**GOD, MIRACLES, CREATION, EVIL, AND STATISTICAL NATURAL LAWS**

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Today, almost everyone, theologians included, acknowledges the statistical nature of the laws of nature, but many may not fully recognize its significance for many traditional theological issues like miracles, theodicy, and creation *ex nihilo*. This essay will explore this significance, partly with the help of Alfred North Whitehead and other process theists who clearly recognize that the laws of nature are purely statistical. If the laws of nature are statistically immanent,[[1]](#footnote-1) as Whitehead thought, and not imposed rigidly from above, outside, or previously,[[2]](#footnote-2) and not arbitrarily imposed by human conventions,[[3]](#footnote-3) this has great metaphysical and theological significance, as explored next.

**Statistical Natural Laws**

Consider the following metaphysical implications of the concept of natural laws as statistical.

*1. Before or without the existence of any actual entities, there are no actual laws of nature*, *only abstract possible laws for possible worlds or “cosmic epochs,” as Whitehead would say.*

Whitehead located all *possible* universals, qualities, relations, laws, and concrete individuals within the “primordial nature of God.” He insisted that there are no novel eternal objects, thus no truly novel possible individuals, patterns, qualities, relations, or combinations of such. With Hartshorne, I disagree with Whitehead about this. There would be no difference in the nature or value of actual and possible worlds if this were so. Hartshorne thought, and I agree, that there are no complex eternal objects for concrete individuals like you and me; only the most abstract possibilities or repeatable “objects” are “eternal.” God creates more definite possibilities as needed for their actualization. Calling *created* possibilities “*eternal*” would be self-contradictory, so I will refer to “possibilities,” not to “eternal objects.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Possible laws of nature are the general formal patterns of relations between actual entities in one or more possible worlds. As Whitehead defined them for our world, “The laws of nature are forms of activity which happen to prevail within the vast epoch of activity which we dimly discern…There is no necessity in their nature.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

I will also use “actualities” instead of Whitehead’s “actual occasions.”[[6]](#footnote-6) By “actualities,” I include existing events plus more enduring entities or structures like Whitehead’s “regular trains of waves, individual electrons, protons, individual molecules, societies of molecules such as inorganic bodies, living cells, and societies of cells such as vegetable and animal bodies.”[[7]](#footnote-7) I also include actualized repeatable properties (qualities and relations)—usually called “universals.” I will not follow Whitehead in calling them “eternal objects” but will instead refer to “universals” or “properties.”

2. *The actual laws of nature are created by the properties, dispositions, and habits of actual entities*.

The statistical laws prevailing in our universe are not directly “imposed” from above, outside, or before our universe. Instead, they are created by actualities within our universe.

Statistics do not apply to individuals, only to large sets, collections, or classes of similar actualities sharing similar properties (qualities and relations, habits, or dispositions). “All electrons are very similar to each other,”[[8]](#footnote-8) said Whitehead. So are all thing belonging to our conceptual classifications. Whitehead repeatedly affirmed statistical natural laws—as derived from the habits, actions, properties, or “characters” of similar actualities. Consider these examples.

This doctrine, that order is a social product, appears in modern science as the statistical theory of the laws of nature…[[9]](#footnote-9)

Statistics tell you nothing about the future unless you make the assumption of the permanence of statistical form…There is no valid inference from mere possibility to matter of fact.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The laws of nature are the outcome of the characters of the entities which we find in nature. The entities being what they are, the laws must be what they are; and conversely the entities follow from the laws.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Thus in a society, the members can only exist by reason of the laws which dominate the society, and the laws only come into being by reason of the analogous characters of the members of the society.[[12]](#footnote-12)

But the laws of nature are derived from the characters of the societies dominating the environment.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Whitehead and theists influenced by him distinguish between natural laws as “imposed” from above, versus “immanently derived” laws, as required by the statistical theory. We still want to say something closely resembling “imposed,” as in Whitehead’s own, “conversely entities follow from the laws,” and “the members can only exist by reason of the laws.” Here we must be very careful with our language, perhaps even more careful than Whitehead. We are accustomed to thinking that God gives the universe its laws, so we may easily lapse into language incompatible with statistical laws as “the outcome of the characters of the entities which we find in nature.” So what exactly do we want to say, and to avoid saying? “Imposed” natural laws are generally associated with predestination and rigid determinism, with “Law imposed by the will of inflexible Allah.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Clearly, we process theists do not want to say that. Statistical laws are not rigid or imposed, and we strongly prefer “persuasion” to “force.”

Still, we want to affirm that somehow God “gives” the universe its basic order, its formal statistical patterns or laws. Whitehead said, “The quantum is that standpoint in the extensive continuum which is consonant with the subjective aim in its original derivation from God. Here ‘God’ is that actuality in the world, in virtue of which there is physical ‘law.’”[[15]](#footnote-15) The entities to which God gives subjective aims already exist, are already actual and habituated, already have their own subjective forms, and must choose whether or not to accept novel aims. Most but not all process theologians reject creation *ex nihilo* and affirm the creation of our universe and its ingredient actualities out of the ashes or chaos of antecedent oscillating universes—going back to infinity.[[16]](#footnote-16) This leaves them with the problem of what God does for the world, if anything at all, since the “stuff” of all universes co-exists with God everlastingly. Yes, God “persuades” by providing novel possibilities or subjective aims, and God’s memory “saves” the actualities of the world as they perish in time, but what else? One answer is that God gives the world its natural laws. Hartshorne wrote of “laws of nature (which, some of us believe, are divinely decided and sustained)” and that “it is no small thing to give the world sufficient orderliness to make it possible for free creatures…to adapt to one another essentially harmoniously.”[[17]](#footnote-17) We clearly reject rigidly deterministic laws, but in what sense can God “decide” or “give” the world its lawful order without “imposition”? What exactly does God do?

The most carefully worded process answer is something like this. God decides *what kind* *of actualities* will exist within any given cosmic epoch or universe. That is, God imposes their *characters,* their most elemental properties. According to Lucien Price, Whitehead once said, “Why talk about the ‘laws of nature’ when what we mean is the characteristic behavior of phenomena within certain limits at a given stage of development in a given epoch—so far as these can be ascertained.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Thus, in selecting *the relatively enduring properties* of the most fundamental *kinds of entities* in the universe, God indirectly imposed their basic *habitual* *activities*. The habits of enduring objects like atoms, molecules, cells, etc., issue partly from their given characters or properties, partly from their God-given ongoing novel aims, and partly from their own choices that can cumulatively create new habits. *Natural laws* as we know them are then “*derived from*” the characters, choices, activities, and habits of large quantities of similar actualities. They are the *formal numerable patterns of* such habits in mass. Thus, in choosing the elemental characters or properties of the basic actualities of the universe, God indirectly, not directly, “gives” the worlds its laws. A pure imposition theory says that God installed natural laws as such directly, quite apart from a universe’s actualities. A statistically immanent theory says this happened only indirectly. Theistically, their “character” is God-given, but their actions jointly create their own formal statistical patterns or laws. We must avoid theological language that insinuates direct and separate installation of rigid laws of nature by God or by anything else. By “laws of nature,” we really mean, “patterns of activity derived from masses of similar actualities.”

*3. The laws of nature are not efficient causes of anything; they are only formal causes.* *They do not forcefully make things happen or prevent anything from happening.*

Formal causes are universals. They are the patterns of the processes and interactions of very large numbers of concrete actualities and their inherent repeatable qualities and relations. They exist only within, between, and because of those actualities. They are derived or abstracted from those actualities. They do not actively cause those actualities. Actualities actively cause them. Formal causes have no, force, energy, or power of their own; only efficient causes do. Because “efficacy” is so closely associated with “cause,” it can be misleading to call them “causes” at all. So why do so?

Formalities of every description exist only within and because of actualities. Laws and other repeatable properties are effects, not efficient causes (hereafter “e-causes”). Some atheistic “scientific” cosmologists today contend that the Big Bang that originated our universe was originally caused, not by God, but by quantum fluctuations in absolute nothingness, as allowed or required by pre-existing laws of quantum physics, also located in absolute nothingness. I call this “Big Accident Cosmology” and devote a critical chapter to it in my *What Caused the Big Bang?[[19]](#footnote-19)* There are many difficulties with this theory. Three obvious ones are these. First, these “scientists” are no longer doing empirical science. They are doing non-empirical, *a-priori*, blind-faith, current-fad, “atheistic theology,” to coin an accurate phrase that they would find obnoxious. Second, they are talking nonsense, for there is always “something” like pre-existing quantum laws in their “nothingness.” Third, they are disregarding an empirical truth confirmed 100 percent of the time by experience: universals always exist within concrete individuals or actualities, never in complete isolation from them. Aristotle was right about that, as Whitehead agreed![[20]](#footnote-20)

This third point provides an empirical basis for Whitehead’s “ontological principle” which affirms:

[T]he notion of ‘power’ I transformed into the principle that the reasons for things are always to be found in the composite nature of definite actual entities—in the nature of God for reasons of the highest absoluteness, and in the nature of definite temporal actualities for reasons which refer to a particular environment. The ontological principle can be summarized as: no actual entity, then no reason.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Aristotle’s final (teleological), efficient, and formal causes are all embraced by the ontological principle, especially the first two: “It could be termed the ‘principle of efficient and final causation.’ This ontological principle means that actual entities are the only *reasons*; so that to search for a *reason* is to search for one or more actual entities.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

No quantum laws can exist and fluctuate in a nothingness in which there are no actual entities whatsoever. Experience, not just Whitehead’s authority, confirms this 100 percent of the time. “Everything must be somewhere; and…’somewhere’ means ‘some actual entity.’”[[23]](#footnote-23) If something transcendent explains our universe, a transcendent God is a much better answer than “nothingness” or “laws within nothingness,” which are something after all.

Whitehead agreed with Plato that “being” (or “actuality”) is power.[[24]](#footnote-24) Abstract formalities like laws, universal, and possibilities do not have or exert any power, force, or energy of their own. They are not and cannot be the e-causes of anything. They do not explain actualities; actualities explain them. Only actualities manifest agency and e-causation. Possible but not yet actual laws of nature do not predict, create, or produce, any actual entities, events, or universes. They cause nothing, explain nothing, predict nothing, resist nothing, and prohibit nothing. They place no limitations on anything or anyone, including God.

*4. The laws of nature evolve and change as the choices and habits of actual entities within the world evolve and change.*

Statistical natural laws are not all “given” or “fixed” at or before “the beginning” (at the Big Bang, we might say). They evolve because actualities evolve. Big Bang Cosmologists trace the origin and evolution of physical entities like sub-atomic particles, photons, electrons, waves, fields, photons, atoms, molecules, aggregates, living things, etc., from the primordial soup of pure energy of the Big Bang itself. No pre-existent laws as such determined the nature and habits of anything; rather, such things evolved their own laws. Natural laws merely sum up the general patterns of their habitual behaviors and interactions in mass. Before electrons, atoms, molecules, and living things emerged, there were no laws of physics, chemistry, biology, etc. Neither they nor their laws were instantaneously present in the Big Bang. Their laws emerged only as these actualities emerged. Divine “persuasion” influenced and encouraged their emergence. The view that a-temporal pre-existent laws caused their emergence “has the cart before the horse.”

Because their formal laws emerged from them, not vice versa, individual natures, essences, rules, or relatively enduring properties are never totally fixed by their efficient or formal causal antecedents. Degrees of self-creation and natural law-creation are very real. Process metaphysics make this very clear.

*5. Statistical laws of nature do not tell us what any particular actual entity is doing or must do. They tell us only what large masses of similar actual entities are doing, have done, or will do, on average.*

The laws of nature known to us describe or express only statistical averages. They do not dictate or describe what happens to each or any individual covered by such laws. They do not prescribe, determine, coerce, or predict what any given individual must or will actually do. This is conspicuously true in some cases. Statistical laws pertaining to radioactive elements like radon and uranium recognize that large quantities of their molecules will spontaneously discharge a predictable percentage of their electrons within a given period of time. However, exactly which particular molecules will do this is completely undetermined and undeterminable. Heisenberg showed that the positions and velocities of sub-atomic particles are not simultaneously determined or determinable. In evolutionary biology, no laws predict or explain the detailed novelties of “punctuated equilibrium.” At the human level, insurance companies can predict quite accurately how many people will get sick or die in a given period of time, but they cannot identify any specific individuals who will do so. Statistical actuariallaws say only that on average, a relatively definite (but otherwise unidentifiable) number will die.

All statistical natural laws posit only high probabilities, not absolute certainties. They leave room for a few of the instances they cover to be very atypical without affecting, changing, or violating the statistical averages. Some atypical and unpredictable instances might be miracles, *if* there are any. When averaged in with the vast quantities of events covered by statistical “laws of nature,” an occasion old-fashioned divine miracle or “anomaly” would not make any noticeable difference at all in those statistics, so in what sense could such miracles be said to “violate” them?

**God and Miracles**

Does God work miracles, and if so, why do so many evils exist in the world? Such problems are immensely complicated. What do we mean by “God,” “miracles,” and “evils”? Perhaps nature’s laws as statistical can shed some interesting and meaningful light on such things.

Traditionally “miracles” meant that God’s transcendent e-causation occasionally violates, suspends, or overrides the absolute laws of nature, but since these laws are only statistical, not absolute, all relevant issues must carefully reconsidered.

In traditional debates on “miracles” versus “natural laws,” both sides presupposed that natural laws are e-causes that force some things to happen and prevent others from happening. However, we now know that statistical natural laws are the effects, not the causes, of any actual happenings. Actual happenings create statistical natural laws, not vice versa. Traditional miracles as “violations” of natural laws meant that God sporadically causes odd and unexpected things to happen by exercising transcendent e-causation that overcomes the e-causation of the inviolable laws of nature. “Scientific” or “naturalistic” minds refuse to accept this. However, statistical natural laws also possess, exert, and resist no force. They are purely formal, not efficient causes. Only actual forces can “violate” (overpower) or be “violated by” by other actual forces. Atheists say that since God does not exist, God has and uses no power. Yet, statistical natural laws have no power either. This calls for further consideration.

“Miracle” has several meanings. Miracles may also be “things that happen which are surprising, unexpected, and unpredictable.” In this sense, miracles that break no laws “happen every day.” Even at a deep physical level, many odd and unpredictable things happen in our universe. If and when enough odd but similar things happen, they become commonplace; their collective habits become the laws of nature. When electrons and photons *first* emerged from the original primordial soup of pure energy, there were no natural statistical laws for them. No natural laws existed to determine them in advance or to predict their properties or propensities. The whole course of physical, chemical, and biological emergence illustrates the emergence of new laws of nature. So does the whole course of biological evolution, evolutionary psychology, and human sociology and history, for which there are hardly any natural laws at all, if any. One does not have to be a process thinker to hold such views.

When we wonder if God works miracles, do we want to know if God somehow causes surprising and unpredictable events to happen, or do we want to know something more? Miracles as astonishing and unpredictable events regularly happen under God’s lure or inspiration, so process theists believe. Providing actual entities with novel “actual aims” involves more than God’s final/formal causation. It also involves a degree of efficient causation. Whitehead acknowledged this in his own technical terminology when discussing “hybrid physical feelings,” understood as forms and aims derived from some active “physical” source such as God. He proclaimed, “All conceptual feelings are derived from physical feelings,” even those that temporal actual entities derive from God.[[25]](#footnote-25) So, even God’s “persuasion” involves transcendent efficient as well as final and formal causation. If God actively gives actualities novel aims every moment, very small e-causation miracles occur constantly. God’s usual “miracles” are almost imperceptible and not very surprising. Theists are most interested in miracles that are perceptibly large, noticeable, and quite astonishing. Small or large, God injects transcendent efficient causal energy and novel possibilities into the immanent world without “violating” (overpowering) the statistical laws of nature—which have no energy or e-causality of their own. If God uses e-power to initiate unexpected events or minor “fluctuations” within events, the use of that power would never “violate” the *powers* of the laws of nature. There are none.

Saying that God gave our universe its natural laws is only a roundabout way of saying that God gave certain relatively enduring properties, powers, qualities, and relations to the universe’s enduring actualities. To affect nature’s laws indirectly, God must act directly and creatively on substantial numbers of its actualities, not on its laws. God does this in process theism by inspiring or infusing actualities with novel possibilities or aims for further self-development.

**God, Power, and Evil**

The really troublesome concern about God’s e-causation power is ethical or axiological, not metaphysical. If God has the e-power to do surprising and unpredictable things without “violating” statistical natural laws, why doesn’t God surprise us much more often by preventing both humanly initiated moral evils *and* naturally occurring evils like diseases, deformities, injuries, catastrophic epidemics, tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis? Perhaps God does not prevent *moral* evils, the terrible things we freely decide to do to one another, because doing so would negate our freedom, creativity, and self-control. But *natural* evils are another story.

We can identify at least four process “solutions” to the problem of “theodicy,” the attempt to reconcile God’s goodness and power with the presence of evils in the world. Clearly, morally good human parents would *actually do something*, where possible, to prevent their children from being harmed by both moral and natural causal agents, but God clearly does not do so. Why not? Is God less good than loving human parents? How can God be morally good and not prevent all such harms? At least four process theodicies try to explain how God can be supremely good, yet fail to prevent evils or harms.

1. God simply *lacks transcendent e-causal power* to prevent evils, work traditional miracles, and create universes out of nothing. Also, some additional necessary and independent metaphysical principle like *creativity* prevents God from doing so.

2. God *has the transcendent e-power* to prevent evils, work miracles, and create universes out of nothing, but God usually limits this power *voluntarily* so some if not all creatures can be free, creative, and morally virtuous and responsible. However, God occasionally works e-causation miracles and did create our universe out of nothing.

3. God does not prevent evils because God’s *necessary* (not voluntary) love and moral goodness does not allow God to override the freedom and creativity of creatures. God also *lacks the power* to do so, that is, to work traditional efficient-causation-miracles (hereafter “e-miracles”), and to create universes out of nothing. God nevertheless works miracles-by-persuasion (hereafter “p-miracles”).

4. God *has the power* to prevent evils, to work e-miracles, and to create universes out of nothing, but God does not work e-miracles because doing so would be immoral, that is, *unjust* and unloving. God does work non-traditional p-miracles, however, and God used transcendent e-causation to create our universe out of nothing.

1. David Griffin offers and vigorously defends the first process theodicy. His view, expressed in many publications, is that God is not the e-cause of anything. God is only a final and formal cause. God lacks the power to work e-miracles to prevent harms. God also lacks the power to create universes out of nothing, for if God had it, God would also have and inevitably would use this power to work e-miracles, which does not happen. God affects the world only by persuasion, never by working e-miracles that interfere with or overpower nature’s laws. Griffin completely renounces God’s e-power (traditional omnipotence) in order to save God’s goodness.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In addition, Griffin maintains, an independent necessary metaphysical principle, *creativity*, absolutely prevents God from acting with direct causal efficacy to prevent evils. Necessarily, all actualities are partly self-creative, and God lacks the power to interfere with individual or cumulative creature-creativity in order to avert harmful consequences.[[27]](#footnote-27)

2. Process theists come in many varieties. In addition to mainstream Process Theologians like David Griffin and John B. Cobb, Jr., many others, who prefer to call themselves Relational or Open Theologians, are also process or temporalistic theists who attribute change, process, or temporality to God. They generally affirm that God has transcendent e-causal power to create our universe out of nothing, and to work occasional e-causation miracles that “violate” the laws of nature. God did in fact create the universe *ex nihilo*, and God does work such miracles occasionally, they think. However, God usually does not work miracles to prevent evils because God *voluntarily* limits God’s own power so creatures can be free, creative, and morally responsible.[[28]](#footnote-28)

3. Tom Oord is the best representative of the third and newest process theodicy, though I find some ambiguity in his thinking about God’s e-causality. His most recent book, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*, is his most thorough and convincing presentation of the view that God *necessarily* refrains from e-causation miracles, not just *voluntarily*. Oord regards himself as an Open and Relational Theist, but he disagrees with those who hold that God refrains *voluntarily* from preventing evils so that creatures can be free, creative, and morally virtuous and responsible. Instead, God *necessarily* refrains because of God’s necessary, involuntary, uncontrolling love and moral goodness. Refraining, or not, from e-miracles is never an optional matter of voluntary choice for a loving God. God “necessarily provides freedom, agency, self-organization and regularity to creation” and cannot withdraw or override it.[[29]](#footnote-29) This is because of God’s primordial, necessary, and involuntary moral attributes of love and goodness,[[30]](#footnote-30) not because creativity as an independent metaphysical principle, or because anything outside of God, “imposes limitations.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

I find some ambiguities in Oord’s thinking about whether or not God has or lacks the power to work e-causation miracles and create *ex nihilo*. On the one hand, he says, “But my theory is essentially neutral on the issue of *creation ex nihilo*,”[[32]](#footnote-32) that God as a spirit “exerts efficient causation,”[[33]](#footnote-33) and that God has the power to give power to others.[[34]](#footnote-34) On the other hand, he clearly affirms that “*creatio ex nihilo* should be abandoned,”[[35]](#footnote-35) partly because it is an extra-biblical doctrine, added later, partly because it ranks God’s power over his love, etc. He also seems to accept Griffin’s often repeated argument that if God had the efficient causal power to create *ex nihilo*, God would also have the power to work law-violating efficient causation miracles, and God would inevitably do so,[[36]](#footnote-36) which God does not do, so God must lack e-causal power. However, Oord believes, God definitely does work large-scale surprising-to-us miracles by persuasion—like those in the New Testament—by coaxing the relevant atoms, molecules, cells, organs, organisms, and physical processes to do very surprising things coordinately.[[37]](#footnote-37) Oord may hold that God’s e-causation is never sufficiently strong to override creaturely freedom and self-determination, but is this a metaphysical or a moral necessity for God, or somehow both?

4. The fourth view is that God has sufficient e-causal power to prevent evils, but God does not do so from love, justice, and moral goodness—with special emphasis on *justice or fairness*. This is my own view. It is closer to Oord’s than to any of the others. It might be identical with Oord’s if certain ambiguities in his position were removed, and if he were more open to the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*. I disagree with Griffin because, like most Open and Relational theists, I think that God does indeed have sufficient e-causal power to create universes *ex nihilo*. I also think that creativity is entirely at God’s disposal and is not an independent metaphysical principle that imposes limitations on God. I side with Oord against the “voluntary self-limitation” position, and hold with him that not preventing harms is *necessitated* by God’s uncontrolling love, justice, and moral goodness.

However, my view emphasizes *justice* and other positive goods in addition to human freedom, creativity, self-determination, and responsibility. More than these are at stake in matters of theodicy, and Oord would agree in his own way.[[38]](#footnote-38) My best account of what I believe to be a workable process theodicy is in my *What Caused the Big Bang?* book.[[39]](#footnote-39) There I explain that there is no single “silver bullet” that reconciles God’s power with God’s goodness. Only the cumulative force of a number of considerations, outlined next, will work. Each is explained in some detail in my book.

1. The *free-will defense*, according to which God in his goodness, not from metaphysical necessity, gives creativity, self-determination, and degrees of “free will” to all creatures throughout all creation, not just to human beings. Moral evil results from our abuse of this gift, and much natural evil results unintended from collective creative decisions made down through the depths of nature.

2. The *soul-making defense*, heavily emphasized by John Hick, according to which it would be impossible for human beings to have, develop, or exercise many, if any, moral and spiritual virtues in a universe lacking all dangers and evils.

3. The great *utility of law and order*, which enables us to partly predict and control much of the future, including the desirable and undesirables consequences of our own actions.

4. The *inevitable conflict of good with good* in any rich and complicated universe, a theme heavily emphasized by Charles Hartshorne.

5. The great *consolation* derived from knowing that God suffers with us in our suffering.

6. Possible *compensation* in “life after death.”

7. To these, I will shortly add a seventh, *God’s justice or fairness to all*. I missed this earlier but now regard it as an essential addition to the cumulative effective of a number of elements in a workable process theodicy.

More values and disvalues must be considered when doing theodicy than whether or not a good and powerful God could or would prevent harms through e-causation. My approach considers both preventing harms and sustaining many positive values. God’s love, providence, and moral goodness could be expressed in all of the above ways, (necessarily so—given Oord’s recent influence upon my thinking). No one of these alone is sufficient for a plausible process theodicy, but collectively they seem to me to be.

Tom Oord holds that the only way God *will* influence or change the world is through persuasion, that is, through a combination of final and formal causation. He seems to differ from Griffin in thinking that this is the only way God *can* do this. Does God actually have sufficient e-causal power to influence or change the world more directly, other than by persuasion alone? Most Relational and Open process theists would say, “Yes,” and so do I, but with the qualification that God *has* the power to work e-miracles, but *does not use* it for moral reasons, that is, because God is *fair or just*. Can this compromise position can be developed next in a way that would make it plausible to all process theists? Please consider the following.

In my 2001 Big Bang book, I allowed at the time that God might occasionally work e-miracles that forcefully override natural laws. I now see, however, that because natural laws neither force nor prevent anything, they cannot be forcefully “violated.” God can still influence and change individual properties, qualities, and relations, but how? Part of the answer surely involves God’s luring, inspiring, and exercising final/formal causation. In this way, massive microscopic creative changes that noticeably alter the macroscopic patterns of activity that we call the statistical laws of nature usually occur very, very slowly. In dramatic cases like the miracles of the Bible, however, Oord’s rather swift miracles-as-persuasions of massive numbers of relatively localized actualities might explain how God does things that greatly surprise us, especially natural scientists and naturalistic atheists. Even here, though, we can still wonder why God doesn’t work more p-miracles to prevent terrible harms. Perhaps this is because most partly self-creative but already habituated actualities refuse to cooperate in making rapid cumulative physical changes, especially with respect to creating novel physical obstacles that would block harms.

I end up where Oord does, with God as necessarily uncontrolling and non-overriding for moral reasons, though perhaps I give slightly more emphasis to justice, which he would also include within love. I agree with Oord that God may work dramatic p-miracles (though rare, unlikely, and not an easy task). Unlike Oord, I want to say unambiguously that God *has* sufficient e-causation power to work miracles, but God does not *use* it for reasons of *fairness*.

My own prior publications in philosophical theology consistently allowed for the possibility of rare e-miracles. I never ruled them out *a priori*, as do many process thinkers like David Griffin. Occasional miracles to prevent harms or simply to announce God’s presence or guidance, either by e-causation or by persuasion (final/formal causation), still present serious theodicy problems. If God *occasionally* works *either* e or p miracles to prevent pointless suffering, incapacitation, deformity, and premature death, why not *always*, as any loving parent would do? God is supposed to be much more loving, powerful, and knowledgeable than human parents.

Part of the answer is that a loving God would necessarily give freedom and not override it, as Oord insists, but there is more to it than that. In addition to *free-will* and *soul-making,* highly relevant also is the great *utility of law and order* that enables us to predict and control much of the future. To make a long story short, consider the immense instrumental goodness of having reliable “laws of nature,” even if they are only formal statistical summaries of the habits of very large quantities of similar actualities like atoms, molecules, cells, and organisms.

Loving human parents are in no position to work e-miracles, that is, to make sudden and drastic localized changes contrary to the general statistical laws of nature. But if God can work e-miracles, why does God not do so? Partly, this is because our dwelling in an orderly and predictable universe is itself a very great instrumental good for us and other living beings. The dependability of nature is worth the price of many of the evils that result from the general uniformities we abstract and conceptualize as natural statistical laws. Their advantages to us usually outweigh their disadvantages, but not always. Usually they work for us, but when they work against us, why doesn’t a loving and e-powerful God *always* work e-miracles to “save us from all ills”? This is mainly because *if we knew we could expect God to solve all our problems for us and save us miraculously every time we get into a jam, we would never develop into morally conscientious, virtuous, creative, and responsible persons*.

In a universe of unfailing Divine miracles, we would never develop *any* human virtues or seek *any* knowledge, all of which hinge on our own needs, curiosity, choices, efforts, actions, foresights, insights, growth, and maturity. Expecting miracles can be a way of avoiding personal responsibility. Soul-making reenters the picture unexpectedly at this point. Reliable laws of nature enable, promote, and demand it. Most non-human animals learn and generalize from experience, but even they would not learn, try, grow, and mature in their own more limited yet significant ways if God’s e-miracles were universal. If e-miracles were universal, they would simply be the statistical laws of nature, and we would rely totally on them. But many valuable things would be absent from such a universe.

An *occasional* e- or p- miracle to prevent harms might not block all moral and spiritual growth and undermine all our efforts to take responsibility for our own lives and influences. The trouble is, a morally good and *just* God would *always* prevent *all* harms, as would morally good parents who have the knowledge and power to do so. Of course, such parents gradually relinquish control as their children mature. God’s preventing *all* harms would completely overturn all the regularities of nature, as we know them. Then we could and would not control the future course of our lives (as we now do within limits). This would undermine all our efforts and desires to control our own destinies and prevent harms to ourselves or to anyone else. Indeed, if we could always rely on God to solve all of problems for us, why bother with or care about anything? If God did everything for us, we would never do anything for ourselves. We would not be creative or moral beings at all. Can we even imagine living in such a universe?

But why insist on either the *universality* of e-miracles, or *none* at all? This is because a morally good God would be both loving *and just*—necessarily. Love inevitably includes justice or fairness, especially where more than one individual is involved. To take account of God’s *justice*, (and to more definitively resolve problems of theodicy), I must now add the seventh highly significant consideration to the six explained in my Big Bang book. I found this new-to-me argument in the third chapter of *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, and Faith* by Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp.[[40]](#footnote-40) To summarize briefly, if God were to intervene only selectively and occasionally to prevent harms to *a few* people (or animals) in danger, but *not to everyone* in danger, this would be incredibly *unjust or unfair*. Where only one out of a hundred people survive an airplane crash, some say thatGod deliberately and actively saved only the one, but, by implication, not everyone else. How horribly unfair this God would be to the ninety and nine others! Such an unjust God would be downright immoral, horribly so, definitely not that Supremely Good Reality than whom none better and more worshipful can be conceived. God’s justice, as well as God’s love, requires God either to work e-miracles to prevent all harms *always*, or *never*. We now understand how disastrous *always* would be. So, a supremely good, loving, and just God who *has* the power to work e-miracles would never *use* it, *because doing so selectively would be infinitely unfair or unjust to everyone not so favored*.

So where are we? The possibility of Oord’s p-miracles, usually ineffective because the ability of concrete actualities to resist persuasion, remains intact. But a necessarily moral, loving, and just God who deserves our supreme devotion would necessarily *have* but never *use* infinite e-power to work traditional miracles. Yet, God could still have and use such infinite power to create universes *ex nihilo*. Many Open and Relational process theists believe that without infinite e-power, God would not be that Supremely Good Reality than whom none more admirable and worshipful can be conceived. I agree. God’s power is not God’s supreme perfection-making attribute, as it was in much of classical theology. Nevertheless, God’s e-causal power has great perfection-making significance. Something highly desirable would be lacking in a Super-celestial Wimp who only nags but can never actually do anything. Infinite power not used for e-miracles would not be useless to God, who could and would use it to create universes to love. God’s traditional omnipotence need not be rejected in order to explain why a morally good God would not “violate the laws of nature” to save us from all ills. *God’s justice definitively breaks the allegedly inevitable connection between e-miracles and e-creation presupposed by Griffin and others.*

Even if unbiblical, there might still be good *philosophical* reasons for accepting creation *ex nihilo*, and for rejecting both atheistic explanations of the Big Bang and the alternative of an infinite number of antecedent, oscillating, God-influenced universes presupposed by process theists like Hartshorne, Griffin, Cobb, and Oord. I argue for this forcefully and at great length in my *What Caused the Big Bang?* There I also explain how and why process theists can and should affirm creation *ex nihilo*, and how God could be everlastingly creative of universes to love, yet still create our universe out of nothing. But all of that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Thus, I conclude (with justification, I think) that when God created our world out of nothing, there were no pre-existent individuals, independent metaphysical principles, or lawful regularities to “violate.” There was only God in God’s necessary and infinite goodness, love, justice, knowledge, wisdom, and power. “In the beginning,” God Had It All—and used it.

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1. Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 111-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 113-115. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 115-118, 136-139. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a more complete critical discussion of Whitehead and Hartshorne on “eternal objects,” see: Rem B. Edwards, “Whitehead’s Theistic Metaphysics and Axiology,” *Process Studies*, 45:1, 2016, 8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I explain my doubts about “actual occasions” in Rem B. Edwards, *What Caused the Big Bang?* Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, 2001, 244-253; and Rem B. Edwards, “The Human Self: An Actual Entity or a Society?” *Process Studies* 5, (1975), 195-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition*, (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 92. See also 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1971), 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*,91. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas,* 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. David Griffin, *Panentheism and Scientific Naturalism,* (Claremont, Calif.: Process Century Press, 2014), 24-26, 100-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*, (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1984), 18, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Lucien Price, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead,* (New York: Mentor Books, 1956), 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Edwards, *What Caused the Big Bang?,* 163-178. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid., 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Adventures of Ideas*, 119-120, 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 246-247. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Griffin, *Panentheism and Scientific Naturalism*, 117-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 90-91, 118-122, 124, and especially 255-256. For my critique of this, see Edwards, “Whitehead’s Theistic Metaphysics and Axiology,” 21-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Excellent critical discussions of these “voluntary self-limitation” theists can be found in many of Tom Oord’s books. See Thomas J. Oord, *Defining Love*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 147-212; Thomas J. Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 85-157, and 5; Thomas J. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 2015), 107-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., 170-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Oord, *The Nature of Love*, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*, 149, n. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Oord, *Defining Love*, 194, n. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 210-211. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 207, n. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid., 143, 106-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*, Ch. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 169, n. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Edwards, *What Caused the Big Bang?*, 295-310 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, and Faith*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), .44-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)