worse impersonally? Well, on the up side, it has God in it, which adds, I take it, great impersonal value - the easy conclusion. But, on the down side, as with Nothingness, it doesn't have any of the sorts of impersonal values that we create in the actual world - objects of beauty, philosophy, and so forth. I would hesitatingly say that the atheist should say of Just God that it would be better than the actual world impersonally (because God adds more value than is taken away by the absence of the sorts of impersonal values that we create), but I am hesitant about that. (As already stated, I only hesitatingly reject a person-affecting requirement on value.) I can of course be more confident that Just God would not be worse for any of us, as we wouldn't be there and I am, as always, assuming my variant of The Full Comparative Requirement. So, again Weak Pro-Theism is justified; anything stronger I find myself unable to support without some hesitation.

Conclusion

I've explored the routes by which one might travel to a particular answer to the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-theism question as it will be configured by the theist and as it will be configured by the atheist, and I have shown that all these routes leave one justified in endorsing Weak Pro-Theism; it is somewhat better or at least no worse that there is a God than it would have been had there not been a God/it would be somewhat better or at least no worse were there to have been a God than it is, given that there's not. Some of these routes lead to stronger pro-theistic conclusions than that. My point is that none lead to weaker (not that there is a weaker form of Pro-Theism than my Weak Pro-Theism; the 'weaker' form would be some form of Anti-Theism).

In summary, depending on which route he or she takes, the theist should judge the nearest world within the doughnut along the relevant axis as either (a) Nothingness, (b) Simulacrum minus God, or (c) Simulacrum minus God plus God minus. All of these candidates for comparator world, I have suggested, can be seen to be worse than the world Theism commits one to thinking is actual. Nothingness - (a) - is worse impersonally than the actual world (for the easy reason) but not worse - or, significantly, better - for anyone personally (given my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement). Simulacrum minus God - (b) - is worse impersonally (the easy reason, again) than the actual world and mildly worse for all of us personally; it's worse even than Simulacrum minus God plus God minus - (c) - in that the people in Simulacrum minus God are worshipping nothing at all. Simulacrum minus God plus God minus - (c) - is worse than the actual world impersonally (the easy reason, again) and even-more-mildly worse for all of us personally; at least the people in this world are worshipping something that is at least somewhat worship-worthy.

Depending on which route he or she takes, the atheist should judge the relevant comparators to be either (a) A Simulacrum-plus-God world or (b) Just God. As much as the theist, the atheist may use the easy reason to evaluate simulacra-plus-God worlds - (a) - as better impersonally. Simulacra-plus-God worlds don't differ much in value from one another; each are worlds in which there's a physical simulacrum of the actual world, which may or may not depend on God, but, in any case, after each of us has lived in that physical simulacrum, we enjoy a heavenly afterlife (presuming that I am right in thinking that this is logically entailed by there being a simulacrum of our earthly lives and God). Simulacra-plus-God worlds are

thus clearly considerably better personally than the world that the atheist thinks is actual. If I'm not right in thinking that a simulacrum of our earthly lives and God entail Heaven for all, the route the atheist will need to tread in order to evaluate them as better for us than the actual becomes more treacherous. But still, I have suggested, it will be navigable to my weak pro-theistic conclusion (or even something stronger). Just God - (b) – is hard to evaluate for similar reasons to Nothingness being hard to evaluate for the theist, though it seems to me – hesitatingly – that the right thing for the atheist to say is that it would be better impersonally than the actual world (for the easy reason). It seems to me – far less hesitatingly – that the right thing for him to say is that Just God is not better or worse personally than the actual world, in that we don't exist in it. Just God then is – hesitatingly – to be said to be impersonally better; unhesitatingly, to be said to be not personally worse. Weak Pro-Theism again is supported. If that though is all that can be said in going along this route, it reveals once more quite what a weak pro-theistic view Weak Pro-Theism really is. Still, for the reasons discussed in this paper, I do not think that anything stronger than Weak Pro-Theism can rationally commend itself to theists and atheists alike as the answer to the comparative version of the Pro-theism/Anti-theism question.

One might hope that progress could be achieved on the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question prior to progress being made on the Theism/Atheism question merely by knocking out some contenders for comparator worlds, but a quick look at the various contenders and what would follow from knocking out various combinations of them reveals that doing merely that would not, in fact, advance the case that agreement across the theist/atheist divide can coalesce on something stronger than Weak Pro-Theism. Nor would merely knocking out my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement. Nothingness was worse only impersonally than the world the theist thinks actual due to my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement; without it, it might be said to be worse, indeed - why not? – a lot worse for each of us personally that we don't exist in it. That then might justify (assuming the necessities of God's existence and everything non-God depending on God can be kept separate) from a theistic starting point, a strong pro-theistic conclusion. However, knocking out my variant of the Full Comparative Requirement would, by the same token, also leave Just God worse for each of us personally than the world the atheist is committed to thinking actual, justifying for the atheist an anti-theistic conclusion. So, we'd lose agreement. Remember, I am looking for an agreeable-across-the-theist/atheist divide answer. Of course, if one could knock out Just God in addition – leaving the atheist with a simulacrum-plus-God comparator, that might help somewhat.

In fact though, I have argued, Nothingness should *not* be taken to be the comparator world for the theist; the theist should take Simulacrum Minus God (Or Simulacrum Minus God Plus God Minus) to be the comparator world and this is only plausibly mildly worse, personally, than the world the theist thinks actual; similarly, I have argued, the atheist should not take Just God to be the comparator, but rather take a simulacrum-plus-God world to be the comparator, which he or she should think is quite a bit better, personally (in that we all get to Heaven on it [assuming my argument to Universalism is right]), than the world that the atheist thinks actual. That being the case, again agreement across the theist/atheist divide on anything stronger than Weak Pro-Theism can't be reached if considering personal value alone. But perhaps it could be reached on Weak Pro-Theism coming out true in a way that means it doesn't deserve the name 'Neutralism', as I introduced it earlier. Regardless of my

variant of the Full Comparative Requirement being right (it is just not needed to evaluate any simulacra-minus-God worlds or any simulacra-plus-God worlds), the theist must rate the alternative to there being a God as only mildly worse personally than reality; the atheist must rate the alternative to there not being a God as considerably better personally than reality. Both then can agree on Weak Pro-Theism coming out true in the non-neutralist way on grounds of personal value. But, even with Nothingness and Just God knocked out, nothing more strongly pro-theistic than that can be agreed with respect to personal value. Of course one may bring in the easy reasoning for something stronger on the grounds of impersonal value, but then I have my hesitations about that (generated by my only hesitatingly rejecting a person-affecting requirement on value anyway and, less hesitatingly, thinking that impersonal values don't count for much when personal ones are in play).

If we want to get more agreement than that, we'll need to resolve the Theism/Atheism question first so we can work out which variant of the comparative question we should be asking. Or we'll need to switch to other questions. As I started by arguing, the following is an issue which is different from the comparative Pro-theism/Anti-theism issue as I defined it, but which admits of easier agreement across the Theism/Atheism divide. The question as it will strike the theist: How much worse would the world be were I to be wrong in my Theism?²² Answer: Quite a bit. The question as it will strike the atheist: How much better would the world be were I to be wrong in my Atheism? Answer: Quite a bit. So, on these grounds, both theist and atheist can join in reasonably hoping that Theism is right and Atheism is wrong. But – to repeat the point made at the start – that issue is just not the same as the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism one that I've been addressing. The comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question as it may strike the theist is this: How much worse would the world have been had Theism been wrong? Answer (I have argued): Impersonally (and thus to be said only hesitatingly), quite a bit; personally, only mildly. The Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question as it may strike the atheist is this: How much better would the world have been had Atheism been wrong? Answer (I have argued): Impersonally (and thus to be said only hesitatingly), quite a bit; personally, quite a bit. Given my reasons for hesitation about impersonal value, I myself hence conclude that Weak Pro-Theism as defined is the answer that must be given to the comparative Pro-Theism/Anti-Theism question pending a resolution of the Theism/Atheism question or other issues, e.g. those leading to my hesitation. But at least – due to the issue on which they can reach easier agreement – theists and atheists can join in reasonably hoping that they'll discover that the answer to the Theism/Atheism question is Theism. We, theists and atheists alike, can all agree that if Theism's right, things are a lot better than if Atheism's right²³ even though we can't agree that if Theism's right, things are much better than they would have been had it been wrong.²⁴

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²² I assume that putting it this way sets the constraint that the theist asking it must exist in the world he or she is then led to consider – for him or her to be wrong in his or her Theism, he or she needs to exist. If that constraint isn't yet built-in by the phrasing of the question, tweaking it, I presume, could make it so. Having something like this in play helps by straightaway removing the temptation to consider as cogent Nothingness (and, *mutatis mutandis*, for the atheist, Just God).

²³ I haven't actually given the argument for this in anything but a compressed form, earlier on.

²⁴ I am grateful for Jason Carter, Klaas Kraay, Brian Leftow, Martin Pickup, Richard Swinburne, Roger Trigg, and Vincent Vitale for their comments on this paper.