

## ‘New Atheism’ versus ‘Christian Nationalism’

It is inconceivable that ‘the relation of philosophy to religion today’ might be adequately discussed in anything less than a very large book. Across the globe, there is an enormous diversity of systems of religious beliefs, and there is a correspondingly large diversity of systems of philosophical beliefs. If we take as our topic the relations that do, or can, or perhaps should, hold between systems of religious beliefs and systems of philosophical beliefs, then we already have an obviously unmanageable topic. Throw in the further observation that there is no evident reason to privilege *actually* held systems of religious and philosophical beliefs above *merely possibly* held systems of religious and philosophical beliefs, and the magnitude of the task is increased almost beyond comprehension.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the evident difficulties involved in the making of generalisations about religion and philosophy, we have recently witnessed a flood of ‘new atheist’ attacks on religion and religious belief in the name of philosophy and reason. In the works of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and other like-minded ‘new atheist’ authors, we find declarations that religion is an enemy of philosophy and reason, a hangover from our barbaric past that needs to be extinguished with extreme prejudice. Here, for example, is Harris (2005:25):

The idea ... that religious faith is somehow a sacred human convention—distinguished as it is, both by the extravagance of its claims and by the paucity of its evidence—is really too great a monstrosity to be appreciated in all its glory. Religious faith represents so uncompromising a misuse of the power of our minds that it forms a kind of perverse, cultural singularity—a vanishing point beyond which rational discourse proves impossible. When foisted upon each generation anew, it renders us incapable of realising just how much of our world has been unnecessarily ceded to a dark and barbarous past.

And here is Dawkins (2006:307-8):

[W]hat is really pernicious is the practice of teaching children that faith itself is a virtue. Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument. Teaching children that unquestioned faith is a virtue primes them—given certain other ingredients that are not hard to come by—to grow up into potentially

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, we might also add that there is much more to religion and to philosophy than systems of *beliefs*. In a full account, we would also want to think about actual (and possible?) philosophical and religious organisations, institutions, movements, practices, behaviours, publications, doctrines, dogmas, histories, etc. But we don’t need to mention these in order to establish the almost inconceivable magnitude of the task of examining relations between philosophy and religion. (It is also perhaps worth noting that, while there is a distinction between the *descriptive* project of describing the relations that hold between actual systems of religious and philosophical beliefs, organisations, institutions, movements, practices, behaviours, publications, doctrines, dogmas, etc., and the *normative* project of describing the relations that should hold between more or less idealised systems of religious and philosophical beliefs, organisations, institutions, movements, practices, behaviours, publications, doctrines, dogmas, etc., there is no reason to think that we can invoke this distinction to cut down the size of the task to manageable proportions.)

lethal weapons for future jihads or crusades. ... Faith can be very, very dangerous, and deliberately to implant it into the vulnerable mind of an innocent child is a grievous wrong.

While these authors are particularly disturbed by the recent rise (and excesses) of militant Islam and evangelical Christianity<sup>2</sup>, the scope of their critiques extends to all manifestations of religious belief: in their view, there can be no such thing as reasonable religious faith. Here, again, is Harris (2005:45):

[T]he greatest problem confronting civilisation is not merely religious extremism: rather, it is the larger set of cultural and intellectual accommodations we have made to faith itself. Religious moderates are, in large part, responsible for the religious conflict in our world, because their beliefs provide the context in which scriptural literalism and religious violence can never be adequately opposed.

And here is Dawkins (2006:306):

As long as we accept the principle that religious faith must be respected simply because it is religious faith, it is hard to withhold respect from the faith of Osama bin Laden and the suicide bombers. The alternative, one so transparent that it should need no urging, is to abandon the principle of automatic respect for religious faith. This is one reason why I do everything in my power to warn people against faith itself, not just against so-called 'extremist' faith. The teachings of 'moderate' religion, though not extremist in themselves, are an open invitation to extremism.

In Oppy (2006), I argue at length for the claim that there can be reasonable difference of opinion on the question whether there exists a standardly conceived monotheistic god. Moreover, I argue—at even greater length—for the claim that there are no successful arguments about the existence of standardly conceived monotheistic gods: no arguments that ought to persuade those who have reasonable views about the existence of standardly conceived monotheistic gods to change their minds. Given this history, it should not be surprising that I am somewhat at odds with the opinions expressed by the 'new atheists'.<sup>3</sup> While I agree with them that we should not think that religious faith is, in itself, a virtue—and while I also agree with them that we should not think that religious faith must be respected merely because it is religious faith—I think that it is a mistake to suppose that there cannot be reasonable religious belief. If we suppose that it is true, by

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<sup>2</sup> These authors also mean to condemn other cases of fundamentalist religious 'enthusiasm', as, for example, in Hinduism. Since militant Islam and evangelical Christianity are very much centre stage in the thinking of the 'new atheists', I shall mostly refer only to these cases—but it should be understood that the 'new atheists' have all forms of fundamentalist religious 'enthusiasm' in their sights.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, I don't mean to suggest that religious beliefs are exhausted by considerations about the existence of standardly conceived monotheistic gods. The key point, here, is that the belief that there exists a standardly conceived monotheistic god is a paradigmatic religious belief. If there can be a range of reasonable belief in connection with the claim that there exists a standardly conceived monotheistic god, then there can be reasonable religious belief. While it is plainly a matter for further consideration whether there are religious beliefs—or classes of religious beliefs—that simply lie beyond the rational pale, this is not a matter that I need to take up in the present context.

definition, that faith requires no justification and brooks no argument, then it seems to me that there can be religious belief that is not religious faith. Alternatively, if we suppose that religious belief entails religious faith, then we should reject the idea that it is simply true by definition that faith requires no justification and brooks no argument.

Given the diversity of systems of religious and philosophical beliefs to which I adverted earlier, it seems to me that it is incredible to suppose that there are no religious believers who are reasonable in their religious beliefs, at least by any ordinary standards of reasonableness<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, I think that my own interactions with religious believers bears out the claim that, not only can there be religious believers who are, by any ordinary standards of reasonableness, reasonable in their religious beliefs, but also that there actually *are* religious believers who are, by any ordinary standards of reasonableness, reasonable in their religious beliefs. Of course, to say this much is not to say very much: even David Hume insisted that, while he would naturally conclude that a man was a scoundrel on hearing him making religious affirmations, nonetheless, some of the best men that he knew were religious believers. Hence, perhaps, it might seem that a straightforward accommodation between my views about reasonable religious belief and the views adopted by the ‘new atheists’ could be reached by way of (acceptance of) the claim that, by ordinary standards of reasonableness, there are *very few* reasonable religious believers.

But I do not believe this accommodating claim either. It seems to me that, at least by ordinary standards of reasonableness, there are *many* reasonable religious believers: *many* religious moderates who are appalled by (for example) the excesses of militant Islam and evangelical Christianity, and whose *religious* beliefs give no comfort to terrorism and religious extremism. Harris (2005:148) notes, *inter alia*, that the religious beliefs of the Jains would lead them to condemn the excesses of militant Islam and evangelical Christianity; and surely the same thing goes for the religious beliefs of High Church Anglicans and members of other ‘liberal’ Christian denominations. It seems to me that there is nothing in the *religious* beliefs of those who belong to ‘liberal’ Christian denominations that requires them to give even tacit support to the excesses of militant Islam and evangelical Christianity. Here, Harris (2005:20) strongly disagrees:

While moderation in religion may seem a reasonable position to stake out in light of all that we have (and have not) learned about the universe, it offers no bulwark against religious extremism and religious violence. From the perspective of those seeking to live by the letter of the texts, the religious moderate is nothing more than a failed fundamentalist. He is, in all likelihood, going to wind up in hell with the rest of the unbelievers. The problem that religious moderation poses for us all is that it does not permit anything very critical to be said about religious literalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, what I mean to say here is that there are religious believers who are no less reasonable in their religious believings than is the majority of humanity in the rest of its believings. There is an argument to be had about the extent to which our ordinary processes of belief formation are genuinely rational: but the key question is not whether religious believings match up to some ideal standard that is rarely attained in other domains; rather, the key question is whether religious believings are somehow less rational than the believings of the majority of human beings in other everyday domains. Wherever I talk about ‘ordinary standards of reasonableness’, I have this more complicated comparative notion in mind.

I think that Harris is just wrong about this. It seems to me to be evidently true that some ‘religious moderates’ have (quite rightly) had very critical things to say about religious literalism; and Harris does damage to the wider struggle against religious ‘enthusiasm’ in failing to recognise the contribution that ‘religious moderates’ can and do make to this wider struggle. Given that ‘religious moderates’ can be—and are—effective and vociferous critics of religious ‘enthusiasm’, we should have no part of the ‘new atheist’ attack on ‘religious moderates’.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, even if it is agreed that the ‘new atheists’ go too far in the claims that they make about the rationality of religious belief in the case of ‘religious moderates’, it might still be firmly insisted that the ‘new atheists’ are right in the claims that they make about the rationality of those given over to the excesses of militant Islam and evangelical Christianity. Here, once more, is Harris (2005:236)

There are days when almost every headline in the morning papers attests to the social costs of religious faith, and the nightly news seems miraculously broadcast from the fourteenth century. One spectacle of religious hysteria follows fast upon the next. Sanctimonious eruptions announcing the death of the pope (a man who actively opposed condom use in sub-Saharan Africa and shielded frocked child molesters from secular justice) are soon followed by other outbursts of religious lunacy. At the time of writing, Muslims in several countries are rioting over a report that US interrogators desecrated a copy of the Koran. ... Such perfect visions of unreason have been punctuated by the more ordinary trespasses of faith: daily reports of pious massacres in Iraq, of evangelical ravings about the evils of a secular judiciary, of widespread religious coercion in the US Air Force, or efforts in at least twenty states to redefine science to include supernatural explanations of the origin of life, of devout pharmacists refusing to fill prescriptions for birth control, of movie theatres refusing to show documentaries that report the actual age of the earth, and on and on and onward ... to the fifteenth century.

Can’t we at least agree with the ‘new atheists’ that the beliefs of evangelical Christians—concerning the evils of a secular judiciary, or the desirability of the establishment of theocracy, or the age of the earth, or the impossibility of Darwinian evolution, or the infallibility of literally interpreted scripture, or the harm done by the distribution of condoms in sub-Saharan Africa, or ...—are plainly not of a kind that could be entertained by any reasonable person, given ordinary standards of reasonableness in the formation and maintenance of beliefs?

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is worth noting that Harris (2006:92) lists Ehrman (2005) as one of ‘ten books I recommend’. But Ehrman’s book is likely to be one of the most effective planks in any argument with (unthinking) religious literalism, even though it is unclear (at least given just the evidence of this book) *how far* Ehrman himself has moved from his earlier self-confessed religious literalism. No one who accepts with Ehrman (2005:216) that ‘texts do not speak for themselves’ can be a straightforward religious literalist who supposes that justification and argument *end* with the citation of a scriptural text.

One difficulty that we face here is that we need to have some way of taking into account considerations about the information (or evidence) that is available to people. Given that it is plainly a rational strategy for young children to believe what they are told by their parents, it is not hard to understand how it can be that intelligent people come to have radically false beliefs even though they are more or less reasonable in the way that they form those beliefs. Furthermore, it may well be unreasonable to expect people to be able to overcome those radically false beliefs unless they are open to instruction by experts with access to information and evidence to which those people have not hitherto been exposed. Thus, rather than insist that the targeted beliefs of evangelical Christians are irrational, we might well do better to insist that they are rather the product of ignorance: what is required, for the correction of these beliefs, is not that the people in question become more rational, but rather that they become better informed. Or, better still, we should say that, while the targeted beliefs of evangelical Christians may often be the product of unreasonableness, they may also be the products of ignorance (or of some mixture of unreasonableness and ignorance).<sup>6</sup>

Suppose, then, that we formulate our question in the following way: are the targeted beliefs of evangelical Christians of a kind that can be reasonably entertained by reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed people, given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc? It is clear that Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, and the other ‘new atheists’ will say ‘No!’ The question that I wish to take up in this paper is whether we should agree with the ‘new atheists’ on *this* point. In particular, I am interested in what we should say about well-established and well-regarded professional philosophers—people like Robert Koons, and William Lane Craig—who hold at least some of the targeted views. But, before we turn to a discussion of what we should say about these professional philosophers, we need to say something about their intellectual background, the wider cultural climate, and the beliefs that they in fact hold.

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Perhaps *the* most significant global political development in the past twenty years has been the rise of ‘Christian Nationalism’ in the United States. Of course, the United States has seen earlier outbursts of religious ‘enthusiasm’, but there has never been a time when evangelical Christianity has had such influence in the halls of government. While the number of evangelical Christians is relatively small—perhaps 10% of the population—and even the number of ‘born-again’ Christians is still not an absolute majority—perhaps 40% of the population—evangelical Christians have enormous influence on the Republican party and its policies.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, because the evangelical Christian

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, it should be noted that there is doxastic symmetry here; evangelical Christians will doubtless say of ‘new atheists’ that their beliefs are the products of unreason, or ignorance, or both. And, of course, it is doubtless true that the atheistic beliefs of *at least some* atheists are the products of unreason, or ignorance, or both. We shall have reason to return to these points later.

<sup>7</sup> Here, I follow Goldberg (2006:9), who cites the evangelical pollster, George Barna. On Barna’s account, ‘born-again’ Christians say that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and accept him as their personal saviour, while evangelical Christians meet six further conditions: they ‘say their faith is very important in their life today; believe they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs

strongholds include most of the less populated red states, this hold on the Republican party and its policies greatly amplifies the influence of evangelical Christians—and, hence, Christian nationalists—in Congress.

What, exactly, is ‘Christian Nationalism’? According to Goldberg (2006:7):

The motivating dream of [Christian nationalism] is the restoration of an imagined Christian nation. With a revisionist history that claims the founders never intended to create a secular country and that separation of church and state is a lie fostered by conniving leftists, Christian nationalism rejects the idea of government religious neutrality. The movement argues that the absence of religion in public is itself a religion—the malign faith of secular humanism—that must, in the interest of fairness, be balanced with equal deference to the Bible. ... [H]owever, the ultimate goal of Christian nationalist leaders isn’t fairness. It’s dominion. The movement is built on a theology that asserts the Christian right to rule. That doesn’t mean the non-believers will be forced to convert. They’ll just have to learn their place.

Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition was a key driver of the Christian nationalist push into the mainstream, but, since the mid-1990s, a web of overlapping Christian nationalist organisations have pushed for changes on many different fronts. Major currents in this movement have included: the push for evangelical Christian home schooling (there are currently more than 2 million children of Christian conservatives being educated at home in the US); opposition to legal recognition of gay relationships and other legal entitlements for gay couples (this issue is one of the mobilising passions of evangelical Christians, and it played a significant role in the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election); support for equal recognition of the theory of intelligent design in public school biology classes (the 2004 Dover School Board battle was just one in a long series of courtroom fights over the teaching of evolutionary theory in public schools); the diversion of billions of dollars of public funds from secular social service organisations to sectarian religious outfits under George W. Bush’s ‘faith-based initiatives’ program (without any provisions to test the efficacy—or the justice of the distribution—of the services provided under this program); the promotion of programs of sex education in public schools that mention nothing but ‘abstinence’ (while promulgating the misinformation that condoms cannot provide protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases); the pushing through of a two-pronged attack on the judicial system that seeks to undermine the power of the Courts (while simultaneously seeking to stack the Courts with judges sympathetic to Christian nationalism); and, through a variety of media, entrenching a view of the world and its history that is radically different from any views accepted by citizens who are not evangelical Christians.<sup>8</sup>

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about Christ with non-Christians; believe that Satan exists; believe that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; believe that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and describe God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today’.

<sup>8</sup> Goldberg (2006:5) gives an account of ‘educational’ literature available at the Christian Home Educators of Colorado Convention of 2005:

The history texts described a past in which America was founded as a Christian nation, only to be subverted and debased by God-hating liberals bent on perverting the country’s heritage. A CD lecture lauded the Christian kindness the Puritans showed to Native Americans. Science videos claimed that

From this mass of activity, there is one area in particular upon which I wish to focus: the battle for equal recognition of ‘the theory of intelligent design’ in public school biology classes. As Goldberg (2006:83ff.) notes—and as Forrest and Gross (2004) document in exhaustive detail—the Centre for Science and Culture has done much of the heavy lifting in this battle, implementing a plan that was originally devised by Phillip Johnson, and set out in ‘The Wedge Strategy’, a vision statement and strategic plan that somehow made its way onto the Internet. While it is well-known that Michael Behe (a biological scientist) and Bill Dembski (a philosopher) are the leading intellectual lights of the intelligent design movement, the point of interest for this paper concerns the philosophers mentioned at the end of the introduction to my paper: Robert Koons and William Lane Craig. According to Forrest and Gross (2004), both of these philosophers have had a very close affiliation with the Centre for Science and Culture, and have been actively involved in the implementation of its strategic plan.<sup>9</sup>

The Centre for Science and Culture is an organ of the Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank. As Goldberg (2006:83) documents, the Discovery Institute receives very substantial financial support from Howard Ahmanson, one of the leading patrons of Christian nationalism, and a long time board member of R. J. Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation.<sup>10</sup> The Chalcedon Foundation advocates dominion theology based on Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstructionism: its principal goal is the replacement of American civil law with Biblical law. Rushdoony, a graduate from UC Berkeley, wrote voluminously on behalf of the abolition of public schools and social services, and the establishment of theocratic rule. He advocated the death penalty for gays, blasphemers, and unchaste women, and claimed that democracy is ‘the great love of the failures and cowards of life’.<sup>11</sup> While the Centre for Science and Culture calls itself a secular

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leading researchers have discredited evolution, and some offered evidence that dinosaurs and men lived together in the Garden of Eden. Astronomy textbooks explained that the universe was created six thousand years ago with the appearance of age, which is why starlight only seems as if it has travelled millions of years to reach the Earth. Many volumes were packed with footnotes referencing books for sale at other tables, all of them confirming each other’s claims. Reading through them one after another, I sometimes felt I was in a novel by Jorge Luis Borges, drifting through a parallel reality contained in a monumental library of lies.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of writing (May, 2007), the CSC website lists Koons and Craig as Fellows, and Behe and Dembski as Senior Fellows. While Forrest and Gross (2004) claim that Alvin Plantinga also has a close association with CSC, it seems that Plantinga has no official affiliation with CSC, even though there are many links to his work from the CSC Website.

<sup>10</sup> According to Goldberg (2006:109-11), Ahmanson has also provided grants to support the writings of Marvin Olasky—author of *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992), *Renewing American Compassion* (1996), *Compassionate Conservatism*, and other such works—who argues that there has been ‘a long decline [in United States social policy] from the moral heights of the 1800s, when the poor were well-served by religious benevolence instead of government bureaucracy’ and who advocates replacing the welfare system with ‘a truly compassionate approach based in private and religious charity’.

<sup>11</sup> Goldberg (2006:37) footnotes the following anecdote which appeared in *Reason* (1998):

For connoisseurs of surrealism on the American right, it’s hard to beat an exchange that appeared about a decade ago in the Heritage Foundation magazine *Policy Review*. It started when two associates of the Rev. Jerry Falwell wrote an article which criticised Christian Reconstructionism, the influential movement led by theologian Rousas John Rushdoony, for advocating positions that even they as committed fundamentalists found ‘scary’. Among Reconstructionism’s highlights, the article cited

organisation—at least when it is addressing the general public<sup>12</sup>—there is little doubt that it shares in the general aim of putting God at the centre of civic life. That’s not to say that all of the members of the Centre share Rushdoony’s particular vision of a theocratic American state; however, it seems reasonable to guess that most of the Fellows and Senior Fellows of the Centre have a commitment to some version of ‘Christian nationalism’.<sup>13</sup>

While the public posture of the Centre for Science and Culture remains that its *sole* purpose is to pursue the hypothesis of ‘intelligent design’ in the interests of furthering the goals of science, the Wedge Strategy document—and the subsequent investigations of, for example, Forrest and Gross (2004), Shanks (2004), and Goldberg (2006)—paint a somewhat different picture. The introduction to the Wedge Strategy document is perfectly clear:

The proposition that human beings are created in the image of God is one of the bedrock principles on which Western civilisation was built. Its influence can be detected in most, if not all, of the West’s greatest achievements, including representative democracy, human rights, free enterprise, and progress in the arts and sciences. Yet, a little over a century ago, this cardinal idea came under wholesale attack by intellectuals drawing on the discoveries of modern science. Debunking the traditional conceptions of both God and man, thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud portrayed humans not as moral and spiritual beings, but as animals or machines who inhabited a universe ruled by purely impersonal forces and whose behaviour and very thoughts were dictated by the unbending forces of biology, chemistry, and environment. This materialistic conception of reality eventually infected virtually every area of our culture, from politics and economics to literature and art. The cultural consequences of this triumph of materialism were devastating. ... Discovery Institute’s Centre for the Renewal of Science and Culture [subsequently renamed the Centre for Science and Culture] seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies. ... The Centre explores how new developments in biology, physics and cognitive science raise serious doubts

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support for laws ‘mandating the death penalty for homosexuals and drunkards’. The Rev. Rushdoony fired off a letter to the editor complaining that the article had got his followers views all wrong: They didn’t intend to put *drunkards* to death. (Ital. in original.)

<sup>12</sup>Goldberg (2006:84) claims that the Centre for Science and Culture—like many organisations of its ilk—speaks in one voice to the general public and in quite a different voice to Christian nationalist insiders. Students of the history of free thought will notice that, if Goldberg’s claim can be sustained, then there is a certain irony here. One of the oft-voiced complaints about freethinkers—and about atheists in general—is that they are untrustworthy because they do not suppose that their utterances are subjects for divine judgement (in light of Biblical injunctions against lying). But, at least on Goldberg’s showing, it is not unheard of for Evangelical Christians to insist that lies and deception are perfectly in order so long as those lies and deceptions advance the interests of their faith (‘do God’s work’, etc.). Consequently, on Goldberg’s account, there are at least some grounds for secularists to complain that Evangelical Christians are not to be taken at their word: they fail to take themselves to be bound by the standards of secular public honesty.

<sup>13</sup> Terms like “Christian nationalism”, “Christian dominionism”, “Christian reconstructionism”, “Christianism”, “the religious right”, and so forth, are used in diverse ways with diverse meanings. For some of the pitfalls here, one might look at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_nationalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_nationalism) and the associated talk page (accessed on July 29, 2007).

about scientific materialism and have re-opened the case for a broadly theistic understanding of nature. The Centre ... briefs policymakers about the opportunities for life after materialism.<sup>14</sup>

The Centre for Science and Culture may with perfect honesty claim to be crucially interested in ‘intelligent design’ because of the role that the hypothesis of ‘intelligent design’ plays in projected ‘theistic science’; but, quite plainly, this key interest, in turn, can be located in a much wider range of social and political interests, of the kind suggested by this cited passage.<sup>15</sup>

In the Wedge Strategy document, the third phase—‘Cultural Confrontation and Renewal’—flags the pursuit of ‘possible legal assistance in response to resistance to the integration of design theory into public schools science curricula’. However, in the case of the 2004 Dover School Board battle—in which the Dover School Board mandated that students be introduced to the theory of intelligent design—the Centre for Science and Culture issued a statement in which it said that the Dover School Board’s policy was ‘misguided’ and should be ‘withdrawn and rewritten’.<sup>16</sup> Some have suggested that this is best understood as a tactical decision on the part of the Centre for Science and Culture. After all, the Dover case is but one in a long line of disputes about the teaching of evolutionary theory in public schools: one key lesson that evangelical Christians have

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<sup>14</sup> The introduction to the Wedge Strategy document might well prompt a reminder of Goldberg’s claim about ‘a parallel reality contained in a monumental library of lies’: there is almost nothing in this introductory statement that will withstand serious scrutiny. But this is not an appropriate place to pursue these considerations. (For a quite different viewpoint on these matters, one might look at more recent statements from CSC. See: <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/index.php?command=view&id=2735>, accessed 08/06/07. There seems to be an interesting case of pot-calling-kettle-black in these later missives about ‘Darwinist paranoia’, ‘the Darwinist fringe’, and the like. The introduction to the Wedge Strategy document is itself open to similar labels—‘Evangelical Christian paranoia’, ‘Evangelical Christian fringe’—in view of its absurdly overheated claims about the baleful role of ‘materialist’ intellectual conspirators in the undermining of the achievements of Western civilisation.)

<sup>15</sup> One often voiced criticism of the Intelligent Design Movement—and hence of the members of the Centre for Science and Culture—is that its espousal of ‘intelligent design’ is merely a sophisticated pretext: no one seriously believes that the hypothesis of ‘intelligent design’ can have a serious role in natural science. On the evidence of the Wedge Strategy document, it seems to me that *this* criticism is misplaced. In the mooted three phase strategy, the first phase is ‘scientific research, writing and publicity’, one of the five year goals is ‘to see intelligent design theory as an accepted alternative in the sciences and scientific research being done from the perspective of design theory’, and two of the twenty years goals are ‘to see intelligent design theory as the dominant perspective in science’ and ‘to see design theory application in specific fields, including molecular biology, biochemistry, palaeontology, physics and cosmology in the natural sciences, psychology, ethics, politics, theology and philosophy in the humanities; to see its influence in the fine arts’ [this last quote preserves the original punctuation]. On this evidence alone, it is clear that the proponents of the Wedge Strategy seriously believe that adoption of the hypothesis of intelligent design will lead to significant advances in a range of natural sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Buckingham, the driving force behind the Dover School Board decision, had pushed hard for the adoption of *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origin* as a biology textbook (in place of the widely used *Biology*, written by Kenneth Miller and Joseph Levine). Interestingly, the copyright for *Of Pandas and People* is held by the Texas-based Foundation for Thought and Ethics; and the academic editor of the Foundation for Thought and Ethics—which also publishes the abstinence-only *Sex and Character*, and the revisionist *Never before in History*—is none other than William Dembski. (Other Centre for Science and Culture associates—including Stephen Meyer and Phillip Johnson—have also published books through the Foundation for Thought and Ethics.) (Cf. Goldberg (2006:88/9.)

learned over the course of these disputes is that over-reaching will lead to serious setbacks for their cause. Thus, for instance, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Edwards versus Aguillard* (1987) to overturn a Louisiana law mandating the teaching of ‘creation science’ alongside evolutionary biology, this established a legal roadblock for similar legislative proposals. (Something similar can be said of the decision of Judge William Overton in the case of *Rev. Bill McLean et al. versus The Arkansas Board of Education et al.* (1984), and a string of earlier judgments and decisions.) Given the lessons of history, it is prudent for Christian nationalists to wait for more sympathetic judiciaries and more promising test cases. Moreover, as Goldberg (2006:101) notes, while the Centre for Science and Culture did not support the Dover School Board policy, it did support the Cobb County Georgia initiative, in which biology textbooks are labelled with a sticker which reads: ‘This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered.’<sup>17</sup>

While the intellectual and political ancestry of the intelligent design movement—and the Centre for Science and Culture—plainly lies in the young earth creationism of George McCready Price, Henry Morris, Duane Gish et al., it is important to recognise that the intelligent design movement—and the Centre for Science and Culture—has no professed commitment to young earth creationism (even though there *are* young earth creationists amongst the fellows of the Centre for Science and Culture). Christian nationalism itself belongs to a diverse community, unified through allegiance to some central evangelical Christian tenets, but harbouring disagreements on many questions. However, if we note only the absence of any professed commitment to young earth creationism in the intelligent design movement, then we fail to get the complete picture. Alongside questions about positions actually held, we need also to ask questions about positions that are treated with respect and about opinions that are taken seriously. Because evolutionary theory is the enemy whose defeat is the proximate goal of the intelligent design movement, all *unopposed* opponents of evolutionary theory make inroads as the intelligent design movement advances. Moreover, there can be no doubting that the fellows and senior fellows in the Centre for Science and Culture are well aware that this is the case.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I think that it is a delicate matter to say how far one should agree that the CSC statement on the Dover School Board policy was merely ‘tactical’. As suggested in footnote 14 above, I’m inclined to think, for example, that the members of CSC sincerely believe that the *sole* purpose of CSC is to pursue the hypothesis of ‘intelligent design’ in the interests of furthering the goals of science. But, even if that’s right, the rise of the intelligent design movement might still properly be understood as a ‘strategic’ (‘tactical’) move in the decades-long assault on the exclusive teaching of evolutionary theory in science classes in US public schools. (Bearing in mind my ‘pot-calling-kettle-black’ observation in footnote 13, I should note that this kind of point applies equally to the rhetoric that is used by Evangelical Christians in their critiques of ‘materialism’, ‘Darwinism’, and the century-long ‘assault on Western civilisation’.)

<sup>18</sup> Of course, Evangelical Christians can equally observe that all *unopposed* opponents of theism make inroads as atheism advances: and this point may help to explain the common Evangelical Christian conflation of atheism with Marxism, and the like. But many atheists—myself included—want no truck with secular replacements for religion, with their utterly unfounded beliefs in the inevitability of ‘human progress’, and the like: and, from that broader critical standpoint, support of atheism offers no comfort to those erstwhile fellow-travelers.

## 2

At the same time that there has been a surge in enthusiasm for Christian nationalism amongst the citizens of the ‘red’ parts of the United States, there has been a corresponding surge in enthusiasm for the study of philosophy of religion in philosophy departments in those same ‘red’ states. Indeed, as many philosophers have observed, there has been a very marked resurgence of activity in the field of philosophy of religion over the past forty years or so, beginning from around the time of the publication of Alvin Plantinga’s *God and Other Minds*. I can do no more than give the roughest outline of this history here.

During the period immediately after the Second World War, the dominant views and methods of philosophy—logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy—were not particularly hospitable to philosophy of religion. While, of course, there were pockets of activity outside the philosophical mainstream—in particular, amongst process philosophers, Thomists, and various other minority groups—mainstream views about the meaningfulness of metaphysical talk and the feasibility of traditional metaphysical projects kept a very tight rein on the kinds of topics in philosophy of religion that were discussed in the leading philosophical journals. Using the developing resources of philosophical logic and philosophy of language, some philosophers provided analyses of arguments for or against the existence of God, and other philosophers provided analyses of some of the traditional divine attributes—but many of the leading journals carried almost no articles even on these topics. Moreover, outside the minority specialist journals—*Modern Schoolman* (1925), *New Scholasticism* (1927), *Thomist* (1939), *Franciscan Studies* (1941), *Traditio* (1943), *Heythrop Journal* (1960), and others of this ilk<sup>19</sup>—there were very few places in which wider discussion of topics in philosophy of religion took place. *Sophia* (1962), *Religious Studies* (1965), and *Zygon* (1966) appeared in the middle of the 1960s, but none had a particularly significant circulation, and each had a relatively restricted range of topics that were covered by contributors.<sup>20</sup> In the early 1970s, another round of journals—*International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (1970), *Augustinian Studies* (1970), *Journal of Religious Ethics* (1973)—appeared, but these, too, were of limited circulation and impact at the time.

Perhaps the most important event in this history that I am describing was the formation of the Society of Christian Philosophers in 1978. The stated purpose of this Society is ‘to promote fellowship among Christian Philosophers and to stimulate study and discussion of issues which arise from their Christian and philosophical commitments’. In particular it aims ‘to go beyond the usual philosophy of religion sessions at the American Philosophical Association and to stimulate thinking about the nature and role of Christian

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<sup>19</sup> There are some specialist journals of even longer standing: e.g., *The Freethinker* (1881), and *Expository Times* (1889). However, these journals have even less impact in philosophical circles than the journals mentioned in the main text.

<sup>20</sup> *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1961) is a more significant journal, with a wider circulation. However, this journal is not particularly concerned with the *philosophy* of religion (though, of course, it often contains articles that are of interest to philosophers of religion).

commitment in philosophy'.<sup>21</sup> In 1981, the Society of Christian Philosophers launched its house journal, *Faith and Philosophy*, which quickly became established as a significant journal in the field. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, following the lead of *Faith and Philosophy*, there was a considerable broadening in the range of topics taken up in other important journals in the field—e.g. *Religious Studies*, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*—and there were a number of new journals launched, including: *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* (1980), *Modern Theology* (1984), *Philosophy and Theology* (1986), *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* (1991), *Philo* (1998), and *Ars Disputandi* (2000).

Another significant event in the history that I am describing was the formation of the Evangelical Philosophical Society in 1974. According to the website of the Society, it 'is an organization of professional scholars devoted to pursuing philosophical excellence in both the church and the academy'. In 1999, the Evangelical Philosophical Society re-launched its house journal—*Philosophia Christi*—and, within a period of five years, it had become the largest circulation journal of philosophy of religion. The Evangelical Philosophical Society publishes *Philosophia Christi* with the support of Biola University, a private Christian university in Southern California, and the most successful of the 102 institutions belonging to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.<sup>22</sup> While *Philosophia Christi* has not yet managed to become a particularly prestigious journal, at least according to the lights of the general philosophical community, there is no denying the impact that it has had in the evangelical community. It is also perhaps worthy of note that the chief office bearers of the Evangelical Philosophical Society at the time of writing—Paul Copan (President) and Chad Meister (Vice-President)<sup>23</sup>—have recently been very active in editing companions and collections for the major philosophical presses: see, for example, Copan and Moser (2003), Copan and Meister (2007a), Copan and Meister (2007b).<sup>24</sup>

Of course, these developments in connection with philosophical journals have been paralleled by developments in other areas of philosophical activity. Over the past forty years, there has been an initially slow, but gradually snowballing, growth in the numbers of monographs, companions, edited collections, and the like, that have appeared in

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<sup>21</sup> These quotes are taken from the website of the Society for Christian Philosophers. See <http://www.siu.edu/~scp/>, accessed on June 7, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> According to the website of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, its mission is 'to advance the cause of Christ-centred higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth'. <http://www.cccu.org/about/about.asp> (Accessed on June 7, 2007.)

<sup>23</sup> At the time of writing, Michael Rea is also one of the office-holders of the Evangelical Philosophical Society.

<sup>24</sup> Many members of the Evangelical Philosophical Society are also members of the Evangelical Theological Society (established in 1948). This latter society requires of its members that they subscribe to the doctrinal claim that 'the *Bible* alone, and the *Bible* in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory'. (See <http://www.etsjets.org/>, accessed on June 7, 2007.)

philosophy of religion.<sup>25</sup> Moreover—and here there is an apparently significant distinction from what has happened in the case of the major generalist philosophical journals—there has been an increased take up of work by evangelical Christian philosophers by the major philosophical presses: OUP, CUP, Routledge, Blackwell, and the like<sup>26</sup>. As I have already noted, there has been an increasing avalanche of companions, guides, collections, etc. with the major presses driven by evangelical Christian philosophers. But there has not been a corresponding avalanche of publications by these philosophers in such journals as *Mind*, *Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Review*, *Nous*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Philosopher's Imprint*, etc. Indeed, to someone who read only these journals, the recent increase in activity in the field of the philosophy of religion might well go more or less unremarked, unless perhaps it could be inferred from the contents of the book reviews sections of some of these journals.<sup>27</sup>

Along with developments in the field of publishing, there have been interesting developments in the field of education. Over the past few years, there has been an explosion in the number of people graduating with PhDs in the field of philosophy of religion. In particular, institutions such as Biola University have been churning out graduates with higher degrees by research in this field. However, as in the case of the leading generalist philosophical journals, this activity has not been matched in leading philosophical institutions. According to the *Gourmet Guide to Philosophy*, the Group 1 Universities are Oxford and Notre Dame, the sole Group 2 University is St. Louis, the sole Group 3 University is Purdue, the sole Group 4 University is Cornell, and the Group 5 Universities are Baylor, Claremont Graduate School, Fordham, Georgetown, Indiana (Bloomington), New England (Australia), UC Riverside, Colorado (Boulder), Oklahoma (Norman), Rochester, St. Andrews (Scotland), Texas (Austin), Wisconsin (Madison), and Yale. Of these universities, the ones that figure in the overall rankings US are: Notre Dame (equal 13<sup>th</sup>.), Cornell (equal 16<sup>th</sup>.), Yale (equal 16<sup>th</sup>.), Wisconsin (equal 24<sup>th</sup>.), Indiana (equal 27<sup>th</sup>.), UC Riverside (31<sup>st</sup>.), Colorado (equal 32<sup>nd</sup>.), Georgetown (equal 39<sup>th</sup>.), and Rochester (equal 44<sup>th</sup>.).<sup>28</sup> So, philosophy of religion is not listed as a strength in any of the top ten departments of philosophy in the US—NYU, Rutgers, Princeton, Michigan, Pittsburgh, Stanford, Harvard, MIT, UCLA, and Columbia. Moreover, at some of these places—e.g. Princeton—there is not even a staff member who is claimed to

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<sup>25</sup> Smith (2001:197) observes: 'In Oxford University Press's 2000-2001 catalogue, there 96 recently published books on the philosophy of religion (94 advancing theism and 2 presenting 'both sides'). By contrast, there are 28 books in this catalogue on the philosophy of language, 23 on epistemology (including religious epistemology, such as Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*), 14 on metaphysics, 61 books on the philosophy of mind, and 51 books on the philosophy of science.' More recent catalogues from OUP, CUP, Routledge, Blackwell, and a host of lesser presses, tell the same tale.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, there has also been an increase in the number of presses that specialize in the publication of monographs on philosophy of religion, both amongst mainstream university presses, and amongst evangelical Christian presses (such as InterVarsity).

<sup>27</sup> Here is a breakdown of publications in the field of philosophy of religion in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* over the period since the Second World War (these totals include articles and critical notices): in the 1950s, 17; in the 1960s, 19; in the 1970s, 5; in the 1980s, 11; in the 1990s, 8; in the first half of the 2000s, 3. There is simply no evidence here of a resurgence of interest in philosophy of religion. (Thanks to Nick Trakakis, who provided me with these figures.)

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/overall.asp>, accessed on June 7, 2007.

specialise in philosophy of religion.<sup>29</sup> Of course, it can hardly go unremarked that none of these top ten departments of philosophy in the US lies in one of the ‘red’ states; and it is probably also worth noting that at least some of the universities that *are* noted for their strength in philosophy of religion could not possibly be mistaken for strongholds of evangelical Christianity.

The shifts in the profession that I have been documenting have not gone unremarked. However, for many—perhaps even most—non-theistic philosophers, it seems to be a matter of indifference that they have so many more counterparts who are theists than do non-theistic members of other academic groups.<sup>30</sup> For some non-theistic philosophers, this is doubtless because the theistic views of theistic philosophers are not visible in the contributions—if any—that theistic philosophers make to the sub-disciplines in which those non-theistic philosophers are working. However, even in those sub-disciplines—including, in particular, various parts of metaphysics and epistemology—in which the theistic views of theistic philosophers do have a bearing on the contributions that those theistic philosophers are making within those sub-disciplines, most non-theistic philosophers seem to be quite happy to ignore the wider context in which those contributions are framed. So, for example, many discussions of the metaphysics of modality take cognisance of the views set out in Plantinga (1974), while steadfastly ignoring the chapters in that work on the ontological argument and the free-will defence. However, one would not necessarily be giving oneself over to some kind of genetic fallacy if one were to wonder about the ways in which certain debates in metaphysics and epistemology have recently been shaped by the changing composition of the profession.

It is an interesting question *why* academic philosophy in the US has seen a greater shift in composition than have other parts of the US academy. While the full story is likely to be very complicated, it seems plausible to suppose that at least part of the story has to do with the nature of academic philosophy and the nature of other academic disciplines. On the one hand, we have plenty of reasons for thinking that explicit theistic hypotheses have no positive role in good natural science: there have been no advances in ecology, or immunology, or linear algebra, or any other scientific discipline that have relied upon the adoption of uniquely theistic postulates. Thus, while theistic belief is not necessarily an impediment to the theoretical and experimental ambitions of a budding scientist—and while it is not inconceivable that theistic belief could confer attitudinal advantages on a budding scientist—there is not the slightest reason to think that incorporation of explicitly theistic beliefs into scientific theory building will advance the theoretical or experimental

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<sup>29</sup> At the time of writing, Adam Elga is the instructor for PHI325, the sole undergraduate course on philosophy of religion at Princeton. To date, he has published nothing in this field. Moreover, at the time of writing, there is no graduate seminar in philosophy of religion at Princeton. See under current courses at <http://philosophy.princeton.edu/>, accessed on June 7, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Smith (2001:197) reports that, while only 7% of top scientists are theists, somewhere between 25% and 33% of academic philosophers are theists. While the first figure is reasonably secure—based in the research of Jarson and Witham (1998)—the second figure is merely based on ‘the exceptionless, educated guesses of every atheist and theist philosophy professor [Smith] asked’. While it would be good to have more reliable figures, there doesn’t seem to be any good reason to doubt that there is greater representation of theists amongst academic philosophers than there is amongst other academic groups (and, in particular, than there is amongst academic scientists).

ambitions of a budding scientist. On the other hand, while it is true that there are still many non-theistic philosophers who are quite content to suppose that theistic belief is just out of the question and that there is no point in giving theistic hypotheses serious critical scrutiny, there are some non-theistic philosophers who are quite happy to enter into discussions of theistic hypotheses. Given that philosophers can be more concerned with the range of reasonable belief—where ‘reasonable belief’ can be assessed primarily in terms of criteria of internal coherence—it should not be found surprising that there is an easier track into the academy for philosophers who wish to make use of explicitly theistic hypotheses than there is for those who belong to other academic disciplines.<sup>31</sup>

### 3

Since the early 1990s, I have been one of a smallish group of non-theistic philosophers who has participated in extensive discussions with theistic philosophers on central topics in philosophy of religion. Initially, my foray into the field was accidental. Following the completion of my PhD in philosophy of language, I became an uncontracted Departmental Visitor in the Philosophy Program in the Research School for the Social Sciences at the Australian National University. Soon after my arrival, the Head of the (separate) Department of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts asked me whether I could teach a course in philosophy of religion in the coming semester. Despite the fact that I had almost no background in philosophy of religion, I immediately accepted this offer, and used the teaching term to acquaint myself with the then current literature on arguments about the existence of God, debates about the nature of divine attributes, and so forth. On the back of a few publications which stemmed from this initial foray into the literature, I received an ARC Postdoctoral Fellowship which allowed me to carry out research that resulted in a book on ontological arguments. Since then, I have worked on other arguments about the existence of God—culminating in the publication of my recent book on this topic—and I have also done some work on divine attributes.

Contemporary theistic philosophers whose writings I have critically examined in my books and journal articles include: William Lane Craig, Robert Koons, David Oderberg, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Rescher, Brian Leftow, Richard Swinburne, Alex Pruss, Mark Nelson, and Stephen Makin. In most cases, my critiques have focussed on a single piece of work [or on a smaller part of a single piece of work], and almost always have simply taken that [part of a] piece of work on its own terms. Typically, these critiques have been motivated by disagreement: I found that I did not concur with what these authors say *and* I thought that I had something useful to say in response to what was said in their articles. In many cases, my initial critiques prompted responses, sometimes leading to a series of exchanges.

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<sup>31</sup> Smith (2001:214n1) observes that some referees for his paper ‘commented at length that philosophy, not science, is the appropriate place for discussion of theism, and that I was not respecting the borderline between science and philosophy. I would respond that this criticism presupposes a false belief about the relation between science and philosophy’. I take it that, whatever the justice of the complaint that Smith makes here, I am not making any false presuppositions about ‘the relation between science and philosophy’ when I point to the different roles that the mapping of mere conceptual space has in philosophy and in science.

Of course, in responding to the writings of the philosophers just mentioned in the way that I have done, I have effectively taken it for granted that these philosophers do not move beyond the pale of reason when they write the kinds of articles to which I have chosen to respond. I have said elsewhere that I think that there can be intelligent, thoughtful, well-educated, reasonable theists; I take it that the authors to whom I have responded all fall into this category. That's not to say that they—or I—never make slips in reasoning or argumentation; however, it is at least to say that, by any ordinary standards, all of these people rank much higher than most on the scales of intelligence, education, reasonableness, and so forth.

Furthermore, in responding to the writings of these philosophers in the way that I have done, I have effectively taken it for granted that it is perfectly proper to enter into debate with these philosophers, and that there is good reason to do so. While it might be that almost all atheists would be prepared to allow that there is a good sense in which these philosophers are intelligent, thoughtful, well-educated, reasonable, etc., I take it that there are many atheists who would insist that it really isn't proper to enter into debate with them, or, perhaps, that there is simply no good reason for—perhaps even no point in—doing so.

Consider, for example, Huw Price. In 2002, Price wrote a review, of Leslie (2001), which was subsequently rejected by the commissioning editor for *The London Review of Books*. In the review proper, Price wrote as follows:

For me, as a resolutely secular philosopher of science, the task of reviewing the book ... presented a practical dilemma. In one sense, it would have been easy enough to play the game that philosophers play, engaging with Leslie's arguments as atheist to his theist. But to do that full-voice, as my considered response to the book, seemed a kind of bad faith. It would have been a concession of intellectual respectability to a viewpoint I regard as off the map of serious philosophical and scientific enquiry, as well as positively harmful in its less theoretical contemporary manifestations ... While it seemed possible, even tempting, to engage with Leslie on particular philosophical points, taking theology at face value would have seemed a kind of moral defeat: feeding an ancient intellectual cuckoo that would be better simply starved. The right course seemed to be to ignore its demands on my attention, and walk away.

And, in a postscript to the review, Price added:

My treatment of Leslie's project was certainly disrespectful, but of course that was the point. Our collective view of what counts as a worthwhile intellectual endeavour changes over time. At a certain point, when a topic nears the margins, the view that it should be pushed beyond them begins to be taken seriously. That view is inevitably a recommendation for disrespect—a disrespect required by self-respect. Theology has been moving in that direction for a long time. Eventually it will be off the map, and even *The London Review of Books* will no more take seriously a work such as Leslie's than they would now review a defence of 'creation science' or astrology.

Until then, it remains important to remind ourselves that we can keep moving in that direction. ... We don't need to keep feeding the theological cuckoo. We are entitled simply to walk away.

It is clear, I think, that Price does not suppose that Leslie is unintelligent, or ill-educated, or deficient in reason, or the like. Rather, what he thinks is that Leslie's subject matter is off the map of serious intellectual endeavour: the views that Leslie defends are not views that are worth talking about, at least in the voice of serious intellectual engagement. Moreover, it is clear that Price would have exactly the same attitude towards the writings of Craig, Koons, Plantinga, and the other theistic philosophers with whom I have debated in print.

Not all atheistic philosophers of science share Price's point of view<sup>32</sup>. In particular, by way of complete contrast, Smith (2001) argues that it is both theoretically ('philosophically') and practically ('culturally') disastrous for philosophers like Price to ignore contemporary theistic activity in the field of philosophy of religion. On Smith's account, roughly speaking, atheistic philosophers need to have good objections to contemporary theistic arguments for theism in order to be justified in their atheistic beliefs. Moreover, on Smith's account, the main reason why theism has taken so much ground in academic philosophy over the past thirty years is precisely that most atheistic philosophers have not actually been in possession of good objections to contemporary theistic arguments for theism. If atheistic philosophers had all bothered to acquaint themselves with contemporary theistic arguments, and with good objections thereto, then theistic philosophers would not have been emboldened to assume or argue for theism in the public sphere, and the philosophical mainstream would have remained resolutely atheistic.

I'm inclined to think that Smith is wrong on all counts. As I noted at the end of the previous section, I think that the full story about why theists have made so much ground in the academic discipline of philosophy is likely to be very complicated; and, moreover, it seems to me that it is not at all plausible to claim that the fact that most atheistic philosophers have not bothered to acquaint themselves with good objections to contemporary theistic arguments has played a significant role in this story. Furthermore, I think that it is not true that any given atheistic philosopher needs to have good objections to contemporary theistic arguments for theism in order for that philosopher to be justified in his or her atheistic beliefs. Of course, each individual atheistic philosopher does need to believe that there *are* good objections to whatever contemporary theistic arguments are getting about; and each individual atheistic philosopher needs to have adequate reason to believe that there are good enough objections to those contemporary theistic arguments.

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<sup>32</sup> Of course, many do. Compare, for example, Blackburn (2001):

And yet I did end Polkinghorne's books, with their sublime contempt for philosophical reasoning and historical thinking, in despair about humanity's desperate self-deceptions and vanities and appetite for illusions. Everything will be all right in the end, we are washed in the blood of the lamb, we are blessed, and above all God is on Our Side. Who could dissent? Fantasy beats reason every time. People believe what they want to believe. I do not know how it is at Princeton, but in Cambridge there are eight established chairs in the Faculty of Divinity, but only two in the Faculty of Philosophy. Hallelujah!

But there are various ways in which one could come to have adequate reason for believing that there are good enough objections to contemporary theistic arguments, even though one is acquainted with neither the arguments nor the good objections to those arguments. To take but one example, it might well be that the expert testimony of Mackie, Gale, Grünbaum, Smith, Fales, Le Poidevin, Martin, Sobel, Everitt, Tooley, Morriston, Draper, and many other atheistic or agnostic philosophers of religion suffices to make it reasonable for other atheistic or agnostic philosophers with no background in philosophy of religion to believe that there are good enough objections to all contemporary theistic arguments.<sup>33</sup>

I'm also inclined to think that Price is wrong, on more than one count. Like Price, I would count myself as a 'resolutely secular philosopher'. Since I don't think that theism is *a priori* false—even though some versions of theism, like some versions of naturalism, are *a priori* false—I do not think that the probability of theism is zero. (By regularity, one should not zero out anything but *a priori* falsehoods.) However, if asked to assign a probability to theism, the best answer that I could give would be 'extraordinarily small—and, for all practical purposes, effectively zero'. But—and this is where I think that I differ from Price—I don't think that it is necessarily intellectually disreputable to assign a much larger probability to theism. Moreover, I don't think that it is necessary for atheists [like me] to fall into bad faith in order for us to engage in serious intellectual discussion—and dispute—with theists about the kinds of theological questions that are the subject matter of Leslie's book.

Price claims that theology is on an intellectual par with astrology and 'creation science', and that the *London Review of Books* would not contemplate the publication of a review of a defence of either astrology or 'creation science'. I don't believe that there could be a serious defence of astrology, i.e. a defence of astrology that merited any kind of serious scholarly attention. Similarly, I don't believe that there could be a serious defence of young earth creationism, i.e. a serious defence of the claim that the universe is but a few thousand years old. However, if 'creation science' includes anything that might fall under the label of 'intelligent design theory', then it also isn't clear to me that there could not be a serious defence of 'creation science': at the very least, it isn't clear to me that, say, Plantinga's critique of evolutionary naturalism deserves *nothing more* than an intellectual cold shoulder.

It is an interesting fact about academic philosophy, and academic philosophers, that they are rarely led to change their views on major, perennial philosophical questions by the *arguments* of other philosophers. Sometimes, it is true, the *writings* of some philosophers have led many other philosophers to change their minds about particular topics. But, on the big perennial questions—god, freedom, immortality, and the like—philosophers are no less confirmed in their beliefs and uncertainties than most human beings. Moreover, if the goal of philosophy is to produce convergence of opinion concerning those big perennial questions, then the history of philosophy is a sorry scandal: at the very least, that history suggests that Price might be right not only about theology, but about philosophy quite generally.

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<sup>33</sup> My list here echoes the list in Smith (2001:203).

Should we think that there is no point in entering into a conversation about the big perennial questions unless there is some genuine prospect of progress towards convergence of opinion on those big perennial questions as a result of engagement in that conversation? I don't think so. As I've argued elsewhere—see Oppy (2007: 17f.)—it is very easy to overestimate the virtues of consensus and agreement in inquiry. While it may be true that the *ultimate* goal of inquiry is convergence on truth, it is nonetheless also plainly true that premature consensus and shallow agreement are enemies of genuine inquiry. In my view, it is a *proximate* goal of inquiry to improve contesting and widely maintained views through robust and vigorous discussion—even in circumstances in which there are no signs that progress is being made towards the ultimate goal of inquiry. Consequently, on my view, there is no reason at all to think that one must be guilty of some kind of intellectual bad faith if one is to enter into serious discussion with philosophers whose views one takes to be almost certainly false.<sup>34</sup>

Plainly, the theoretical justification that I have just offered, for serious engagement with views that one takes to be almost certainly false, is controversial. However, even if these theoretical considerations—and attendant points about theoretical humility, doxastic fallibility, and so forth—fail to carry the day, there are also a range of good pragmatic reasons for thinking that there is reason to enter into serious discussion with philosophers whose views one takes to be almost certainly false. While I disagree with the *reasons* that Smith gives for thinking that it is practically ('culturally') disastrous for resolutely naturalistic philosophers to ignore contemporary theistic activity in the field of philosophy of religion, I do think that there are serious costs associated with this behaviour. In particular, I think that one significant factor in the increased presence of overtly theistic philosophers in US departments of philosophy has been the lack of attention paid by the vast majority of non-theistic philosophers to developing currents in philosophy of religion. From the standpoint of the general public—at least in the red states—and from the standpoint of aspiring students of philosophy, it may well seem that there just is no intellectual opposition to the arguments and views of theistic philosophers. While someone like Price might be quite clear why *he* thinks that it is appropriate to do nothing more than to turn a cold shoulder to theology, that action is likely to be interpreted very differently by those outside of the academy, and those who aspire to become members of the academy. I do not think that naturalistic philosophers within the academy should suppose that the only people for whom they write are other established naturalistic philosophers.

What of Price's claim that taking theology and theism at face value is a kind of moral defeat: feeding an ancient intellectual cuckoo that would be better simply starved? Isn't there something to the thought that, for naturalists, the right course is to ignore the

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<sup>34</sup> It is very tempting to suggest that it is almost inevitably required of philosophers that they enter into serious discussion with other philosophes whose views that take to be almost certainly false (or perhaps, worse, not even candidates for falsity). There are many small tribes of philosophers, and members of any one tribe may well be quite dismissive of the beliefs of the members of the other tribes. While some philosophers are content to do nothing other than engage in conversation with like-minded philosophers, most philosophers are prepared, at least some of the time, to enter into discussion with philosophers who belong to different tribes. Would philosophy be better off if this were not so?

cuckoo's demands on one's attention and walk away? In particular, might one not think that, in paying attention to theology and theism, one is in danger of lending credibility to views which do not deserve that gift? As we've already seen—in our earlier discussion of the Wedge Strategy document issued by the Centre for Science and Culture—there is no doubt that at least some evangelical Christians do take the view that *any* kind of academic discussion lends credibility to their views: if their views are being discussed, then at least those views *are* on the intellectual map. However, even if it is true that any kind of academic discussion lends some credibility to evangelical Christianity—or to theology and theism in general—it seems to me that the weight of pragmatic considerations nonetheless favours some direct intellectual engagement on the part of naturalist philosophers. I see no reason to think that the rising tide of theism in academic philosophy would have been slowed had there been no naturalistic philosophers prepared to engage directly with the writings of the new theist philosophers of religion. Given the rich pickings for the cuckoo in the wider culture, the sustenance afforded by direct intellectual engagement on the part of naturalist philosophers is of relatively minor importance. However, it also seems to me to be plausible to suppose that a much greater involvement of naturalist philosophers in direct disputes about theology, theism, and evangelical Christian doctrines would be likely to advance the interests of naturalism both inside and outside the academy. Price is right to worry about “the less theoretical manifestations” of theism and theological belief; but I do not think that his proposal is the optimal method for secular academic philosophers to address that worry in their professional lives.

#### 4

Towards the end of the introduction to this paper, I said that I want to address the question whether the religious beliefs of evangelical Christians can be reasonably entertained by reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed people, given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc. Moreover, I noted that I am particularly interested in what should be said about the views of well-established and well-respected professional philosophers who are—or have been until very recently—evangelical Christians: people like William Lane Craig, Robert Koons, Michael Rea, and William Dembski. As suggested in my introduction, I shall focus, in particular, on the views of Craig and Koons; however, there are many other [evangelical] Christian philosophers who would be no less suitable subjects for discussion in the present context.

Craig is one of the best-known evangelical Christian philosophers.<sup>35</sup> After being raised in a non-religious family in Iowa, Craig became an evangelical Christian in his mid-teens, and went on to forge an academic career that has allowed great scope for proselytising on behalf of his religious beliefs. Craig has a BA (in communications) from Wheaton College, 2 MAs from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (one in philosophy of religion

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<sup>35</sup> For more information about Craig, see: <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig> (William Craig's Virtual Office, accessed on 07/07/07); <http://www.reasonablefaith.org> (William Craig's Website, accessed on 07/07/07); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Lane\\_Craig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lane_Craig) (Wikipedia entry, accessed on 07/07/07); and <http://www.biola.edu/academics/scs/apologetics/wlcstore/> (William Craig's Online Store, accessed on 07/07/07).

and one in church history), a PhD (earned under the supervision of John Hick) from Birmingham and a doctorate of theology (earned under the supervision of Wolfhart Pannenberg) from Munich. After completing his doctoral studies, Craig held a Humboldt Fellowship, and then moved on to various appointments with Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Westmont College, University of Louvain, and, most recently, Talbot School of Theology at Biola University.

Craig is a prolific author, and an indefatigable public speaker and debater. His sole-authored philosophical books include: *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (1979, Macmillan); *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (1980, Macmillan); *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (1987, Baker); *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (1988, Brill); *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (1991, Brill); *The Tensed Theory of Time—A Critical Examination* (2000, Kluwer); *The Tenseless Theory of Time—A Critical Examination* (2000, Kluwer); and *God, Time and Eternity: The Coherence of Theism II* (2001, Kluwer). His more theological or apologetic sole-authored books include: *The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe* (1979, Here's Life); *The Son Rises: Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus* (1981, Moody); *Apologetics: An Introduction* (1984, Moody); *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus During the Deist Controversy* (1985, Edwin Mellen); *Knowing the Truth about the Resurrection* (1988, Servant); *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (1989, Edwin Mellen); *No Easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure and Unanswered Prayer* (1990, Moody); *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (1994, Crossway); *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (2001, Wheaton); and *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (2003, Wheaton). Craig has co-authored: *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology* (1994, Oxford University Press, with Quentin Smith); *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (2003, InterVarsity, with J. P. Moreland); and *Creation out of Nothing: Its Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration* (2004, Baker, with Paul Copan). Craig has edited *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh University Press) and *Time and the Metaphysics of Relativity* (2001, Kluwer); and he has co-edited: *The Logic of Rational Theism: Exploratory Essays* (1990, Edwin Mellen, with Mark McLeod) and *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (2000, Routledge, with J. P. Moreland). Four of Craig's debates have been published as books: *Will the real Jesus please stand up? A debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (1998, Baker, with John Dominic Crossan); *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment. A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Ludemann* (2000, InterVarsity, with Gerd Ludemann); *Does God Exist: The Craig-Flew Debate* (2003, Ashgate, with Anthony Flew); *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist* (2004, Oxford University Press, with Walter Sinnott-Armstrong).<sup>36</sup> And, on top of this, Craig has also published more than one hundred book chapters and journal articles, including papers in: *Analysis*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *British Journal for Philosophy of Science*, *Erkenntnis*, *Journal of Philosophy*, and *Philosophy of Science*.

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<sup>36</sup> Transcripts for some of Craig's other debates are also available on the Net. See, for example, <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/crec/website/resurrdebate.htm> for the transcript of a debate with Bart Ehrman. (Accessed on 03/07/07).

As the above lists make plain, Craig's main philosophical interests have been in cosmological arguments—particularly *kalām* cosmological arguments—divine foreknowledge, and the nature of time, though he has published on many other topics in natural theology and metaphysics; and Craig's main theological interest has been in the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, though, again, he has published on many other theological topics. Craig's work on these topics has been widely discussed. For example, his work on *kalām* cosmological arguments has been critically discussed by, among others: David Conway, Nicholas Everitt, Stewart Goetz, Adolf Grünbaum, Wes Morriston, Mark Nowacki, George Shields, Robin Small, Quentin Smith, Jordan Howard Sobel, Eric Sotnak, and Julian Wolfe. In particular, Grünbaum, Smith and I have all written extensively about (and against) Craig's views on the *kalām* cosmological argument.<sup>37</sup> I don't think that it is unreasonable to suggest that the fact that Craig's work has received this amount of scholarly attention is at least *prima facie* evidence that this work merits more than a mere intellectual cold shoulder.

Given the amount of writing that Craig does, it is, I think, to be expected that his work is of uneven quality. Moreover, given the nature of the views that he holds, it is also to be expected that the 'new atheists'—and other 'confirmed naturalists'—would be quite dismissive of most of his writings. However, it seems to me that it would be quite hard to make a case for the claim that Craig is not reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed, at least given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc. Moreover, it seems to me that it would be quite hard to make a case for the claim that Craig is not reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed, at least given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc, when it comes to the subject matters on which he has written at length. In particular, his publications in top-tier generalist philosophical journals—*Analysis*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *British Journal for Philosophy of Science*, *Erkenntnis*, *Journal of Philosophy*, and *Philosophy of Science*—should surely be taken as a clear sign of scholarly rigour and serious critical acumen: even if Craig is not in the very uppermost bracket of contemporary philosophers, he is clearly a well-credentialed practitioner of the trade.

Koons is also a well-known Christian philosopher; he has recently attracted considerable attention for his high-profile conversion from Lutheranism to Catholicism. Raised in a religious household, initially in St. Paul Minnesota, and subsequently in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Houston, Texas, Koons was an active member of his church, the Boy Scouts, and debating club. He obtained a BA in philosophy from Michigan State, a BA in theology and philosophy from Oxford, and a PhD in philosophy from UCLA. Since then, Koons has been a member of the Philosophy Department at the University of Texas in Austin, where he now holds the rank of full professor.

Like many philosophers, Koons has worked across a range of fields, including philosophical logic, artificial intelligence, metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of religion. He has written two books—*Paradoxes of Belief and Strategic Rationality* (CUP,

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<sup>37</sup> For more detailed references, see Oppy (2006: 137ff.)

1992), and *Realism Regained: An Exact Theory of Causation, Teleology and Mind* (OUP, 2000)—and a number of articles that have appeared in top-tier philosophy journals, including: *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Mind*, *Minds and Machines*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Synthese* and *Topoi*. Koons is a member of the Association for Symbolic Logic, and has been an active member of the Society for Christian Philosophers. He is a member of the Board of Advisors for the C. S. Lewis Institute of California, a Fellow of the Hill County Institute for Contemporary Christianity, a Senior Fellow of the Witherspoon Institute, a Senior Fellow of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, the Founder of the Program in Western Civilisation and American Institutions (University of Texas at Austin), and, as mentioned earlier, a Fellow of the Centre for Science and Culture in the Discovery Institute.

If anything, it is even clearer in the case of Koons than it is in the case of Craig that he is a serious and well-credentialed philosopher. His books are with the most prestigious presses for philosophical publications (OUP, CUP); most of his journal articles and book chapters are in the highest quality journals. Interestingly, his first major contribution to philosophy of religion—“A New Look at the Cosmological Argument”—appeared in the high-ranking general journal *American Philosophical Quarterly*: while this journal has carried pieces in philosophy of religion throughout its history, these pieces have been relatively few in number. It seems to me that it would be quite implausible to claim that Koons is not reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed, at least given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc.; and it would be no less implausible to claim that is not reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed, at least given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc., when it comes to questions of religious belief, philosophy of religion, and the like.

Suppose that my claims about Koons and Craig are accepted. What then should we say about their association with the Centre for Science and Culture, particularly given the discussion of the Discovery Institute in Forrest and Gross (2004), Goldberg (2006), etc? On the evidence of his ‘An Introduction to Conservatism’<sup>38</sup>, it seems clear that Koons would be quite properly characterised by Goldberg as a Christian Nationalist. Consider, for example:

[C]onservatives [like me] oppose (1) the establishment of religious institutions by the state; (2) treating religious interests as of no special value over and above secular interests; (3) effective control by the state of the arts, humanities, science and education; and (4) a wall of separation that interferes with the right of the people to affirm their religious commitments publicly and collectively, or that excludes religious ideas and convictions from the public square. (p.6)

And consider this:

The founders of the American republic, schooled as they were in the classics of Western civilisation, understood and applied [the principles of piety, accountability,

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.yuricareport.com/Strategies\\_Propaganda/2000-01-15-ConservativePrimer.pdf](http://www.yuricareport.com/Strategies_Propaganda/2000-01-15-ConservativePrimer.pdf), accessed on 06/08/07 (but first accessed some months earlier at a different website)

subsidiarity, the rule of law, separation of powers, mediating institutions, private property and free markets]. The enduring success of the Constitution they crafted, and of the civilisation that took shape on this continent, bear eloquent witness to the validity of these principles. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup>. century, much of the intellectual leadership of our country has abandoned or betrayed these proven ideas, placing their faith instead in a materialistic positivism or in a wildly romantic idealism .... Sowing the wind, we have reaped a whirlwind of social disorder, cultural decline, and political corruption. Today, conservatives lead the way toward a restoration of sanity and a reconstruction of society built on the solid foundation of the permanent truths [concerning God, Human Nature, Objective Knowledge and Original Sin].

These paragraphs would not have been out of place in the Wedge Strategy document; they certainly seem *to me* to manifest a seriously mistaken assessment of the current state of the world, and of the history that led the world to be the way that it is.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, as a Fellow of the Centre for Science and Culture, Koons plainly endorses *some* kind of opposition to evolutionary theory. Forrest and Gross (2004) report the fact that Koons was one of two chief organisers of a conference at the University of Texas at Austin in 1997: *Naturalism, Theism and the Scientific Enterprise*. On Koons' own account, this conference, while a spin-off from the Veritas Forum, was 'designed to be an academic conference in a secular setting', with papers contributed by philosophers of science, historians, geologists, biologists, physicists, computer scientists, rhetoricians, and social scientists.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, according to Koons, the participants in the conference moved towards several shared conclusions<sup>41</sup>:

1. We cannot make *a priori* pronouncements about what kind of theory or what kind of explanation can properly be made in the course of scientific inquiry. In principle, there is nothing to exclude appeals to a superhuman or even extra-cosmic intelligence.
2. Good science consists in working within research programs that are progressive in the following senses: (a) they generate empirically testable novel predictions; (b) they generate explanations of a wide range of phenomena on the basis of a simple, spare system of postulated entities and relationships; (c) they deal with anomalies and predictive failures without resorting to *ad hoc* repairs. The inspiration for a scientific research program can come from anywhere (including religious conviction) but the evaluation of an existing program must be rigorously empirical.
3. If theistic science or intelligent design theory is to become a progressive research program, it must do more than poke holes in the evidence for Darwinism: it must acquire auxiliary hypotheses about the intentions and preferences of the designer

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<sup>39</sup> For more discussion of the suggestion that Koons is some kind of Christian Nationalist, see <http://www.yuricareport.com/Dominionism/OutingCreepingDominionism.html> ("Outing Christian Dominionism", Katherine Yurica, accessed on 06/08/07).

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9701/koons.html> (Great Beginnings: UT Origins Conference opens doors to Dialogue, accessed 07/07/07).

<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.leaderu.com/real/re9701/koons2.html> (Making Progress in the Origins Debate: A Summary of NTSE, accessed 07/07/07).

from which we can generate specific, testable predictions and informative explanations.

4. We should not expect intelligent design theory to offer much, if anything, in the way of support to Christian theology (which does not stand in need of any such support). But, if we are to pursue theistic research programs, it must be for the sake of doing science and doing it well, not for the sake of religion.

So far, this seems pretty sensible. Dawkins' Ultimate 747 argument notwithstanding, it seems to me that the 'new atheists' should be happy to accept that intelligent design is not ruled out *a priori*. Moreover, the 'new atheists' should also be happy to agree with the generic account of scientific virtue, and with the point that intelligent design theory can't get anywhere without auxiliary hypotheses about the intentions and preferences of a postulated designer. Of course, the 'new atheists' should point out that we don't yet have even one example of a good scientific theory that invokes particular intentions and preferences of a postulated designer—but, so long as there is no serious diversion of funding from established, successful research programs, what harm is there in having *some* people pursuing investigations under the rubric of 'intelligent design'?<sup>42</sup>

Koons goes on to write:

I would like to interject a few words of encouragement and advice to those who are considering whether or not to join one of the theistic paradigms of scientific research (here I am speaking only for myself, and not for the conference as a whole). I think that the primary reason why theistic research programs have not been undertaken in the recent past—i.e. the past 200 years or so—is not from lack of courage or lack of opportunity, but from lack of imagination. ... Let me reiterate that the research program does not consist in simply finding more and more examples of things that Darwinism cannot explain. To constitute an alternative paradigm, it must demonstrate that it can produce novel predictions and informative explanations, and that it can outperform naturalism in doing so, at least within significant sub-domains. I can think of one example where this has already happened. A design theorist can confidently predict that we will find more and more anthropic coincidences, with higher and higher levels of fine-tuning required, since the design hypothesis should include the

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<sup>42</sup> Koons writes:

There was no consensus on the question of whether prospects for a successful theistic science are good. Some feel there are strong, although dispositive, reasons for doubting whether such a project can be successful, and others feel that the chances of success justify the investment of time and energy. Fortunately, this is the sort of disagreement that is commonplace in science, and that should lead only to friendly competition, not mutually destructive warfare. No one supposes that neo-Darwinian research should be abandoned or even substantially cut back.

I think that there is *no* serious chance that there will be a successful theistic science; investment of time and energy will just lead to disappointment. But, taking Koons at his word, there is no threat to good science here, so long as there are no 'substantial cut backs'. However, also taking Koons at his word, it seems to me that it is just improper for those promoting intelligent design to want to have 'intelligent design theory' taught in public schools since—on his own admission—we don't yet have a single example of a good *scientific* theory that invokes particular intentions and preferences of a postulated designer. Until there is a serious alternative, we should teach the only good *scientific* theory that we have: standard evolutionary theory.

auxiliary hypothesis that the designer created a world in which the necessity of design would be abundantly manifested.

Koons' example seems to me to be far from compelling. (Why should the design hypothesis 'include the auxiliary hypothesis that the designer created a world in which the necessity of design would be abundantly manifested'? And, even if the design hypothesis were to 'include the auxiliary hypothesis that the designer created a world in which the necessity of design would be abundantly manifested', how would it follow from *that* that we could confidently predict that 'we will find more and more anthropic coincidences, with higher and higher levels of fine-tuning required'. Why not confidently predict instead that, one day, our telescopes will discover an array of stars spelling out the words 'made by God'?<sup>43</sup>) Nonetheless, it seems to me that there is no need for me to say that, in writing as he has done, he shows that he is somehow not reasonable, thoughtful, reflective, well-educated and well-informed, at least given ordinary standards of reasonableness, thoughtfulness, etc., even when he comes to discuss questions about intelligent design. I don't like Koons' beliefs<sup>44</sup>. I think that he has some seriously mistaken views about the history and current state of the world; and I find some of the values exhibited in his 'An Introduction to Conservatism' distasteful. Furthermore, I'm quite certain that 'intelligent design' will not produce a serious scientific competitor to evolutionary theory. But, despite all this, Koons' writings should be met with serious, careful, reasoned discussion, not with over-blown rhetoric, careless misreading, or wilful disregard: what sets him apart from secular philosophers is *not* lack of reason, or lack of ability to argue, or obvious and easily remedied lack of information about the topics that he discusses.

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<sup>43</sup> Juhl (2006: 275) argues that discoveries of more and more 'anthropic coincidence' are predictable with practical certainty independently of whether there is a designer or a multiverse. If that's right, then no interest attaches to the project of trying to figure out what the design hypothesis has to say on this matter.

<sup>44</sup> In saying this, I mean to say not merely that I think that Koons has false beliefs, but that he has false beliefs the widespread holding of which would likely have disastrous consequences.

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