



Review of “Against Indifference Objection to the Fine-Tuning Argument”

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Thomas Metcalf (2022) argues that even if God were indifferent to creating a physical realm over a non-physical realm, fine-tuning is still evidence for theism over atheism. Metcalf argues for this claim in two parts: first, he argues that if indifference objections succeed in showing that a physical realm is surprising given theism, then they succeed equally well in showing that a physical realm surprising given atheism; second, he argues that there are more restrictions on the possible worlds that God could actualize than what the Atheistic Realm Creator (ARC) could actualize, so any indifference objection against theism will in fact be stronger against atheism.

Metcalf’s first argument goes like this: if, for all we know, God is truly indifferent to creating a physical realm over a non-physical realm, then, for all we know, ARC is also indifferent to creating a physical realm over a non-physical realm. Both God and ARC should be indifferent about selecting from the same pool of possible worlds. Metcalf writes, “In general, if God is selecting between n ways of creating a universe, then the ARC should be ‘selecting’ from that *same* n possibilities” (2022, p. 201). So, if indifference objections work against theism, they work equally well against atheism.

In the second argument, Metcalf takes this point even further: he argues that there are even *more* worlds compatible with atheism than worlds compatible with theism. On atheism, there are no restrictions on the worlds that ARC might actualize. But God’s likely preferences restrict the worlds that he might actualize. Although God and ARC select from the same pool of possible worlds, God is highly unlikely to be indifferent to which world he selects; God’s preferences restrict him to selecting from only a proper subset of possible worlds available to ARC, but ARC has no preferences to limit its selection. Thus, given indifference, the sheer number of worlds compatible with ARC’s lack of preferences compared to the number of worlds compatible with God’s likely preferences means that whatever world in which we might find ourselves, it’s more unlikely given atheism. So, *any* indifference objection will in fact be evidence for theism above atheism.

We could put pressure on Metcalf's first argument if we could think of theistic worlds with no obvious corresponding atheistic worlds. It seems that there are such theistic worlds, especially if we consider mental states as features in possible worlds. Consider a world in which God creates only a piece of cheese that he loves. This cheese has the property of being God's favorite piece of cheese. Unless we are willing to grant ARC mental states, there is no corresponding atheistic version of this world. If Metcalf were to respond that ARC could create the cheese and not have any inclinations regarding it, we could say the same thing about God; perhaps he creates the cheese and has no feelings about it. Thus, it appears that the set of cheese worlds compatible with atheism is smaller than the set of cheese worlds compatible with theism.

This objection is similar to a point that Metcalf addresses. Metcalf references Manson's claim that there are theistic worlds in which God miraculously rearranges matter and energy in the universe, worlds which, Manson claims, are impossible if God doesn't exist. Metcalf says that Manson fails to tell us *why* those worlds are impossible if God doesn't exist. Metcalf also says that even if those worlds in which God miraculously rearranges matter and energy are impossible in an ARC world, there are still corresponding ARC worlds which aren't possible in a theistic world because ARC is responsible for rearranging the energy and matter.

Here is one reason to think that it's impossible for matter and energy to be miraculously rearranged in an atheistic world: whatever ARC is, by definition it's not Godlike. Whatever "miracles" that might occur in an atheistic world, they will still be a result of the natural order of things. For example, if ARC is simply an eternally existing universe, then to say that ARC miraculously rearranges matter and energy is tantamount to saying that the matter and energy is inexplicably rearranged. God, by contrast, is outside the natural order of things and can thus rearrange things as he sees fit. But even if God exists, matter and energy can still be inexplicably but not miraculously rearranged. Thus, both miraculous and inexplicable rearrangement are compatible with theism, but *only* inexplicable rearrangement is compatible with atheism. I think that this is Manson's point, and I don't think it's one that Metcalf has fully addressed.

We could put pressure on Metcalf's second argument by challenging the claim that God will likely have preferences but ARC will not. Sure, most theists believe that God has more attributes than merely being powerful. But most atheists think that ARC has properties beyond being simply the actualizer of some possible world. If by preferences we mean something that only intelligent beings possess, ARC won't have preferences between worlds. But if by preferences we mean something along the lines of

inclinations, ARC will surely have preferences in selecting worlds. If ARC is an eternally existing, physical world, then ARC will prefer to actualize a physical world. However, if ARC is an immaterial realm of eternally existing Platonic forms, it seems very unlikely that ARC would give rise to a physical world. The set of possible worlds that are compatible with ARC’s preferences will, therefore, depend on what exactly composes the set of atheistic hypotheses.

Metcalf has nicely shown that Indifference Objections to the fine-tuning argument aren’t nearly as strong against theism as some would have us believe. He has clearly pointed out that we must consider the likelihood of non-physical worlds on atheism, and that it’s wrongheaded to think that God will be truly indifferent in selecting worlds. But I’m not sure he has fully shown that *every* possible theistic world has an atheistic corollary, nor do I think that he has shown that only God will have preferences—broadly construed—in selecting worlds.

Works Cited

Metcalf, Thomas. (2022) Against Indifference Objections to the Fine-Tuning Argument. *Southwest Philosophy Review* 38(1): 199-208.