[A] God

There are at least two different kinds of significant metaphysical questions about God. At any rate, there are two different kinds of significant metaphysical questions about God that I propose to take up in this chapter. These metaphysical questions are related to two importantly different kinds of arguments about the existence of God: those that argue against the existence of God on the basis of claimed inconsistency in the notion of God—or claimed incompatibility between the claim that God exists and other claims plausibly supposed to be true—and those that argue for the existence of God on the basis of inference to the best explanation from claims plausibly supposed to be true.

One kind of significant metaphysical question about God arises in connection with the following schema:

> (A) It is doxastically possible that X is at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like.

The significant metaphysical question about God that arises in connection with this schema is this: Are there false instances of it? That is, are there Xs for which it is the case that it is not even doxastically possible that those Xs are at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like? Are there Xs for which it is logically inconsistent, logically incoherent or broadly logically impossible to suppose

that those Xs are at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like?

Another kind of significant metaphysical question about God arises in connection with the following schema:

> (B) X is best explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like.

The significant metaphysical question about God that arises in connection with this schema is this: Are there true instances of it? That is, are there Xs for which it is the case that the best explanation for those Xs lies in the existence of God, aspects of God, actions of God or the like?

Since there are many different conceptions of God, there are many different sets of significant metaphysical questions that are generated by our schemas. As our conception of God is allowed to vary, we may get different answers to the question whether there are Xs for which it is logically inconsistent, logically incoherent or broadly logically impossible to suppose that those Xs are at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like. As our conception of God is allowed to vary, we may get different answers to the question of whether there are Xs for which it is the case that the best explanation for those Xs lies in the existence of God, aspects of God, actions of God or the like.

We begin, then, with a discussion of conceptions of God, with uses of the words ‘god’ and ‘God’. After that preliminary discussion, we shall return to the metaphysical questions that arise in connection with Schema A and Schema B.

[A] Conceptions of God

A natural proposal about the word ‘god’ is that it connotes something like ‘a supernatural being or force that has and exercises power over the natural world but that is not, in turn, under the power of any higher-ranking or more powerful category of supernatural beings or forces’, where supernatural beings and forces include (i) persons and forces that do not have spatiotemporal locations while nonetheless being causally responsible for and/or having causal effects on things that do have spatiotemporal locations, and (ii) spatiotemporally located persons that bring about causal effects at spatiotemporally remote locations in the absence of spatiotemporally continuous causal processes connecting their actions to these effects (unless somehow making use of quantum entanglement or the like). Given this account of the word ‘god’, a natural proposal about the word ‘God’ is that it connotes ‘the god’. That is, the word ‘God’ refers to the one and only god, on the assumption that there is just one god; else, it fails to refer.[1]

As I have already noted, there is considerable divergence of opinion, among those who suppose that the word ‘God’ does refer, concerning the properties and attributes of the

referent of that term. Before we can proceed with our investigation, we need to make a brief overview of the range of this opinion.[2]

Many theists—i.e. many of those who suppose that the word 'God', or its cognate in some language other than English, refers[3]—claim that God is 'perfect', 'maximal', 'infinite', 'greatest', 'supreme', 'ultimate' or the like. Often, these modifiers are paired with the very general descriptor 'being' in the construction of definite descriptions that God is supposed uniquely to satisfy: 'the perfect being', 'the maximal being', 'the infinite being', 'the greatest (possible) being', 'the supreme being', 'the ultimate being' and the like. Other times, these modifiers are taken to apply to a base set of properties or attributes, recording respects or ways in which God is 'perfect', 'maximal', 'infinite', 'greatest', 'supreme', 'ultimate' or the like. Perhaps, for instance, God is 'perfectly good', or 'maximally powerful', or 'infinitely compassionate', or 'supremely wise', and so forth. Either way, this kind of talk yields a first class of divine attributes which, for want of a better term, I shall call 'extensive modifiers': attributes such as perfection, maximality, infinity, greatness, supremacy, ultimacy and the like.

Many theists claim that there is a range of non-relational 'metaphysical' attributes that are properly attributed to God. These non-relational 'metaphysical' attributes divide into two classes: those that are not typically ascribed to God's creation, and those that are at least sometimes supposed to be shared by parts of God's creation. In the former camp are such attributes as 'simplicity', 'indestructibility', 'impassibility', 'eternity' and the like. In the latter camp are such attributes as 'personality', 'agency', 'consciousness',

'freedom' and so forth. Among theists who claim that there are non-relational 'metaphysical' attributes that are properly attributed to God, there is division of opinion about the extent to which it is literally true that God possesses the properties that are thus attributed. Some theists suppose that it is only analogically, metaphorically or figuratively true that God possesses attributes that are literally possessed by parts of God's creation; it is only analogically, metaphorically or figuratively true that God is a person, an agent, conscious, free and so forth. Others extend this stricture even to properties that are supposed uniquely possessed by God; it is only analogically, metaphorically or figuratively true that God is simple, eternal, impassible, indestructible or the like. Yet others suppose that it is literally true that God possesses properties from both of the classes identified above; it is literally true that God is a person, an agent, conscious, free and so forth, and it is literally true that God is simple, indestructible, eternal, impassible and so forth.

Many theists claim that there is a range of general relational 'metaphysical' attributes that are properly attributed to God. These general relational 'metaphysical' attributes are typically generated from something like the claim that God is the 'creator', 'ground' or 'source' of things other than God. Thus, for example, many theists suppose that God is the creator—and sustainer—of the physical universe, responsible for bringing about and sustaining the existence of the physical universe, and for bringing about and sustaining the laws that govern the evolution of the physical universe. Beyond this, many theists suppose that God is the creator and sustainer of much—or even all—else besides. Some theists suppose that God is the maker (or ground, or source) of logic and logical truth, of

mathematics and mathematical truth, of modality and modal truth, of values and truths about value, of morality and moral truth, and so on.[4]

Many theists claim that there is a range of 'evaluative' attributes that are properly attributed to God. Thus, for example, many theists claim that God is good, just, beautiful, rational, wise, worthy of worship and so forth. Perhaps correlatively, many theists suppose that there is a range of 'reactive attitude' attributes that are properly attributed to God. Thus, for example, many theists claim that God is loving, caring, sympathetic, benevolent, provident, jealous, angry and so on. In both of these cases, again, there is division of opinion about the extent to which it is literally true that God possesses the properties that are thus attributed. Some theists suppose that it is only analogically, metaphorically or figuratively true that God possesses 'evaluative' or 'reactive attitude' attributes that are also possessed by human beings; it is only analogically, metaphorically or figuratively true that God is good, just, beautiful, rational, wise, worthy of worship, loving, caring, sympathetic, benevolent, provident, jealous, angry and so forth. Other theists suppose that it is literally true that God possesses 'evaluative' and 'reactive attitude' attributes that are also possessed by human beings; it is literally true that God is good, just, beautiful, rational, wise, worthy of worship, loving, caring, sympathetic, benevolent, provident, jealous, angry and so forth.

The properties and attributes that we have considered to this point might all be properly viewed as generic properties and attributes of God. Most theists agree that God is properly—though perhaps only analogically, metaphorically or figuratively—described

using some extensive modifiers, non-relational ‘metaphysical’ attributes, general relational ‘metaphysical’ attributes, ‘evaluative’ attributes and ‘reactive attitude’ attributes. However, there are at least two further classes of properties and attributes that lead to much greater division of opinion amongst theists.

Many theists suppose that, apart from the general relational ‘metaphysical’ attributes mentioned above, there are also specific relational ‘metaphysical’ attributes that are properly attributed to God. These specific relational ‘metaphysical’ attributes divide into two kinds. On the one hand, there are God’s particular interventions in the course of mundane events: God’s bringing about of miracles, granting of religious experiences, answering of petitionary prayers and so forth. On the other hand, there is God’s overall planning for and guidance of human history: God’s provision of an eschatological frame for human existence and activity, provision of a soteriological frame for human existence and activity, and so forth. While many theists may agree that there are these two kinds of specific relational ‘metaphysical’ attributes that are properly attributed to God, they may well disagree about further details. For instance, theists often disagree about which events are genuine miracles, which experiences are genuine religious experiences, which events are truly answers to petitionary prayers, what is the true destiny of humanity, wherein salvation really lies and so forth. Consider, for example, the peculiarly Christian doctrines of the trinity, incarnation, atonement and resurrection. There are many theists who do not accept any of these doctrines, and hence who do not accept the imputation of properties and attributes to God that are made on the basis of these doctrines. Or, for another example, consider the peculiarly Catholic doctrine that a plenary indulgence can

be gained on any day by recitation of the rosary or pious exercise of the stations of the cross. There are many Christian theists who do not accept this doctrine, and hence who do not accept the imputation of properties and attributes to God that is made on the basis of this doctrine.

As I noted at the outset, there is widespread disagreement amongst theists about the attributes of God. On the one hand, there is disagreement amongst theists about which of the categories of attributes that I have distinguished have literal application to God. On the other hand, for each—or, at any rate, almost all—of the categories of attributes that I have distinguished, there is disagreement about which of the attributes in those categories have any kind of proper application—literal, analogical, metaphorical or figurative—to God. However, we need only a quite minimal conception of God in order to generate interesting questions in connection with the two schemas identified at the beginning of this paper. In particular, if we suppose that it is literally true that, if God exists, God is the maker of the physical universe—where it is understood that only an agent can be a maker—then we have all we need to establish a launching pad for interesting metaphysical inquiry. Since almost all contemporary metaphysical speculation about God assumes at least this much, there is no danger that, given only this minimal initial assumption, our subsequent investigation will fail to engage with widespread concerns in contemporary metaphysical speculation about God.

[A] Schema A

It is clear that, if there are true instances of Schema A—i.e. if there are true instances of the claim that it is doxastically possible that X is at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like—then it is doxastically possible that God exists.

There are various grounds on which it has been denied that it is doxastically possible that God exists. Some have claimed that the sentence 'God exists' is meaningless; whence, plausibly, it follows that the sentence 'It is doxastically possible that God exists' fails even to express a meaningful claim. Others have claimed that the sentence 'God exists' expresses a claim that is logically contradictory, logically incoherent or broadly logically impossible; whence, plausibly, it follows that the sentence 'It is doxastically possible that God exists' expresses a falsehood.

Grounds for supposing that the sentence 'God exists' is meaningless are diverse. Some have supposed that the sentence 'God exists' is meaningless because it is neither empirically verifiable nor true in virtue of meaning.[5] Some have supposed that the sentence 'God exists' is meaningless because it has no proper use in those religious language games that give meaning to the name 'God'.[6] Some have supposed that the sentence 'God exists' is meaningless because it entails other sentences that are meaningless, e.g. 'There is a person without a body who acts in the world'.[7] It is beyond the compass of this essay to investigate these claims; I propose to proceed on the—arguably commonsensical—assumption that the sentence 'God exists' is at least meaningful.[8]

Grounds for supposing that the sentence ‘God exists’ expresses a claim that is logically contradictory, logically incoherent or broadly logically impossible are also quite diverse. It is clear that we can select, from the range of properties and attributes mentioned in our earlier discussion, sets of properties and attributes that are jointly logically inconsistent. Thus, for example, it is simply incoherent to suppose that it is both literally true that God is impassible and literally true that God possesses certain kinds of reactive attitudes, e.g. that God is literally jealous, angry, moved by our suffering or the like. It is also clear that we can choose to interpret properties that belong to the range of properties and attributes mentioned in our earlier discussion in ways that are logically inconsistent or incoherent. In particular, this point is made vivid by some recent discussions of, say, omnipotence or omniscience.[9] However, it seems prima facie implausible—not to mention downright uncharitable—to suppose that there is no logically coherent conception of God possessed by at least some theists. Since it is plainly beyond the compass of this essay to investigate these issues further, I propose to proceed on the—arguably commonsensical—assumption that it is doxastically possible that God exists.[10]

Given the assumption that it is doxastically possible that God exists, then it is surely plausible to suppose that there are true instances of schema A—that there are true instances of the claim that it is doxastically possible that X is at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like. Perhaps, for example, it is doxastically possible that the existence of the physical universe is at least partly explained in terms of God’s creative activity. However, the most interesting question that

arises in connection with schema A concerns not the existence of true instances of the schema, but rather the existence of false instances given that there are true instances. Some theists have said that everything else—and they mean literally everything else—arises from God. God doesn't just make the physical universe and the physical laws. God also makes logic and logical law, mathematics and mathematical law, morality and moral law, value and axiological law, modality, meaning and so on. Can all—or, indeed, any—of this be so?

In order to think about this question, it seems to me that we should start by considering things from the standpoint of the causal order. Making is a causal activity; to make something so is to cause it to be so. Moreover, to make something so is to effect a change in the causal order. At one point in the causal order, something is not so, and then, as a result of causal activity, that thing comes to be so.[11] The creation of the physical universe can be taken to be a paradigm here. Initially, in the causal order, God exists and the physical universe does not. Then, in the causal order, God causes the physical universe to come into existence, and to operate according to physical laws that God also causes to come into effect. Generalizing from this paradigm case, we have something like the following causal principle:

> (C) When God makes something, there is a point in the causal order where that thing is absent, and then God's activity makes it the case that that thing is present at (some) subsequent points in the causal order.

(C) imposes clear in-principle constraints on God's creative activities. God cannot make—cannot bring about—anything that is true at all points in the causal order, nor can God make—bring about—anything that must already be true in order to make it possible for God to bring things about. If we suppose—as we should—that no point in the causal order can be either logically contradictory or logically incomplete, then it seems to me that we cannot also coherently suppose that God makes logic and logical law. If we suppose that God is always one, then we must be supposing that there is no point in the causal order at which mathematics and mathematical law fails to obtain—whence it surely follows that we cannot coherently suppose that God makes mathematics and mathematical law. If we suppose that there are things that are always necessarily true of God[12], then we must be supposing that there is no point in the causal order at which modality and modal distinction has not yet been instantiated—whence it surely follows that we cannot coherently suppose that God makes modality and modal distinction. If we suppose that God is always good, beautiful and supremely valuable, then we must be supposing that there is no point in the causal order at which value and axiological law, morality and moral law, and beauty and aesthetic law have not yet been instantiated—whence it surely follows that we cannot coherently suppose that God makes value and axiological law, morality and moral law, and beauty and aesthetic law. If we suppose that God is always conscious and capable of agency, then we must be supposing that there is no point in the causal order in which consciousness and capacity for agency are uninstantiated—whence it surely follows that we cannot plausibly suppose that God makes it the case that there are conscious agents (though, of course, for all that has been

argued to this point, we can plausibly suppose that God makes it the case that there are conscious agents other than God).[13] And so on.

In the face of this argument, some theists might be tempted to say that these problematic things—logic and logical law, mathematics and mathematical law, morality and moral law, value and axiological law, beauty and aesthetic law, modality, meaning and so forth—are all just ideas in the mind of God, and hence in that way dependent upon God for their existence. But that suggestion is surely no help. For we can ask: have these ideas always been in the mind of God, or not? [14] If they have not always been in the mind of God, then exactly the same difficulties arise again. Was God not one before God had the ideas of mathematics and mathematical law? Did God have logically contradictory properties before God had the ideas of logic and logical law? Was nothing in God necessary before God had the ideas of modality and modal distinction? Was God neither good nor beautiful before God had the ideas of value and axiological law, morality and moral law, and beauty and aesthetic law? Was God neither conscious nor capable of agency before God had the ideas of agency and consciousness? And so forth. On the other hand, if these ideas have always been in the mind of God, then we need to ask: Could they have been otherwise? That is, could there have been different mathematical, logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas in the mind of God? (Could it have been, for example, the God was given to quussing rather than plussing?[15]) If so, then, ex hypothesi, it is merely a brute fact that the mind of God contains the mathematical, logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas that it happens to contain. Even if we suppose that God exists of necessity, and that, of necessity, there are mathematical,

logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas in the mind of God, it remains the case that, on the view presently under consideration, the content of the particular mathematical, logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas that are in the mind of God is not in any way dependent upon God. On the other hand, if not—i.e. if there could not have been different mathematical, logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas in the mind of God—then, even if we suppose that God exists of necessity, and that, of necessity, there are mathematical, logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas in the mind of God, it remains no less the case that the content of those ideas is not in any way dependent upon God. After all, on the suppositions now in play, there is nothing that God could or can do, no way that God could or can be, that would change the content of those ideas. In short, if we suppose that mathematical, logical, modal, axiological, moral and aesthetic ideas have always been in the mind of God, then whether we think that the presence of those particular ideas in the mind of God is necessary or contingent, we are driven to the conclusion that the contents of those ideas are ontic surds, not in any way dependent upon God's existence, properties, actions or the like.

In the face of this further argument, some theists may be tempted to say that we can defeat the idea that the contents of ideas in the mind of God are ontic surds by appealing to further esoteric doctrines about the properties and attributes of God. One thought—pursued, for example, in Kretzmann (1983)—is that the doctrine of divine simplicity might be invoked to save the day. If we suppose that God is absolutely simple in the sense that God is identical to each of his attributes, then we can suppose, for example,

that God just is perfect goodness, perfect beauty, perfect wisdom and so on. Moreover, we can then go on to embrace pairs of theses like the following, which seem sufficient to license the idea that God does indeed make morality and moral law.

> (D) God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself approves of right actions just because they are right and disapproves of wrong actions just because they are wrong.

> (E) Right actions are right just because God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself approves of them and wrong actions are wrong just because God conceived of as a moral judge identical with perfect goodness itself disapproves of them.

There are at least three problems here. First, it is unclear how this idea could extend to cover mathematics, modality, meaning and other problematic categories. Second, the doctrine of divine simplicity, in the form that Kretzmann gives it, seems to be incoherent in more than one way: it identifies attributes that are plainly different, and it assumes that there can be instantiated attributes that are not instantiated in a bearer of attributes.[16] Third, and most important, any theory that yields both (D) and (E) just has to be wrong, at least on the assumption that 'because' is univocal, irreflexive and transitive. Given univocity and transitivity, (D) and (E) entail, for example, that right actions are right just because right actions are right. But that contradicts irreflexivity. The underlying problem here, I think, is that even if you grant that God is 'perfect goodness itself', it is simply

incoherent to suppose that one thing is both the measure of goodness and also that which makes it the case that it is (itself) the measure of goodness. If you think that 'perfect goodness itself' is the measure of goodness, then I think you have no choice but to say that it is then simply a brute given that 'perfect goodness itself' is the measure of goodness.

Even if the above argument provides good reason for supposing that it cannot be that God makes (all of) logic and logical law, mathematics and mathematical law, morality and moral law, value and axiological law, modality, meaning, and so on, it leaves open the question of exactly what can be coherently supposed to be made by God.[17] However, to pursue that further question would take us beyond the compass of the present essay. Instead, we now turn our attention to the second of the two schemas that I suggested give rise to significant metaphysical questions about God.

[A] Schema B (Causal Order and the Cosmological Argument)

There are various people who will suppose that there are no true instances of Schema B, i.e. of the claim that X is best explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like. In particular, those who suppose that it is meaningless to suppose that God exists, and those who suppose that it is logically inconsistent to suppose, or logically incoherent to suppose, or logically impossible that God exists, will naturally suppose that there are no true instances of Schema B. Following the lead established in

the preceding discussion of Schema A, I propose simply to suppose—without argument, or at least for the sake of argument—that it is doxastically possible that God exists.

Once we grant that it is doxastically possible that God exists, it is plausible to suppose that we grant that it is doxastically possible that there are some true instances of Schema B. For instance, if it is doxastically possible that God exists, then it seems plausible to suppose that it is doxastically possible that the best explanation of the existence of God is the necessary existence of God. For the purposes of the subsequent discussion, I wish to rule out 'trivial' cases like this. What is of interest to me are instances of Schema B in which X is not something that is in dispute between theists and non-theists. The paradigm case—the one that I shall explore in detail below—is the existence of the domain of natural causes. Could it be that the existence of the domain of natural causes is best explained by the creative activities of God? Or, at any rate, could it be that the existence of the domain of natural causes is better explained by the creative activities of God than by any competing putative explanation?

Some people may suppose that this question is not particularly interesting. According to these people, when it comes to questions about what the best explanation is, what one ought to do is to consider total theory in the light of total evidence. The best theory—the theory that one ought to accept—is the theory that gives the best overall explanation of the total evidence that one has. Moreover, questions about best explanation concerning matters of detail are always simply 'spoils to the victor': the best overall explanation of the total evidence is, ipso facto, the best explanation concerning any matter of detail. If

we suppose—as non-theists must—that our best overall explanation of the total evidence is one that makes no mention of God's existence, attributes, or activities, then, on the account currently under consideration, we must also suppose that there is no X that is best explained by God's existence, attributes, activities or the like.

It is not clear that a view of this kind is defensible. After all, one might think, one can only work out which is the best overall explanation of the total evidence by considering how competing putative explanations fare on all of the particular pieces of evidence that one has to hand. And, one might also think, it is implausible to suppose that we ever really do arrive at best overall explanations of total evidence; for a range of reasons, we simply don't have the capacity to compare total theories on total evidence. At any rate, for the purposes of subsequent discussion, I am going to assume that we can make sensible comparisons of the explanatory virtues of different theories with respect to particular pieces of evidence. In particular, I am going to assume that we can make sensible comparisons of the explanatory virtues of naturalism and theism when it comes to the explanation of the existence of the domain of natural causes. This discussion is meant to illustrate the way in which Schema B can be used to raise and address interesting metaphysical questions.

We begin, then, with the assumption that there is a domain of natural causes. For the purposes of discussion, it might ease exposition to suppose that the domain of natural causes can just be identified with the physical universe that we inhabit. It might ease exposition even further to suppose that the physical universe that we inhabit is a standard

Friedmann-Robertson-Walker (FRW) universe.[18] However, it is a substantive hypothesis that the domain of natural causes does not extend beyond the spatiotemporal manifold within which we are embedded, and it is an even more substantive—indeed, I think, almost certainly false—hypothesis that our universe is a standard FRW universe. Of course, we do suppose that the physical universe that we inhabit is at least a part of the domain of natural causes; what is left open is whether the physical universe is a proper part of the domain of natural causes. In order not to beg any questions, we do not suppose that the domain of natural causes is a domain in which there are none but natural causes; rather, we suppose that the domain of natural causes is the smallest domain beyond which there are no natural causes.

The hypotheses to be compared are (a) the naturalist hypothesis that there are none but natural causes and (b) the theistic hypothesis that there are none but natural and divine causes.[19] The method is to consider the theoretical—and, in particular, explanatory—virtues of these two hypotheses when they are paired with hypotheses about the global shape of causal reality, i.e. the global shape of the domain of causes.

A first hypothesis about the global shape of the domain of causes is that it involves an infinite regress under the causal relation. If there is an infinite regress under the causal relation, then, under the naturalistic hypothesis, there is an infinite regress of natural causes. However, under the theistic hypothesis there are several at least prima facie possibilities. First, there might be a finite series of natural causes preceded by an infinite regress of divine causes. Second, there might be both an infinite regress of natural causes

and an infinite regress of divine causes. Third, there might be an infinite regress of natural causes preceded by a finite series of divine causes.

It is incoherent to suppose that there is an infinite regress of natural causes preceded by a finite series of divine causes, since, ex hypothesi, there is no natural cause that uniquely succeeds the last of the finite series of divine causes (hence, no natural cause that is the one that is caused by that last divine cause). So we can set this case aside.[20]

If we compare the hypothesis that there is an infinite regress of natural causes with the hypothesis that there is a finite series of natural causes preceded by an infinite regress of divine causes, then it seems clear that the former hypothesis is more explanatorily virtuous, since it invokes only one kind of cause (as against two), and since, otherwise, the two hypotheses are explanatorily on a par (since each involves an infinite regress of causes).

If we compare the hypothesis that there is an infinite regress of natural causes with the hypothesis that there is both an infinite regress of natural causes and an infinite regress of divine causes then, again, it seems clear that the former hypothesis is more explanatorily virtuous, since it invokes only one kind of cause (as against two), since it invokes only one infinite regress (as against two), and since, otherwise, the two hypotheses are explanatorily on a par. (Might the theistic hypothesis have an explanatory advantage here if it says that each of the natural causes also has a theistic cause? No. Even under this

further assumption, the divine causes in the theistic hypothesis would have exactly the same explanatory standing as the natural causes under the naturalistic hypothesis.)

Collecting the various threads together: under the hypothesis that there is an infinite regress under the causal relation, the hypothesis that there are none but natural causes is more explanatorily virtuous than the hypothesis that there are both divine and natural causes, insofar as we are merely concerned with explaining the fact that there is a domain of natural causes.

A second hypothesis about the global shape of the domain of causes is that it involves an initial contingent cause. This hypothesis admits of further elaboration: it might be that the initial contingent cause involves a contingent state of a necessarily existent being; or it could be that the initial contingent cause involves a contingent state of a contingently existing being.

Suppose, first, that there is an initial contingent cause involving a contingent state of a contingently existing being. Under the naturalistic hypothesis, there is a finite series of natural causes beginning with an initial contingent cause involving a contingent state of a contingently existing natural entity. Under the theistic hypothesis, there is a finite series of natural causes preceded by a finite series of divine causes, beginning with an initial contingent state involving a contingently existing divine being. If we compare these two hypotheses, then it is clear that the former is more explanatorily virtuous, since it invokes

only one kind of cause (as against two), and one category of being (as against two), and since the two hypotheses are otherwise explanatorily on a par.

Suppose, second, that there is an initial contingent cause involving a contingent state of a necessarily existing being. Under the naturalistic hypothesis, there is a finite series of natural causes beginning with an initial contingent cause involving a contingent state of a necessarily existing natural entity. Under the theistic hypothesis, there is a finite series of natural causes preceded by a finite series of divine causes, beginning with an initial contingent state involving a necessarily existent divine being. If we compare these two hypotheses, then it is clear that the former is more explanatorily virtuous, since it invokes only one kind of cause (as against two), and one category of being (as against two), and since the two hypotheses are otherwise explanatorily on a par.[21]

Perhaps it might be objected here that it is a mistake to suppose that the postulation of a metaphysically necessarily existent natural entity is no less explanatorily virtuous than the postulation of a metaphysically necessarily existent divine entity. Certainly, it must be conceded that many naturalists have rejected the suggestion that there are any necessarily existent entities. However, it seems to me that it is nonetheless a mistake to suppose that naturalists cannot countenance metaphysically necessarily existent natural entities. If naturalists are going to take metaphysical necessity seriously, then, given the assumption that there is an initial state of the actual world, there is much to recommend <u>to them</u> the view that says that all metaphysically possible worlds have initial states that involve the same entities that are present in the initial state of the actual world. But, on that theory of

metaphysical possibility, if there is an initial natural causal state involving an initial natural entity, then the existence of that initial natural entity does turn out to be metaphysically necessary.

A third hypothesis about the global shape of the domain of causes is that it involves an initial necessary cause. Under the naturalistic hypothesis, there is a finite series of natural causes beginning with an initial necessary cause (a necessary state of a necessarily existent natural being). Under the theistic hypothesis, there is a finite series of natural causes preceded by a finite series of divine causes, beginning with an initial necessary cause (a necessary state of a necessarily existent divine being). If we compare these two hypotheses then, again, it is clear that the former is more explanatorily virtuous, since it invokes only one kind of cause (as against two), and only one category of being (as against two), and since the two hypotheses are otherwise explanatorily on a par. (Again, I anticipate that some may object that necessary states of necessarily existent entities are not naturalistically kosher. But I demur. Naturalists can countenance metaphysically necessary states of metaphysically necessarily existent entities; and, if they do, they do best to adopt the view that says that all metaphysically possible worlds overlap with some initial segment of the actual world.)

Collecting together the various strands of the argument, we have the following conclusion: no matter what hypothesis we make about the global shape of the domain of causes, the relevant naturalistic hypothesis is more explanatorily virtuous than the

relevant theistic hypothesis, insofar as we are merely concerned with explaining the fact that there is a domain of natural causes.

Perhaps some may be tempted to object to this conclusion in the following way. If we compare the view of a theist who holds that there is a finite series of natural causes preceded by a finite series of divine causes, beginning with an initial contingent cause (a contingent state of a necessarily existent divine being), and a naturalist who holds that there is an infinite regress of natural causes, we have been given no reason at all to suppose that the view of that naturalist is more explanatorily virtuous than the view of that theist. Indeed, isn't it plausible to claim that, in this particular case, the view of the theist is actually more explanatorily virtuous than the view of the naturalist, at least insofar as we are merely concerned with explaining the fact that there is a domain of natural causes?

I can certainly grant—at least for the sake of argument—that, in this particular case, the view of the theist is more explanatorily virtuous than the view of the naturalist, at least insofar as we are merely concerned with explaining the fact that there is a domain of natural causes; there is simply no inconsistency between this concession and the conclusion of the argument that I set out above. Schematically, my argument has a conclusion that looks like this: N_1 is preferable to T_1; N_2 is preferable to T_2; N_3 is preferable to T_3. It is perfectly consistent with this conclusion that, say, T_3 is preferable to N_1. However, if we suppose that the choice between N and T is either a choice between N_1 and T_1, or N_2 and T_2, or N_3 and T_3, then it still follows from my argument that N

should be chosen ahead of T. But, if we set all other considerations aside, and concern ourselves solely with explanation of the fact that there is a domain of natural causes, then it is perfectly proper to suppose that the choice between N and T is either a choice between N_1 and T_1, N_2 and T_2, or N_3 and T_3. (Alternatively, we might argue the case as follows. Suppose that it is true that T_3 is preferable to N_1. It is still true that N_3 is preferable to T_3. And if, further, T_2 is preferable to N_3, it is still true that N_2 is preferable to T_2. Assuming that we cannot have violation of transitivity, it is guaranteed that there is a naturalistic hypothesis that is preferable to all of the theistic hypotheses.)

No doubt others will be tempted to object that the above argument is vitiated by the use that it makes of controversial theories of metaphysical necessity and metaphysical possibility. How could these appeals to controversial theories of metaphysical necessity and metaphysical possibility be justified given the aims of the argument?

Perhaps it might be said that judgments about naturalist invocations of metaphysical necessity and metaphysical possibility are to be assessed by naturalist lights, i.e. in terms of what naturalists judge to be the best available interpretations of metaphysical necessity and metaphysical possibility. However, that response seems to undermine the idea that we are undertaking a neutral cost-benefit analysis of rival metaphysical hypotheses: for, it might be said, there is no reason to suppose that theists will be satisfied with naturalist interpretations of metaphysical necessity and metaphysical possibility.

A better response is to observe that theists who countenance metaphysical necessity and metaphysical possibility typically accept the same kind of theory that has here been offered to naturalists. For, on the assumption that God exists necessarily and that God's existence cannot be causally posterior to anything else, it follows that, if God's causally initial state is metaphysically necessary, then all possible worlds overlap with some initial segment of the actual world; and it also follows that, if God's causally initial state is metaphysically contingent, then all possible worlds have initial states that involve the same entities that are present in the initial state of the actual world. Insofar as we are merely concerned with explaining the fact that there is a domain of natural causes, the extent of the domain of metaphysical possibility is plainly irrelevant. Disagreement between theists and naturalists about what is metaphysically necessary and metaphysically possible has no implications for the cost-benefit analysis of competing explanations of the fact that there is a domain of natural causes.

Given all of the preceding discussion, I conclude that, if we focus merely on explanation of the fact that there is a domain of natural causes, naturalism trumps theism. In light of recent literature—and, in particular, in light of recent enthusiasm for causal cosmological arguments[22]—this may seem to be a surprising conclusion. As that literature makes clear, there are many people who suppose that it is possible to develop cosmological proofs of the existence of God based on considerations concerning the explanation of the fact that there is a domain of natural causes without so much as asking about the comparative explanatory virtues of naturalistic theories. The main moral that I draw from the preceding discussion is that you are very likely to go wrong if you try to develop

arguments for a preferred view using only resources available from within that view and without considering the resources available from competing standpoints.

[A] Schema B (Fine-Tuning and the Argument for Design)

Even if it were conceded that, if we focus merely on explanation of the fact that there is a domain of natural causes, naturalism trumps theism, it might still be argued that this shows neither that there is no useful purpose that might be served by causal cosmological arguments nor that we need look very far in order to find further data that will reverse the explanatory ranking. For example, it might be suggested that considerations about the alleged fine-tuning of the universe for life, and considerations about the presence of consciousness in the universe, immediately give the explanatory edge to theism.

Consider, first, the alleged fine-tuning of the universe for life. The allegation that the universe is fine-tuned for life is typically based in some version of the claim that, if the values of various physical parameters had been slightly different, then life would not—and could not—have arisen in the universe. The question that is then posed is this: What explanation is there of the fact that these parameters take life-permitting values—i.e. that they take values that fall within the narrow ranges that characterize life-permitting universes? Setting aside any scruples that one might have about the claim that the universe is fine-tuned for life—i.e., supposing without any further critical discussion that it is simply true that the universe is fine-tuned for life[23]—we ask: does one of theism and

naturalism provide a better explanation than the other does of the fine-tuning of the universe for life?

In order to think about this question, it seems to me to be fruitful to consider hypotheses about where in the causal order the fine-tuning for life of our universe first makes its appearance. But, in order to think about where in the causal order the fine-tuning for life of our universe first makes its appearance, we need first to consider hypotheses about where in the causal order our universe initially makes its appearance. On the one hand, it could be that there is no part of the natural causal order that precedes our universe; on the other hand, it could be that there is some part of the natural causal order that precedes our universe. Furthermore, it could be that all parts of the natural causal order are fine-tuned for life, or it could be that there is some initial part of the natural causal order that is not fine-tuned for life. Finally, if there is a divine causal order that is antecedent to the natural causal order, then it could be that there is an initial part of the divine causal order in which it has not yet been determined that our universe is fine-tuned for life, or it could be that, at all points in the divine causal order, it is determined that our universe is fine-tuned for life.

Suppose we say that the global causal order is fine-tuned for life at any point at which it is determined that our part of the natural order is fine-tuned for life. Then we have two major hypotheses: either the global causal order is everywhere fine-tuned for life, or else there is an initial part of the global causal order that is not fine-tuned for life.

First, we consider the suggestion that the global causal order is everywhere fine-tuned for life. Following our earlier discussion, we consider four hypotheses about the shape of the global causal order: infinite regress, necessary origin, contingent origin (but involving necessary existents), and contingent origin (involving only contingent existents). We compare the explanatory merits of naturalism and theism on each of these four hypotheses in turn.

If the global causal order is an infinite regress that is everywhere fine-tuned for life, then naturalism says that there is an infinite regress of natural causes, and that each point in that regress is fine-tuned for life. Whatever theism says—that there is an infinite regress of divine causes preceding a finite series of natural causes, all of which are fine-tuned for life, or that there are infinite regresses of both divine and natural causes, each of which is fine-tuned for life—it is clear that naturalism is more explanatorily virtuous.

If the global causal order has a necessary origin and is everywhere fine-tuned for life, then naturalism says that there is a necessary initial natural state that is necessarily fine-tuned for life, whereas theism says that there is a necessary initial divine state that is necessarily fine-tuned for life (i.e. there is a necessary initial divine state at which it is already determined that our part of the natural order is fine-tuned for life). Again, it is obvious that, in this case, naturalism is more explanatorily virtuous.

If the global causal order has a contingent origin involving necessary existents, then there are two possibilities for fine-tuning: either it is necessary or it is contingent. If it is

necessary, then the argument goes the same way as the previous case. If the fine-tuning is contingent, then, in order to compare naturalism and theism, we need to compare ranges of possibilities. On the present hypothesis, naturalism says something like this: it is a matter of brute contingency that the universe is fine-tuned for life; there is no explanation of why the relevant values fall in the life-permitting range. And theism says something like this: it is a matter of brute contingency that God makes a universe that is fine-tuned for life; there is no explanation of why God has the preferences, intentions, beliefs, desires, and so forth that lead to the making of a universe that is fine-tuned for life rather than some other kind of universe. While, as always, the cost of naturalism is less, we cannot immediately conclude that it is more virtuous in this case. For it might be that, if we imagine uniform sampling applied to the two cases, we judge that it is much more likely that we should end up with fine-tuning on the theistic hypothesis than on the naturalistic hypothesis. However, if we suppose—as I think we should—that God could make any universe that is possible on the naturalist hypothesis, then we are surely entitled to the conclusion that the range of possibilities is no narrower on the theistic hypothesis than it is on the naturalistic hypothesis.[24] And, if that is so, then we can conclude that naturalism is also more explanatorily virtuous than theism if the global causal order has a contingent origin involving necessary existents and in which the fine-tuning of the global causal order is contingent.

If the global causal order has a contingent origin involving only contingent existents, then, I think, the argument goes the same way as the case in which the global causal order has

a contingent origin involving necessary existents and in which the fine-tuning of the global causal order is contingent.

Collecting together the various parts of the argument, we can conclude that, if the global causal order is everywhere fine-tuned for life, then naturalism trumps theism insofar as we are concerned merely with explanation of the fact that the universe is fine-tuned for life.

Second, we consider the suggestion that there is an initial part of the global order that is not fine-tuned for life. Here, things get even messier, because we need to consider a range of hypotheses about where fine-tuning is introduced into the causal order. Fine-tuning might be introduced into our universe after some initial segment of the universe. Or it might be introduced at the origin of our universe, after some initial segment of the natural causal order. Or it might be introduced at some earlier point in the natural causal order, after some initial segment of the natural causal order. Or it might be introduced at some point in the divine causal order that precedes the natural order, after some initial segment of the divine causal order.

On the supposition that fine-tuning is introduced into the causal order in any of the first three ways just mentioned—i.e. if it is introduced into our universe after some initial segment of the universe, or if it is introduced at the origin of our universe, after some initial segment of the natural causal order, or if it is introduced at some earlier point in the natural causal order, after some initial segment of the natural causal order—naturalists

are driven to the conclusion that fine-tuning arises as the result of an objectively chancy process. However, on the supposition that fine-tuning is introduced into the causal order in the fourth of the ways mentioned above—i.e. if it is introduced at some point in the divine causal order that precedes the natural order, after some initial segment of the divine causal order—theists are also driven to the conclusion that fine-tuning arises as the result of an objectively chancy process. Hence, we can conclude that, on any version of the suggestion that there is an initial part of the global order that is not fine-tuned for life, it turns out that fine-tuning arises as the result of an objectively chancy process. Consequently, given the assumption that God could have preferences, intentions, beliefs, desires and so forth that lead to the making of any of the universes that the naturalist supposes are possible, it seems that we quickly arrive at the conclusion that, if there is an initial part of the global order that is not fine-tuned for life, naturalism trumps theism insofar as we are concerned merely with explanation of the fact that the universe is fine-tuned for life.

And so, collecting together the threads of the overall argument, we can indeed conclude that, insofar as we are concerned merely with the explanation of two facts— the fact that there is a domain of natural causes and the fact that our universe is fine-tuned for life—naturalism trumps theism. Surprising as it might seem, theism has no explanatory advantage over naturalism when it comes to the explanation of either of these two facts; theism is always more theoretically expensive than naturalism, and it never gives a more satisfying explanation of that which is to be explained.

[A] Coda

Even if it is accepted that the fact that there is a domain of natural causes and the fact that our universe is fine-tuned for life are not—separately or collectively—better explained by theism than by naturalism, it may still be thought that we shall not need to go much further afield in order to find facts that are much better explained by theism than by naturalism. As foreshadowed above, it might be said—for example—that the fact that there are conscious agents in our universe is much better explained by theism than by naturalism.[25] Or it might be said—perhaps relatedly—that the fact that there are rational agents in our universe is much better explained by theism than by naturalism.[26]

Does the explanatory advantage swing back from naturalism to theism when these further facts—that there are conscious agents in our universe and that there are rational agents in our universe—are thrown onto the scales? Unlike the cases that we have examined so far—weighing the virtues of theist and naturalist explanations of the fact that there is a domain of natural causes and the fact that our universe is fine-tuned for life—these new cases do not allow a straightforward comparison in the light of hypotheses about the global shape of the causal order. According to theism, consciousness and reason are initial and universal properties of the causal order; there is no point in the causal order at which there fails to be a conscious, rational agent. However, according to naturalism, consciousness and reason are neither initial nor universal properties of the causal order; for any points in the causal order at which there are conscious, rational agents in particular locations, there are earlier points in the causal order at which there are no

conscious, rational agents at those same locations. How, then, shall we set about evaluating the comparative explanatory merits of theism and naturalism when it comes to the existence of conscious, rational agents in our universe?

Many people suppose that it is a mystery how consciousness and reason could be found in a purely natural world: how could mere aggregations of molecules possibly be sites of consciousness and reason? Many other people suppose that it is a mystery how consciousness and reason could be found beyond a purely natural world: how could unembodied entities possibly be sites of consciousness and reason? As things stand, we clearly don't have sufficient reason to say that the explanatory advantage swings back from naturalism to theism when these further facts—that there are conscious agents in our universe, and that there are rational agents in our universe—are thrown onto the scales. (At the very least, we could only have sufficient reason to say this if we had some adequate way of evaluating the comparative mysteries.)

Moreover, the ground on which we might seek further facts that would deliver such a swing in explanatory advantage is plausibly not very broad. On the one hand, there are the limitations that are imposed by the kinds of arguments that we developed in connection with Schema A: we cannot expect that considerations about logic, meaning, mathematics, value, modality, morality, aesthetics, or anything else of a normative kind will suffice to make the pendulum swing. And, on the other hand, it is surely implausible to suppose that considerations about miracles, religious experience and divine intervention in the mundane world can provide sufficient impetus; if naturalism trumps

theism in all other explanatory domains, then we surely have very good reason to think that there are no miracles, veridical religious experiences, divine interventions in the mundane order and the like.

If all of this is even roughly right, then it suggests that theists need to be quite heavily invested in the idea that there really is a mystery how consciousness and reason could be found in a purely natural world. If we follow Dennett (1991)—and others—in supposing that allegations of mystery are seriously misplaced, then, I think, we must come very close to thinking that naturalism defeats theism; there simply is no domain in which theistic explanation is better than naturalistic explanation.

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Craig, W. L. and Moreland, J. P. (eds.) (2010) Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology. Oxford: Blackwell

This volume collects together state-of-the-art surveys of the major arguments for the existence of God—and the argument from evil against the existence of God—by notable contemporary theistic philosophers (including Charles Taliaferro, Alexander Pruss, Robin Collins, Victor Reppert, Stewart Goetz, Timothy McGrew, Lydia McGrew, and the editors of the volume). More than half of its pages are taken up with discussion of cosmological arguments and arguments for design.

Hoffmann, J. and Rosenkrantz, G. (2002) The Divine Attributes Oxford: Blackwell

This book belongs to Blackwell's Exploring the Philosophy of Religion series, edited by Michael Peterson. The series aims to occupy the middle ground between elementary text and pioneering monograph. The book has chapters on the idea of God, substantiality, incorporeality, necessary existence, eternality, omniscience, perfect goodness and

omnipotence. In most chapters, Hoffmann and Rosenkrantz defend controversial philosophical analyses justified against the background of contemporary debate.

Mackie, J. L. (1982) The Miracle of Theism Oxford: Clarendon

Mackie's book is the gold standard for recent discussions of arguments about the existence of God. Mackie provides clear and concise analyses of a wide range of arguments for and against the existence of God, including ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, arguments for design, arguments from consciousness, moral arguments, Pascal's wager, arguments from evil, arguments from the diversity of religious experience, and so forth.

Manson, N. (ed.) (2003), God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science. London: Routledge.

Manson's book is a collection of new and recent essays on arguments for design. Apart from Manson's own excellent introduction, the collection includes papers by Elliott Sober, John Leslie, Richard Swinburne, Paul Davies, William Lane Craig, Robin Collins, Martin Rees, William Dembski, Michael Behe, Michael Ruse, and others. The collection provides an excellent introduction to recent debates about arguments for design. (I give a more detailed review of Manson's book in Sophia 43, 1, 2004, pp.127-31.)

Martin, M. (1990), Atheism: A Philosophical Justification. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Martin's book is a comprehensive treatment of arguments about the existence of God. Martin argues that there are no good arguments in favour of belief in God, and that there are many good arguments in favour of failure to believe in God (and, indeed, in favour of believing that God does not exist). (For a detailed critical study of Martin's book, see Oppy, G. (2007) "Atheism: A Retrospective" Philo 10, 1, pp.72-84.)

O'Connor, T. (2008), Theism and Ultimate Explanation: The Necessary Shape of Contingency. Oxford: Blackwell.

O'Connor's book provides an interesting defence of a cosmological argument from contingency. The first half of the book is concerned with the development of a general metaphysics and epistemology of modality; the second half applies this framework in the defence of a combined cosmological-cum-design argument for the existence of God. (I review O'Connor's book in Notre Dame Philosophical Review; and I analyse O'Connor's argument in Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion, Volume 3.)

Oppy, G. (2006), Philosophical Perspectives on Infinity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book aims to discuss general philosophical questions about infinity that bear on central issues in philosophy of religion. In particular, this book supplies necessary background for proper understanding of debates about cosmological arguments, arguments for design, Pascal's wager, analyses of omniscience, no-best-world responses to arguments from evil, and much else besides.

Oppy, G. (2009), 'Gods', in Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion, Volume 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 231-50.

This paper defends the view that to be God is to be the one and only god, where to be a god is to be a supernatural being or force that has and exercises power over the natural world but that is not, in turn, under the power of any higher-ranking or more powerful category of beings or forces. (Cf. Footnote 1 above.) The paper considers various alternative views about the meaning of the word 'God', and argues against them.

Pruss, A. (2006), The Principle of Sufficient Reason. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pruss's excellent book is an extended—book-length!—discussion of the principle of sufficient reason, i.e., roughly, of the claim that nothing happens without a reason, or cause, or sufficient explanation, or the like. Pruss defends the principle of sufficient reason with a diverse range of arguments, responds to objections to the principle (including well-known objections from Hume and van Inwagen), and indicates the

various philosophical benefits that—in his view—would flow from acceptance of the principle.

Sobel, J. H. (2004) Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sobel's book is the only more recent book to come close to Mackie (1982). Sobel provides detailed and intricate analyses of ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, arguments for design, arguments from miracles, paradoxes of omnipotence and omniscience, logical and evidential arguments from evil, and Pascal's wager. (I give a lengthy review of Sobel's book in Philo, 9, 1, 73-91.)

Swinburne, R. (1977) The Coherence of Theism Oxford: Clarendon

This book is the first of a trilogy (the other two volumes of which are The Existence of God (1979) and Faith and Reason (1981)). The book is concerned with the meaning and coherence of the claim that God exists. After an initial discussion of religious language, there are chapters on many of the attributes that are standardly ascribed to God: freedom, creativity, omnipotence, omniscience, perfect goodness, eternity, immutability, necessity, holiness and worship-worthiness.

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[1] See Oppy (2009) for an extended discussion and justification of this account of the meaning of the word 'God'.

[2] For more detailed discussions, see, for example: Hoffmann and Rosenkrantz (2002), Morris (1992), Swinburne (1977) and Wierenga (1989).

[3] Here I stipulate a meaning for the term 'theist'. Some may say that I would do better to use the term 'monotheist', arguing that all polytheists—including those who do not suppose that there is a supreme god—are, ipso facto, theists. However, it is now standard to use the term 'theist' in the way that I have here stipulated.

[4] See, for example: Adams (1999) and Leftow (forthcoming)

[5] Notoriously, see Ayer (1936).

[6] Perhaps no less notoriously, see, for example, Phillips (1976).

[7] This view is at least suggested by remarks in Rundle (2004).

[8] This claim has been little contested, even by non-theists, since Mackie (1982, pp. 1-3). There are, of course, notable exceptions, e.g. Nielsen (1985) and Martin (1990).

[9] See, for example, Everitt (2004, Chapters 13 and 15) and Martin (1990)

[10] Again, this follows the standard practice even of most non-theists who have written about God since Mackie (1982). Perhaps Sobel (2004) might be thought to be an exception. However, I take it that he can allow that it is doxastically possible that there is something that is objectively worthy of worship, even though he supposes that it is metaphysically impossible for there to be any such thing.

[11] In order to ward off possible misunderstanding, I emphasize that 'then' has no temporal connotations in this discussion (and likewise for 'next', 'thereafter', and so forth). There are various views that one might have about the connections that hold between time and causation, and between the direction of time and the direction of causation: perhaps time and causation necessarily coincide. Perhaps there can be time

without causation; perhaps there can be causation without time. My discussion is meant to be neutral between these kinds of hypotheses.

[12] Remember: 'always' here means 'at every point in the causal order'!

[13] In connection with agency we can also make the following point. It is obviously incoherent to suppose that God first acts in order to then bring it about that there is agency and the capacity for agency in the world. God must already have the capacity to act if God is to act.

[14] Again, remember: 'always' here means 'at every point in the causal order'!

[15] For an explanation of what it is to quus, see Kripke (1982).

[16] There are other versions of the doctrine of divine simplicity that have been the subject of recent discussion and defense. See, for example, Brower (2008) and references therein. I do not think that 'truth-maker' versions of the doctrine of divine simplicity have the capacity to provide substantive support for the claim that God makes all of logic and logical law, mathematics and mathematical law, morality and moral law, value and axiological law, modality, meaning and so on.

[17] Of course, like any philosophical argument, the foregoing is both contestable and susceptible of improvement. At the very least, it marks a first attempt at addressing views that have been vehemently defended by some contemporary theists. For an instance of such defense, see Plantinga (2007).

[18] FRW models are the Standard Models of modern cosmology. Almost all cosmologists agree that slightly modified FRW models fit very well with the observable universe, i.e. with the post-inflationary universe. For further discussion, see, for example, Oppy (2006).

[19] Some theists may suppose that there are other categories of causes: perhaps, for example, there are other kinds of supernatural causes—angelic, demonic, Satanic, and the like. However, in the interest of easing exposition, I simply ignore this consideration.

[20] Neil Manson asked me: What about Leibniz's hypothesis that there is an infinite regress of natural causes, each sustained or made to be by a single act of God? Am I deeming that hypothesis simply incoherent? I reply: I am not deeming incoherent the suggestion that each natural cause is preceded by both a divine (sustaining) cause and a natural (efficient) cause. However, on the coherent version of this suggestion there is no action of the divine (sustaining) cause that is prior to all natural causes; and so this proposal is properly regarded as falling to the same kind of objection that I make against the proposal that there are two infinite regresses, one of natural causes and one of divine causes.

[21] Neil Manson asked me: Does it make sense to suppose that there might be initial contingent states of a necessarily existing being? I answer: For my purposes, it would not matter if the answer to this question were negative. All I am concerned to argue is that, if we are prepared to countenance initial contingent states of a necessarily existing being, then we should prefer the naturalistic version of this hypothesis to its theistic alternative. (However, I should add that I cannot see any decisive objection to the thought that there are things that must be even though there is no particular *way* that they must be.)

[22] See, for example, Craig (2010), Gale and Pruss (1999), Koons (2000), O'Connor (2008), Pruss (2006) and Rasmussen (unpublished).

[23] For discussion pro and con, see the essays in Manson (2003).

[24] Could it reasonably be denied that God could have preferences, intentions, beliefs, desires, and so forth that lead to the making of some of the universes that the naturalist supposes are possible? I don't think so; but there is doubtless room for further debate on this point. (Note that, if the relevant values do not fall in the life-permitting range, then what we get is a universe in which life does not arise. Consequently, it is not here relevant whether God's moral perfection rules out creation of universes with unfavourable balances of pain over pleasure and bad over good. The issue is whether it can be coherently supposed that God *could* choose to make a universe in which life will never arise. As I indicated above, I can't see why not.)

[25] See, for example, Taliaferro (1994) and Moreland (2010).

[26] See, for example, Reppert (2010).