Review of Michael J. Murray (ed.) (1999) *Reason for the Hope Within* Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, pp.xvi+429

Foreword: Alvin Plantinga
Introduction: Michael J. Murray

Chapter 1: "Reason for Hope (in the Post-modern World)" Michael J. Murray
Chapter 2: "Theistic Arguments" William C. Davis
Chapter 3: "A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God: The Fine-Tuning Design Argument" Robin Collins
Chapter 4: "God, Evil and Suffering" Daniel Howard Snyder
Chapter 5: "Arguments for Atheism" John O'Leary Hawthorne
Chapter 6: "Faith and Reason" Caleb Miller
Chapter 7: "Religious Pluralism" Timothy O'Connor
Chapter 8: "Eastern Religions" Robin Collins
Chapter 9: "Divine Providence and Human Freedom" Scott A. Davison
Chapter 10: "The Incarnation and the Trinity" Thomas D. Senor
Chapter 11: "The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting" Trenton Merricks
Chapter 12: "Heaven and Hell" Michael J. Murray
Chapter 13: "Religion and Science" W. Christopher Stewart
Chapter 14: "Miracles and Christian Theism" J. A. Cover
Chapter 15: "Christianity and Ethics" Frances Howard-Snyder
Chapter 16: "The Authority of Scripture" Douglas Blount

This book comes with glowing endorsements from a number of prominent Christian philosophers of religion, including a very enthusiastic foreword from Alvin Plantinga. While there are things to like about the book, I believe that the dust jacket hype is greatly overstated. In particular, while I think that some of the individual chapters are very good indeed, I do not think that the book as a whole does much at all towards advancing the standing of Christian apologetics.

The editor notes that the explicit aim of the book is to bring important recent work by Christian philosophers of religion to a wider public so as to further the ends of Christian apologetics. According to the editor, there are two different directions in which those ends might be furthered. First, the book might make advances in the field of 'negative apologetics', i.e. in the direction of 'explaining to non-believers [and perhaps also to potentially wavering believers] how puzzling and paradoxical features of the Christian faith can be understood and reasonably maintained' (15). Second, the book might make advances in the field of 'positive apologetics', i.e. in the direction of 'pointing out [to theists and non-theists alike] the uncomfortable fit unbelievers experience in their belief structure [because they do not accept Christianity]' (15). It is worth noting that, in either of these directions, the book aims to speak both to believers and to non-believers: in particular, in the case of target non- believers, the sections on 'negative apologetics' aim to explain to non- believers how 'puzzling and paradoxical features of the Christian faith can be understood and reasonably maintained'; and the sections on 'positive apologetics'

aim to contribute to the task of persuading non- believers of the truth of the sum of the core claims of Christianity.

It seems reasonable to take the book itself as a guide to what the sum of the core claims of Christianity amounts to. According to the consensus of the authors of the book, the vast majority of Christians believe that:

> There is an immaterial, omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good creator (*ex nihilo*) and sustainer of all things who is three persons in one substance, with one of these three persons being numerically identical to a human being who died to atone for human sins; who exercises providential control over free human beings; who will bring about the bodily resurrection of all to eternal life; who allows some lives to lead to eternal bliss and other lives to lead to eternal torment; and who is the author of authoritative (and perhaps inerrant) scripture, viz. the Christian *Bible*.

Given that this is what Christians believe, and given that the book has the explicit aim of contributing to the task of persuading non- believers of either the reasonableness of believing, or the truth of, Christianity, it is fair to assess the book in terms of its success in giving non-believers—and, in particular, atheists—good reasons to believe (or to believe that it can be reasonable to believe) the above claim. This is what I shall do in the present review.

On the question of whether the book contributes to the task of persuading non-believers of the truth of Christianity, our summary can be brief (though I will add details below for those who want them). There is no argument in this book that so much as has as its conclusion that the sum of the core claims of Christianity is true. True enough, there are some (in my opinion not at all persuasive) arguments that have as their conclusion that the universe has a cause of its existence, and that some cosmological and/or biological features of the universe are the product of intelligent design (Davis, Collins): but those arguments are manifestly inadequate to the task of persuading non-believers that the sum of the core doctrines of Christianity is true. Moreover, on all hands, the authors are agreed that reason to believe many of the core doctrines of Christianity resides ultimately in the deliverances of scripture and revelation. Indeed, I take it that most of the authors would agree with Miller, who writes:

> It would … be a serious mistake to insist that the Christian faith is defensible by arguments that would convince any intelligent person. … The Christian faith, moreover, does not give us any reason to think that there are any such arguments. In fact, it gives us reason to think that there are no such arguments precisely because of the truth of Christian beliefs about the direct and indirect noetic effects of sin, even on intelligent people. (161)

In the light of this kind of comment, it is perhaps not at all surprising that one simply cannot find arguments in this book that *ought* to persuade intelligent atheists (or, indeed, non-believers more broadly) of the truth of the sum of the core claims of Christianity. But,

since this is the task of ‘positive apologetics’, it is immediately evident that this book makes no serious contribution to ‘positive apologetics’.

Some readers of this review may worry about an apparent gap in the above argument. What Miller—and the other authors of the book—concede is that there are no arguments that *will* succeed in convincing atheists; but it hardly follows from this concession that they also concede that there are no arguments that *ought* to succeed in convincing atheists. However, it is important to note that, when it comes to the task of ‘negative apologetics’, almost all of the authors are very keen to insist that it is an adequate response to an argument that appears to show that some part of Christian doctrine is incoherent, or logically inconsistent, or at odds with well known empirical facts, that those arguments have premises that Christians *as a matter of fact* reject. That is, they are all keen to insist that certain arguments offered by non-believers are plainly unsuccessful because they have premises that, as a matter of fact, Christians fail to accept. Moreover, they are also keen to insist that *non-believers should be prepared to agree that these arguments are unsuccessful* because they have premises that those non-believers can see are, as a matter of fact, not accepted by Christians. But it can hardly be reasonable to suppose that, simply as a matter of the proper regulation of debate, non-believers should be prepared to agree that arguments against Christianity are unsuccessful if they have premises that non-believers can see are, as a matter of fact, not accepted by Christians, unless it is also reasonable to suppose that, simply as a matter of the proper regulation of debate, Christians should be prepared to agree that arguments against unbelievers are unsuccessful if they have premises that Christians can see are, as a matter of fact, not accepted by non-believers. At the very least, there is a choice to be made here. On the one hand, the authors might give up the supposition that it suffices, for the purposes of ‘negative apologetics’ (directed towards non-believers) to point out that critics of Christianity begin with assumptions that Christians reject: but, in that case, the authors would surely have to concede that their attempts at ‘negative apologetics’ are abject failures (since they all rely on this assumption). On the other hand, the authors might endorse the assumption that it suffices, for the purposes of negative apologetics (directed towards non-believers) to point out that critics of Christianity begin with assumptions that Christians reject: but, in that case, the authors are surely obliged to concede that almost all of their attempts at ‘positive apologetics’ are abject failures (since they almost all rely on the rejection of the corresponding assumption for non-believers).

Of course, a more cynical reviewer might suggest that the policy of this book (and of many other books of its ilk) is to hand the chapters on ‘positive apologetics’ to Christians who (at least for the nonce) are prepared to reject the assumption that non-believers can adequately respond to arguments of ‘positive apologetics’ simply by pointing out that these arguments begin with assumptions that non-believers reject; and then to hand the chapters on ‘negative apologetics’ to Christians who (at least for the nonce) are prepared to endorse the assumption that Christians can adequately fulfil the requirements of ‘negative apologetics’ simply by pointing out that the counter-arguments of non-believers begin with assumptions that Christians reject. (A more cynical reviewer might also be given to wonder how it came about that the workshopping process that supported the production of this book failed to disclose the evident conflict between the

methodological/procedural assumptions of the chapters on 'positive apologetics' and the methodological/procedural assumptions of the chapters on 'negative apologetics'. I can't believe that Howard-Snyder, Hawthorne, Cover, Merricks, et al. really endorse the claim that the arguments presented in the chapter by Davis have a serious contribution to make to 'positive apologetics', i.e. to the task of constructing arguments that non-believers should agree provide them with persuasive reasons for allowing that the sum of the core claims of Christianity is true.)

Let me provide a couple of illustrations of the kind of conflict that I have just been describing. In his chapter on the fine-tuning argument, Collins argues that it is 'uncontroversial that the existence of the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism': 'since God is an all good being, and it is good for intelligent, conscious beings to exist, it is not surprising or improbable that God would create a world that could support intelligent life' (53-4). But, in his chapter on arguments from evil, Howard-Snyder claims that various kinds of considerations (about our cognitive limitations and the like) 'together constitute a good reason to be in doubt about whether it is highly likely that we would see a reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil if there were a reason' (112). So, what's it to be? Are we to grant ourselves confident insight into the reasons that would be possessed by the being described in the sum of the core claims of Christianity or not? If a non-believer is to accept that we've got no idea whether it is highly likely that we would see a reason that would justify God in permitting horrendous evil, why on earth should a non-believer also accept that we can see perfectly well that it is highly likely that we can see a reason that would justify God in creating a fine-tuned universe? Perhaps we non-believers might agree with Collins that the fact that it is good for intelligent, conscious beings to exist would provide God with a *pro tanto* reason to create a world that could support intelligent life—just as we can surely insist that the fact that certain actions and events are horrendous evils would provide God with a *pro tanto* reason to prevent them—but why should we non-believers think that there is reason to have confidence about the move to all-things-considered judgment in exactly one of these cases?

In his chapter on theistic arguments, Davis argues that 'when all of the features of the world calling for explanation are taken together … the compelling verdict is that the world is much more the way one would have expected it to be given God's existence than ti would have been if metaphysical naturalism were true' (41). But, again, if we are to follow Howard-Snyder in accepting that we have good reason to be in doubt about whether it is highly likely that we would see all-things-considered reason that justifies God in permitting so much evil, why should we be prepared to follow Davis in supposing that we have no good reason to be in doubt about whether it is highly likely that we would see all-things-considered reason that justifies God in making a world like ours? Howard-Snyder clearly thinks that non-believers should be prepared to concede that they are not well-placed to make judgments about what an omniscient and perfectly good being would permit (by way of horrendous evil); and Davis clearly thinks that non-believers should be prepared to allow that they are well-enough placed to make judgments about the kind of universe that an omniscient and perfectly good being would

create. I do not think that *any* Christian apologists can reasonably expect to have it both ways here.

On the question of whether the book contributes to the task of persuading non-believers of the reasonableness of believing in Christianity, it seems to me that matters are less straightforward than on the question of whether the book contributes to the task of persuading non-believers of the truth of Christianity. Speaking for myself, I've long been happy to allow that there can be—and, indeed, are—reasonable Christians, and so stand in no need of persuading on this score. However, I suspect that non-believers who already harbour strong doubts about the reasonableness of Christian belief are not very likely to have their minds altered by the material provided in this book (much as I fear that those Christians who harbour strong doubts about the reasonableness of non-belief are not very likely to have their minds swayed by the kinds of considerations adduced in the present review). Still, given a certain kind of view about reasonable belief and the amenability of belief to reasonable change by way of argument, it is very natural to suppose that there can be widespread disagreement between rational believers. (For an account of a view of rational belief of this kind, see my "Arguing about the *Kalām* Cosmological Argument" *Philo* 5, 1, 2002, 34-61.) In my view, Christians who want to persuade atheists to accept the view that there can be reasonable Christian belief would do better to adopt the indirect strategy of arguing for this kind of conception of reasonable belief than to adopt any of the standard direct strategies of 'negative apologetics'. (I think that Howard-Snyder, Hawthorne, Cover and Merricks all exhibit some kind of sympathy for a view of reasonable belief of the kind in question, though doubtless they would not accept all of the details of the view of rational belief that I hold.)

With this preliminary discussion behind me, I turn now to a more detailed examination of the various contributions to the book. Here, I shall try to summarise the contents of the various chapters, and to provide some critical assessment.

1. Murray discusses what he takes to be three important challenges to the 'apologetic enterprise': 'scepticism', 'relativism', and 'antirealism'.

'Scepticism' is the view that 'we are duty bound to refrain from coming to hold beliefs on some matter or other' (4). (More exactly, though Murray doesn't say this, he likely means that we are duty bound to refrain from coming to hold *first-order* beliefs on some matter or other. Even if, for example, I'm duty bound to refrain from forming any belief on, say, the question whether there is extraterrestrial intelligence, I'm hardly duty bound to refrain from forming the belief that I am duty bound to form no belief on the question whether there is extraterrestrial intelligence.) In particular, the question for Murray is whether 'sceptics have any good reason for thinking the sorts of things discussed under the heading of apologetics are beyond our grasp?' (9). Murray says: 'While any answer to this question would be controversial, I think we can safely answer "No!"' But, of course, we need to distinguish questions here. I don't see why a 'sceptic' couldn't reasonably insist that *she* has no way of assigning any probability to the sum of the core claims of Christianity, since she has no way of assigning any probability to the claim that God would make a world like ours. Christians *might* reasonably suppose that the sorts of

things discussed under the heading of apologetics are not beyond *their* grasp; but they shouldn't suppose that they are able to speak for all of the rest of us.

'Relativism' is either the view that 'which worldview one selects depends on the assumptions one makes in inferring the best explanation, [where] which assumptions one adopts is sometimes a matter of mere preference' (16), or else the view that 'which worldview is *true* depends on the assumptions one makes in inferring the best explanation, [where] which assumptions one adopts is sometimes a matter of mere preference'. Murray insists—correctly in my view—that, on the second conception, relativism is benighted, and that, on the first conception, relativism is benign, but not particularly interesting. (A natural lesson to draw—though not one that Murray himself draws—is that the prospects for 'positive apologetics' are dim when seen in the light of benign relativism: since it is entirely proper for non-believers to rely on their *own* judgments about the goodness of explanations, it is unlikely that there are positive apologetic arguments that ought to persuade non-believers to give up their non-belief on pain of conviction of irrationality.)

'Anti-realism' is the view that, '[while] the description of the world that we carry around with us is one that might be thoroughly adequate for our purposes … this description [does not] map onto "the way the world really is"' (6). Murray claims that there is a sense in which 'anti-realism' has a place in Christian apologetics: 'we can be antirealist about … explanations for evil or the Trinity. [These explanations] provide good models for thinking about the Christian faith even if the models themselves turn out to be incorrect.' (18) I think that it is a little odd to assimilate 'anti-realism' to the kind of fictionalism that Murray recommends in the case of 'models' of the Trinity and the like. The 'models' that turn up in later chapters of the book—are in no cases claimed to be 'thoroughly adequate for our purposes' (except insofar as that purpose is merely to convince unbelievers that certain beliefs are not self-evidently irrational). To take a clear example: it is just part of orthodox Christian belief that there are three divine persons in one substance. No Christian can be anti-realist about this claim, i.e. no Christian can contend that it fails to reflect 'the way the world really is'. What a Christian can do is to doubt that anyone can construct a sufficiently clear account of how it can be that there are three divine persons in one substance. Interestingly though, it seems plausible to hold that commitments to anti-realism (in this odd sense) all tend to weigh against the claims of 'positive apologetics': how can non-believers reasonably come to accept claims whose content can't be adequately explained to them by those who profess to espouse the claims in question?

Along with his reflections on 'scepticism', 'relativism', and 'anti-realism', Murray also provides some general thoughts about what apologetics can and can't achieve. According to Murray, 'sledgehammer apologetics'—i.e. the attempt to construct apologetic arguments that make it impossible for unbelievers presented with those arguments to continue in their unbelief (11)—faces a serious problem: because theories are always underdetermined by their data, no (consistent) theory can ever be decisively refuted, and hence non-believers can always 'backtrack and readjust to avoid Christian conclusions' (14). There are two difficulties with Murray's position here. On the one hand, it can be

irrational to hold a theory even though that theory fits perfectly with one's data: for there are other theoretical desiderata than fit with the evidence. In particular, a theory that is loaded up with too many *ad hoc* auxiliary hypotheses can die under the weight of its own complexity. Consistent theories are rationally rejectable on grounds other than lack of fit with evidence. So Murray hasn't here identified a good reason to think that 'sledgehammer apologetics' faces a serious problem. On the other hand, though, there are serious problems that face 'sledgehammer apologetics'. In particular—as, for example, Cover allows (371)—it is just massively implausible to suppose that there are arguments for Christianity that every rational person must accept. Believers and non-believers disagree about a great many things, and it is almost beyond belief that one can find premises *among those matters upon which they agree* that will support the conclusion that Christianity is true.

2. Davis defends various theistic arguments for the existence of God. About these arguments he claims that, while they provide very good reasons (based on highly plausible premises), they are all capable of evasion by 'a determined sceptic, [who] will always be able to find a reason—even if somewhat implausible—for persisting in unbelief' (21). Even setting aside the point—noted above—that these arguments are only arguments for theism (and not arguments for Christianity), there are many reasons for dissenting from the judgment that Davis makes of them.

First, Davis defends an argument from contingency:

1. There are contingent things (at least some things might not have existed).
2. All contingent things are dependent (at least for their coming into existence) on something else.
3. Not everything can be dependent on something else. (Even if the chain of dependence looped back on itself, the entire chain would still be dependent, and thus something outside the chain would be needed.)
4. Thus, a non-dependent (necessary) thing exists (which explains dependent things). (And for those already familiar with God on the basis of revelation, it is not hard to give a name to this necessary thing.)

Davis says that this is a good argument, but that there are two loopholes for the unbeliever. First, the unbeliever might insist that the universe [= the sum of contingent things] is a necessary existent (thus denying the first premise); second, the unbeliever might insist that there is at least one contingent thing—the universe—that does not depend for its existence on anything else. (Davis adds, in a footnote, that one might think that a finitely powerful deistic god is 'sufficient for the narrow task of initiating the sequence of causes' (25n5).

But, of course, there are other options.

A non-believer might be *reasonably undecided* between the claim that the universe is a necessary existent, and the claim that the universe is a non-dependent contingent existent. *Ex hypothesi*, such an unbeliever would have independent reason to reject the conjunction

of the premises of the argument. Moreover, it is clearly hopeless to insist that the argument is a good argument against such a non-believer; what is now required is some further argument against the (in effect) disjunctive belief that is held by the non-theist in question. (Of course, we could make the same points about any non-believer who denies any one of the premises of this argument. It is evident that this argument can play no role at all in showing that such a non-believer is irrational. But—for example—there are millions of non-believers who reject the second premise of the argument.)

A non-believer might deny that tacit mereological principle that is adverted to in the parenthetical remark appended to the third premise. Perhaps there are infinitely many things that are contingent, but there is no thing that is the mereological sum of those things. In that case, it could be true that every contingent thing is dependent upon some other contingent thing, but false that there is a non-dependent necessary thing which explains the existence of contingent things. (Think of this as a 'model' for explaining how it could be that there are only contingent things. It's hardly in worse shape than the 'models' that later authors in this book advert to in order to defend their beliefs in Christian doctrines such as the Trinity.)

A non-believer can surely insist that the remark in Davis' footnote does not go nearly far enough. There are any number of competing conceptions of the nature of the non-dependent thing that might be invoked (apart from the conception to be found in 'standard theism' and 'finite deism'). While Christians might be quite confident that they should prefer the conception of 'standard theism', it is quite unclear why non-believers should follow them in this matter. Non-believers might well be prepared to concede to Christians that the Humean panoply of alternative supernatural explanations does not give Christians a reason to revise their beliefs; but Christians should equally be prepared to concede that there is a serious obstacle here to the project of 'positive apologetics'. Certainly, it seems to *me* that an evil God, or a morally indifferent God, is no less consonant with the evidence that I have at *my* disposal than is a perfectly good God.

And so on. A full discussion of this argument would occupy us for a very long time. However, I do not doubt that most of the contributors to the book under review would themselves agree that this argument has very little to contribute to the task of positive apologetics (conceived of as the task of constructing arguments that ought to persuade reasonable non-believers to change their minds.).

Second, Davis defends a (fairly synoptic) argument that goes by inference to the best explanation. According to Davis, the following features of the world are all 'better explained by God's existence than by metaphysical naturalism' (36):

1. The fact that there is a universe of contingently existing things. (25)
2. The fact that 'the universe is orderly to a remarkable degree, and in more than one way'. (36)
3. The fact that '[moral and aesthetic value] appears to be an objective feature of the world'. (36/7)

4. The fact that human beings are conscious, intelligent, possessed of reliable cognitive faculties aimed at truth, appreciative of beauty, and possessed of a sense of humour. (37, 40-1)
5. The fact that there appears to be intentional design at the cellular level. (38-40)
6. The fact that the universe appears to be fine-tuned for life. (28)

Indeed, says Davis, 'When all of the features of the world calling for explanation are taken together … the compelling verdict is that the world is much more the way one would have expected it to be given God's existence than it would have been if metaphysical naturalism were true.' (41)

The overarching principle to which Davis appeals in making his assessment is that the best explanation is the one that has the best fit to the evidence. He illustrates his endorsement of this principle by reference to a quasi-historical account of justification for the belief that the earth is an oblate spheroid (rounded out with the insistence that, even now, a 'skilful arguer' can resist the conclusion that the earth is an oblate spheroid). Moreover, he clearly means to suggest that the non-believer is in exactly the same boat as a contemporary figure who insists that the earth is flat: in each case, it is possible to maintain the claim in question without accepting contradictions, and hence, to this extent (but no further) it is possible to rationally maintain each claim.

In a footnote, Davis acknowledges that the overarching principle is strictly false: 'the strength of a hypothesis is a function of both its explanatory power and its simplicity' (29n7). However, 'since it is difficult to assess the relative simplicity in a way which doesn't seem to beg the question, I will be assuming that the simplicity of the pairs of hypotheses considered here are roughly equal'. So, applied to the main case of interest—Christianity versus metaphysical naturalism—Davis simply *assumes* that the two hypotheses are equally simple. But no sensible non-believer will agree to this assumption (whence, as argued in other cases above, we immediately reach the conclusion that this particular argument makes no contribution to the project of 'positive apologetics').

Now, of course, there might be some *other* way in which a Christian could argue for the explanatory superiority of Christianity vis. a vis. metaphysical naturalism with respect to the above menu of 'facts'. But, as soon as one starts to think about the details of the cases, one begins to suspect that this is most unlikely to be so. Set aside the point that, before we begin, metaphysical naturalism has a huge advantage on the score of simplicity. Consider, for example, the first of Davis' 'facts'. According to Christians, the world is created by God as the result of a (libertarian) free choice. What does that mean? It means that, if we compare two (*ex hypothesi*) possible worlds, one in which God creates, and the other in which God refrains from creating, there is no explanation of why God *chooses* to create in the one world, but refrains from *choosing* to create in the other. Here, we have brute, inexplicable fact. Why, then, on the Christian view, does God choose to create a universe of contingent existents (rather than refrain from choosing to create a universe of contingent existents)? Ultimately, for *no* reason: upon closer examination, the alleged explanatory advantage of Christianity simply vanishes. (The lesson here is that—setting aside the possibilities afforded by circles, infinite regresses, and the like—it must be that,

if there is contingency, then there is brute unexplained contingency; and that—setting aside the possibilities afforded by circles, infinite regresses, and the like—it must be that, if there is contingent existence, then there is brute unexplained contingent existence.)

Let's consider another of Davis' 'facts', viz. that moral and aesthetic values appear to be an objective feature of the world. If we suppose that moral and aesthetic values actually are objective features of the world, then I take it that Euthyphro considerations establish that Christians are no better placed than metaphysical naturalists to explain how this is so. If, on the other hand, we suppose that moral and aesthetic values merely appear to be an objective feature of the world, then it is quite unclear how Christians would offer to explain this fact. (Davis claims that metaphysical naturalists are threatened by the fact that 'the enterprises of morality and aesthetics are very common human activities which lack apparent survival value' (36n14). But metaphysical naturalists needn't be committed to *crude* evolutionary accounts of morality and aesthetics, nor—for that matter—of anything much else.) It surely doesn't require much by way of insight and imagination to see that non-believers are not at all likely to accept Davis' claims about the alleged explanatory advantage of Christianity vis. a vis. this 'fact'.

And so on. Under examination, the idea that the catalogue of 'facts' exhibited by Davis should, *by the lights of non-believers*, give them reason to trade in the simpler hypothesis of metaphysical naturalism for the questionably greater explanatory power of the far more complex hypothesis of Christianity, ceases to look in the least bit plausible. Of course, none of this is to say that, by their lights, Christians are not entitled to suppose that Christianity offers the better explanation of the menu of alleged 'facts'. However, it is to say that even Christians really ought to be prepared to concede that non-believers are not necessarily at all on a doxastic par with those benighted souls who currently believe that the earth is flat.

Interestingly, Davis goes on to complain that non-believers give *offence*—and cause *annoyance* and *frustration*—to Christians by refusing to accept the testimony of those who have had experience of God's presence. (42) However, it seems to me that non-believers would have no less justification in complaining that Davis gives offence—and causes annoyance and frustration—to non-believers by claiming that their non-belief is on a doxastic par with the beliefs of flat-earthers. The main point here is not—as Davis seems to suppose—that non-believers are unwilling to be swayed by evidence that falls short of *proof*. No less than reasonable Christians, reasonable non-believers make an 'inference to the best explanation' on the basis of all of the evidence that is available to them. *Moreover*, there is an interesting symmetry in the role that claims about 'damaged faculties' can play in these two views. Davis writes that 'The crucial question is whether the Christian practice of trusting one's experience of God's presence … involves a strong suspicion of compromised faculties or an independent reason to think their report false. Critics of theism … have all but given up thinking that God's existence can be disproved, so their case must depend upon showing that the experience of God's presence depends upon compromised faculties' (44). Now, of course, non-believers have not given up on the idea that Christians are mistaken in thinking that God exists; and, inevitably, they suppose that this means that there is some kind of mismatch between Christian cognitive

faculties and reality. But, in no smaller measure, Christians believe that there is some kind of mismatch between non-believers' cognitive faculties and reality: they hold that the inner life of non-believers is not illumined by the Holy Spirit, or the like. Maybe, at this point, Davis should reconsider the beam in his own eye …

There is so much more with which to disagree in Davis' essay that I have barely begun to scratch the surface. But it is time to move on.

3. Collins defends the following version of the cosmic fine-tuning argument:

1. (Prime Principle of Confirmation): Whenever we are considering two competing hypotheses, an observation counts as evidence in favour of the hypothesis under which the observation has the highest probability (or is the least improbable). (51)
2. The existence of the fine-tuning is not improbable under theism.
3. The existence of the fine-tuning is very improbable under the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.
4. (Hence), the fine-tuning data provide strong evidence to favour the design hypothesis over the atheistic single-universe hypothesis.

Moreover, in support of Premise 3, Collins appeals to a 'qualified principle of indifference' which says that, when we have no reason to prefer any one value of a parameter over another, we should assign equal probabilities to equal *real physical* ranges, areas, or values. (68-71)

Collins claims that we can be very confident that the Prime Principle of Confirmation is true, because: (i) it can be derived from the probability calculus; (ii) there is no case of recognisably good reasoning that violates this principle; and (iii) the principle has a wide range of applicability, and undergirds much of our reasoning in science and everyday life. (53) I think that Collins is wrong about all of this. Whenever we consider competing hypotheses in the light of evidence, we have to trade off the simplicity of those hypotheses with their goodness of fit to our data. If, as Collins claims, all we care about is goodness of fit to data, then we shall almost always end up committed to maximally complicated hypotheses. (For example, suppose that you are plotting points on a graph. You can always draw a highly complicated line so that all of the data points fall on the curve: and the data will be more probable, relative to such a curve, than it is to any curve upon which some of the data points fail to fall. Nonetheless, in many cases, we—quite rightly—suppose that there are simpler curves with worse fit to the data that are more likely to represent the truth. To suppose otherwise is to forget about the prevalence of noise and error in our data.)

Interestingly, Collins cites the 'odds form of Bayes' Theorem' in a footnote:

$Pr(H_1/E) / Pr(H_2/E) = (Pr(H_1) / Pr(H_2)) . (Pr(E/H_1) / Pr(E/H_2))$

and then goes on to say that his Prime Principle of Confirmation 'does not require the applicability or truth of Bayes' Theorem' (52n10). While this is true, I take it that the odds form of Bayes' Theorem illustrates the flaws in Collins' claims about his Prime Principle of Confirmation. Essentially, his principle says that if $Pr(E/H_1) > Pr(E/H_2)$, then the evidence E confirms H_1 over H_2. But, in order for E to confirm H_1 over H_2, Bayesians will insist that what we really need is that $Pr(H_1/E) > Pr(H_2/E)$ – and that means that the values of the prior probabilities, $Pr(H_1)$ and $Pr(H_2)$ cannot be ignored. Even if one is not a Bayesian, one should agree that considerations about simplicity have to make an impact *somewhere* in the assessment of the bearing of evidence on hypotheses.

Since the second and third premises in Collins' argument are claims of the form Pr(E/H), and not claims of the form Pr(H/E), it is clear that his argument is a failure because his Prime Principle of Confirmation is false. However, even if one accepted his Prime Principle of Confirmation, one might still deem the argument a failure, depending upon how one assessed the claim the Pr(fine-tuning/theism) > Pr(fine-tuning/atheism). I have already given reasons for thinking that it is not at all clear that we should suppose that Pr(fine-tuning/theism) is very high; indeed, if we follow the lead of sceptical theist discussions of the evidential argument from evil, it seems that we should be hesitant to assign any value to this probability. Moreover—though I shan't try to argue for this here—I suspect that there are good reasons for refusing to assign any value to the probability that Pr(fine-tuning/atheism) as well. (See, for example, McGrew et al. (2001) "Probabilities and the Fine-Tuning Argument: A Sceptical View" *Mind* 110, 1027-38, for an argument to this conclusion.) So, I think, there would be good reason for non-believers to resist Collins' argument even if the Prime Principle of Confirmation were true.

As noted above, Collins argues that the claim, that Pr(fine-tuning/atheism) is very low, is supported by his 'qualified principle of indifference'. However, it is important to note that Collins himself acknowledges that this 'qualified principle of indifference' is false. For, as he concedes at 71n29, Bertrand showed that 'sometimes there are two equally good and conflicting parameters that directly correspond to a physical quantity and to which the principle of indifference applies'. In response to this difficulty, Collins says that 'In these cases, at best we can say that the probability is somewhere between that given by the two conflicting parameters. This problem, however, typically does not seem to arise for most cases of fine-tuning.' But, first, the suggested patch doesn't work: in some cases, there are *many* equally good and conflicting parameters that directly correspond to a physical quantity. And, second, it seems wrong to claim that the problem doesn't arise in cases of alleged fine-tuning. (Again, see the paper by McGrew et al. cited above.)

Apart from arguing for the superiority of theism to the atheistic single universe hypothesis, Collins also argues for the superiority of theism to the atheistic multiple universe hypothesis. However, in this case, unsurprisingly, Collins does *not* frame his argument in terms of the Prime Principle of Confirmation. Plainly enough, given his assumptions, it seems plausible to suppose that Pr(fine-tuning/multiple universes) will be higher than Pr(fine-tuning/theism), in which case atheists could insist on the goodness of the following argument:

1. (Prime Principle of Confirmation): Whenever we are considering two competing hypotheses, an observation counts as evidence in favour of the hypothesis under which the observation has the highest probability (or is the least improbable). (51)
2. The existence of fine-tuning is (perhaps) moderately probable under theism.
3. The existence of fine-tuning is *very* probable under the atheistic multiple-universe hypothesis.
4. (Hence), the fine-tuning data provide strong evidence to favour the atheistic multiple-universe hypothesis over theism.

But, *inter alia*, Collins launches a series of objections against this argument. First, 'everything else being equal, we should prefer hypotheses for which we have independent evidence or that are natural extrapolations from what we already know' (60). Second, 'the "many-universes generator" seems like it would need to be designed' (61). Third, 'the "many-universes generator" would need to select the laws of physics' (62). Fourth, there are other features of the universe—e.g. the beauty, elegance, and ingenuity of the basic laws of physics—that cannot be explained on the atheistic multiple-universe hypothesis.

Strategically, it seems dangerous for Collins to raise these objections at this point. After all, we might imagine a non-believing objector to his original argument making the following objections. First, everything else being equal, we should prefer hypotheses for which we have independent evidence or that are natural extrapolations from what we already know—and hence we should greatly prefer the atheistic single-universe hypothesis to the theistic hypothesis. (Of course, this point is just one way of registering the need to take account of simplicity in our assessment of evidence; that Collins feels the need to make this kind of point illustrates that he isn't *really* strongly committed to his Prime Principle of Confirmation.) Second, it seems that God would need to be designed (else there would be complexity emerging from simplicity). Third, it seems that there would need to be an independent mechanism that caused God to adopt his plan for creation (else there would be brute complexity). Fourth, there are other features of the universe—e.g. the nature and distribution of horrendous evil—that simply cannot be explained on the theistic hypothesis.

While there are further moves to be made on each side (in assessing the objections raised against the two arguments now on the table), it seems to me that we are already in a position to conclude that Christians should be loath to embrace the conclusion that Collins' argument makes a significant contribution to 'positive apologetics'. (Again, there is much more in Collins' article that deserves discussion, and with which non-believers will almost certainly wish to dissent. Readers interested in pursuing this route should look at Collins' subsequent publications on the same topic, many of which replicate the flaws to be found in the chapter presently under discussion.)

4. Daniel Howard-Snyder discusses the following argument from evil:

1. There is no reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil rather than a lot less.
2. If God exists, then there must be such a reason.
3. (So) God does not exist.

He concedes that we cannot see how any reason we know of, or the combination of all of the reasons we know of, could justify God in permitting so much horrific evil as there is to be found in the world. However, he argues, *first*, that attempts to justify the inference from:

P: There is no reason we know of that would justify God in permitting so much evil, rather than a lot less

to:

1: There is no reason that would justify God in permitting so much evil, rather than a lot less

fail; and, *second*, that there are good reasons to think that this inference is no good.

Howard-Snyder observes that the goodness of the inference from P to 1. depends upon Rowe's Noseeum Assumption, viz: *if there are reasons that justify God in permitting so much evil, then we will very likely see or comprehend those reasons*. If we have reason to be in doubt about this assumption, then we have reason to reject the inference from P to 1. Here, I shall focus on Howard-Snyder's reasons for claiming that there are good reasons for everyone—theist *and non-theist* alike—to be in doubt about Rowe's Noseeum Assumption.

First, Howard-Snyder claims that there are two quite direct reasons for being sceptical about Rowe's Noseeum Assumption. On the one hand, 'it takes the insights attainable by finite, fallible human beings as an adequate indication of what is available in the way of reasons to an omniscient, omnipotent being'. And, on the other hand, 'it involves trying to determine whether there is a so-and-so in a territory the extent and composition of which is largely unknown to us'. (Both quotes are due to William Alston.) Various analogies drawn with cases in which there are limitations on expertise, or extent of view, seem to support the suggestion that God might very well have reasons for permitting so much evil that we are not at all likely to be able to comprehend.

Second, Howard-Snyder claims that it would not be surprising if there has been periodic progress in the discovery of intrinsic goods by human beings, and hence that it would not be surprising if there are intrinsic goods that human beings have not yet discovered. But, if this is right, then it should not be surprising that there are goods of which we are ignorant, but of which God is not ignorant.

Third, Howard-Snyder claims that it seems plausible to suppose that the complexity involved in certain states of affairs plainly makes it extraordinarily difficult for us to assess the intrinsic goodness of those states of affairs. But, if there are reasons that justify God in permitting so much evil, then it seems plausible to suppose that those reasons have to do with matters of extraordinary complexity. And, if this is right, then, once again, it should not be surprising that there are reasons that justify God in permitting so much evil, but that we are not able to discern.

I'm inclined to think that these arguments can make a significant contribution to 'negative apologetics'; they can help non-believers to see how Christians might reasonably respond in the face of the amount of horrendous evil that is to be found in the world. That is, it seems to me that if you are already strongly committed to the claim that God exists, and if you can't find any reason that would justify God in permitting the amounts and kinds of horrendous evils to be found in the world, then the kinds of considerations to which Howard-Snyder appeals may well be considerations to which it is reasonable for you to appeal. (Of course, there are many non-believers who will disagree with me here. Given that the very same response would be available to believers no matter how bad the world were, one might think that the response is not entirely respectable. I don't propose to pursue these considerations here.)

As I indicated earlier, it also seems to me that, if you are a non-believer who can't find any reason that would justify God in permitting the amounts and kinds of horrendous evils to be found in the world, then, if you suppose that Christians are rationally required to fall back on the kinds of considerations to which Howard-Snyder appeals, you will find here further reason for supposing that there are no good reasons for you to embrace Christian beliefs. In particular, if we accept that people are not likely to have insights into the reasons (motives, values) of God, and if we accept that reality is too complex (and our knowledge of intrinsic value too limited) for us to be able to provide a proper accounting of its value, then it is hard to see how we non-believers could have any reason to accept the claim that the hypothesis that the Christian God exists is even weakly supported by the available evidence. If—revelation and scripture apart—we have no good way of determining what God would do, or what the value of the universe really is, then the prospects for 'positive apologetics' are surely very dim indeed.

5. Hawthorne—formerly 'O'Leary-Hawthorn*e*', not as misspelled in the work under review—discusses two core arguments for atheism.

The first core argument runs as follows:

1. If theism is worth taking seriously, this is either because theism is knowable *a priori* or else because there is good evidence—direct perceptual evidence, or explanatory evidence—for theism.
2. Theism is not knowable *a priori*.
3. There is no good evidence—direct perceptual evidence, or explanatory evidence—for theism.
4. (Therefore) Theism is not worth taking seriously.

In response to this argument, Hawthorne—perhaps surprisingly—challenges the second premise. The key idea is that faith is a gift that transforms people into beings for whom the sum of the core claims of Christianity is primitively and immediately compelling. Given this key idea, 'it is relatively clear that the reasonableness of theism requires neither evidence nor accessibility by the natural light of reason according to human beings.' (128) Of course, as Hawthorne acknowledges, one would hardly expect non-believers to be satisfied with this response:

> The atheist may complain at this point: 'But how do I know that your faith is a gift as opposed to an illusion?' That is precisely a complaint that one should expect from someone who lacks the gift of faith. … Our inability to pacify a group of atheists who lack the gift of faith need not oblige us to become less convinced of theism. (128)

Hawthorne also challenges the third premise of the above argument, at least up to a point. He insists that many Christians will quite properly claim that they have had religious experiences that provide them with good reasons ('direct perceptual evidence') for their beliefs. But, of course, even if this claim is allowed to stand, non-believers will insist that this is not good evidence that is available to *them*. Perhaps, then, Christians might try to claim that the doctrines of Christianity have some kind of explanatory power, even for non-believers. But Hawthorne is sceptical of this tack:

> Many contemporary philosophers—including Christian philosophers—are pretty convinced that one cannot reasonably expect people to come to believe Christian doctrine on the basis of its explanatory power. … Those who agree with me that [the standard theistic arguments] do not, on their own, make belief in Christianity reasonable will hold that if someone has no compelling religious experiences and lacks the gift of faith then he is indeed poorly placed to reasonably treat anything as evidence for theism. (129)

So, on Hawthorne's own account, the needs of 'negative apologetics' are best served by conceding that the prospects for 'positive apologetics' are extremely dim: the core evidential argument for atheism is defeated in a way that makes it clear that no argument for Christianity is such that it ought to persuade non-believers to become Christians, on pain of conviction of some kind of irrationality.

The second core argument that Hawthorne considers is not set out explicitly. I think that it runs something like this:

1. If Christianity is worth taking seriously, then there should be clear markers of its superiority to other systems of belief.
2. But markers of the clear superiority of Christianity to other systems of belief are manifestly absent: it is merely one of many wildly different systems of religious belief, all of which are grounded in things—e.g. fear of death—that have

nothing to do with the subject matter that those beliefs are about, and all of which make substantial contributions to the evil that is to be found on our planet.

3. So Christianity is not worth taking seriously.

In response to this argument, Hawthorne notes, at least *inter alia*, that non-believers all subscribe to systems of belief that are merely one amongst many wildly different systems of belief, that in many cases these systems of belief are grounded in things that have nothing to do with the subject matter of those beliefs, and that these systems of belief make a substantial contribution to the evil that is to be found on our planet. As Hawthorne observes, 'the category of arguments that we are considering run some considerable risk of committing the genetic fallacy' (134).

So far, so good: I don't see much to complain about in this discussion. Hawthorne concludes his discussion as follows:

> It is no surprise to anyone to learn that atheism is widespread in the contemporary academic community. What is surprising is to see how tenuous the arguments that favour atheism are. … [W]e have taken a brief look at some of the ones more commonly offered and shown why they are, on the whole, something far less than rationally compelling.

Why shouldn't Hawthorne be surprised by the fact that atheism is widespread in the contemporary academic community? After all, on his own account, the distribution of atheism is determined by the distribution of the gift of faith from a being whose reasons and intentions we cannot even begin to fathom. On this account, it is hard to see why one should expect less—or more—incidence of Christian belief in the contemporary academic community than in any other community whose membership is not determined by facts about religious belief.

Moreover, why should Hawthorne—or anyone else—be surprised by the tenuous nature of arguments that favour atheism, given the demanding standard that is set for these arguments? It seems to me that, where there are perennially contested propositions—e.g. that people have libertarian free will, or that only the present moment exists, or that there are objective values—one should be quite confident before one turns to the details of these debates that there are no extant *persuasive* arguments for or against these propositions, i.e. arguments capable of persuading the brightest and best-informed of those who take the contrary view to change their minds on pain of conviction of irrationality.

6. Miller discusses a range of questions about the connections between Christian faith and human reason. In particular, he considers (i) whether Christian faith is or must be opposed to human reason; (ii) how 'faith' and 'reason' should be understood; and (iii) what are the implications of the Christian doctrines of creation, fall and redemption for Christian accounts of what it is possible for human beings to know and to rationally believe.

Under the first head, Miller is particularly concerned to address those Christians who hold that faith and reason are opposed to one another, and those Christians who suppose that reason can be used to prove the truth of theism or the Christian faith by way of rational arguments based on incontrovertible evidence. Here, Miller follows Plantinga in claiming that belief in God is or can be rational even though it is not and perhaps cannot be the conclusion of reasoning that should convince virtually anyone who is competent, adequately informed and intellectually honest and that goes by way of an argument with premises that should be accepted by all parties using rules of inference acceptable to all parties. Furthermore, Miller follows Plantinga in claiming that rational Christian belief can be based, or grounded, in the right kinds of experiences—e.g. experiences in which there is encounter with God's love, forgiveness, guidance, disapproval, etc. Miller writes:

> There is not, as I see it, nearly as much rational support for theistic beliefs, especially for distinctively Christian beliefs, in objective reasoning as there is in experience. There are, I suspect, no beliefs which virtually every rational person would accept and from which virtually every rational person would infer the truth of Christianity. (144)

And:

> Arguments have premises. To prove something to someone by way of argument requires that it follows from premises accepted by that person. If sin has left people without a belief in God, why should we assume that they have retained beliefs which they regard as certain and from which it obviously follows that there is a God? (149)

Hence, as the second quotation here makes clear, Miller also follows Plantinga in supposing that, while it is natural for people to hold Christian beliefs, the natural tendency to form Christian beliefs can be defeated by the impact of sin on human belief-forming structures. (In short, Miller holds that there is no opposition between faith and reason, but that there is good reason for Christians to suppose that unaided reason cannot provide compelling reasons for Christian belief. Again, it is worth pointing out here that non-believers who are prepared to accept that Plantinga's reformed epistemology has a role to play in 'negative apologetics' are surely entitled to conclude that the prospects for 'positive apologetics' are correspondingly dimmed.)

Under the second head, Miller distinguishes three different meanings of 'faith'—'a set of beliefs that Christians have typically held to be true and central to Christianity', 'believing that some important set of [Christian] claims or doctrines is true … [and] having some sort of personal relationship with God', 'a specific way of acquiring knowledge and justifying belief … by way of divine revelation'—and three different meanings of 'reason'—'the proper use of human cognitive faculties', 'the proper use of natural human faculties in interactions with the natural world', 'aligning beliefs with the truth by thinking carefully about what is implied by those beliefs'.

Under the third head, Miller claims: (i) that Christians do not have good reason to think that God has designed us in such a way that—even prior to the fall—our honest truth-seeking is infallible, though they do have good reason to think that a reliance on reason will enhance rather than diminish the likelihood that they believe the truth and avoid error (154); (ii) that Christians have good reason to hold that the function of cognitive faculties is impaired by sin in such a way that awareness of God is particularly subject to impairment, and in such a way that the noetic effects of sin are most pronounced in moral and religious matters (155); and (iii) that the best way to understand how there can be revelations to Christians by the Holy Spirit is to suppose that truly basic confidence, that God is at work in a very special sort of way in the Christian community and Christian church, is directly grounded in experience (157).

7. O'Connor examines religious pluralism, i.e., roughly, the claim that all religions are true, or that all religions are paths to the same Ultimate Reality. In particular, O'Connor argues: (i) that the main pluralist arguments against 'exclusivist' Christian belief fail; and (ii) that the main arguments in favour of [the strongest formulation of] religious pluralism also fail. While it may be that facts about religious diversity can provide grounds for non-belief, it is clear that atheistic non-believers need have no stake in the outcome of this dispute between exclusivists and pluralists: if there are no supernatural entities, then theistic religions are all mistaken, whether or not they are all paths to the same Ultimate Reality.

O'Connor examines three pluralist arguments against exclusivist Christian belief.

First, there is John Hick's claim that one must embrace pluralism in order to 'avoid the implausibly arbitrary dogma that religious experience is all delusory with the single exception of the particular form enjoyed by the one who is speaking' (168, citing Hick *An Interpretation of Religion*, 1989, 235). Since all religions appear to be roughly equal with respect to the goal of moving from self-centredness to Ultimate-Reality-centredness—the common goal of religions according to Hick and other pluralists—one might be tempted to say that there can be no non-arbitrary reason for supposing that Christian experiences of Ultimate Reality are alone reliable, while experiences of Ultimate Reality in other religious traditions are wholly illusory. Against this 'No Difference in Spiritual Fruits' objection, O'Connor replies, roughly, that it is open to Christians to hold that there are non-illusory experiences of God in other religious traditions that are misdescribed under the influence of false religious teachings. Moreover, O'Conner adds that:

> None of us can say to what extent our supposed experiences of God are the result of self-delusion or of some unreliable source. Christians themselves are taught to look on their religious experiences with some degree of caution and to test whether any content they have (purporting to reveal something about God's nature or his purposes) are consistent with authoritative teaching. (170)

It is interesting to consider how this claim sits with the argument that Hawthorne employs to resist the core atheistic argument from lack of evidence. According to Hawthorne, the pillars of reasonable Christian belief are *compelling religious experience* and *the gift of*

faith. But there is at least some reason to read O'Connor as claiming that the real pillar of reasonable Christian belief is *authoritative teaching*: for faith and religious experience are to be found in all of the world's religions, and Christians ought not to say that this faith and religious experience is wholly illusory in the case of all of the religions apart from Christianity.

Second, there is the 'Arrogance' objection, which is based on the claim that 'for any belief of yours, once you become aware (a) that others disagree with it and (b) that you have no argument on its behalf that is likely to convince all or most of the reasonable, good-intentioned people who disagree with you, then it would be arrogant of you to continue holding that belief' (171). And, third, there is the 'Irrationality' objection, which is based on the claim that 'For any belief of yours, once you become aware both that others disagree with it and that you have no argument on its behalf that is likely to convince all or most of those dissenters that are relevantly informed, and of good will, it would be irrational of you to continue holding that belief' (173). As O'Connor points out, it is pretty plausible to maintain that both of these objections are self-defeating, or at any rate incapable of serious intellectual defence. In particular, how could you consistently endorse either of these claims, once you take account of the obvious point that not everyone accepts them?

O'Connor suggests—again plausibly, I think—that attempts to make the doctrine of religious pluralism more precise typically take the following form:

> Religious beliefs that have formed within major religious traditions such as Christianity are culturally conditioned responses to Ultimate Reality. In itself, [Ultimate Reality] is beyond all of the categories religious believers apply to it. Many devout persons of every established faith experience [Ultimate Reality], but never as it really is (something which is unknowable), but only through one or another of its many manifestations, all of which are conditioned by religious tradition. This is an inevitable consequence of the gulf between this Ultimate Reality and our finite minds. … We cannot worship [Ultimate Reality] 'as it really is' since we are intellectually incapable of grasping it this way. None of the distinctions which structure our religious experience can apply to it, not even as an approximation or by analogy. 'As it really is', [Ultimate Reality] is neither personal nor impersonal, one nor many, good nor evil. (176)

But, as O'Connor says, it is highly doubtful that religious pluralism, as thus characterised, is coherent. If we way that Ultimate Reality is not one, and that Ultimate Reality is not not one, then we simply contradict ourselves. Moreover, we cannot evade the contradiction by claiming that the predicate 'is one' is vague. Indeed, unless we maintain that all religions agree on all claims of the form 'Ultimate Reality is F', where the predicate 'F' is not vague, it seems that religious pluralism cannot avoid incoherence. Yet the worlds religions do disagree on claims of the form 'Ultimate Reality is F', where 'F' is not vague. (It would be interesting to consider how O'Connor's argument against religious pluralism bears on that part of the Christian theological tradition that claims that no predicative sentence of the form 'God is F' can be true, and that all predicative

sentences of the form ‘God is not F’ are true. I think that it should not be too hard to show that ‘negative theology’ is incoherent, using similar argumentative strategies.)

8. Collins addresses the suggestion that the major Eastern religions—Hinduism and Buddhism—offer a viable alternative worldview to Western theism, i.e. to the doctrinal core that is shared by Christianity, Islam and Judaism. He defends the following three claims: (i) to the extent that the Sankara school of Hinduism and the Mahayana school of Buddhism make positive claims about reality, these claims are incoherent; (ii) Theravada Buddhism is plainly less plausible than the doctrinal core of Christian theism; and (iii) at least superficially, the theistic schools of Hinduism—the Ramanuja and Madhva schools—do offer philosophically viable alternatives to Western theism. Moreover, on the basis of these three claims, he draws the conclusion that ‘the primary apologetic challenge the major world religions present Christianity is not that of challenging the belief in a personal, omnipotent, all good God, but rather that of providing alternative conceptions of God’s relation to the world and of how God has acted in human history’ (216).

It is not entirely clear to me that the final conclusion that Collins draws here is correct, even if the preliminary claims that he makes are granted. As he notes, key elements of many Eastern religions include claims about *reincarnation*, claims about *karma*, claims about *other universes and realities*, and commitment to the idea that salvation consists in *liberation from the cycle of rebirths* and its associated karma. But, from the standpoint of non-believers, it is not clear why we should suppose that the doctrinal core of Christianity, Islam and Judaism is evidently more plausible than views that reject some of the key components of that doctrinal core, and incorporate some of the characteristic elements of Eastern religions. Consider, for example, a view which supposes that a knowledgeable and powerful, but evil, God created a multi-verse in which there is a cycle of rebirth and associated karma involving cross-universe recycling, and in which all sentient creatures begin their first cycle in the universe that we currently occupy. Is there really good reason for *me*—and other similarly placed non-believers—to suppose that this view suffers by comparison with the doctrinal core of Christianity, Islam and Judaism? By their own lights, Christians may well have good reasons to think that this kind of view is not an equal competitor with the doctrinal core of Western theism—but that is no good reason to deny that, by the lights of non-believers, the two views may be very much on a doxastic par.

9. Davison discusses questions about the compatibility of human freedom with the exercise of divine power (and divine providence), and the existence of divine knowledge. His aim is to set out the range of reasonable belief in these questions, and he concludes with the observation that:

> Probably the controversies surrounding these issues will never be resolved to everyone’s satisfaction because the issues are so complicated, deep, and hard to assess. This doesn’t mean that we should stop thinking about these issues or that we should never make up our own minds about them, but it does mean that we should be tolerant of those who hold contrary views. (237)

The two questions that prompt Davison's enquiry are: (1) How can human beings have any control over anything if God has total providential control over the universe? (*The Power Question*); and (2) How can human beings have any freedom of choice if God has complete knowledge of the future? (*The Knowledge Question*).

In order to set out the range of possible answers to these questions, Davison provides a number of preliminary clarifications, and draws a number of distinctions.

First, he notes that Christianity is committed to the claim that there are three aspects of God's providence for the created universe, viz. (i) God's bringing the world into being from nothing at the first instant of time (creation *ex nihilo*); (ii) God's sustaining the world in being from moment to moment (conservation); and (iii) God's cooperating with the activities of every created thing (concurrence).

Second, he adverts to the standard philosophical distinction between compatibilist and libertarian conceptions of human freedom. Here, Davison himself notes that he endorses the libertarian conception (since it makes more sense of moral responsibility, absolves God of responsibility for moral evil, and is needed for plausible accounts of eternal punishment. However, Davison also acknowledges that the dispute between compatibilists and libertarians—even amongst Christians—is hardly one that can be settled once and for all.

Third, Davison distinguishes between three different conceptions of control: (i) an agent controls an event in the *strong sense* iff the agent brings about the event without the independent contribution of any other agents, and the agent could have prevented the occurrence of the event; (ii) an agent controls an event in the *middle sense* iff the agent cooperates with another agent in bringing about the event, and the agent could have prevented the occurrence of the event; and (iii) an agent controls an event in the *weak sense* iff the agent did not bring about the event (at all) but the agent could have prevented the occurrence of the event.

Fourth, using this taxonomy of conceptions of agent control, Davison distinguishes three different theories of divine providence: (i) God controls every event in the strong sense (Strong Providence); (ii) God controls some events in the strong sense, and all other events—including those that involve free human choices—in the middle sense (Middle Providence); (iii) God only exercises weak control over free human choices (Weak Providence). Of course, this taxonomy is hardly complete; but the many other conceptions of divine providence that might be considered are ignored in Davison's discussion.

Fifth, Davison distinguishes three views that one might take about God's knowledge of the future: (i) God doesn't know the future because there is nothing to know (Open Future); (ii) God doesn't know the future because God is not in time (Timeless Eternity); and (iii) God knows what free agents will do because God has 'middle knowledge' of

counterfactuals of (libertarian) freedom, i.e. of what people with libertarian freedom would freely do if placed in given possible situations (Molinism).

Davison's preferred answer to the questions that prompt his enquiry are given by the package of Middle Knowledge, Middle Providence, and Libertarianism. I am not at all convinced that this package of views is consistent. (See my "Arguments from Moral Evil", *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion*, forthcoming, for the details.) However, even if I am right about this, it is clear that there is a large range of views here that require detailed examination. One conclusion that non-believers might be tempted to draw on the basis of the discussion in this chapter—if they were not already persuaded of the truth of this claim—is that the task of 'negative apologetics' is certainly no easy one, even in this much-discussed area.

10. Senor takes on the difficulty task of defending the coherence of the central Christological claims that God became incarnate in Jesus, and that the Godhead is triune. More exactly, Senor offers responses to arguments that seek to convince Christians that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are simply incoherent.

Senor begins with the dispute about Incarnation. Christians claim that Jesus Christ, a human being, is identical to God the Son. But, if Jesus is 'fully God', then he must be an uncreated creator. And, if Jesus is 'fully human', then he must be created. So the Christian claim about the Incarnation leads directly to contradiction.

In response to this argument, Senor denies the claim that, if Jesus is 'fully human', then he must be created. If one supposes that it is essential to being (fully) human that one is limited in power, then one will endorse the claim that, if Jesus is fully human, then he must be created. But, if one supposes that it is merely 'rather common' for (fully) human creatures to be limited in power, then one may recognise that it is perfectly possible for Jesus to be (fully) human and yet not limited in power.

Even if this strategy avoids the charge of logical incoherence, it raises other concerns. It is part of orthodox Christian belief that Jesus shared in the human condition, but it is hard to see how any being that is both omnipotent and omniscient can do that. Moreover, there is scriptural evidence that Jesus was not omniscient (e.g. Matthew 24:36). In the face of these worries, there are several standard responses. A first standard response—kenoticism—holds that God the Son gave up features of his divine existence in order to take on humanity. (But, as Senor points out, while this response might help with the 'fully human' requirement, it seems to imperil the 'fully God' requirement.) A second standard response—the Two Minds view—holds that the Incarnate God has two minds, one human and one divine (or, perhaps, that the Incarnate God has a conscious mind that is human, and a subconscious mind that is Divine). On this response, though, it seems that God the Son is a fusion of three distinct beings, one of which is a human body, another of which is a human mind, and the third of which is a divine mind. A third standard response—a variant of the second—holds that, while the Incarnate God has only one mind, it has two wills, one human and one divine. While this response overcomes the

worry about the distinctness of the divine and human individuals, it does so at the expense of intelligibility: for how could there be two wills in a single mind?

Senor claims that his discussion shows how we might conceive of the Incarnation, even though we have no way of telling whether the 'model' is true. ('I have set out a model which shows us how we might conceive of the Incarnation. I don't claim to know that this model is true. I do claim, however, that (i) it is consistent with our general strategy for dealing with the logical problems the doctrine of the Incarnation allegedly possesses, (ii) it is consistent with the full humanity of Christ and the biblical record, and (iii) we have no good reason to think it is false.' (252)) However, I doubt that there are many non-believers who would be prepared to say that Senor's 'model' shows to them that it is possible to form a clear and consistent conception of the Incarnation. On the one hand, I do not think that Senor's response to the argument for incoherence really cuts to the heart of the matter. (What does it mean to say that something is '*fully* human' or '*fully* divine'? Moreover, even setting that question aside, aren't there other properties—apart from omnipotence and omniscience—that raise *prima facie* challenges to the coherence of the doctrine of the Incarnation? Can a human being be omnipresent? Can a human being be located outside of time? Can a human being be the creator and sustainer of all things?) And, on the other hand, I see good reason to doubt that Senor has managed to provide even one fully intelligible model of the Incarnation. Certainly, I see no reason to suppose that these models ought to persuade *non-believers* that there is a coherent doctrine in the offing.

As I have already indicated, the other dispute that Senor takes up concerns the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians claim that the Godhead is three persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) and yet a single substance. That is, while God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are not identical, they are nonetheless one.

Senor notes that there are two accounts of the Trinity that must be avoided on grounds of unorthodoxy. On the one hand, Christians reject *modalism*, i.e. the claim that there are three modes or manifestations of a single divine being. On the other hand, Christians reject *tritheism*, i.e. the claim that there are three distinct divine persons who are somehow closely related to one another. In order to navigate between these two 'extremes', Senor proposes that Christians say that the Godhead consists of three centres of will and cognition that are necessarily aligned in such a way that there is no possibility of conflict between them. (This is the proposal of 'social trinitarianism'.)

I doubt that non-believers should be prepared to allow that this account makes the doctrine of the Trinity intelligible to them. If there are really three centres of will—and not merely one—and if we suppose that, as many Christians suppose, the Godhead possesses libertarian freedom, then it is very hard to understand how those centres of will could be necessarily aligned in such a way that there is no possibility of conflict between them. After all—on the libertarian conception of freedom—*the* essential property of wills is that they have libertarian freedom. But, if wills have libertarian freedom, then there just is no way that they can be necessarily aligned. If the Godhead possesses libertarian freedom, and if it has no subparts that fail to be necessarily aligned in such a way that

there is no possibility of conflict between them, then it seems to *me* that one ought to say that the Godhead possesses but one will. Once again, the discussion here seems to me to reinforce the implausibility of the claim that the program of positive apologetics is capable of being carried out: how could anyone reasonably suppose that there are arguments that ought, on pain of conviction of irrationality, to persuade non-believers (and, in particular, atheists) of the truth of Christianity, when it is so uncertain that Christians even have the means to persuade those non-believers that the central claims of Christianity are so much as intelligible?

11. Merricks takes as his goal the task of *defending* Christian doctrines about resurrection and eternal life against certain kinds of objections. He does not claim to be able to show that these doctrines are true; indeed, he says that he thinks that Christians *only* know that these doctrines are true by way of scripture.

According to Christian doctrine, all will have a bodily resurrection at an appropriate time in the future. This doctrine raises various puzzles. How are bodies resurrected? Do we have the very same bodies when we are resurrected? Does it even make sense to suppose that we have the very same bodies when we are resurrected? (Particularly if we add that resurrection bodies are 'changed' and 'glorified'!) And what does resurrection of the *body* have to do with eternal life? (After all, according to many Christians, we are souls—non-physical, spiritual entities—so why do we need a bodily resurrection?)

On the question of *how* bodies might be resurrected, Merricks offers a vigorous critique of the 'reassembly of parts' view, i.e. the view that, at the resurrection, bodies are reassembled from their scattered smallest parts. (Perhaps some things are smallest parts of more than one body. Perhaps some smallest parts are destroyed, and hence unavailable at the time of resurrection. And surely there is no non-arbitrary collection of smallest parts that cries out for reassembly in the resurrection of any given person.) He then notes that there is no better alternative view that anyone has yet proposed. 'But the fact that we cannot see how resurrection is supposed to go, that we cannot explain what God does to bring an annihilated body back into existence, does not imply that God's doing that is impossible; it implies only that we are ignorant.' (276)

On the question of what the resurrection of the body has to do with eternal life, Merricks speculatively endorses Christian physicalism, i.e. the view that human beings do not have non-physical souls, but rather are the very same thing as their physical bodies. While this view is unorthodox, Merricks makes a pretty good case that it sits better with some passages of scripture than does Christian dualism; and he also makes a plausible case that his view is much better placed to explain why the Christian hope for eternal life is tied to a future *bodily* resurrection.

Merrick's defence of Christian physicalism has interesting consequences for 'positive apologetics', since it seemingly undermines certain kinds of arguments [for the existence of God] from consciousness and the nature of mind that have been defended recently by Christian dualists (e.g. Swinburne). Moreover, it raises interesting questions about, for

example, freedom of will and the supervenience of the mental on the physical. But this is not an appropriate place to try to explore these considerations further.

12. Murray tries to respond to the charge that, on the traditional Christian view of hell, God is either unjust or unloving. First, he offers three 'models' for understanding the traditional doctrine of hell. Second, he canvasses the annihilationist and universalist alternatives to that traditional doctrine. And, third, he relies on the last of his 'models' in responding to the allegations that are his central concern.

On the 'Penalty' model, sinners incur the penalty of 'spiritual death', i.e. separation from God for all eternity. However, those (and only those) who are willing to allow this penalty to be paid on their behalf by Christ—'by repenting of their former ways and placing their faith in Christ's work on the cross and his victory in resurrection' (291)—can escape the torments of hell. A natural objection to this model is that, since no offence that finite beings could commit in a finite time could merit an infinite punishment, the penalty imposed in the 'Penalty' model is manifestly unjust. Murray replies: (1) that sinners might only receive a finite sentence that is forever extended because they re-offend while in hell; and (2) that all sin has infinite weight because all sin involves transgression against an infinite being. (To the further objection that some sins are worse than others, Murray insists that, while even the most minor sin merits infinite punishment, many sins merit more punishment—say, ten times as much. But, on plausible accounts of instantiated infinities, this response is incoherent: $10.\aleph_0 = \aleph_0$. So it seems that the second reply won't do. But the first reply is also problematic: given that reprobate sinners have libertarian freedom, it is certainly possible for some of them not to re-offend, no matter how long they spend in hell. So there is no guarantee that a finite sentence can be justifiably extended throughout all eternity.) According to Murray, the 'Penalty' model is 'completely defensible' (295); I doubt that many non-believers will concur. (Indeed, many non-believers surely find endorsement of the 'Penalty' model morally abhorrent. But let's not pursue that kind of consideration here.)

On the 'Natural Consequences' model, God intends earthly life to act as a time of soul-making, i.e. as a time when people have powers to make free choices to be a person of one sort or another. Those who become 'God-lovers' naturally end up entering into the divine presence, to love and enjoy God forever; those who become 'God-haters' naturally end up eternally separated from God (since accepting them into God's presence would be utterly odious to them, and would amount to robbing them of the freedom of self-determination that alone makes their lives significant). Importantly, on this view, we are to think of those in heaven and hell as those who are maximally set in their ways, i.e. as disposed to act as lovers or haters of God without fail. (298) Moreover, it is only by God's gift of grace that 'God-lovers' naturally end up entering into the divine presence: one cannot become a 'God-lover' who is maximally set in her ways without divine assistance. According to Murray, a natural objection to make to the view concerns those who die prematurely, and those who convert late in life, i.e. those who don't get the chance to become 'God-lovers' who are maximally set in their ways. Here, Murray suggests that God can transform these people in accordance with the decisions that they would have made (about whether or not to turn to God). But, if God has middle

knowledge of the kind mentioned here, then there is a serious threat that the 'Natural Consequences' model lapses into incoherence. If—as Murray insists—God has the *aim* that all will see that being a 'God-lover' is something to value over all else, then surely God cannot know in advance of particular people that they will not be 'God-lovers'. Moreover—even if one disputes the claim that it is incoherent to suppose that a fully rational being might take as an aim that which the being in question already knows with certainty will not be attained—one might also object to this model on the grounds that it is not even remotely psychologically plausible to suppose that people are 'maximally set in their ways'—i.e. disposed to act in certain ways *without fail*—when they die.

As Murray notes, the 'Natural Consequences' model seems to leave no role for the Atonement. So Murray proposes—and endorses—a 'Hybrid' model which adds to the 'Natural Consequences' model the further claim that sin also carries a penalty that we cannot pay on our own. 'So the atonement on the cross is a necessary condition for receiving divine grace, which in turn is necessary for being made fit for spending eternity in God's presence' (304). While Murray claims that this has the advantages of both of the previously discussed models, it seems to me to be worth emphasising that it also has the disadvantages of both models as well. But let's set this consideration aside, and turn instead to further objections that might be made, along the following lines. If the 'Hybrid' model is true, then:

1. God is unjust because the punishment in hell does not fit the crime.
2. God is unjust because some who go to hell never have a chance to hear or understand the gospel.
3. God is unloving because true love would not allow the beloved to suffer such a fate.
4. God is unloving because he would not make the eternal consequences of heaven and hell depend on what we think and choose in earthly lives of this sort.

Murray's answers: Ad 1: No, the punishment does fit the crime (cf. the discussion above). Ad 2: Maybe *none* of those who never hear would believe if they did hear. Maybe all of the information that is needed is available to all, whether or not they have the chance to hear or read the gospels. Maybe those who don't hear in this life get a chance to hear after death and before judgment. In any case, God owes none of his fallen creatures salvation—so how could his actions be unjust? Ad 3: God did send his Son to cancel the penalty of sin. Moreover, for God to block the 'natural consequences' would be to make freedom meaningless. 'For freedom to be meaningful, it is not only true that we must be able to choose amongst alternatives. It must also be the case that the course of events varies with out choices. … To interfere [by blocking the 'natural consequences' would be to remove the meaningfulness of ... freedom, and this would be to undermine both … human dignity and the real purpose of earthly life: autonomous soul-making.' (311) Ad 4: God could not make the task clearer without removing the freedom necessary for soul-making. Moreover, there is no clear reason to say that the tools that God has given us are insufficient for the task of life.

As we noted earlier, some Christians have proposed that those who end up in hell receive the (finite) penalty merited by their sins, and are then annihilated. Against this suggestion, Murray objects that it is odd to judge that, in eternity, capital punishment is less severe than a life sentence, whereas, on earth, the reverse is true. But what is the mystery about this? In hell, you have a guarantee of unending misery that makes annihilation a preferred option. But, on earth, a life sentence in jail might well be preferable to death. After all, jail *need not* be unending misery on the same scale of suffering; indeed, on the Christian account, there is no way that it *could* be.

13. Stewart looks at 'ways Christians can and should think about the relationship between science and religious belief' (320). Initially, Stewart's focus is on what he claims to be mistaken views of the relationship between science and religious belief; later, he turns to consider ways in which the relationship might be more properly conceived.

Some people—echoing Laplace—claim that science renders religious belief in God superfluous. To them, Stewart says: '[T]he existence of God is not best regarded as a large-scale hypothesis postulated to explain anything, let alone those things science cannot explain. We arrive at our knowledge of God by way of revelation, both 'generally' (through creation) and 'specially' (in Jesus Christ, as well as through Scriptures and the Church)' (322). But it seems to me that to say this is to admit that 'positive apologetics' is a hopeless task, and to reject the work of Davis, Collins, et al. as so much wasted labour. Whither (say) the fine-tuning argument if the existence of God is not properly thought of as an explanatory hypothesis?

Some people claim that science makes it very likely that there is no God. To them, Stewart says: 'Many scientists … maintain that the scientific process assumes a kind of methodological naturalism. This methodological commitment is, these scientists insist, distinct from metaphysical naturalism, or a commitment to naturalism as an overall metaphysical outlook. Methodological naturalism stipulates that scientific accounts must refer to wholly natural phenomena without reference to immediate or direct contributions by non-natural or supernatural forces or agents. … It may be perfectly acceptable to talk about non-natural or supernatural activity, but such talk does not, strictly speaking, belong to science. To call this methodological naturalism serves to highlight the fact that it is a way of characterising a particular methodology, nothing more. It does not suggest (or is at least not normally intended to suggest) a larger metaphysical or ontological claim about what sort of activity is or it not possible in the real world.' (324) Moreover, Stewart goes on to add that: '[E]ven if one did (mistakenly) think that methodological naturalism requires a commitment to metaphysical naturalism there is, on the face of it, something logically suspect about the claim that 'science proves metaphysical naturalism'. More precisely, this argument seems to commit the fallacy logicians call 'begging the question'—assuming the very thing one is attempting to prove.' (325) Here, Stewart makes the kind of conflation, of considerations about arguments and persuasiveness with considerations about reasons and rationality, that, in my view, is characteristic of so much contemporary philosophy of religion. It could perfectly well be that, given the findings of modern science, metaphysical naturalism is very likely to be true (and Christianity is very unlikely to be true), even though—because science presupposes naturalism for

methodological purposes—it would be question-begging simply to assert against Christians that, given modern science, metaphysical naturalism is very likely to be true. Nothing in what Stewart says gives non-believers any reason to give up the claim that, given the findings of modern science, metaphysical naturalism is very likely to be true.

Some people endorse what Stewart calls 'The Conflict Thesis', i.e. the claim that science and religion are inherently opposed to one another' (325). Against this claim, Stewart objects: (1) that the Conflict Thesis is historically misleading; and (2) that defences of the Conflict Thesis exaggerate the force or status of scientific claims about the world.

Under the first head, Stewart notes that the Conflict Thesis 'completely ignores the historical reliance of science on religion for presupposition, sanction, and in some cases, even motivation' (326). Moreover, he insists that it is a mistake to see either Galileo or Darwin as a victor in wars between enlightened science and obscurantist religion. In particular, he claims that either 'the thesis of common ancestry' is consistent with Christian theism, or else Christians have good reason to believe that 'the thesis of common ancestry' is false. Finally, Stewart notes that it is not possible to 'eliminate the possibility of tension between science and [Christian] grasp of scripture' (333), but goes on to insist that 'the tension is often a fruitful one … and calls for a healthy dose of humility with respect to every means of knowledge at our disposal' (333). (In my view, these claims that Stewart makes tend to pull against one another. Typically, when non-believers insist on 'The Conflict Thesis' what they have in mind is precisely the point that there are 'tensions' between science and [Christian] grasp of scripture. In the face of this point, considerations about 'the historical reliance of science on religion for presupposition, sanction, and in some cases, even motivation' are completely beside the point, as are claims about simplistic readings of the history of physics and biology. Given, as even many Christians allow, that science presupposes methodological naturalism—i.e. that 'scientific accounts must refer to wholly natural phenomena without reference to immediate or direct contributions by non-natural or supernatural forces or agents'—it is very hard to see how science could fail to conflict with the views of those Christians who reject 'the thesis of common ancestry' in favour of the doctrine of 'special creation'. No answer that these Christians endorse can be scientific, given this widely held assumption about science. While these Christians might be correct to claim that there is no adequate scientific account of human origins, they can hardly deny that there is some kind of conflict between science and religion at this point.

Under the second head, Stewart aims to 'debunk the idea that religion is (unlike science0 entirely subjective and speculative, whereas science is (unlike religion) all objective and certain' (334). He begins by insisting that, owing to 'the theory-ladenness of observation', science is clearly not *objective*; and that, owing to the abductive nature of scientific inference, science is clearly not *certain*. Moreover, he insists that Christians are better placed than non-believers to explain why the marks of good abductive reasoning—fit with background beliefs, production of novel predictions, simplicity, beauty, and elegance—are conducive to discovery of truth. Finally, he concedes the point made at the end of the preceding paragraph, but insists that Christians need not be bothered by it. In his view, 'The best defences of methodological naturalism connect it with its contribution

to achieving science's goal of understanding the natural world. … Consensus is ... the immediate practical aim of scientific inquiry (while the cognitive aim is truth). Science is something we do together, all of us, and thus it should preclude appeals to metaphysical or religious views that are not universally shared. Otherwise, agreement becomes impossible.' (340) But while there are sensible grounds for adopting methodological naturalism, Christians might insist that the fact that science is thus 'not religiously neutral' might be grounds for preferring a 'theistic science' that does not adopt methodological naturalism as a guiding principle.

There are lots of questions to ask here. First, one might wonder whether anyone could seriously endorse the suggested justification for the adoption of methodological naturalism. In particular, one might well wonder how the preclusion of appeals to 'metaphysical views that are not universally shared' is to work in practice. Does this suggestion entail that scientific cosmology is to be precluded from assuming that the universe is more than 10,000 years old, since this is a 'metaphysical view' that is not universally shared? Is it rather that we are to suppose that those people who work within the framework of standard Big Bang cosmology are not doing science? Surely what we have here is a *reductio* of the claim that this is the 'best defence' that can be offered of methodological naturalism.

To linger on this point a little longer, it seems to me to be absurd to suppose that consensus is the immediate practical aim of scientific inquiry. The immediate practical aims of scientific inquiry are much more plausibly claimed to be technological in nature. But, when it comes to questions of technology, it is not consensus, but rather *success*, that is all important. Moreover—as Kitcher and others have insisted—disagreement is a crucial element in successful scientific communities: scientific progress typically emerges from conflict between those who are strong supporters of conflicting theories. No; at least by the lights of non-believers like me, the reason why it is plausible to suppose that science has come to presuppose methodological naturalism is because—throughout the full sweep of human history—there is not one plausible instance of a case where scientific or technological progress has depended essentially on the incorporation of a supernaturalist assumption into a theory or a piece of reasoning. No one has ever made predictions, or carried out crucial experiments, that have vindicated or supported supernaturalist hypotheses. There are no physical, or chemical, or biological, or geological, or astronomical, or … experiments or observations that count in favour of supernaturalism. By my lights, at least, a plausible inference to the best explanation from the historical record is that there are no supernatural entities that interact causally with the natural world.

14. Cover takes as his goals: (1) the determination of the extent to which 'some strong apologetic strategy—some argument from miracles to the existence of God—is workable' (348); and (2) the provision of a defence of the rationality of Christian belief in miracles. In the end, the position that he arrives at is—by my lights at least—suitably irenic. Cover insists that "the success of defending a rational belief in miracles is in not way dependent upon the success of giving 'an argument from miracles to the existence of God'" (363). Moreover, he says: "So far as I can see, apologetics is about defending the

rationality of the Christian faith, not proving it. There is probably no convincing proof for Naturalism, but it is not thereby irrational to believe that Naturalism is true. There is probably no argument for theism that every rational person must accept, but theism isn't thereby irrational to believe'. (371) "If what is counted as good grounds for believing some claim is to be judged on the basis of the likelihood or reasonableness of other, prior beliefs, then an unbeliever—sharing no such beliefs as those deliverances of religious experience and natural theology and faith might provide—may well lack sufficient grounds for believing in miracles. But the believer needn't be in this position. And the believer who isn't in that position, who aims to defend the rationality of believing in miracles, needn't presume the posture of 'adopting' it by obliging the familiar demand for 'theistically neutral evidence'." (373)

Cover begins by considering the suggestion that an event e is a miracle iff:

(1) e violates at least one law of nature, i.e. e is an anomalous event; and
(2) e is caused by God either directly or though some divine agency

Cover discusses three well-known objections to the suggestion that there could be reasonable belief in miracles, on this account of miracles. First, there is Hume's famous argument that, when we come to weight the evidence from testimony in favour of the claim that an anomalous event has occurred against the evidence for the claim that the allegedly violated law is indeed a law of nature, rationality requires that we always side with the claim that the anomalous event did not occur, and that the alleged law of nature really is a law of nature. Second, there is the objection that if we have evidence for the occurrence of an apparently anomalous event—i.e. an event that violates what we take to be a law of nature—then, to the extent that the evidence is good, the evidence supports the claim that what we previously took to be a law of nature isn't really a law of nature after all. Third, there is the objection that, even if we are warranted in supposing that an anomalous event has occurred, we could have no good reason to suppose that the event was caused by God either directly or through some divine agency. (Perhaps, for example, the bush that bursts into flames spontaneously does so without any cause at all. What reason could there be to prefer the hypothesis that God caused the bush to burst into flames to the hypothesis that the bush burst into flames uncaused?)

In response to the first of these objections, Cover points out that Hume's argument, if successful, would prove far too much. Hume vastly overrates the weight of accumulated experience: we do allow that scientists can discover that what we previously took to be laws of nature are no such thing. Moreover, in the face of the residual thought that—on the Humean conception of laws of nature—it is surely impossible for there to be violations of the laws of nature, Cover suggests that it is a mistake to follow Hume in thinking of miracles as violations of law-like regularities. Rather, we should think of the divine intervention involved in miracles as the bringing about of occurrences that cannot be caused by the natural forces operative in created objects left to themselves. (Exercise for the reader: How does this idea comport with the insistence—manifested, for example, in the chapter by Davison—that God conserves the world in existence, and that God co-operates with the activities of every created thing?) On this alternative account of

miracles, ‘miracles are so to speak ‘gaps in nature’, occurrences having causes about which laws of nature are simply silent. The laws are true, but simply don’t speak to events caused by divine intervention. … Miracles are anomalous—non-nomological, non-lawlike—not because they violate laws of nature, but rather because the laws of nature don’t speak to their causes at all.’(362)

So far, so good. But ‘if the Humean objection emerges as weak overall, the same cannot quite be said of the remaining [two] objections’ (364). For, here, the irenic considerations that I adverted to above cut in. While the second and third objections need cut no ice by the light of theists—i.e. they hardly serve to show that it is irrational to believe in miracles—they surely do serve to show that there is no good ‘positive apologetic’ argument from the occurrence of alleged miracles to the existence of God (and the truth of the sum of the core claims of Christianity). Of course, there is much more to say about particular miracle claims—and, in particular, about whether there is any sufficiently well-attested Christian miracle claim. (Here, there is some interesting material in the later part of Hume’s essay on miracles that is worthy of consideration.) But it seems to be that Christians and non-believers are no more likely to find common ground on the question whether there is reason to believe that miracles have occurred than they are to find common ground on the question whether it is possible for there to be reason to believe that miracles have occurred.

15. Frances Howard-Snyder begins with a discussion of ethical relativism, and then moves to a discussion of the alternative to ethical relativism that Christians endorse. Of course, metaphysical naturalists like me might be inclined to worry that there is an implicit—and insidious—implication buried in this way of structuring the discussion, viz. that metaphysical naturalists, or, at any rate, consistent metaphysical naturalists, are ethical relativists. Since I hold no brief for ethical relativism, I shall not comment further on the criticisms that Howard-Snyder makes of it.

When she turns to Christian ethics, Howard-Snyder begins with a discussion of Divine Command Theory. On this view, an act is right because—and only because—God commands it; and an act is wrong because—and only because—God forbids it. (380)Howard-Snyder points out, inter alia, that this view is subject to serious ‘Euthyphro’ objections—surely God commands certain acts because they are right, and forbids certain acts because they are wrong, rather than the other way around (as the Divine Command Theory would have it)—but adds that these difficulties ‘may not be insurmountable; this appears to be one of those issues on which serious thinking Christians can disagree. (384) Well, maybe. But non-believers are surely entitled to conclude that if *this* is where Christian belief leads, then *this* is another major roadblock in the path of ‘positive apologetics’.

The bulk of Howard-Snyder’s chapter is taken up with discussion of the principles that unify Christian moral teaching and Christian moral thought. In her view, Christianity does offer a distinctive unifying moral principle: the ‘first great commandment’—love God with all your heart, soul and mind—summarises our moral obligation to God; and the ‘second great commandment’—love your neighbour as yourself—summarises our

obligations to other human beings. Of course, there is work to do in explaining how these principles are to be interpreted. Moreover, even when properly interpreted, these principles do not provide a complete guide to moral action: they do not yield an effective decision procedure for moral action, even though 'all the law and the prophets hang on the law f love' (395). In particular, as Howard-Snyder acknowledges, these principles seem to be silent (at least in some cases) on the question of how to resolve conflicts between the interests of our various neighbours. While Howard-Snyder holds that one who truly loves God and truly loves her neighbours can do no wrong—even though she can make mistakes—it seems to me, as I expect it will to other non-believers, that she is very likely mistaken here. If you love God and love your neighbours, but make the wrong choice in a 'trolley case'—choosing to kill twenty rather than one—you stand convicted of a moral wrong, even if your chosen moral code doesn't enjoin you to kill the one rather than the twenty. Sincerity and purity of heart are not enough; morality also requires that you get it right!

16. Blount tries to show that, in believing solely on the basis of scripture that Josiah tore his clothes, one is not being irrational. More exactly, Blount claims that it is because one need not be irrational in believing that the *Bible* is inerrant that one need not be irrational in believing that Josiah tore his clothes. I think that there are reasons why even Christians might doubt that Blount succeeds in his attempts to defend this claim.

Blount begins by offering an account of knowledge: if one reasonably believes that p, and it is true that p, then one knows that p. (This analysis is, I think, mistaken. As Russell pointed out nearly a hundred years ago, one can reasonably form the belief, by looking at a clock at the right time, that is 10:18, when it is in fact 10:18, even though—unbeknownst to one—the clock has stopped. But, in these circumstances, one doesn't know that it is 10:18. Half a century later, Edmund Gettier created an entire philosophical puncture-and-patch industry by constructing other examples to make this same point.)

Blount then points out that the affirmation of inerrancy 'does not amount to affirming a flat-footed literalism which ignores the subtleties of genre and language implicit in the biblical texts' (402). One ought not to confuse the commitment to the doctrine of inerrancy with commitment to a particular set of interpretations of the *Bible*.

Next, Blount says that his remarks are addressed only to Christians. ('Attempts to persuade those who lack faith in Christ that it's reasonable to believe the doctrine of inerrancy aren't likely to have much apologetic value.' (405)) Given this proviso, he feels entitled to assume that scripture is divinely revealed, and that it is possible that scripture is inerrant. Given these assumptions, he offers the following explanation of the reasonableness of believing that Josiah tore his clothes:

> How have I come to believe that Josiah tore his clothes? Well, obviously enough, I've come to believe this by way of reading 2 *Kings* 22. But, on the Christian account of things, this isn't the whole story. For, on that account, a believer who reads 2 *Kings* 22—or any other biblical passage—can expect assistance from the Holy Spirit in doing so. … Assuming that the Holy Spirit has in fact guided this

> reading, the means by which I've come to believe that Josiah tore his clothes include the Spirit's having guided me to do so. And, of course, it's hard to imagine a more reliable means of coming to believe something than the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

But don't Christians sometimes arrive at incompatible beliefs on the basis of reading the *Bible*? Sure!

> But what makes [a person's] belief reasonable (in the absence of convincing reasons for giving it up) is not that [that person] can tell it resulted from the Spirit's work but rather that it actually did result from the Spirit's work. Here it's important to recognise the difference between the Holy Spirit's work in one's life and one's awareness of that work. What makes one's belief reasonable (in the absence of convincing reasons for giving it up) is that the means by which one comes to have it actually are quite likely to lead to truth. (414) … So it seems plausible to regard as reasonable one's belief that the *Bible* is inerrant when that belief seems to have arisen out of one's experience within the Christian community. Or, at least, so it does in the absence of convincing reasons not to hold it. (415)

Perhaps, dear reader, you might fear that there is something slippery in the argument just set out. But let us press on, to consider Blount's treatment of the question of what it would take to show that scripture is not inerrant. According to Blount, if there were contradictions or clear factual errors in the *Bible*, then there would be good reason to deny that it is inerrant. But there are no contradictions in the *Bible*. Consider, for example, the apparent contradiction between Exodus 24:9-11 and Exodus 33:17-20. While the first passage says that Moses and his entourage saw God without dying, the second passage says that no one can see God without dying. But there is no contradiction in this, because the first passage uses the word 'saw' in the sense of 'had a vision', while the second passage uses the word 'see' in something like its literal sense.

Now, let's go back to Josiah and his garments. Is it really reasonable to believe, on the basis of scripture, that it is literally true that Josiah rent his clothes? Mightn't it be preferable to treat this claim as giving metaphorical expression to the fact that Josiah had a hissy fit? What grounds could there be for preferring the literal interpretation to the metaphorical interpretation at this point? Moreover, how can the assumption that the *Bible* is inerrant help us to resolve this point? Thinking about the reasons that are fully accessible to us, it is hard to see how one could have reason to believe the claim that Blount insists one can have reason to believe.

Of course, Blount allows his official account of rationality to take in reasons that are not fully accessible to the agent in question. But, under examination, his key argument seems to go like this:

1. It is possible that scripture is inerrant.
2. (Hence) it is possible that believing what you read in Scripture is a reliable mechanism for forming beliefs.

3. (Hence) It is possible that it is rational to believe what you read in Scripture.

And, of course, the last step here is only justified on the externalist conception of reasons; else, the argument is a *non-sequitur*. Moreover, when Blount writes later that 'given the other beliefs which they have, it might be that those who believe that scripture errs are rational to do so' (422), it is clear there he is there operating with the more familiar, internalist conception of reasons. So it seems doubtful that even Blount fully endorses the implausible externalist conception of reasons that his account requires.