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# ARGUING TO THEISM FROM CONSCIOUSNESS

Ben Page

I provide an argument from consciousness for God's existence. I first consider a version of the argument which is ultimately difficult to evaluate. I then consider a stronger argument, on which consciousness, given our worldly laws of nature, is rather substantial evidence for God's existence. It is this latter argument the paper largely focuses on, both in setting it out and defending it from various objections.

Unlike many other theistic arguments, relatively little attention has been given to arguing from the existence of consciousness to theism. Like others, I find this is surprising.<sup>1</sup> Of those who have argued from consciousness to theism the argument typically proceeds from arguing for one's favourite form of dualism and then positing that God provides the best explanation of the regular causal connections between brain events and mental events.<sup>2</sup> Here I formulate a different argument from consciousness, where I shall argue that the existence of consciousness,<sup>3</sup> be it materialist, dualist, or panpsychist, is more probable/likely on theism than on atheism.<sup>4</sup> As such, given probability theory, the existence of consciousness confirms theism over atheism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hawthorne and Isaacs write, "The argument from consciousness seems very striking (and strangely under-discussed)" ("Misapprehensions about Fine-Tuning," 137).

<sup>2</sup>For example, Moreland, "Searle's Biological Naturalism," Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God*, Moreland, "The Argument from Consciousness," Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 209–212, Swinburne, "The Argument from Colors and Flavors," Adams, *The Virtue of Faith*, 243–262, Kimble and O'Connor, "The Argument from Consciousness Revisited."

<sup>3</sup>I am excluding God's consciousness, so by "consciousness" I mean any consciousness other than God's.

<sup>4</sup>For the purpose of this paper I will only be able to comment on general forms of materialism, dualism, and panpsychism, rather than the numerous specific forms that exist. Supposing my argumentative strategy is helpful, it will be useful in the future to look at specific instances of these theories of consciousness to assess how they affect the argument.

<sup>5</sup>It is important to emphasise that the argument I give has nothing to do with God filling an explanatory gap in explaining consciousness. As such, the argument will run even if there are fully atheistic explanations of consciousness. This is because I am interested in probability rather than explanation. To see a distinction here, note that something could be



Before arguing for this let me first set out what I shall mean by theism and atheism. By theism I shall refer to “bare theism,” by which God(s) is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good and all-loving creator(s) of the universe.<sup>6</sup> By atheism I shall mean naturalism, which holds that there is (or are) no God(s) but only the natural world. One might worry here that naturalism is underspecified, for it seems that there might be different forms of naturalism,<sup>7</sup> perhaps some adopting Nagel’s teleological laws or Leslie’s axiarchic principle whilst others not.<sup>8</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I will rule out forms of naturalism that make use of Nagel’s teleological laws, Leslie’s axiarchic principle, or anything analogous to this. This is because it appears to me that these forms of naturalism are not popular amongst naturalists. As such my paper is primarily aimed towards those who find bare-theism and naturalism, as I have outlined it, to be the only two plausible options on the table when assessing the evidential value of consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Put another way, I shall follow Poston in claiming that “for the purposes of the following Bayesian model, I assume the useful falsehood that theism and naturalism are mutually exclusive and exhaustive.”<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that one cannot translate my argument so to assess other hypotheses, since I welcome one to do so. Rather it is that for the purpose of this already ambitious paper it will be easier to limit myself to these two hypotheses.<sup>11</sup>

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wholly explained in a number of ways, but the probability given to each explanation will vary. Further, the reliance on probability rather than explanation allows me to bypass “there is no explanation” replies. Hawthorne and Isaacs also note this latter point and seem to imply that it is a reason for favouring formulating fine-tuning arguments in a Bayesian manner (“Misapprehensions about Fine-Tuning,” 144 n.29).

<sup>6</sup>This contrasts with other Bayesian arguments that employ a more robust version of theism, a not-so-bare theism (e.g., Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain*, 7–12). One could also translate my argument into these terms, but I don’t do so here.

<sup>7</sup>The Stanford Encyclopedia’s article on naturalism begins as follows. “The term ‘naturalism’ has no very precise meaning in contemporary philosophy” (Papineau, “Naturalism”). As such it is unsurprising that I cannot provide a precise definition of naturalism. Yet since thinking about probabilistic arguments based on atheism and/or naturalism is typical in theistic debates (e.g., Poston, “The Argument from (A) to (Y),” Hawthorne and Isaacs, “Fine-Tuning Fine-Tuning,” Benton, Hawthorne, and Isaacs, “Evil and Evidence,” Rowe, “The Evidential Argument from Evil,” Collins, “The Teleological Argument”), I suggest most have a sufficient, albeit unprecise, grasp on what is meant to be signified by atheism and/or naturalism, and therefore I shall continue in this vein.

<sup>8</sup>Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, and Leslie, *Infinite Minds*, respectively.

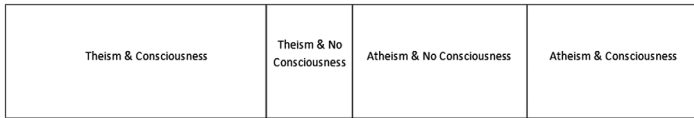
<sup>9</sup>One may be able to translate my argument into thinking about hypotheses based on Draper’s Source Physicalism and Source Idealism if they prefer this distinction to bare-theism and atheism/naturalism. Draper, “Atheism and Agnosticism,” Wilson, “Fundamentality and the Prior Probability of Theism.”

<sup>10</sup>Poston, “The Argument from (A) to (Y),” 374.

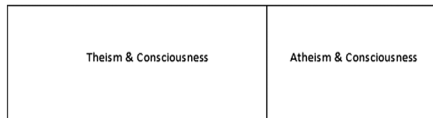
<sup>11</sup>As a reviewer rightly pointed out, different forms of atheism would make different predictions, since atheistic positions range from Buddhism to absolute idealism to eliminative materialism. Given this there are likely no predictions that are coherent across all types of atheism, other than that there is (or are) no God(s), and as such they must be investigated on a case by case basis. Here I investigate the case I think is currently most popular among atheists.

*A Weak Argument from Consciousness*

Here is an argument from consciousness to get us started, which I think is very difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, it is helpful for us to consider it since it will help us see how to formulate a more successful argument. Stipulate that a perfect agnostic would give a 50/50 credence to theism and atheism. How then should one think about the prior probabilities one ought to give theism and consciousness, atheism and consciousness, and their contraries? I suggest they should look something akin to those illustrated in the bar below, where the addition of all of one's priors equals probability 1, that is, the whole bar.<sup>12</sup>



As one can see from the bar the theistic half is weighted in favour of consciousness 75/25, whilst the atheistic half gives a 50/50 distribution as to how likely consciousness is. Once we add in our evidence, the fact that there is consciousness, we remove the portions of the bar where the existence of consciousness is denied. When one removes these portions from the bar and makes the remaining portions of the bar into the whole bar it is vital that the ratios between the probability segments of the bar are preserved, a process more formally known as renormalisation. After going through this process we end up with our posterior probabilities, with our bar looking as follows:<sup>13</sup>



Since the theistic portion of the bar has grown and the atheistic portion has shrunk, consciousness is some evidence for theism.<sup>14</sup> This is because

<sup>12</sup>I use the bar primarily for two reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, is due to accessibility, as I think it's easier for those with less familiarity with the formal tools of Bayesianism to see what is going on and what needs to happen to one's priors for the argument to be overturned. Secondly, since it nicely conveys that one cannot give exact numerical values for epistemic probabilities (See: Swinburne, "Phenomenal Conservatism," Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 341, Benton, Hawthorne, and Isaacs, "Evil and Evidence," 5). I admit that if one measured the sections of the bar there would be precise values, nonetheless the bar represents more clearly than numbers that we can only approximate epistemic probabilities.

<sup>13</sup>One could extend the bar to the same length as the previous one, as long as the ratios of the portions of the bar are preserved. However, by not extending the bar to its original length, one can see instantly, without any further calculations, the new probabilistic outcomes.

<sup>14</sup>Briefly let me outline how what takes place on the bar maps onto the formal account of Bayesian probability theory:

$$P(H | E) = \frac{P(H) \times P(E | H)}{P(E)}$$

I understand evidence as probability raising. Nevertheless, one can see that consciousness isn't significant evidence for theism, since the theistic portion of the bar hasn't grown much over the  $\frac{1}{2}$  it originally had, and likewise the atheistic portion hasn't decreased much. The reason for this is due to the priors I originally assigned, which are illustrated in the initial bar. Let me attempt to justify them now.

### *Justifying the Priors*

I think God is fairly likely to create consciousness, something I will discuss shortly. Yet given this, why didn't God's creating consciousness take up more space in my original probability distribution? The main reason for this is that theists generally claim that if God is perfectly good He doesn't need to create anything and therefore could have existed on His own. Given this fact, I take it that one should give a fairly substantial prior to God existing without consciousness, something that I have done. There may be other reasons for God not creating consciousness, but I shall say more about this and the reasons God might have for creating consciousness when I provide a revamped and stronger version of the argument.

As for the priors on the atheist side, I imagine many theists will think I have been too generous. After all, on atheism, unlike on theism, there is no being that wants to bring about consciousness. As such, nothing intends consciousness, and hence its existence seems less likely than on theism. This is because it seems plausible for one to give a higher probability to a certain state of affairs X coming about on a hypothesis on which there is a being who intends to bring about X, all else being equal.<sup>15</sup> Further, the probability will be increased if achieving the state of affairs X is particularly complex. Given that achieving consciousness appears complex and

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Suppose we ask the question how likely theism is given consciousness. To do so we input into the formula the prior probability for (H), theism, which is 0.5, and then multiply it by the probability of consciousness given theism,  $P(E | H)$  which is 0.75. Both of these values can be ascertained by looking at the initial bar. We then divide this result by the probability of the evidence,  $P(E)$ . To do this we add together the bits of the initial bar where (E) is true and then ascertain what proportion of the whole bar this occupies. Mathematically, we can do this if we are armed with two values: the likelihood of (E) on (H), and the likelihood of (E) on ( $\sim H$ ). We add these two values together, whilst also weighting each one according to how big a slice of the bar (H) and ( $\sim H$ ) occupy (i.e., their prior probabilities), respectively. Hence in order to calculate  $P(E)$  what we need to fill in is:  $[P(E | H) \times P(H)] + [P(E | \sim H) \times P(\sim H)]$ . This is the probability of consciousness given God's existence, 0.75, multiplied by the probability of God's existence, 0.5, plus the probability of consciousness given God's non-existence/atheism, 0.5, multiplied by the probability of God's non-existence/atheism, 0.5. Once again, one can find out all these values by looking at the initial bar. The result of this calculation is 0.625 and therefore once we plug all our values into Bayes theorem we end up with the same result as our final bar displays visually, namely that the probability of theism and consciousness is 0.6. For further explication as to how one is to use the bar, what has been called the Bayesian bar, see: Page, "Introducing Bayesianism Through the Bayesian Bar," Hawthorne, "Theism, Atheism, and Bayesianism."

<sup>15</sup>All else isn't equal on the theism/atheism debate, in that God has the knowledge, power, and freedom to bring about most Xs should He so choose.

doesn't seem to be brought about easily and/or regularly, should I not have given it a far lower probability on atheism than I have done?

Here is one reason to think not. It seems possible that there could be many atheistic worlds in which consciousness is very easy to come by, worlds in which the laws of nature and the nature of consciousness are such that the existence of consciousness is actively promoted. I also admit that the opposite might be the case, namely, that consciousness is very hard to get in most atheistic worlds, perhaps in many cases being impossible. However, since we don't have a clear grasp as to what these other atheistic worlds would be like, how probable they make consciousness, and how probable they are themselves, I think a 50/50 assignment of consciousness on atheism is more than fair. At the very least, I think consciousness is less likely than on theism.

Given this assignment of probabilities, the existence of consciousness provides some evidence for theism. Yet this evidential boost isn't significant and ultimately justifying our priors and working out how good this argument is seems difficult to evaluate. It is thus not an argument I would be inclined to put forward for theism. Nevertheless, I think a stronger argument can be given once one learns lessons from this argument, and it is to this we turn.

#### *A Stronger Argument from Consciousness*

One of the possibilities that lowered the probability of God's creating consciousness is that God might not create anything at all. On the atheist side, one of the possibilities that raised the likelihood of consciousness is the possible existence of different atheistic worlds where consciousness was easily produced. The revamped version of my argument attempts to remove both possibilities. It does this by asking what the probability of consciousness is given theism/atheism and certain facts that we know about the world, namely *our* worldly laws of nature (LoN). With this addition of LoN we rule out both the possibility of God's existing on His own, since He has created something, namely LoN, and the many atheist worlds in which their LoN's bring about consciousness easily and regularly.<sup>16</sup> As such it seems to me that the probabilities we should assign to consciousness on theism and LoN, and consciousness on atheism and LoN will differ from the former argument.

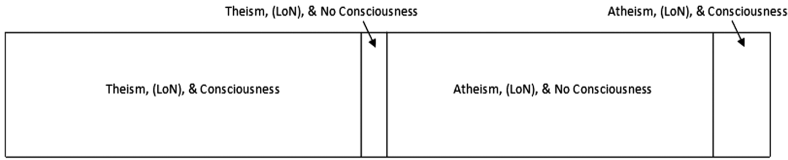
Before giving these probabilities let me note that for the sake of argument, I take it that the addition of LoN does not by itself affect the priors of theism or atheism. I say this because if one supposed that LoN was more likely on atheism, or not at all likely on theism, then this would change the prior probabilities I have given and possibly disrupt the argument.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>It seems that the only view in which God doesn't create laws of nature is the Platonic position. See Page, "Dis-Positioning Euthyphro," 34–36.

<sup>17</sup>I also wish to keep the fine-tuning argument and the argument from consciousness that I'm developing here separate, unlike Kimble and O'Connor, "The Argument from Consciousness Revisited," with this being another reason why I am happy to let the addition of LoN do nothing to affect the priors of both theism and atheism.

(I will, however, say a little more about this assumption when dealing with objections towards the end of the paper.) With this clarification made, I suggest our new bar should look as follows:



As one can see, with the addition of LoN my priors have changed significantly, and as such consciousness will provide stronger evidential confirmation of theism. The main question now is whether one can justify these epistemic probability assignments.<sup>18</sup>

*Theism, LoN, and Consciousness*

I think it likely, yet not inevitable, that God creates consciousness. I'll start by sketching some reasons why I think the former, since they will reveal why I don't think it is inevitable. Here is one reason: God is interested in having relationships with creatures, with this being a good that God cannot achieve on His own.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it is in virtue of being perfectly loving that God would wish to create other beings which He could interact and share life with. Creating non-conscious beings like rocks wouldn't seem to do the job here, but creating conscious beings would.<sup>20</sup> Other reasons can also be given. For instance, perhaps God, instead of wanting a loving relationship, wants to share His knowledge

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<sup>18</sup>A reviewer suggests my argument needs to show that not only is it unlikely that consciousness comes about in this world given LoN, but that it is unlikely given any possible world with our LoN. Suppose this is correct. I claim that for there to be different probability assignments something in the world will have to change, otherwise if nothing changes then we will very likely get the same or similar outcomes and as such give the same probabilistic judgements. Since we are holding LoN fixed the change will likely regard the initial conditions. Yet, if the initial conditions are important then these too can be added into the equation, for we can ask how likely is it that we have the right initial conditions. However, this takes us into the territory of fine-tuning arguments, and as I've previously stated, I wish to keep these arguments separate.

<sup>19</sup>The major monotheistic religions all take God to be interested in creating conscious beings, with this seemingly providing a further reason for thinking God would be interested.

<sup>20</sup>Oppy writes of moves like this, "We all know people who are not interested in meaningful relationships with others and who have no desire at all to bring other people into being" (Oppy, "Critical Notice," 196). One problem here is that God is perfectly loving, and on certain views of love it seems very likely that God will create (see Page and Baker-Hytch, "Meeting the Evil God Challenge"). As such I think God will be unlike those people Oppy speaks of. Further, even if this possibility is true of God, all I require is that it is more likely that God is interested in meaningful relationships with others and desires to bring conscious beings into being than God not be, and I think this is very likely the case.

and what it is like to experience things, and so creates conscious beings.<sup>21</sup> Or maybe God's goodness is essentially diffusive, and therefore since God is essentially good He must create something.<sup>22</sup> This by itself isn't enough to have God create consciousness, but many also hold that God, perhaps due to His essential goodness, will only create worlds that reach a certain level of goodness.<sup>23</sup> It seems plausible to me that most worlds which reach the required level have consciousness in them. A reason for thinking this is that consciousness, and many of the things that come along with it, are very great goods.<sup>24</sup> For instance, many moral goods appear to require conscious awareness, with these being goods of a different type, and seem more valuable than other types of goods applicable to non-conscious beings like trees. I don't here try to suggest what counts as a good enough world, with the boundaries likely being vague, but since the thought that God can only create good enough worlds seems to be presupposed in much philosophy of religion, undergirding many discussions of the problem of evil, I don't justify it any more here. Thus, assuming I'm right that most worlds with enough goodness require goods that come with consciousness, such as moral goods, we have another reason to raise the epistemic probability of God creating consciousness.

I think there are likely other reasons too why we might think God creates conscious beings, but limitations of space prohibit further discussion.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, as is clear from the bar, I don't take it to be epistemically certain that God will create conscious beings. The reason for this is that I suppose that there might be a limited number of worlds in which there is no consciousness and yet the level of goodness of these worlds is sufficient for God to create them. Given this I suggest that we should give a non-negligible credence to God not creating consciousness, even given LoN.

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<sup>21</sup>Many of the reasons I give could also apply to animals as well as humans since animals are relational beings and can know things.

<sup>22</sup>See: Kretzmann, "A General Problem of Creation," O'Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation*, 111–122. This doesn't necessarily conflict with God's freedom, since as O'Connor (*Theism and Ultimate Explanation*, 121–122) nicely points out, many people today see the essential component of freedom being sourcehood rather than the principle of alternative possibilities. Therefore, one might think God is perfectly free in that He is the source of His actions even if He couldn't have acted otherwise.

<sup>23</sup>For instance, see Kraay, "Creation, Actualization and God's Choice."

<sup>24</sup>The value of consciousness is an area that is starting to receive some attention within philosophy of mind, with some arguing consciousness also allows for both morality (for example, Woodward, "Consciousness") and free will (for example, Shepherd and Levy, "Consciousness and Morality," Hodgson, *Rationality + Consciousness = Free Will*).

<sup>25</sup>There has been surprisingly little written about *why* God would create, although Swinburne (*The Existence of God*, 112–123) provides an exception. Manson ("How Not to be Generous") offers some difficulties for certain theistic reasons as to why God might create. I note here that some of Manson's complaints do not affect my argument since I'm interested in consciousness rather than physical life.



Before turning to the probability judgements given to the atheistic side of our bar, I note a few things. First, the probability judgements given here should *not* be thought of as only being justified posterior to the fact of God's actually creating, since they all concern what God was likely to do prior to His creating. Second, how God creates consciousness and its nature doesn't really matter much to me. No matter how consciousness came about and whatever its nature, I claim its existence is more likely on theism. To think otherwise one would have to show that on certain ways of consciousness coming to be and on specific views of its nature, the probability that God would bring it about in that way and with that nature is low. I claim that for at least the current prominent ways which I explore shortly, neither the way consciousness is brought about nor its nature is improbable on theism.<sup>26</sup> In fact, as I will go on to argue, I think it is far more improbable on atheism.<sup>27</sup> This gives my argument a two-pronged attack. First, that however probable consciousness is on atheism, it is more probable on theism, since on theism there is an agent who very likely desires conscious beings, whilst on atheism there is no such being. And secondly, to strengthen the argument, that the probability of consciousness on atheism is low. I turn to this second aspect now and try to justify the claim that consciousness is less likely on atheism.

#### *Atheism, LoN, & Consciousness*

I don't think the probability of the existence of consciousness on atheism is all that high. The main reason for thinking this is empirical. That is, it seems to be a discovery of science that our LoN make it very difficult to produce consciousness, whatever its nature happens to be. I will look at the main options available for atheists both concerning the nature of consciousness and how it is brought about, but for now I merely wish to note that I am not alone in thinking consciousness is extremely unlikely if our world is atheistic. Thus, the staunch atheist McGinn writes,

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<sup>26</sup>One might think that if consciousness wasn't dualist then that would lower the likelihood that God created consciousness. However, contrary to popular opinion there are numerous theists who are not dualists, such as those who are materialists about creaturely consciousness (e.g., van Inwagen, "Dualism and Materialism," Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*) and those who embrace panpsychism, such as Leibniz (Goff, Seager, and Allen-Hermanson, "Panpsychism"). As such, showing it is very unlikely that God would create non-dualist views of consciousness seems to me to be a very difficult task to accomplish.

<sup>27</sup>Note that it seems that any way in which consciousness is brought about on atheism is also available to the theist, unless bringing consciousness into existence requires too many unjustified evils. Yet showing that God couldn't create consciousness in a certain way would require one to work out what would be too much evil for God to permit, which is no easy feat, particularly if van Inwagen is right and God faces a type of sorites problem when deciding this cut off (*The Problem of Evil*, 95–112). Further, it seems that the theist also has at least one option available to them that the atheist does not, namely that God brought about consciousness *ex nihilo*.

Consider the universe before conscious beings came along: the odds did not look good that such beings could come to exist. The world was all just physical objects and physical forces, devoid of life and mind. The universe was as mindless then as the moon is now. The raw materials for making conscious minds—matter in motion—looked singularly unpromising as the building-blocks of consciousness. . . . It appears as if the impossible has occurred. Unconscious physical particles have conspired to generate conscious minds.<sup>28</sup>

Note that the odds McGinn talks of here do not concern whether conscious beings *would* come to exist but more fundamentally as to whether they *could* come to exist. For the purpose of this paper I'm assuming that conscious beings *could* come to exist in an atheistic world given LoN. What I am interested in is how likely it is that conscious beings *would* come to exist, since if it isn't likely on atheism, then because it is very likely on theism, the existence of consciousness will confirm theism over atheism. Given this way of arguing, McGinn's suggestion that "a naturalistic theory must *exist*" that explains how consciousness came to be,<sup>29</sup> will never be enough to block my argument. I am interested in probability rather than mere possibility, with this being something many atheists mirror in problem of evil discussions. With that said it is time to look more closely at different views of consciousness and how they might arise.

For our purposes, I suggest that the main theories of consciousness can be split up into three categories: materialist, dualist, and panpsychist.<sup>30</sup> I will look at each in turn. I am open to the fact that certain conceptions of consciousness might make its existence more likely on atheism than other conceptions. As such one could draw distinct bars for each theory of consciousness and the way it was brought about on theism or atheism and assess each individually. While I suspect each bar would look a little different, I claim that on each scenario, consciousness would be more probable on theism rather than atheism, where my reasons for thinking this can be surmised by what I say below. Due to space I stick with one bar, and one can take the bar I have given above as a rough indication as to how I think things would look if I combined all the individual bars into one.

### *Materialist Consciousness*

On materialistic theories of consciousness, mental properties are types of material properties. No other type of property or substance is needed; everything is material. Nonetheless, it seems something needs to occur in

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<sup>28</sup>McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame*, 14–15.

<sup>29</sup>McGinn, "Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?" 362n18.

<sup>30</sup>Perhaps the only major theory left out here is idealism. This isn't because there cannot be atheistic idealism, although it is less frequently held, but because on idealism primary being is consciousness. As such the question we are asking on idealism would become, how probable is the existence of something rather than nothing given theism and given atheism. This is a Bayesian version of the Leibnizian question, and I won't discuss this here.

order that there are materialist mental properties, rather than other types of non-mental material properties. This is because materialists, as I use the term, are not panpsychists, in that they do not think that everything material also has mental properties. As such these material mental properties must come about somehow, perhaps due to organised complexity of the lower level components on reductive materialism, or through supervenience relations arising due to the fundamental grounds of the mental properties. The question then becomes, supposing this is how material consciousness arises, how likely is it to come about on atheism given that an extremely specific type of organised complexity is required to produce it?<sup>31</sup>

Given LoN, I suggest it isn't likely. We seem, despite our continual trying, unable to intentionally produce anything close to consciousness by manipulating matter, arranging and rearranging it into certain forms. We might be able to fix or replace aspects of brains, which is at least linked in some way to consciousness, but this is far from bringing about materialist consciousness from non-conscious material.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps it will be replied that there is some undiscovered LoN such that it invariably brings about consciousness. I worry about this suggestion. This is not to say that no law like this will ever be discovered, but as of yet, other than the evidence of consciousness, there seems no good reason for positing one. Rather at present it appears to be an *ad hoc* postulate and therefore one that shouldn't be taken seriously, something that can be seen by applying similar postulates in other instances. For suppose I claimed there was as of yet an undiscovered LoN such that a specific being, Jesus of Nazareth, would rise from the dead on a specific date after he had been killed in a specific way. Given this, objections to Christianity based on the resurrection's breaking LoN would no longer have any bite. Yet I think people would and should object to this type of reasoning, thinking it improbable and *ad hoc*. Similarly, so it seems to me, at present the postulation of a hidden law that regularly produces consciousness should also be rejected, at least until we have far superior reasons for thinking there is one.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>I don't question whether the coming about of consciousness due to complex arrangement is possible, but rather assume for the sake of argument that it is.

<sup>32</sup>One might claim that non-conscious matter does become conscious when we fix or replace aspects of brains. Suppose this is true. Yet it seems that the non-conscious matter becomes conscious by being integrated into already existing conscious matter, in a similar way that the food I eat and digest becomes integrated in my body. However, I am not interested in non-conscious matter becoming conscious due to some integration with already existing conscious matter. Rather I am interested in how non-conscious matter becomes conscious when there is no other conscious matter to begin with, and it is this I think we are far away from being able to do.

<sup>33</sup>It might seem that I don't need to *reject* the claim that there is such a LoN, but simply say that it's unlikely that there is one, or at least that it is unlikely given atheism. However, the structure of my argument does require positive rejection of the claim. For I am conditioning on our LoN, with "LoN" rigidly designating the actual laws. If LoN included a law that entailed that there would be consciousness, then LoN entails consciousness, and the probability of consciousness on LoN plus atheism (as well as on LoN plus theism) would be one.

The other primary way one might think about getting the complex arrangement sufficient for materialist consciousness on atheism is through evolution. So consider the claim that given evolutionary theory, conscious beings would likely come about since they would be selected for. Again, I'm unconvinced. To see why, draw a distinction between consciousness and computation. I think materialists should think that there can be beings who perform computation without being conscious, with some sophisticated computers being able to achieve this already. With this distinction in mind I see no reason why evolution wouldn't produce beings that perform computation rather than those which are conscious. As far as I can tell, the addition of consciousness adds no evolutionary advantage and therefore is not a trait that will be selected for.<sup>34</sup> Further, it's not clear that "selection" even helps. Selection on atheism obviously doesn't refer to evolution intending to bring about certain traits that it knows will have adaptive advantages. So, evolution does not "select" in that sense. Instead the way that evolution "selects" is that once a particular trait has arisen in a creature, it might be adaptive such that the creature is particularly successful, and produces offspring that outcompete creatures without the trait, etc. But this sort of selection is selection of a trait that already exists. The selection here is just the favouring of creatures with this trait. Hence there is no mechanism being described here which produces any trait, let alone that of consciousness. Given this, it seems that evolution selecting for consciousness is extremely improbable or even misguided.<sup>35</sup>

Instead, maybe the thought is that evolution, given random mutations, would likely just stumble upon the right combination of material constituents in the right structure so to produce consciousness. This seems to have some epistemic probability; however, I think the probability is extremely small. Given the varying combinations of ways the material particles could be arranged, it seems highly improbable, even given the vast length of evolutionary time, that this would come about.

Finally, it might be suggested that consciousness is an evolutionary spandrel; an unintended by-product of some feature/s which evolution did select for.<sup>36</sup> It seems Gould might have thought something like this when he wrote,

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<sup>34</sup>Perhaps consciousness might be selected for due to providing helpful desires that non-conscious beings may not have, such as the desire for continual survival. Yet it seems that one could be in brain states of desire whilst being a zombie. As such the actions which come from the brain states will be the same, and hence there is no evolutionary advantage. Zombies, or those beings only able to perform computation, will survive just as well as those who are conscious. Indeed, perhaps they will survive better since they will be less prone to certain behaviours, such as fainting, due to feeling intense pain.

<sup>35</sup>Thanks to Martin Dunkley Smith for suggesting this line of thought.

<sup>36</sup>Gould and Lewontin, "The Spandrels of San Marco."

The human brain may have reached its current size by ordinary adaptive processes keyed to specific benefits of more complex mentalities for our hunter-gatherer ancestors on the African savannahs. But the implicit spandrels in an organ of such complexity must exceed the overt functional reasons for its origin.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the thought is that adaptive processes gave us the brain, and the fact that it is conscious rather than merely computes is just a lucky spandrel. I don't really know what to say to this proposal other than it seems possible and provides us with an evolutionary "just so" story as to how consciousness arose. Nevertheless, I'm not convinced that it's very probable. I think most would be very surprised to learn that consciousness was an evolutionary spandrel, with this thought being justified by the fact that consciousness seems a far more significant type of spandrel than those which are usually postulated today. As such, although I think some epistemic probability should be given to this atheistic hypothesis, I'm unconvinced it should be much.

However, when we "make theistic" some of these hypotheses they seem to become more probable, since we have an agent, God, desiring and acting to get consciousness. For instance, suppose we found out that consciousness did arise due to an evolutionary process. It seems to me that its arising from a theistic evolutionary process would be more likely than its arising from an atheistic evolutionary process. Since God would know how the matter would need to be arranged to make consciousness, He could make it that the particles would arrange in that way through some type of theistic evolution. After all, God has to get the conscious beings He desires in some way. Nothing like this, however, could be said for the atheistic process. Similar adaptations can be made for the other options I have given here. Thus, the addition of a being that strongly desires that consciousness exist into each of the hypotheses given above raises their probability somewhat.

I can summarise much of the thinking behind this section with a thought experiment. Suppose there are beings that didn't know whether they were material or not but learned somehow that there were material beings with human-like brains. We are then asked whether such beings are conscious or mere automata. I don't think you would be surprised, upon careful examination of the neural structure, to learn that these beings engage in sophisticated computation. But I think you would be surprised to learn that they were beings with consciousness. Indeed, it seems to me that we just wouldn't expect that brains of the sort humans have would give rise to consciousness, and more generally, we wouldn't expect evolution would give rise to any mental activity, but rather just computation.

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<sup>37</sup>Gould, "The Exaptive Excellence of Spandrels," 10755.

Note, too, that even if we *knew* that a materialist functionalism was true,<sup>38</sup> this still wouldn't make the probability that evolved beings are conscious high, for we wouldn't have good reason to think that the kinds of computation likely to evolve are the ones that give rise to consciousness.<sup>39</sup> On functionalist views, we should consider the space of all possible computational systems modulo functional isomorphism, and note that some subset of that space consists of *conscious* systems. But what kind of a reason, independent of our knowledge that there is in fact consciousness among evolved beings like us, do we have to think that that subset is likely to intersect with the computational systems that evolution gives rise to?

The question presents serious conceptual problems, given the infinitude of the space of possible computational systems. It can be very difficult to assign probabilities in infinitary cases, barring special symmetries. Fortunately, there is some reason to think evolution will give rise to computational systems that are relatively simple, since evolution is a process that, after all, starts with very simple organisms. Thus, we may be able to restrict the relevant part of the space of possible computational systems to a large but finite subset *F* consisting of relatively simple systems. What fraction, then, of that finite subset consists of systems that are conscious?

It is still difficult to get a clear answer to this. Intuitively, however, it seems extremely unlikely that a randomly-generated computer program of some relatively small level of complexity (say, measured by the length of the program) would be conscious. Here is a way to see that we have this intuition. We would have no moral qualms about generating, say, 100 billion different random computer programs and running them on an isolated computer. But if the proportion of consciousness among the relatively simple computational systems were significantly more than about one in 100 billion, it would be likely that one of these programs would be conscious—and for all we know, it might be a program that would suffer terrible pains. Thus, we would be taking a significant moral risk by running lots of random computer programs.

Now, evolutionary processes on earth have historically generated about five billion species. If we think of each species as exemplifying a computational system, the chance that one of these systems is conscious can then be expected to be small. Of course, evolution does not generate computational systems completely at *random*. There is selection going on. However, the selection is not for consciousness but for fitness. Barring some *a priori* reason to think that the computations that help with fitness are more likely to be conscious, there is no good reason to think that this

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<sup>38</sup>I add that functionalism seems more probable on theism than on atheism. I can see how God might look at a functional state and grace it with appropriate mentality; conditional on atheism, it seems strange and accordingly more improbable to think that some principle should produce mental states whenever there are appropriately corresponding functional states.

<sup>39</sup>The thoughts in the present and following three paragraphs are due to Alex Pruss from personal correspondence.

selection-based directedness in evolution will increase the chance of hitting consciousness rather than decrease it.

As such I think the existence of materialist consciousness is very improbable on atheism, and therefore I give it a very low epistemic probability.

### *Dualistic Consciousness*

Dualism comes in various forms, with none to my mind being incompatible with atheism. For instance, there are dualists about substances, and dualists about properties. All I require from dualism is that conscious states are of a different type to non-conscious states, and therefore monistic views, such as materialism, are rejected. As such on this view of consciousness, atheists need to provide a probable account as to how consciousness arises from non-consciousness, that is, how a distinct type of property or substance arises from another. I put things this way not because I take it that consciousness being fundamental and then later embodied is incompatible with atheism, since it is not,<sup>40</sup> but since I take it that most atheists think that non-conscious matter is temporally prior to consciousness and that from which consciousness arose.

Many seem to think that it is extremely difficult to get the distinct type "consciousness" from matter given LoN. I have already quoted McGinn to this effect, but others, for instance Locke, given the traditional reading, say much the same,

For unthinking Particles of Matter, however put together can have nothing thereby added to them, but a new relation of Position, which 'tis impossible should give thought and knowledge to them.<sup>41</sup>

Locke here wonders if it is *possible* to get conscious properties from non-conscious ones, much like McGinn did, but again for the sake of argument I take it that it is. I ask the additional question: how likely is it that consciousness arises from matter given LoN and atheism? It seems to me that it is extremely unlikely. In order to justify this, I must first note that it appears to me that the way this new type of entity, property or substance, will come about will be through some type of strong emergence. The reason for this is that it doesn't seem that the mere rearrangement of properties, as in the previous materialist section, is sufficient to get us an entity of a new type, but rather merely different entities of the same type. Strong emergence, however, is thought to provide us with something novel.

Yet, it has been argued that strongly emergent entities, at least in our world, "will appear only in physical systems achieving some specific threshold complexity."<sup>42</sup> As such, we must ask questions as to how likely it is that this specific threshold of complexity comes about on atheism,

<sup>40</sup>For instance, Oppy, *The Best Argument Against God*, 55–56, raises this possibility.

<sup>41</sup>Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 627.

<sup>42</sup>O'Connor and Wong, "The Metaphysics of Emergence," 644, Gillett, *Reduction and Emergence*, 18, 205.



given that on atheism there is no driving force towards conscious beings. It again seems to me that the probability will be low, given all the combinations physical systems can have. (Again, I can argue as in the case of random computer programs. It seems quite morally safe to randomly build projects from Lego without fearing that one is making something that is suffering exquisite pain.) As such the epistemic probability I give to this occurring is low.

This probability might be dented somewhat further, since many will want to suggest that the probability of strong emergence ever occurring or having occurred is extremely low,<sup>43</sup> mostly because it will be thought impossible. Perhaps those who think this won't give it an epistemic probability of zero, but the value they place on it occurring will not be high. Part of the worry here is often that it's not exactly clear what strong emergence is, with many thinking it looks very much like some type of magic.<sup>44</sup> I'm not convinced it is magic, nevertheless this concern lowers the probability I give for strong emergence occurring, and therefore it also decreases the likelihood that consciousness is brought into existence in this way. As a result of this I don't think a high epistemic probability should be given for consciousness strongly emerging in an atheistic world where LoN hold.

However, on theism strong emergence seems more probable. Why is this? Well not because it is any more coherent, since it doesn't seem God adds anything to make that the case. Rather God makes strong emergence more probable because He is omniscient and would know exactly how the physical systems need to be arranged so to produce emergent consciousness. Being interested in consciousness, He would then bring it about in some way that these physical systems were arranged in that specific way.

There is also a further aspect of emergence that seems more probable on theism than on atheism. Emergentists, so Hasker suggests, claim "that ordinary matter contains within itself the potentiality for consciousness."<sup>45</sup> This seems similar to a panprotopsychist's claim that "the deep nature of the physical is not itself experiential but somehow intrinsically suited for realizing, or bringing about, experience."<sup>46</sup> Similar or not, the same point seems applicable to both. Namely that for either of these views to work a specific type of material stuff is required. LoN, I take it, doesn't determine what the material stuff each atom is made of is. The stuff is just a given. It seems to me, however, more than possible

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<sup>43</sup>For instance, Bohn writes, "there is no convincing actual case of emergence, and methodological reasons speak against ever postulating it." Bohn, "Normativity All the Way Down," 4111.

<sup>44</sup>Strawson, *Real Materialism*, 62n24, 66, 68.

<sup>45</sup>Hasker, *The Emergent Self*, 195.

<sup>46</sup>Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, 19. Perhaps the difference between the two is that some panprotopsychists will claim only constitution is needed for consciousness to come about. However, other theorists still think emergence is required. See: Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, 162.



that there could have been other material stuff which did not have the potentiality of developing consciousness. I'm unsure how probable it is to get matter such that it can produce consciousness, but I certainly take it to be more probable on theism than on atheism. After all, as I have repeated throughout this paper, there are good reasons to think that God wants conscious beings, and therefore it seems more likely that He create this type of matter than it being there by pure chance or luck on atheism. As such, dualistic theories of consciousness seem far more likely on theism than on atheism. Rather on atheistic worlds where our LoN hold, it seems to me highly probable that the conditions for strong emergence are never met and as such consciousness never strongly emerges.<sup>47</sup>

### *Panpsychist Consciousness*

On the final view, panpsychism, everything has some type of conscious aspect to it. Theists interested in the argument from consciousness often mention panpsychism only to swiftly reject it.<sup>48</sup> The reason for this seems to be that they think the probability of panpsychism is so low that it isn't worth considering. I will be less harsh, particularly given that panpsychism has recently received much interest.<sup>49</sup> Given a panpsychist view of consciousness, what is the probability of consciousness? It appears the answer is 1, and hence we are certain that there will be consciousness. As such if the world was panpsychist then it may seem to undercut the argument from consciousness that I have given.

This, however, is too fast. First, it might appear that panpsychism is more likely on theism than on atheism since we might think that God wants many conscious beings, perhaps due to His preferences or maximizing the goodness of the world. As such it is very likely that He would create a panpsychist world since this seems to give Him as much consciousness as possible, since everything will be conscious in some way. On the atheistic view, there is nothing like this to say, and therefore panpsychism seems less likely on atheism.

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<sup>47</sup>A concern might be raised due to my conditioning on LoN. For suppose LoN in fact contains an emergence law that implies that consciousness emerges from a physical configuration P. Suppose also that LoN also implies that P is likely on evolutionary grounds. Then the probability of consciousness given LoN and atheism is high. Note that even though we don't know whether LoN is like this, since we are conditionalising on it, to rule it out we need to know it doesn't. A possible solution would be to make LoN, which I am conditionalising on, include only *physical* laws, namely laws governing physical causes of physical effects. Thus, laws about the emergence of non-physical stuff will not be included in LoN. Thanks to Alex Pruss for raising this concern and the suggested response.

<sup>48</sup>Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God*, 114–134, Moreland, "The Argument from Consciousness," 298, Adams, *The Virtue of Faith*, 255.

<sup>49</sup>For two recent examples of books devoted to panpsychism see Brüntrup and Jaskolla, *Panpsychism* and Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*. See also, Goff, Seager, and Allen-Hermanson, "Panpsychism," for further references.

Second, panpsychism also appears to involve thinking that the world is composed of a specific type of stuff, much like the previous view. We then need to ask how likely it is that the world is composed of this stuff on theism and atheism. Since we are holding LoN fixed and take it that LoN doesn't determine what the fundamental nature of the stuff that constitutes the world is, LoN does nothing to help us out here.<sup>50</sup> I think it likely that there are many different types of possible stuff, where only a small subset of these will be panpsychist. This is because panpsychist stuff appears to have a specific nature, and it seems probable that there are many other types of stuff without this type of specificity. If this is the case, then the likelihood of getting stuff which provides us with a panpsychist world will likely be low. This will be the case unless we have some reason for raising the probability that panpsychist stuff will be the type that will be instantiated. Theism, once again, gives us the resources for raising this probability, as God wants consciousness and so would more likely create this type of stuff. By contrast, on the atheistic view the panpsychist stuff appears to arise by chance/luck, since nothing desires consciousness. I am hesitant to say how unlikely this type of stuff will be on atheism, as assessing the probability of merely possible states is difficult at best. Nevertheless, the probability of getting this panpsychist type of stuff seems to be far higher on theism than atheism.<sup>51</sup>

Another way to make panpsychism more probable on theism than on atheism is by suggesting that the consciousness I am interested in is not micro-consciousness—that is, the consciousness of particles—but the consciousness of subjects such as animals and humans, what I call macro-consciousness. This brings us into the territory of the combination problem for panpsychism.<sup>52</sup> One option for solving this problem is to appeal to strong emergence. Some panpsychists will object to this,

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<sup>50</sup>A move such as this doesn't appear possible on every metaphysical view of laws of nature. For if one holds to a powers/dispositions view of laws, one cannot hold that LoN remain fixed with different matter (for more on this see Page, "The Dispositionist Deity," Page, "Dis-Positioning Euthyphro," Page, "Fine-Tuned of Necessity?"). This is because LoN will be partly determined by the powers/dispositions of the matter. Yet there is *typically* nothing in the powers/dispositions view of laws that requires that there are no other possible types of matter. (This is true on most powers/dispositions views of LoN, however see: Page, "Fine-Tuned of Necessity?" for elaboration of those who think the same LoN hold in every possible world whilst also embracing a powers/dispositions view of LoN.) Thus, on the powers/dispositions view of laws we can still ask how likely it is that we get this type of matter. However, working out any probability assignments here seems extremely difficult and we will no longer be able to hold the LoN fixed since the different matter will supply different LoN.

<sup>51</sup>Note that saying panpsychism is metaphysically necessary won't help here, since my argument is concerned with epistemic probabilities, and epistemic probabilities need not track metaphysical necessities and impossibilities.

<sup>52</sup>The combination problem for panpsychism says that it "is very difficult to make sense of: "little" conscious subjects of experience with their micro-experiences coming together to form a "big" conscious subject with its own experiences" (Goff, Seager and Allen-Hermanson, "Panpsychism").

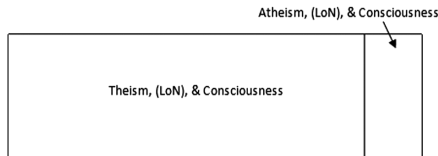
since their panpsychism was postulated in part to avoid the problems of emergent phenomena. Nevertheless, for those who do opt for this solution it will be remembered that emergence can only take place when material systems are arranged in a specific way. We might then ask the question as to how likely it is that these structures come to be arranged in that specific way on atheism or theism. For similar reasons as I gave before, I think it is far more probable that they get into this arrangement on theism. Much the same can be said for the constitutive approach for solving the combination problem. Here the combination of micro-consciousness in a specific way brings about macro-consciousness without requiring strong emergence. Again, this seems to me far more likely to occur on theism than atheism. After all God knows how the micro-consciousnesses are to be arranged to produce this, He plausibly wants beings with macro-consciousness, and He can guide this so that it comes about. On atheism, however, we have none of this, and therefore getting macro-consciousness is likely a matter of chance/luck, and therefore far more improbable.

Here is one final reason to think panpsychism is more likely on theism. Panpsychism says that every concrete thing is conscious. Theism says that there is a concrete conscious being. This theistic fact surely raises the probability a little of the thesis that all concrete beings are conscious, just as learning that one raven is black raises the probability of the thesis that all ravens are black. Hence once again we have a further reason for thinking the panpsychist answer is more likely on theism.

Given all this, I suggest that panpsychism is improbable on atheism, but fairly probable on theism, and that macro-consciousness, which is what I am primarily interested in, is probable on a theistic panpsychism but not at all probable on an atheistic panpsychism.

*Result*

Assuming that I have successfully justified the priors, we can remove the portions of the bar which deny the existence of consciousness, since consciousness does exist, and renormalize our bar. The result looks as follows:



It is evident from our final bar that the probability of theism has significantly increased whilst the probability of atheism has significantly decreased. Therefore, consciousness is very good evidence for theism, and bad news for atheism. Further, note that one would have to change the priors that I gave above significantly to overcome this argument. Given

what I've said above, I think a change significant enough to block the argument would be implausible.

### *Objections and Replies*

Some of the objections that follow have similarities with objections raised against Bayesian-style fine-tuning arguments. The responses that can be given there have similarities with what can be said in response to objections given against my argument. Therefore, those interested in additional objections and responses would do well to look at the literature responding to objections against Bayesian fine-tuning arguments from which they can make an educated guess as to how I would respond here.<sup>53</sup> Note, however, that the argument I have given bypasses certain objections to the fine-tuning argument, such as the normalization problem,<sup>54</sup> since there is only a finite range of outcomes of the arrival of consciousness rather than an infinite number.<sup>55</sup> With that said let me turn to some specific objections and replies.

*Objection.* Sceptical theism means one cannot make probabilistic judgements about God of the sort I have.<sup>56</sup>

*Reply.* I could drop sceptical theism as a response to evil. However, it also seems, as with all types of scepticism, that there are differing levels of it, and that some levels of scepticism might be sufficient to do some work within problem of evil discussions whilst also enabling me to make the judgements I have here. One possible option, amongst others, might be DePoe's "Positive skeptical theism," where "the motivation for the skeptical component of the skeptical theism is generated from one's positive knowledge of God's reasons for creating a world."<sup>57</sup>

*Objection.* We cannot work out how likely it is for God to want to do something since these probabilities are inscrutable.<sup>58</sup>

*Reply.* I disagree. Whilst I acknowledge that very precise values cannot be given, I do think justified proposals can be made as to how likely it is for God to do certain things. I don't know what will persuade my objectors otherwise, but just as it is unlikely that I will be able to persuade them that this can be done, it is unlikely that they will be able to persuade me that it can't be. All I can do is point out that probabilistic judgements about what

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<sup>53</sup>For instance, see Hawthorne and Isaacs, "Misapprehensions about Fine-Tuning," Hawthorne and Isaacs, "Fine-Tuning Fine-Tuning," Collins, "The Teleological Argument."

<sup>54</sup>McGrew, McGrew, and Vestrup, "Probabilities and the Fine-tuning Argument," Colyvan, Garfield, and Priest, "Problems with the Argument from Fine-Tuning."

<sup>55</sup>A caveat here, since there may be one thing I have said that is subject to this objection. Here I am thinking about the possibility of different types of matter which I raised in the pansychism section, since one might claim there is an infinite variety of types. Whether this is the case is not something I claim to know. In any case, I make no claim as to whether we should think the normalization problem is persuasive, but rather that most of what I have said will bypass it, and therefore it will not be an objection to my overall argument.

<sup>56</sup>For an example of this objection see: Oppy, *Arguing About Gods*, 400.

<sup>57</sup>DePoe, "On the Epistemological Framework," 33.

<sup>58</sup>For an example of this objection see: Oppy, *Arguing About Gods*, 196–197.

God would do, particularly when it comes to evidential arguments from evil, are made very often.<sup>59</sup> Yet if probabilities relating to arguments from evil are not inscrutable, we will need an in-principle difference as to why some probabilistic judgements regarding God are more acceptable than others. Supposing there is such a difference, it seems that my objector and I will reach an impasse, and therefore my argument will only apply to those who think the probabilistic judgements of the sort I make can be made.

*Objection.* The priors some would give to theism are so low that the argument from consciousness does nothing to make consciousness good evidence for theism.<sup>60</sup> For instance, Oppy writes that the probability of theism “‘is so low that it approximates to zero’; I expect that other naturalists acquainted with the relevant literature of the last twenty-five years will say the same.”<sup>61</sup>

*Reply.* I’m unsure what to make of Oppy’s comments, since it seems rather an extreme view.<sup>62</sup> Bayes’s theorem measures epistemic probabilities rather than metaphysical necessities, such that God’s existence may be impossible and yet rightly not have an epistemic probability of zero.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps one could assume some kind of “knowledge first” framework such that one knows that atheism is true, and therefore given one’s total body of evidence one is epistemically certain that atheism is true?<sup>64</sup> I’m unsure. In any case, I think most will suppose that theism isn’t *extraordinarily* unlikely to begin with. Nevertheless, even if we take atheism to be

<sup>59</sup>Even Oppy appears to make judgements like this: Almeida and Oppy, “Sceptical Theism,” 502.

<sup>60</sup>How exactly this objection is set up will depend upon whether one is a subjective or objective Bayesian. On the former view the priors one has are arational and as such it is difficult to change the opinion of those who have different priors to one’s own. On the latter view, priors are meant to have rational constraints such that there are priors you ought to have. Yet if we disagree about our priors, it’s likely that I’m going to think you ought to have my priors and you will think that I ought to have yours. Therefore, changing people’s minds about what priors they should have will also be a challenge.

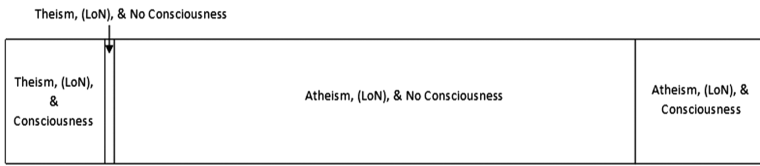
<sup>61</sup>Oppy, “Critical Notice,” 195. The internal quote Oppy takes from Moreland 2008, 33.

<sup>62</sup>One reason Oppy has for thinking this is that there is a *large* body of work on conceptual problems related to disembodied consciousness, of which God would be a type. Oppy, “Critical Notice,” 195–196. I’m unpersuaded by this, and being cheeky, since Oppy’s only reason given for thinking this is the *large* literature against disembodied consciousness, I point out that the literature which assumes or in one way or another argues that this type of consciousness is possible is surely *significantly larger* given the whole history of philosophy. That is, I trump his argument to many authorities, with an argument to *significantly* many more authorities.

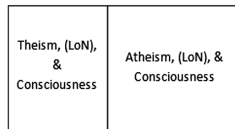
<sup>63</sup>From personal correspondence with Oppy I think the main problem he would have with my argument is its Bayesian roots, since he favours thinking about theory choice in terms of theoretical virtues. He would also claim that because he thinks naturalism is necessarily true, such that it is impossible that there are gods, he can see no coherent way of assigning non-zero epistemic probability to the claim that God exists, given his views about what is metaphysically possible. Unfortunately, I cannot give adequate space to discuss this here, but see Swinburne, “Phenomenal Conservatism,” for some initial thoughts that seem relevant to some of Oppy’s concerns.

<sup>64</sup>For some discussion of this see Benton, Hawthorne, and Isaacs, “Evil and Evidence,” 24–25.

significantly more likely than theism I still think consciousness provides theism with a significant evidential boost and therefore is good evidence for theism. I show this using the bars below.



The bar above gives most of the probability space to atheistic hypotheses and only a fraction to theistic ones. Yet the likelihood of consciousness on atheism and LoN is still low when compared with the likelihood of no consciousness on atheism and LoN. By contrast on the theistic hypothesis it is very likely that there will be conscious beings if theism is true. Yet once we find out that there is consciousness, it has a big effect on our probabilities:



As can be seen in our new bar the probability of theism has significantly increased given the evidence of consciousness, and the probability of atheism greatly decreased. This is the case even though the probability of atheism overall is still higher. Yet since I am thinking about evidence in terms of probability raising, and since consciousness does this a lot for theism, whilst lowering the probability of atheism, consciousness is significant evidence for theism. Perhaps by itself the evidence of consciousness isn't enough for one to come to adopt theism, but no one said it would or had to be. After all, agreeing with an adapted quote from Hawthorne and Isaacs,

The epistemic status of theism depends not only on [this] . . . argument, but also on the status of just about every other argument in the philosophy of religion. The . . . [argument from consciousness] does not accomplish everything, but it does accomplish something (and that's not bad at all for a philosophical argument).<sup>65</sup>

Further, arguments to theism that people find persuasive are often cumulative case arguments, and as such it is only when different pieces are put together that we get an argument for theism which some will think makes theism more likely than atheism overall.<sup>66</sup> Given this, even with small theistic priors, I still think consciousness is good evidence for theism.

<sup>65</sup>Hawthorne and Isaacs, "Misapprehensions about Fine-Tuning," 133.

<sup>66</sup>See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 328–342 for an example of this. Bayesian arguments, of which mine is a type, are added together easily so to make a cumulative case. For a model as to how this can be done see: Poston, "The Argument from (A) to (Y)."

*Objection.* The addition of the LoN into the argument means that the priors we give to theism and atheism should also change, not remain constant as I have suggested.

*Reply.* This point is well taken. For instance, it might seem that our worldly LoN are one of the reasons why there is so much evil in the world, and as such their existence makes God's existence less likely, since we can claim that due to this implication their existence is somewhat surprising on theism but less surprising on atheism. Given this, the addition of LoN, should mean that we give more space of our initial bar over to atheism. Yet on the other hand, it appears that the laws are fine-tuned to make certain valuable states of affairs, such as life, possible, which seems somewhat surprising on atheism but not all that surprising on theism.<sup>67</sup> As such this argument pulls us to say that with the addition of LoN we should give more space of our initial bar over to theism. How exactly we think the priors should be affected when we add LoN into the mix, will therefore be dependent on our assessment of the weight that the problem of evil and fine-tuning argument should be given when thinking about the existence of LoN. This is obviously a huge topic, and one I cannot delve into here, and as such for the purpose of this paper I claim that the addition of LoN does nothing to change our priors of theism and atheism. If one disagrees, they can draw their own bar with their own priors after considering how LoN changes them from my 50/50.<sup>68</sup> However, let me note that the preceding two bars that I gave in reply to the previous objection can also be thought of as showing that my argument still would provide substantial evidence for theism even if one thought LoN moved the priors in favour of atheism.

*Objection.* Why conditionalise on consciousness rather than something else? Why not conditionalise on the existence of tennis, or anything else for that matter? The thought is that conditionalising on these other things would be crazy, and so why not think it is equally crazy to conditionalise on consciousness.

*Reply.* I conditionalise on consciousness since I think there are reasons to think it likely that God wants to produce conscious beings. As much as tennis is a great thing, and something I would always desire to bring about, I have no arguments to give prior to the fact of the existence of tennis that make me think it probable that God would want to bring about tennis. I suggest that most things will be like this, and there will only be a select few things that we can plausibly say that it

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<sup>67</sup>Collins, *The Teleological Argument*, 211–213.

<sup>68</sup>How this bar will be drawn will obviously vary from person to person. For instance, Hawthorne and Isaacs claim that whilst "evil is more likely—much more likely—conditional on atheism than conditional on theism . . . The evidential impact of evil would barely dent the evidential impact of the package plus life [by which they mean their fine-tuning argument]" (Hawthorne and Isaacs, "Fine-Tuning Fine-Tuning," 158n44). As such they would think that the addition of LoN into our reasoning should mean that we increase the theistic portion of our initial bar. Yet I do not doubt that there are many others who would disagree and claim the opposite.



is likely that God would want to bring that about, with consciousness being one of them.

*Objection.* If an atheist assumes a large enough multiverse then the likelihood of consciousness on atheism is high, since it will be highly probable, if not inevitable, that there be consciousness.

*Reply.* I don't have anything original to say here. As such my first suggestion is that we include the stipulation in our conditionalisation that there is no multiverse, as Hawthorne and Isaacs do regarding the fine-tuning argument.<sup>69</sup> Alternatively, one could argue that the multiverse is improbable, perhaps due to concerns one might have with its postulation,<sup>70</sup> and as such the prior probability of it is very low so as not to be much of a threat to my argument.

*Objection.* Given determinism, our world's initial conditions, and LoN, the probability of consciousness on atheism is high, if not certain.

*Reply.* Even if one grants determinism, the probability of our world's initial conditions on atheism is extremely low. To see this, one need only turn to fine-tuning arguments, which often run off probabilities concerning initial conditions.<sup>71</sup> Yet whereas fine-tuning arguments are concerned with life, here I am concerned with consciousness. Given this, the initial conditions that I am interested in would seem to be a subset of the initial conditions that are life permitting, since I take it that there could be life which isn't conscious.<sup>72</sup> As it is claimed by many that the initial conditions for life are very bad news for atheism, the initial conditions required for conscious beings would seem to be even worse news. If this is right, then this objection doesn't hold any promise.

*Objection.* Your argument is a God-of-the-gaps argument, since further empirical discoveries could show it fails, and these types of arguments are bad.<sup>73</sup>

*Reply.* Perhaps my argument is in some sense a God-of-the-gaps argument. However, if it is, I'm not too worried about it, since I don't think this type of argument is as bad as its pejorative name suggests. Perhaps it isn't as good as wholly non-empirical arguments, in that new empirical data coming to light won't be able to overturn them. Nevertheless, I still think arguments based on empirical data are worthwhile. For instance, a few years ago it was thought

<sup>69</sup>Hawthorne and Isaacs, "Fine-Tuning Fine-Tuning," 144.

<sup>70</sup>For instance, see Dorr and Arntzenius, "Self-Locating Priors and Cosmological Measures," Collins, "The Teleological Argument," 256–272, Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 185–188.

<sup>71</sup>Collins, "The Teleological Argument," 220–222, Hawthorne and Isaacs, "Fine-Tuning Fine-Tuning," Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 172–188.

<sup>72</sup>It seems that only panpsychists may have a problem with this suggestion.

<sup>73</sup>Lim argues that standard arguments from consciousness, which I mentioned in my introduction, are of this type ("Zombies, Epiphenomenalism," 440). Moreland replies on behalf of the standard argument from consciousness by claiming that it is not a god of the gaps argument since he gives in principle reasons as to why there couldn't be a scientific explanation of consciousness ("God and the Argument from Consciousness," 247). I provide a different response.



that there were good arguments for thinking that driving diesel cars was better for the environment compared to driving petrol cars. People thought this because this is what the scientific data supposedly showed. It turns out, given further scientific data, that this is no longer a good argument. The data that once made it a good argument has been overturned such that it no longer backs up one of the premises. Instead, the empirical data now provides us with a good argument for thinking that driving petrol cars is better for the environment when compared to diesel. Yet there may come a point when further empirical analysis comes in which claims that in fact diesel cars are once again thought to be better overall. Just because the empirical data on which these arguments rely is open to revision, doesn't seem to me to supply us with a good reason to think that the arguments are in principle bad. Perhaps the empirical data will never change, and instead continue to confirm what it originally claimed. Perhaps not. In any case, it seems more than appropriate to run arguments based on this type of data, all the while knowing it might come under attack by future discoveries. Perhaps the argument I've given here will be subject to this misfortune, that is, that future empirical work will show that consciousness is just as likely on atheism as it is on theism. If that is the case then my argument follows in the footsteps of many other arguments that once seemed good. Then again, maybe it never will succumb to this type of critique and the empirical data will continue to mount in its favour and strengthen my case. As such I think only the test of time will tell how successful the argument in fact is, but at the present it seems to me a fairly good one!

### *Conclusion*

I originally gave an argument that claimed that consciousness is more likely on theism than on atheism, and as such it confirms theism over atheism. I suggested that this argument was difficult to evaluate but that a stronger argument from consciousness to theism could be given once we incorporated certain facts that we know about the world into our reasoning, namely *our* worldly LoN. This was because the addition of LoN increased the probability of consciousness on theism and decreased it on atheism. I have tried to justify these probabilistic assignments and answer some objections that might be raised against my argument. If I have been successful in doing so then you, my conscious reader, provide good evidence for theism since your conscious existence, I suggest, is much more likely on theism than on atheism.<sup>74</sup>

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