



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #252 — OCT. 22, 2012

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'Where Do We Come From, Grandpa?'

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Oct. 22, 2012)

I know you don't really know what planet you've landed on, so to speak, my *bonita* little granddaughter, but you are already waking up and learning new things every day. In fact, that process has probably been going on for some time with you already, when you were still part of your mother. On Thursday afternoon, when you arrived here on Earth, that process exploded into your new babyhood. What you are is not so much a baby as a *learner*. I'm not exactly sure why you, in particular, are here, my dear child, but I believe you might as well make your purpose to



My wonderful, lovely daughter, Marissa, with my beautiful new granddaughter, Malaya!
I can't wait to meet her!



And, in the interest of equal time...my other incredible daughter, Laurel,
and her handsome, talented family.

learn and grow all you can. Then take what you have learned and try to make the world a better place, even if that part of the world you can affect is just yourself and those around you. I know you will follow in your mother's footsteps and succeed wonderfully!

Someday, perhaps at *madrugada*, when you see the *lucero* hanging low on the brightening horizon like a pearl somehow illuminated yet dying, you will wonder and contemplate, as have I and as have we all, where you came from and what you believe, especially about God, because, whether God exists or not, that is where all things begin.

If, at that time, you were to ask me what I think, I would have to say, "No one really knows what to believe, in the true sense of the word." But that doesn't mean mankind and womankind haven't spent an enormous amount of time and energy on the subject. The articles which follow are just one small illustration of that.

For what it's worth, I want to tell you where I have come to stand on these issues and why. I'm going to keep it simple...much simpler than the following articles, because I'm just a simple man, and I don't want to waste your time. Plus, I only have a couple of hours to write this before I have to walk the four blocks down the street to help open the Cookie Factory.

First, don't believe anything I say about God. Don't believe anything anyone says about God! You must look into your own heart, because only there will you find the answer for you. After you learn all you can, after you find out who you are, then you will discover your own truth about things like God. Don't believe the charlatans.

I am burdened by, or enlightened by, certain assumptions. I believe that it is best to assume that life, that one's own life, has a purpose. At the very least, that purpose is to create as much more good than evil as possible, however those terms are defined, because this is where true human happiness lies, this is how we are fulfilled. Anything else is the definition of insanity and sociopathology.

Also, I don't put much stock in the particulars of any organized religion. And I guess I should also tell you that I have come to the point of disbelief in the God of my youth. If there is, in some sense, a God, then I think he/she must be much more incomprehensible and distant than anything I have ever been able to imagine. And in all the particulars I have looked into, they seem to me to be full of the mind and agendas of men—from way before the Greeks through the Mormons and Scientologists.

One other important assumption, though I tend to be a materialist, is that we can't really know if the physical world we experience is "real". Modern physicists admit that even lead is mainly empty space and that lead, itself, is impossible to actually see (all we can see is light). They also tend to think there may be other, hidden dimensions which permeate the three we know, though none of them knows what time is. A universe, as we know it, could much more easily be constructed of information than of particles and atoms and energy. We could be computer programs, though I wonder if that "illusion" of being on the inside—sentient, conscious, and looking out.—could be created in software. If not, maybe that's why a physical universe exists.

Stripped of particulars, the search for God becomes philosophical—metaphysical, aesthetic, and ethical.

Stand with me now, your video camera at the ready, in the time and place we think does not "exist", i.e. before the Big Bang. The physicists and philosophers and the believers in magic with their agendas all have their theories and arguments (see the articles below), but no one really knows. Either God was there to do whatever he/she did, or there was some unknown naturalistic process that can create a universe out of "nothing". Surely, there would, at least, be a helluva lot of energy or information involved! Regardless, you can easily have it either way, so point your camera at God if you so choose and if you can find him/her.

What does this creator-of-universes, cosmic God look like? Remember, he's really, really out there, standing as he is somewhere before the Big Bang or whatever Bang came first in whatever dimension or membrane or multiverse. God can't be the wise, patient, loving old man with a white beard shepherding his flock on our humble planet. He/She is much more alien than that, yet can't simply be an "alien" for that can't be "God". God would have to be more like a metaphysical "presence" with an unknowable mind and purpose. A force of nature, much like the ocean, much like the energy that drives time, the atom, the stars, and the movement of the stars. A mystery equal to "something from nothing". Not some needy, vengeful king with a white beard, robes, and a big-ass book.

I found the God of my childhood to be comforting. A guide I could talk to. For me, that God is no longer possible, despite some spiritual dimension of the universe which I seem to somehow sense, but which might just be dark energy or the vibrations of atoms or a sense of the hidden dimensions. I don't much trust impressions or emotions as arbiters or even harbingers of truth.

But, take your pick. I don't see much difference between the two, God or nature, though I will say that I miss my old friend, and especially the fantasy of someday being reunited with him/her, my parents, my dear son, and, someday, even with you, sweet Malaya. Yet such is the reality of realism and materialism.

Now, let's say you're going to end up believing in God. OK, fine. Now, if you then say you want to believe in some specific manifestation of the mystical on Earth, then I have to tell you that might be a problem. How is one to ever know which manifestation, if any, is real? Is any one thing really a manifestation of God—not nature, or the Devil, or an angel, or aliens from another dimension, or man, or oneself? I think you see the problem.

Where does one begin and end in one's beliefs? If the Bible is a manifestation of God, what about the predictions of fortune tellers, the miracle cure in front of the Virgin of Cotoca, the miracle of life, the Bhagavad Gita, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, or magic itself? Tread carefully on this ground, my dear granddaughter. Read history, look at your neighbors to see the human suffering that has resulted from convictions based on the comparative worthlessness of this life when compared to the alleged "afterlife".

Even if you decide to be not just spiritual, but religious, even if you believe every word of the Bible is the literal truth from God's own "lips"—know that it's all part of the great unknown and unknowable. Only you can decide what is true for you. Most others have agendas not to be completely trusted.

Further, I think we should strive to be "good", but not to get to "heaven". We should be good and fight evil to help create a world that is better for us, those we love, and those who will follow. It's as simple as that. But making this a better world is different than striving to get into "heaven". Rarely, for instance, does the mystical end justify a terrible means because, for the "non-believer", the means and end both exist in this world, not some other—spread across heaven, earth, and hell, for instance.

The article and book reviews which follow don't necessarily reflect my views, but they do indicate the necessary subject matter one has to consider to arrive at considered judgments. They serve, I think, to sort of bring up the subject and, perhaps, to open some doors or windows, as the case may be.

Yes, I miss my judgmental old friend with the beard and the promises. Though I prefer to go it alone, in the world my generation is leaving behind, guided much of the way by men of religion, you might find God to be a valuable friend, just as I once did.

May your life be full of peace, love, truth, and good, my little angel, Malaya.

"Theistic Critiques of Atheism" by William Lane Craig, Reasonable Faith

2007, (<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/theistic-critiques-of-atheism>)

(An account of the resurgence of philosophical theism in our time, including a brief survey of prominent anti-theistic arguments such as the presumption of atheism, the incoherence of theism, and the problem of evil, along with a defense of theistic arguments like the contingency argument, the cosmological argument, the teleological argument, and the moral argument.)

The last half-century has witnessed a veritable revolution in Anglo-American philosophy. In a recent retrospective, the eminent Princeton philosopher Paul Benacerraf recalls what it was like doing philosophy at Princeton during the 1950s and '60s. The overwhelmingly dominant mode of thinking was scientific naturalism. Metaphysics had been vanquished, expelled from philosophy like an unclean leper. Any problem that could not be addressed by science was simply dismissed as a pseudo-problem. Verificationism reigned triumphantly over the emerging science of philosophy. "This new enlightenment would put the old metaphysical views and attitudes to rest and replace them with the new mode of doing philosophy."¹

The collapse of Verificationism was undoubtedly the most important philosophical event of the twentieth century. Its demise meant a resurgence of metaphysics, along with other traditional problems of philosophy which Verificationism had suppressed. Accompanying this resurgence has come something new and altogether unanticipated: a renaissance in Christian philosophy.

The face of Anglo-American philosophy has been transformed as a result. Theism is on the rise; atheism is on the decline.² Atheism, though perhaps still the dominant viewpoint at the American university, is a philosophy in retreat. In a recent article in the secularist journal *Philo*, Quentin Smith laments what he calls "the desecularization of academia that evolved in philosophy departments since the late 1960s." He complains:

Naturalists passively watched as realist versions of theism...began to sweep through the philosophical community, until today perhaps one-quarter or one-third of philosophy professors are theists, with most being orthodox Christians...in philosophy, it became, almost overnight, 'academically respectable' to argue for theism, making philosophy a favored field of entry for the most intelligent and talented theists entering academia today.³

Smith concludes, "God is not 'dead' in academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments."⁴

As vanguards of a new philosophical paradigm, theistic philosophers have freely issued various critiques of atheism. In so short a space as this entry it is impossible to do little more than sketch some of them and to provide direction

for further reading. These critiques could be grouped under two basic heads: (1) There are no cogent arguments on behalf of atheism, and (2) There are cogent arguments on behalf of theism.

No Cogent Arguments on Behalf of Atheism

Presumption of Atheism

Theists have complained that the usual arguments against God's existence do not pass philosophical muster. One of the most commonly proffered justifications of atheism has been the so-called presumption of atheism. At face value, this is the claim that in the absence of evidence for the existence of God, we should presume that God does not exist. So understood, such an alleged presumption seems to conflate atheism with agnosticism. When one looks more closely at how protagonists of the presumption of atheism use the term "atheist," however, one discovers that they are sometimes re-defining the word to indicate merely the absence of belief in God. Such a re-definition trivializes the claim of the presumption of atheism, for on this definition atheism ceases to be a view, and even infants count as atheists. One would still require justification in order to know either that God exists or that He does not exist.

Other advocates of the presumption of atheism use the word in the standard way but insist that it is precisely the absence of evidence for theism that justifies their claim that God does not exist. The problem with such a position is captured neatly by the aphorism, beloved of forensic scientists, that "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." The absence of evidence is evidence of absence only in cases in which, were the postulated entity to exist, we should expect to have more evidence of its existence than we do. With respect to God's existence, it is incumbent on the atheist to prove that if God existed, He would provide more evidence of His existence than what we have. This is an enormously heavy burden of proof for the atheist to bear, for two reasons: (1) On at least Christian theism the primary way in which we come to know God is not through evidence but through the inner work of His Holy Spirit, which is effectual in bringing persons into relation with God wholly apart from evidence.⁵ (2) On Christian theism God has provided the stupendous miracles of the creation of the universe from nothing and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, for which events there is good scientific and historical evidence—not to mention all the other arguments of natural theology.⁶ In this light, the presumption of atheism seems presumptuous, indeed!

The debate among contemporary philosophers has therefore moved beyond the facile presumption of atheism to a discussion of the so-called "Hiddenness of God" —in effect, a discussion of the probability or expectation that God, if He existed, would leave more evidence of His existence than what we have. Unsatisfied with the evidence we have, some atheists have argued that God, if He existed, would have prevented the world's unbelief by making His existence starkly apparent. But why should God want to do such a thing? On the Christian view it is actually a matter of relative indifference to God whether people believe that He exists or not. For what God is interested in is building a love relationship with us, not just getting us to believe that He exists. There is no reason at all to think that if God were to make His existence more manifest, more people would come into a saving relationship with Him. In fact, we have no way of knowing that in a world of free persons in which God's existence is as obvious as the nose on one's face that more people would come to love Him and know His salvation than in the actual world. But then the claim that if God existed, He would make His existence more evident than it is has little or no warrant, thereby undermining the claim that the absence of such evidence is itself positive evidence that God does not exist. Worse, if God is endowed with middle knowledge, so that He knows how any free person would act under any circumstances in which God might place him, then God can have so providentially ordered the actual world as to provide just those evidences and gifts of the Holy Spirit which He knew would be adequate for bringing those with an open heart and mind to saving faith. Thus, the evidence is as adequate as needs be.

(In)coherence of Theism

One of the central concerns of contemporary Philosophy of Religion is the coherence of theism. During the previous generation the concept of God was often regarded as fertile ground for anti-theistic arguments. The difficulty with theism, it was said, was not merely that there are no good arguments for the existence of God, but, more fundamentally, that the notion of God is incoherent.

This anti-theistic critique has evoked a prodigious literature devoted to the philosophical analysis of the concept of God. Two controls have tended to guide this inquiry into the divine nature: Scripture and Perfect Being theology. For thinkers in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness. Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a "great-making" property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judaeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God. Theists thus find that anti-theistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in formulating a more adequate conception.

For example, most Christian philosophers of religion today are quite happy to deny that God is simple or impassible or immutable in any unrestricted sense, even though medieval theologians affirmed such divine attributes, since these attributes are not ascribed to God in the Bible (and seem even to be incompatible with the biblical descriptions of God) and are not clearly great-making. Should it turn out that certain notions like omnipotence or omniscience are inherently paradoxical under certain definitions, that no being could have all powers, say, or know all truths, this conclusion, while of considerable academic interest, would in the end be of little theological significance, since what God cannot do or know on such accounts is so recondite that no incompatibility is thereby demonstrated with the God described in the Bible.

In fact, however, a coherent doctrine of God's attributes can be formulated. Take omnipotence, for example. This attribute stubbornly resisted adequate formulation until Flint and Freddoso's analysis published in 1983. A key insight into the concept of omnipotence is that it should be defined in terms of the ability to actualize certain states of affairs, rather than in terms of raw power. Thus, omnipotence should not be understood as power which is unlimited in its quantity or variety. If we understand omnipotence in terms of ability to actualize states of affairs, then it is no attenuation of God's omnipotence that He cannot make a stone too heavy for Him to lift, for, given that God is essentially omnipotent, "a stone too heavy for God to lift" describes as logically impossible a state of affairs as does "a square triangle" and thus describes nothing at all.

Shall we say, then, that an agent S is omnipotent if and only if S can actualize any state of affairs which is broadly logically possible? No, for certain states of affairs may be logically possible but due to the passage of time may no longer be possible to actualize. Let us call past states of affairs which are not indirectly actualizable by someone later in time the "hard" past. Shall we say, then, that an agent S is omnipotent at a time t if and only if S can at t actualize any state of affairs which is broadly logically possible for someone sharing the same hard past with S to actualize at t ? It seems not. For counterfactuals about free actions raise a further problem. One has control over counterfactuals about one's own free decisions but not over counterfactuals about the free decisions of others. That implies that an adequate definition of omnipotence cannot require S to be able to actualize states of affairs described by counterfactuals about the free decisions of other agents, for that would be to demand the logically impossible of S . Shall we say, then, that S is omnipotent at a time t if and only if S can at t actualize any state of affairs which is broadly logically possible for S to actualize, given the same hard past at t and the same true counterfactuals about free acts of others? This seems almost right. But it is open to the complaint that if S is essentially incapable of any particular action, no matter how trivial, than S 's inability to perform that action does not count against his omnipotence. Therefore we need to broaden the definition so as to require S to perform any action which any agent in his situation could perform. The following analysis would seem satisfactory: S is omnipotent at a time t if and only if S can at t actualize any state of affairs which is not described by counterfactuals about the free acts of others and which is broadly logically possible for someone to actualize, given the same hard past at t and the same true counterfactuals about free acts of others. Such an analysis successfully sets the parameters of God's omnipotence without imposing any non-logical limit on His power.

Or consider omniscience. On the standard account of omniscience, for any person S , S is omniscient if and only if S knows every true proposition and believes no false proposition. On this account God's cognitive excellence is defined in terms of his propositional knowledge. Some persons have charged that omniscience so-defined is an inherently paradoxical notion, like the set of all truths. But the standard definition does not commit us to any sort of totality of all truths but merely to universal quantification with respect to truths: God knows every truth. Moreover, the standard definition does not purport to give us the mode of God's knowledge but merely its *scope* and *accuracy*. Christian theologians have not typically thought of God's knowledge as propositional in nature but as an undivided intuition of reality, which we finite knowers *represent* to ourselves in terms of propositions. We express

propositionally what God knows non-propositionally. On this view there do not actually exist an infinite number of propositions, but only as many propositions as human beings have cognized. Indeed, if one is a fictionalist with respect to abstract objects like propositions, then propositions are just useful fictions which we employ to describe people's belief states, and the ground is swept from beneath any objections formulated on the basis of Platonistic assumptions concerning the reality of propositions. Finally, adequate definitions of divine omniscience are possible which make no mention of propositions at all. Charles Taliaferro proposes, for example, that omniscience be understood in terms of maximal cognitive power, to wit, a person *S* is omniscient if it is metaphysically impossible for there to be a being with greater cognitive power than *S* and this power is fully exercised.

Thus, far from undermining theism, the anti-theistic critiques of theism's coherence have served mainly to refine and strengthen theistic belief.

Problem of Evil

Undoubtedly the greatest obstacle to belief in God is the so-called problem of evil. During the last quarter century or so, an enormous amount of philosophical analysis has been poured into this problem, with the result that genuine philosophical progress on the age-old question has been made.

Most broadly speaking, we must distinguish between the intellectual problem of evil and the emotional problem of evil. The intellectual problem of evil concerns how to give a rational explanation of the co-existence of God and evil. The emotional problem of evil concerns how to comfort those who are suffering and how to dissolve the emotional dislike people have of a God who would permit such evil.

Contemporary thinkers recognize that there are significantly different versions of the intellectual problem of evil and have assigned various labels to them, such as "deductive," "inductive," "logical," "probabilistic," "evidential," and so on. It may be most helpful to distinguish two ways in which the intellectual problem of evil may be cast, either as an internal problem or as an external problem. That is to say, the problem may be presented in terms of premises to which the theist is or ought to be committed as a theist, so that the theistic worldview is somehow at odds with itself, or it may be presented in terms of premises to which the theist is not committed as a theist but which we nonetheless have good reason to regard as true.

It is worth noting that traditionally atheists have presented the problem of evil as an internal problem for theism. That is, atheists have claimed that the following statements are either logically inconsistent or improbable with respect to each other:

A. An omnipotent, omnibenevolent God exists.

and

B. The quantity and kinds of suffering in the world exist.

As a result of the work of Christian philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, it is today widely recognized that the internal problem of evil is a failure as an argument for atheism. No one has ever been able to show that (A) and (B) are either logically incompatible with each other or improbable with respect to each other.

Having abandoned the internal problem, atheists have very recently taken to advocating the external problem, often called the evidential problem of evil. If we take God to be essentially omnipotent and omnibenevolent and call suffering which is not necessary to achieve some adequately compensating good "gratuitous evil," the argument can be simply summarized:

1. If God exists, gratuitous evil does not exist.
2. Gratuitous evil exists.
3. Therefore, God does not exist.

What makes this an external problem is that the theist is not committed by his worldview to the truth of (2). The Christian theist is committed to the truth that *Evil exists*, but not that *Gratuitous evil exists*. Thus the atheist claims that the apparently pointless and unnecessary suffering in the world constitutes *evidence* against God's existence.

Now the most controversial premise in this argument is (2). Everybody admits that the world is filled with *apparently* gratuitous suffering. But that does not imply that these apparently gratuitous evils really *are* gratuitous. There are at least three reasons why the inference from apparently gratuitous evil to genuinely gratuitous evil is tenuous.

1. *We are not in a good position to assess with confidence the probability that God lacks morally sufficient reasons for permitting the suffering in the world.* Whether God's existence is improbable relative to the evil in the world depends on how probable it is that God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting the evil that occurs. What makes the probability here so difficult to assess is that we are not in a good epistemic position to make these kinds of probability judgements with any sort of confidence. Only an omniscient mind could grasp the complexities of providentially directing a world of free creatures toward one's pre-vised goals. One has only to think of the innumerable, incalculable contingencies involved in arriving at a single historical event, say, the enactment of the Lend-Lease policy by the American Congress prior to the United States' entry into World War II. We have no idea of the natural and moral evils that might be involved in order for God to arrange the circumstances and free agents in them requisite to such an event. Certainly many evils seem pointless and unnecessary to us—but we are simply not in a position to judge. To say this is not to appeal to mystery, but rather to point to the inherent cognitive limitations that frustrate attempts to say that it is improbable that God has a morally sufficient reason for permitting some particular evil.

Ironically, in other contexts atheists recognize these cognitive limitations. One of the most damaging objections to utilitarian ethical theory, for example, is that it is quite simply impossible for us to estimate which action that we might perform will ultimately lead to the greatest amount of happiness or pleasure in the world. Because of our cognitive limitations, actions which appear disastrous in the short term may redound to the greatest good, while some short term boon may issue in untold misery. Once we contemplate God's providence over the whole of history, then it becomes evident how hopeless it is for limited observers to speculate on the probability that some evil we see is ultimately gratuitous. Our failure to discern the morally justifying reason for the occurrence of various evils gives very little ground for thinking that God—especially a God equipped with middle knowledge—does not have morally sufficient reasons for permitting the evils we observe in the world.

2. *Christian theism entails doctrines that increase the probability of the co-existence of God and evil.* The atheist maintains that if God exists, then it is improbable that the world would contain the evils it does. Now what the Christian theist can do in response to such an assertion is to offer various hypotheses that would tend to raise the probability of evil given God's existence: $\text{Pr}(\text{Evil}/\text{God}\&\text{Hypotheses}) > \text{Pr}(\text{Evil}/\text{God})$. The Christian can try to show that if God exists and these hypotheses are true, then it is not so surprising that evil exists. This in turn reduces any improbability which evil might be thought to throw upon God. These hypotheses are various Christian doctrines, so that the Christian's claim is that the observed evil in the world is more probable on Christian theism than it is on mere theism (or, alternatively, that these doctrines should lead us to revise upward $\text{Pr}(\text{Evil}/\text{God})$ in light of the realization that $\text{Pr}(\text{Evil}/\text{Christian God})$ is not so low after all). Four Christian doctrines come to mind in this connection.

First, the chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God. One reason that the problem of evil seems so intractable is that people tend naturally to assume that if God exists, then His purpose for human life is happiness in this world. God's role is to provide a comfortable environment for His human pets. But on the Christian view, this is false. We are not God's pets, and the goal of human life is not happiness *per se*, but the knowledge of God—which in the end will bring true and everlasting human fulfillment. Many evils occur in life which may be utterly pointless with respect to the goal of producing human happiness; but they may not be pointless with respect to producing a deeper, saving knowledge of God. To carry his argument, the atheist must show that it is feasible for God to create a world in which the same amount of the knowledge of God is achieved, but with less evil—which is sheer speculation.

Second, mankind has been accorded significant moral freedom to rebel against God and His purpose. Rather than submit to and worship God, people have freely rebelled against God and go their own way and so find themselves alienated from God, morally guilty before Him, and groping in spiritual darkness, pursuing false gods of their own making. The horrendous moral evils in the world are testimony to man's depravity in this state of spiritual alienation from God. The Christian is thus not surprised at the moral evil in the world; on the contrary he *expects* it.

Third, God's purpose spills over into eternal life. In the Christian view, this earthly life is but a momentary preparation for immortal life. In the afterlife God will give those who have trusted Him for salvation an eternal life of unspeakable joy. Given the prospect of eternal life, we should not expect to see in this life God's compensation for every evil we experience. Some may be justified only in light of eternity.

Fourth, the knowledge of God is an incommensurable good. To know God, the locus of infinite goodness and love, is an incomparable good, the fulfillment of human existence. The sufferings of this life cannot even be compared to it. Thus, the person who knows God, no matter what he suffers, no matter how awful his pain, can still truly say, "God is good to me!", simply in virtue of the fact that he knows God.

These four Christian doctrines increase the probability of the co-existence of God and the evils in the world. They thereby serve to decrease any improbability which these evils might seem to cast upon the existence of God. In order to sustain his argument the atheist will have to show that these doctrines are themselves improbable.

3. There is better warrant for believing that God exists than that the evil in the world is really gratuitous. It has been said that one man's modus ponens is another man's modus tollens. The atheist's own argument may thus be turned against him:

1. If God exists, gratuitous evil does not exist.

2*. God exists.

3*. Therefore, gratuitous evil does not exist.

Thus, if God exists, then the evil in the world is not really gratuitous.

So the issue comes down to which is true: (2) or (2*)? In order to prove that God does not exist, atheists would have to show that (2) is significantly more probable than (2*). As Daniel Howard-Snyder points out in his book *The Evidential Problem of Evil*, an argument from evil is a problem only for the person "who finds all its premises and inferences compelling and who has lousy grounds for believing theism."⁷ But if one has better reasons for believing that God exists, then evil "is not a problem."⁸ The Christian theist might maintain that when we take into account the full scope of the evidence, then the existence of God becomes quite probable, even if the problem of evil, taken in isolation, does make God's existence improbable.

Cogent Arguments on Behalf of Theism

The renaissance of Christian philosophy over the last half century has been accompanied by a re-appreciation of the traditional arguments for the existence of God. Limitations of space permit mention of only four such arguments here.

Contingency Argument

A simple statement of the argument might run:

1. Anything that exists has an explanation of its existence (either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause).
2. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God.
3. The universe exists.
4. Therefore the explanation of the existence of the universe is God.

Premise (1) is a modest version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. It circumvents the typical atheist objections to strong versions of that principle. For (1) merely requires any existing *thing* to have an explanation of its existence. This premise is compatible with there being brute facts about the world. What it precludes is that there could exist things which just exist inexplicably. This principle seems quite plausible, at least more so than its contradictory. One thinks of Richard Taylor's illustration of finding a translucent ball while walking in the woods. One would find the claim quite bizarre that the ball just exists inexplicably; and increasing the size of the ball, even until it becomes co-extensive with the cosmos, would do nothing to obviate the need for an explanation of its existence.

Premise (2) is, in effect, the contrapositive of the typical atheist retort that on the atheistic worldview the universe simply exists as a brute contingent thing. Moreover, (2) seems quite plausible in its own right. For if the universe, by definition, includes all of physical reality, then the cause of the universe must (at least causally prior to the universe's existence) transcend space and time and therefore cannot be temporal or material. But there are only two kinds of things that could fall under such a description: either an abstract object or else a mind. But abstract objects do not stand in causal relations. Therefore it follows that the explanation of the existence of the universe is an external, transcendent, personal cause—which is one meaning of "God."

Finally, (3) states the obvious, that there is a universe. It follows that God exists.

It is open to the atheist to retort that while the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation lies not in an external ground but in the necessity of its own nature; in other words, (2) is false. This is, however, an extremely bold suggestion which atheists have not been eager to embrace. We have, one can safely say, a strong intuition of the universe's contingency. A possible world in which no concrete objects exist certainly seems conceivable. We generally trust our modal intuitions on other familiar matters; if we are to do otherwise with respect to the universe's contingency, then the atheist needs to provide some reason for such skepticism other than his desire to avoid theism. Moreover, as we shall see below, we have good reason to think that the universe does not exist by a necessity of its own nature.

Cosmological Argument

A simple version of this argument might go:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Conceptual analysis of what it means to be a cause of the universe then helps to establish some of the theologically significant properties of this being.

Premise (1) seems obviously true—at the least, more so than its negation. It is rooted in the metaphysical intuition that something cannot come into being from nothing. If things could really come into being uncaused out of nothing, then it becomes inexplicable why just anything and everything do not come into existence uncaused from nothing. Moreover, the conviction that an origin of the universe requires a causal explanation seems quite reasonable, for on the atheistic view, if the universe began at the Big Bang, there was not even the *potentiality* of the universe's existence prior to the Big Bang, since nothing is prior to the Big Bang. But then how could the universe become actual if there was not even the potentiality of its existence? It makes much more sense to say

that the potentiality of the universe lay in the power of God to create it. Finally, the first premise is constantly confirmed in our experience. Atheists who are scientific naturalists thus have the strongest of motivations to accept it.

Premise (2), the more controversial premise, may be supported by both deductive, philosophical arguments and inductive, scientific arguments. Classical proponents of the argument contended that an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist, since the existence of an actually infinite, as opposed to merely potentially infinite, number of things leads to intolerable absurdities. The best way to support this claim is still by way of thought experiments, like the famous Hilbert's Hotel⁹, which illustrate the various absurdities that would result if an actual infinite were to be instantiated in the real world. It is usually alleged that this sort of argument has been invalidated by Georg Cantor's work on the actual infinite. But Cantorian set theory may be taken to be simply a universe of discourse, a mathematical system based on certain adopted axioms and conventions. The argument's defender may hold that while the actual infinite may be a fruitful and consistent concept within the postulated universe of discourse, it cannot be transposed into the spatio-temporal world, for this would involve counter-intuitive absurdities. He is at liberty to reject Platonistic views of mathematical objects in favor of non-Platonist views such as fictionalism or divine conceptualism combined with the simplicity of God's cognition.

A second argument for the beginning of the universe offered by classical proponents is that the temporal series of past events cannot be an actual infinite because a collection formed by successive addition cannot be actually infinite. Sometimes the problem was described as the impossibility of traversing the infinite. In order for us to have "arrived" at today, temporal existence has, so to speak, traversed an infinite number of prior events. But before the present event could arrive, the event immediately prior to it would have to arrive; and before that event could arrive, the event immediately prior to it would have to arrive; and so on *ad infinitum*. No event could ever arrive, since before it could elapse there will always be one more event that will had to have happened first. Thus, if the series of past events were beginningless, the present event could not have arrived, which is absurd.

It is frequently objected that this sort of argument illicitly presupposes an infinitely distant starting point in the past and then pronounces it impossible to travel from that point to today, whereas in fact from any given point in the past, there is only a finite distance to the present, which is easily traversed. But proponents of the argument have not in fact assumed that there was an infinitely distant starting point in the past. To traverse a distance is to cross every proper part of it. As such, traversal does not entail that the distance traversed has a beginning or ending point or a first or last part. The fact that there is *no beginning* at all, not even an infinitely distant one, seems only to make the problem worse, not better. To say that the infinite past could have been formed by successive addition is like saying that someone has just succeeded in writing down all the negative numbers, ending at -1. And, we may ask, how is the claim that from any given moment in the past there is only a finite distance to the present even relevant to the issue? For the question is how the *whole* series can be formed, not a finite portion of it. To think that, because every *finite* segment of the series can be formed by successive addition, the whole *infinite* series can as well is to commit the fallacy of composition.

A third argument for the universe's beginning is an inductive argument based on contemporary evidence for the expansion of the universe. The standard Big Bang model does not describe the expansion of the material content of the universe into a pre-existing, empty space, but rather the expansion of space itself. This has the astonishing implication that as one extrapolates back in time, space-time curvature becomes progressively greater until one arrives at a singularity, at which space-time curvature becomes infinite. It therefore constitutes an edge or boundary to space-time itself.

The history of twentieth century cosmology has, in one sense, been a series of failed attempts to craft acceptable non-standard models of the expanding universe in order to avert the absolute beginning predicted by the standard model. While such theories are possible, it has been the overwhelming verdict of the scientific community that none of them is more probable than the Big Bang theory. There is no mathematically consistent model which has been so successful in its predictions or as corroborated by the evidence as the traditional Big Bang theory. For example, some theories, like the Oscillating Universe (which expands and re-contracts forever) or the Chaotic Inflationary Universe (which continually spawns new universes), do have a potentially infinite future but turn out to have only a finite past. Vacuum Fluctuation Universe theories (which postulate an eternal vacuum out of which our universe is born) cannot explain why, if the vacuum was eternal, we do not observe an infinitely old universe. The No-Boundary Universe proposal of Hartle and Hawking, if interpreted realistically, still involves an absolute origin of the

universe even if the universe does not begin in a singularity, as it does in the standard Big Bang theory. Recently proposed Ekpyrotic Cyclic Universe scenarios based on string theory or M-theory have also been shown, not only to be riddled with problems, but, most significantly, to imply the very origin of the universe which its proponents sought to avoid. Of course, scientific results are always provisional, but there is no doubt that one rests comfortably within the scientific mainstream in asserting the truth of premise (2).

A fourth argument for the finitude of the past is also an inductive argument, appealing to thermodynamic properties of the universe. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, processes taking place in a closed system tend toward states of higher entropy, as their energy is used up. Already in the nineteenth century scientists realized that the application of the Law to the universe as a whole (which, on naturalistic assumptions, is a gigantic closed system, since it is all there is) implied a grim eschatological conclusion: given sufficient time, the universe would eventually come to a state of equilibrium and suffer heat death. But this apparently firm projection raised an even deeper question: if, given sufficient time, the universe will suffer heat death, then why, if it has existed forever, is it not now in a state of heat death? The advent of relativity theory altered the shape of the eschatological scenario predicted on the basis of the Second Law but did not materially affect this fundamental question. Astrophysical evidence indicates overwhelmingly that the universe will expand forever. As it does, it will become increasingly cold, dark, dilute, and dead. Eventually the entire mass of the universe will be nothing but a cold, thin gas of elementary particles and radiation, growing ever more dilute as it expands into the infinite darkness, a universe in ruins.

But this raises the question: if in a finite amount of time the universe *will* achieve a cold, dark, dilute, and lifeless state, then why, if it has existed for *infinite time*, is it not *now* in such a state? If one is to avoid the conclusion that the universe has not in fact existed forever, then one must find some scientifically plausible way to overturn the findings of physical cosmology so as to permit the universe to return to its youthful condition. But no realistic and plausible scenario is forthcoming.¹⁰ Most cosmologists agree with physicist P. C. W. Davies that whether we like it or not we seemed forced to conclude that the universe's low entropy condition was simply "put in" as an initial condition at the moment of creation.¹¹

We thus have good philosophical and scientific grounds for affirming the second premise of the cosmological argument. It is noteworthy that this premise is a religiously neutral statement which can be found in any textbook on astrophysical cosmology, so that facile accusations of "God-of-the gaps" theology find no purchase. Moreover, since a being which exists by a necessity of its own nature must exist either timelessly or sempiternally (otherwise its coming into being or ceasing to be would make it evident that its existence is not necessary), it follows that the universe cannot be metaphysically necessary, which fact closes the final loophole in the contingency argument above.

It follows logically that the universe has a cause. Conceptual analysis of what properties must be possessed by such an ultra-mundane cause enables us to recover a striking number of the traditional divine attributes, revealing that if the universe has a cause, then an uncaused, personal Creator of the universe exists, who, *sans* the universe, is beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and enormously powerful.¹²

Teleological Argument

We may formulate a design argument as follows:

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either physical necessity, or chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, it is due to design.

What is meant by "fine-tuning"? The physical laws of nature, when given mathematical expression, contain various constants, such as the gravitational constant, whose values are independent of the laws themselves; moreover, there are certain arbitrary quantities which are simply put in as boundary conditions on which the laws of nature operate, for example, the initial low entropy condition of the universe. By "fine-tuning" one means that the actual values assumed by the constants and quantities in question are such that small deviations from those values would

render the universe life-prohibiting or, alternatively, that the range of life-permitting values is exquisitely narrow in comparison with the range of assumable values.

Laypeople might think that if the constants and quantities had assumed different values, then other forms of life might well have evolved. But this is not the case. By "life" scientists mean that property of organisms to take in food, extract energy from it, grow, adapt to their environment, and reproduce. The point is that in order for the universe to permit life so-defined, whatever form organisms might take, the constants and quantities have to be incomprehensibly fine-tuned. In the absence of fine-tuning, not even matter or chemistry would exist, not to speak of planets where life might evolve.

It has been objected that in universes governed by different laws of nature, such deleterious consequences might not result from varying the values of the constants and quantities. The teleologist need not deny the possibility, for such universes are irrelevant to his argument. All he needs to show is that among possible universes governed by the same laws (but having different values of the constants and quantities) as the actual universe, life-permitting universes are extraordinarily improbable.

Now premise (1) states the three alternatives in the pool of live options for explaining cosmic fine-tuning. The question is which is the best explanation.

Now on the face of it the alternative of physical necessity seems extraordinarily implausible. As we have seen, the values of the physical constants and quantities are independent of the laws of nature. If the primordial matter and anti-matter had been differently proportioned, if the universe had expanded just a little more slowly, if the entropy of the universe were marginally greater, any of these adjustments and more would have prevented a life-permitting universe, yet all seem perfectly possible physically. The person who maintains that the universe must be life-permitting is taking a radical line which requires strong proof. But as yet there is none; this alternative is put forward as a bare possibility.

Sometimes physicists do speak of a yet to be discovered Theory of Everything (T.O.E.), but such nomenclature is, like so many of the colorful names given to scientific theories, quite misleading. A T.O.E. actually has the limited goal of providing a unified theory of the four fundamental forces of nature, but it will not even attempt to explain literally everything. For example, in the most promising candidates for a T.O.E. to date, super-string theory or M-Theory, the physical universe must be 11-dimensional, but why the universe should possess just that number of dimensions is not addressed by the theory. M-Theory simply substitutes geometrical fine-tuning for fine-tuning of forces.

Furthermore, it seems likely that any attempt to significantly reduce fine-tuning will itself turn out to involve fine-tuning. This has certainly been the pattern in the past. In light of the specificity and number of instances of fine-tuning, it is unlikely to disappear with the further advance of physical theory.

What, then, of the alternative of chance? Teleologists seek to eliminate this hypothesis either by appealing to the specified complexity of cosmic fine-tuning (a statistical approach to design inference) or by arguing that the fine-tuning is significantly more probable on design (theism) than on the chance hypothesis (atheism) (a Bayesian approach). Common to both approaches is the claim that the universe's being life-permitting is highly improbable.

In order to save the hypothesis of chance, defenders of that alternative have increasingly recurred to the Many Worlds Hypothesis, according to which a World Ensemble of concrete universes exists, thereby multiplying one's probabilistic resources. In order to guarantee that by chance alone a universe like ours will appear somewhere in the Ensemble, an actually infinite number of such universes is usually postulated. But that is not enough; one must also stipulate that these worlds are randomly ordered with respect to the values of their constants and quantities, lest they be of insufficient variety to include a life-permitting universe.

Is the Many Worlds Hypothesis as good an explanation as the Design Hypothesis?

It seems doubtful. In the first place, as a metaphysical hypothesis, the Many Worlds Hypothesis is arguably inferior to the Design Hypothesis because the latter is simpler. According to Ockham's Razor, we should not multiply causes beyond what is necessary to explain the effect. But it is simpler to postulate one Cosmic

Designer to explain our universe than to postulate the infinitely bloated and contrived ontology of the Many Worlds Hypothesis. Only if the Many Worlds theorist could show that there exists a single, comparably simple mechanism for generating a World Ensemble of randomly varied universes would he be able to elude this difficulty.

Second, there is no known way of generating a World Ensemble. No one has been able to explain how or why such a collection of varied universes should exist. Some proposals, like Lee Smolin's cosmic evolutionary scenario, actually served to weed out life-permitting universes, while others, like Andre Linde's chaotic inflationary scenario, turned out to require fine-tuning themselves.

Third, there is no evidence for the existence of a World Ensemble apart from the fine-tuning itself. But the fine-tuning is equally evidence for a Cosmic Designer. Indeed, the hypothesis of a Cosmic Designer is again the better explanation because we have independent evidence of the existence of such a being in the other theistic arguments.

Fourth, if our universe is but one member of an infinite World Ensemble of randomly varying universes, then it is overwhelmingly more probable that we should be observing a much different universe than that which we in fact observe. Roger Penrose calculates that the odds of our universe's low entropy condition obtaining by chance alone are on the order of $1:10^{10^{123}}$, an inconceivable number. By contrast, the odds of our solar system's being formed instantly by random collisions of particles is, according to Penrose, about $1:10^{10^{60}}$, a vast number, but inconceivably smaller than $10^{10^{123}}$. If our universe were but one member of a collection of randomly ordered worlds, then it is vastly more probable that we should be observing a much smaller universe. Adopting the Many Worlds Hypothesis to explain away fine-tuning would thus result in a bizarre illusionism: it is far more probable that all our astronomical, geological, and biological estimates of age are wrong and that the appearance of our large and old universe is a massive illusion. Or again, if our universe is but one member of a World Ensemble, then we ought to be observing highly extraordinary events, like horses' popping into and out of existence by random collisions, or perpetual motion machines, since these are vastly more probable than all of nature's constants and quantities falling by chance into the virtually infinitesimal life-permitting range. Observable universes like those are much more plenteous in the ensemble of universes than worlds like ours and, therefore, ought to be observed by us if the universe were but one member of an ensemble of worlds. Since we do not have such observations, that fact strongly disconfirms the multiverse hypothesis. On atheism, at least, it is therefore highly probable that there is no World Ensemble. Penrose concludes that anthropic explanations are so "impotent" that it is actually "misconceived" to appeal to them to explain the special features of the universe.¹³ Thus, the Many Worlds Hypothesis fails as a plausible explanation of cosmic fine-tuning.

It therefore seems that the fine-tuning of the universe is plausibly due neither to physical necessity nor to chance. Unless the design hypothesis can be shown to be even more implausible than its competitors, it follows that the fine-tuning is due to design.

Moral Argument

Theists have presented a wide variety of moral justifications for belief in a Deity. One such argument may be formulated as follows:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

Consider premise (1). To speak of objective moral values and duties is to say that moral distinctions between what is good/bad or right/wrong hold independently of whether any human being holds to such distinctions. Many theists and atheists alike agree that if God does not exist, then moral values and duties are not objective in this sense.

For if God does not exist, then what is the foundation for moral values? More particularly, what is the basis for the value of human beings? If God does not exist, then it is difficult to see any reason to think that human beings are special or that their morality is objectively valid. Moreover, why think that we have any moral obligations to do anything? Who or what imposes any moral duties upon us? As a result of socio-biological pressures, there has evolved among *homo sapiens* a sort of "herd morality" which functions well in the perpetuation of our species in the struggle for survival. But there does not seem to be anything about *homo sapiens* that makes this morality objectively binding. If the film of evolutionary history were rewound and shot anew, very different creatures with a very different set of values might well have evolved. By what right do we regard our morality as objective rather than theirs? As the humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz puts it, "The central question about moral and ethical principles concerns this ontological foundation. If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they purely ephemeral?"¹⁴

Some philosophers, equally averse to transcendentally existing moral values as to theism, try to maintain the existence of objective moral principles or supervenient moral properties in the context of a naturalistic worldview. But the advocates of such theories are typically at a loss to justify their starting point. If there is no God, then it is hard to see any ground for thinking that the herd morality evolved by *homo sapiens* is objectively true or moral goodness supervenes on certain natural states of such creatures. Crudely put, on the atheistic view humans are just animals; and animals are not moral agents.

If our approach to meta-ethical theory is to be serious metaphysics rather than just a "shopping list" approach, whereby one simply helps oneself to the supervenient moral properties or principles needed to do the job, then some sort of explanation is required for why moral properties supervene on certain natural states or why such principles are true.¹⁵ It is insufficient for the naturalist to point out that we do, in fact, apprehend the goodness of some feature of human existence, for that only goes to establish the objectivity of moral values and duties, which just is premise (2) of the moral argument.

We therefore need to ask whether moral values and duties can be plausibly anchored in some transcendent, non-theistic ground. Let us call this view Atheistic Moral Realism. Atheistic moral realists affirm that objective moral values and duties do exist and are not dependent upon evolution or human opinion, but they insist that they are not grounded in God. Indeed, moral values have no further foundation. They just exist.

It is difficult, however, even to comprehend this view. What does it mean to say, for example, that the moral value *Justice* just exists? It is hard to know what to make of this. It is clear what is meant when it is said that a person is just; but it is bewildering when it is said that in the absence of any people, *Justice* itself exists.

Second, the nature of moral obligation seems incompatible with Atheistic Moral Realism. Suppose that values like *Mercy*, *Justice*, *Forbearance*, and the like just exist. How does that result in any moral obligations for me? Why would I have a moral duty, say, to be merciful? Who or what lays such an obligation on me? On this view moral vices such as *Greed*, *Hatred*, and *Selfishness* also presumably exist as abstract objects, too. Why am I obligated to align my life with one set of these abstractly existing objects rather than any other? In contrast with the atheist, the theist can make sense of moral obligation because God's commands can be viewed as constitutive of our moral duties.

Thirdly, it is fantastically improbable that just that sort of creatures would emerge from the blind evolutionary process who correspond to the abstractly existing realm of moral values. This seems to be an utterly incredible coincidence when one thinks about it. It is almost as though the moral realm *knew* that we were coming. It is far more plausible to regard both the natural realm and the moral realm as under the hegemony of a divine Creator and Lawgiver than to think that these two entirely independent orders of reality just happened to mesh.

Although theistic meta-ethics assumes a rich variety of forms, there has been in recent years a resurgence of interest in Divine Command Morality, which understands our moral duties as our obligations to God in light of His moral commands, for example, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," and so on. Our moral duties are constituted by the commands of an impartial and loving God. For any action *A* and moral agent *S*, we can explicate the notions of moral requirement, permission, and forbiddenness of *A* for *S*:

A is required of *S* if an impartial and loving God commands *S* to do *A*.

A is permitted for *S* if an impartial and loving God does not command *S* not to do *A*.

A is forbidden to *S* if an impartial and loving God commands *S* not to do *A*.

Since our moral duties are grounded in the divine commands, they are not independent of God nor is God bound by moral duties, since He does not issue commands to Himself. Neither are God's commands arbitrary, since they are necessary expressions of His nature.

The question might be pressed as to why God's nature should be taken to be definitive of goodness. But unless we are nihilists, we have to recognize some ultimate standard of value, and God seems to be the least arbitrary stopping point. Moreover, God's nature is singularly appropriate to serve as such a standard. For by definition, God is the greatest conceivable being, and it is greater to be the paradigm of moral value than merely to conform to such a standard. More specifically, God is by definition a being worthy of worship. And only a being which is the locus and source of all value is worthy of worship.

Traditional arguments for God's existence such as the above, not to mention creative new arguments, are alive and well on the contemporary scene in Anglo-American philosophy. Together with the failure of anti-theistic arguments, they help to explain the renaissance of interest in theism.

Notes

¹Paul Benacerraf, "What Mathematical Truth Could Not Be—I," in *Benacerraf and His Critics*, ed. Adam Morton and Stephen P. Stich (Oxford: Blackwell: 1996), p. 18.

²The change has not gone unnoticed even in popular culture. In 1980 *Time* magazine ran a major story entitled "Modernizing the Case for God" in which it described the movement among contemporary philosophers to refurbish the traditional arguments for God's existence. *Time* marveled, "In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anybody could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers, but in the crisp intellectual circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse" ("Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, Apr. 7, 1980], pp. 65-66). The article cites the late Roderick Chisholm to the effect that the reason that atheism was so influential a generation ago is that the brightest philosophers were atheists; but today, in his opinion, many of the brightest philosophers are theists, using a tough-minded intellectualism in defense of that belief that was formerly lacking on their side of the debate.

³Quentin Smith, "The Metaphilosophy of Naturalism" *Philo* 4/2(2001): 3-4. A sign of the times: *Philo* itself, unable to succeed as a secular organ, has now become a journal for general philosophy of religion.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵One of the most significant developments in contemporary Religious Epistemology has been so-called Reformed Epistemology, spearheaded and developed by Alvin Plantinga, which directly assaults the evidentialist construal of rationality. With respect to the belief that God exists, Plantinga holds that God has so constituted us that we naturally form this belief under certain circumstances; since the belief is thus formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties in an appropriate environment, it is warranted for us, and, insofar as our faculties are not disrupted by the noetic effects of sin, we shall believe this proposition deeply and firmly, so that we can be said, in virtue of the great warrant accruing to this belief for us, to know that God exists.

⁶On Jesus' resurrection see N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 3: The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁷Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Introduction," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. xi.

⁸Ibid. The Christian theist will therefore insist that in assessing the external problem of evil we consider, not just the evil in the world, but all the evidence relevant to God's existence, including the contingency argument for a Sufficient Reason why something exists rather than nothing, the cosmological argument for a Creator of the universe, the teleological argument for an intelligent Designer of the cosmos, the axiological argument for an ultimate, personally-embodied Good, the no-logical argument for an ultimate Mind, the epistemological argument for a Designer of our truth-directed cognitive faculties, the ontological argument for a Maximally Great Being, as well as evidence concerning the person of Christ, the historicity of the resurrection, the existence of miracles, and, in addition, existential and religious experience.

⁹The story of Hilbert's Hotel is related in George Gamow, *One, Two, Three, Infinity* (London: Macmillan, 1946), 17.

¹⁰See survey of options in my "Time, Eternity, and Eschatology," in *Oxford Handbook on Eschatology*, ed. J. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹¹P. C. W. Davies, *The Physics of Time Asymmetry* (London: Surrey University Press, 1974), p. 104.

¹²See argument in my "Naturalism and Cosmology," in *Analytic Philosophy without Naturalism*, ed. A. Corradini, S. Galvan, and J. Lowe (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹³Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), pp. 762-5.

¹⁴Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 65.

¹⁵Some philosophers seem to suppose that moral truths, being necessarily true, cannot have an explanation of their truth. The crucial presupposition that necessary truths cannot stand in relations of explanatory priority to one another is not merely not evidently true, but seems plainly false. For example, the proposition A plurality of persons exists is necessarily true (in a broadly logical sense) because God exists is necessarily true and God is essentially a Trinity. To give a non-theological example, on a non-fictionalist account $2+3=5$ is necessarily true because the Peano axioms for standard arithmetic are necessarily true. Or again, No event precedes itself is necessarily true because Temporal becoming is an essential and objective feature of time is necessarily true. It would be utterly implausible to suggest that the relation of explanatory priority obtaining between the relevant propositions is symmetrical.

"Vilenkin's Cosmic Vision: A Review of *Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes* by Alex Vilenkin" by William Lane Craig, Reasonable Faith

2009, (<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/vilenkins-cosmic-vision-a-review-essay-of-many-worlds-in-one>)

(*Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes* by Alexander Vilenkin, New York: Hill and Wang, 2006. 235 pages.)

Vilenkin's recent book is a wonderful popular introduction to contemporary cosmology. It contains provocative discussions of both the beginning of the universe and of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life. Vilenkin is a prominent exponent of the multiverse hypothesis, which features in the book's title. His defense of this hypothesis depends in a crucial and interesting way on conflating time and space. His claim that his theory of the quantum creation of the universe explains the origin of the universe from nothing trades on a misunderstanding of "nothing."

The task of scientific popularization is a difficult one. Too many authors think that it is to be accomplished by frequent resort to explanatorily vacuous and obfuscating metaphors which leave the reader puzzling over what exactly a particular theory asserts. One of the great merits of Alexander Vilenkin's book is that he shuns this route in favor of straightforward, simple explanations of key terms and ideas. Couple that with a writing style that is marvelously lucid, and you have one of the best popularizations of current physical cosmology available from one of its foremost practitioners.

Vilenkin vigorously champions the idea that we live in a multiverse, that is to say, the causally connected universe is but one domain in a much vaster cosmos which comprises an infinite number of such domains. Moreover, each causally connected domain is subdivided into an infinite number of subdomains, each constituting an observable universe bounded by an event horizon. As if that were not enough, Vilenkin also endorses Everett's Many Worlds Interpretation of quantum physics, so that even the infinite multiverse is but one of an indefinitely large class of distinct multiverses. The result is a breath-taking vision of physical reality.

At the heart of Vilenkin's vision of the world is the theory of future-eternal, or everlasting, inflation (Vilenkin misleadingly calls it eternal inflation, even though he holds that the inflationary multiverse has only a finite past). According to generic inflationary theory, our universe exists in a true vacuum state with an energy density that is nearly zero, but earlier it existed in a false vacuum state with a very high energy density. The energy density of the false vacuum overwhelms even the intense gravitational attraction generated by the extremely high matter density of the early universe, causing a super-rapid, or inflationary, expansion, during which the universe grew from atomic proportions to a size larger than the observable universe in a thirtieth of a microsecond. Vilenkin does a nice job of explaining the empirical evidence that supports the fact of such an early inflationary era.

But Vilenkin needs more than generic inflationary theory. In order to ensure eternal inflation, Vilenkin hypothesizes that the scalar fields determining the energy density and evolution of the false vacuum state are characterized by a certain slope which issues in a false vacuum expanding so rapidly that, as it decays into pockets of true vacuum, the "island universes" thereby generated in this sea of false vacuum, though themselves expanding at enormous rates, cannot keep up with the expansion of the false vacuum and so find themselves increasingly separated with time. New pockets of true vacuum will continue to form in the gaps between the island universes and become themselves isolated worlds. Despite the fact that the multiverse is finite and geometrically closed, Vilenkin claims that the false vacuum will go on expanding forever. He does not explain how this is consistent, apart from special pleading, with the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

At this point Vilenkin executes a nifty piece of legerdemain. As the island universes expand, their central regions eventually grow dark and barren, while stars are forming at their ever-expanding perimeters. We should think of the decay of false vacuum to true vacuum going on at the islands' expanding boundaries as multiple Big Bangs. From the global perspective of the inflating multiverse, these Big Bangs occur successively, as the island boundaries grow with time. In the global time of the multiverse, each island is at any time finite in extent though growing. Now comes the sleight of hand. When we consider the internal, cosmic time of each island universe, each can be traced back to an initial Big Bang event. We can now string together these various Big Bang events as occurring simultaneously. Big Bangs which will occur in the global future are now to be regarded as present. As a result, the infinite, temporal series of successive Big Bangs is converted into an infinite, spatial array of simultaneous Big Bangs. Hence, from the internal point of view each island universe is infinite in extent.

This blurring of appearance and reality leads Vilenkin to some bizarre conclusions. Since each island universe is taken to be infinite by its inhabitants, it can be subdivided into an infinite number of observable regions (or O-regions) each the size of our observable universe. Quantum mechanics implies that there is only a finite number of histories from the Big Bang to any moment in any O-region. Hence, given an infinite number of O-regions, it follows that every single history is repeated an infinite number of times. Thus, our own world in minutest detail is duplicated an infinite number of times throughout the O-regions in our island. Indeed, "all possible variations" on our world's history will appear an infinite number of times in the ensemble of O-regions.

Notice that this conclusion presupposes that the physical world can be completely described by the equations of quantum mechanics. As such, it is subverted by the presence in the world of agents endowed with freedom of the will whose actions are emphatically not random. There is no reason whatsoever to think that in some O-region Adolf Hitler (or his counterpart) will deliver his Nürnberg address standing on his head, much less that he (or they) would decide to do something so silly an infinite number of times. But never mind; the more fundamental error on Vilenkin's part is his deft transformation of an infinite, temporal succession of future O-regions into an infinite, spatial array of simultaneous O-regions. We see the switch when he says, "any history that has a nonzero probability will happen—or rather has happened—in an infinite number of O-regions!" (p. 112). Viewed globally, these O-regions are in the future and will be infinite in number only in the sense that the island will continue to exist forever. Even more fundamentally, Vilenkin's conclusion seems to presuppose spacetime realism or, as it is sometimes called, four-dimensionalism, for if tense and temporal becoming are objective features of reality, then

the future is potentially infinite only, and future O-regions do not in any sense exist. If there is a global tide of becoming, then there is no actually infinite collection of O-regions after all.

This reviewer cannot help but wonder about the psychology of persons who seem to find a certain glee in the prospect of infinite duplicates of our world. (I'm told that Vilenkin initially found this idea depressing; but if so, he seems to have gotten over it.) Why do some people seem to find this idea so attractive? I think we have a clue in Vilenkin's *A Farewell to Uniqueness*, where he writes:

In the worldview that has emerged from eternal inflation, our Earth and our civilization are anything but unique. Instead, countless identical civilizations are scattered in the infinite expanse of the cosmos. With humankind reduced to absolute cosmic insignificance, our descent from the center of the universe is now complete (p. 117).

Never mind the odd assumption that the significance of humankind is to be assessed in terms of its rarity in the cosmos; it is the note of celebration that accompanies this alleged demotion that strikes me.

Much of Vilenkin's interest in postulating many worlds in one is to find purchase for the Anthropic Principle in order to explain away the fine-tuning of the universe. Quantum fluctuations in the scalar fields determine what sort of vacuum will decay out of the false vacuum, each associated with a different set of values for the constants of nature. By postulating an infinite array of island universes, randomly varying in their constants, Vilenkin can appeal to the Anthropic Principle to explain away the observed fine-tuning: our observations are constrained by a selection effect imposed by our own existence. Postulating many worlds enables one to avoid the inference to design, which might be taken to place homo sapiens (the most complex structure in the world) at the center of the universe. The delight in duplicate worlds springs from the consequent dethronement of mankind as the crown of creation.

But if an infinite ensemble of simultaneous island universes does not actually exist, Vilenkin's attempt to explain away the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life collapses. For if, in fact, an infinite array of island universes does not yet exist, if most of them lie in the potentially infinite future and are therefore unreal, then there actually exist only as many universes as can have formed in the false vacuum since the multiverse's inception at its boundary in the finite past. Given the incomprehensible improbability of the constants' all falling randomly into the life-permitting range, it may well be highly improbable that a life-permitting island universe should have decayed this soon out of the false vacuum. In that case the sting of fine-tuning has not been relieved.

Vilenkin's whole multiverse scenario depends, it will be recalled, on the hypothesis of eternal inflation, which in turn is based upon the existence of certain primordial scalar fields which govern inflation. Although Vilenkin observes that "Inflation is eternal in practically all models suggested so far" (p. 214), he also admits, "Another important question is whether or not such scalar fields really exist in nature. Unfortunately, we don't know. There is no direct evidence for their existence" (p. 61). One would have thought that this lack of evidence would have tempered the confidence with which Vilenkin promotes the multiverse hypothesis.

Wholly apart from its speculative nature, however, the multiverse hypothesis faces a potentially lethal problem, which Vilenkin does not even mention. Simply stated, if our universe is but one member of an infinite collection of randomly varying universes, then it is overwhelmingly more probable that we should be observing a much different universe than that which we in fact observe. This same problem proved devastating for Ludwig Boltzmann's appeal to a multiverse hypothesis in classical physics in order to explain why, if it has existed forever, the universe is not now in a state of thermodynamic equilibrium or heat death. Boltzmann made the bold speculation that the universe as a whole does, in fact, exist in a state of heat death, but that here and there random fluctuations produce pockets of disequilibrium, which Boltzmann referred to as "worlds." Ours is one of these, and we should not be surprised to observe our world in such a highly improbable disequilibrium state, since observers cannot exist anywhere else. Boltzmann's daring hypothesis has been universally rejected by contemporary physics on the grounds that were our universe but one such world in a multiverse, it is vastly more probable that we should be observing a much smaller region of disequilibrium—even one in which our solar system alone was produced in the twinkling of an eye by a random fluctuation—than what we do observe, since that is incomparably more probable than the whole universe's being progressively formed by a decline in entropy from an equilibrium state.

Now a similar problem afflicts the contemporary appeal to the multiverse to explain away fine-tuning. Roger Penrose has calculated that the odds of our universe's low entropy condition obtaining by chance alone are on the order of $1:10^{10^{123}}$, an inconceivable number. If our universe were but one member of a multiverse of randomly ordered worlds, then it is vastly more probable that we should be observing a much smaller orderly universe. The odds of our solar system's being formed instantly by random collisions of particles is, according to Penrose, about $1:10^{10^{60}}$, a vast number, but inconceivably smaller than $10^{10^{123}}$. Or again, if our universe is but one member of a multiverse, then we ought to be observing highly extraordinary events, like horses' popping into and out of existence by random collisions, or perpetual motion machines, since these are vastly more probable than all the constants and quantities of nature's falling by chance into the virtually infinitesimal life-permitting range. Observable universes like those are much more plentiful in the ensemble of universes than worlds like ours and, therefore, ought to be observed by us if the universe were but one member of a multiverse of worlds. Since we do not have such observations, that fact strongly disconfirms the multiverse hypothesis. On naturalism, at least, it is therefore highly probable that there is no multiverse.

But Vilenkin is not through yet. While acknowledging that most physicists take an agnostic attitude toward the physical interpretation of quantum mechanics, Vilenkin feels compelled to embrace Everett's Many Worlds Interpretation. On the Copenhagen interpretation it is measurement by an observer which reduces quantum indeterminacy to a precise state. "The 'orthodox' Copenhagen interpretation, which requires an external observer to perform measurements on the system, cannot even be formulated in this case [i.e., quantum cosmology]: there are no observers external to the universe" (p. 115). Such an assertion seems, however, to presuppose atheism. Moreover, it ignores the fact that Copenhagen and Many Worlds do not exhaust our choices: there are plenty of alternatives.

Tellingly, Vilenkin later asserts that his own favored theory of quantum creation presupposes as a necessary condition the Many Worlds Interpretation:

If the Copenhagen interpretation is adopted, then the creation was a one-shot event, with a single universe popping out of nothing. This, however, leads to a problem. The most likely thing to pop out of nothing is a tiny Planck-sized universe, which would not tunnel, but would instantly collapse and disappear. Tunneling to a larger size has a small probability and therefore requires a large number of trials. It appears to be consistent only with the Everett interpretation (p. 187).

Vilenkin had better hope that such is not the case, for most philosophers and physicists would regard it as the *reductio ad absurdum* of his creation account.

This brings us to the other great cosmological question that occupies Vilenkin in the book: whether the universe—or, rather, multiverse—had an absolute beginning. After recounting the prediction of an absolute beginning by the standard Big Bang model and cataloguing various attempts to avert it, Vilenkin explains his formulation with Arvind Borde and Alan Guth in 2003 of a theorem which establishes that any universe which has on average over its past history been in a state of expansion cannot be infinite in the past but must have a spacetime boundary. This is a theorem of great power which applies both to inflationary models and to current, higher dimensional, brane cosmological models based on string theory, as well to as typical expansion models. Vilenkin pulls no punches: "It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape, they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning" (p. 176).

While recognizing that theologians have often welcomed evidence of the universe's beginning as evidence for God's existence, Vilenkin dismisses such a view as "far too simplistic" (p. 177). How so? Vilenkin cites the Jain poet Jinasena, who asked, "If God created the world, where was He before creation?" and "How could God have made the world without any raw material?" (p. 170). Since Vilenkin rejects the Jain view that the world is uncreated and eternal, he knows that similar "paradoxes" face him as well (p. 177). If theism is simplistic, therefore, it will not be because it confronts peculiar problems, but because it stops short of addressing those problems. Vilenkin seems to assume that the theist is stupefied in the face of such questions. But that is hardly the case. Jinasena's first question concerns the efficient cause of the universe and his second the material cause. The first question is not difficult to answer: "Nowhere," since space and time come into being at creation, so that there is no "before" and "where" prior to the beginning. The second question is more baffling; but if Vilenkin's theory of quantum tunneling

provides an account of how the universe can arise without a material cause, then the theist may freely avail himself of it also. The advantage of theism over naturalistic accounts is that theism provides an efficient cause of the universe, whereas naturalism cannot.

The naturalist is therefore constrained to say that the universe came into being without either an efficient or a material cause. Vilenkin's theory of quantum creation is precisely an attempt to make such a view plausible. His exposition of his model is so clear and simple that it is easy for the metaphysician to see where Vilenkin has misconstrued its ontological import. He invites us to envision a small, closed, spherical universe filled with a false vacuum and containing some ordinary matter. If the radius of such a universe is small, classical physics predicts that it will collapse to a point; but quantum physics permits it to "tunnel" into a state of inflation. (Recall that such an event is nonetheless so improbable that the Many Worlds Interpretation must be invoked to save the account.) If we allow the radius to shrink all the way to zero, there still remains some positive probability of the universe's tunneling to inflation. Now Vilenkin equates the initial state of the universe explanatorily prior to tunneling with nothingness: "what I had was a mathematical description of a universe tunneling from zero size—from nothing!—to a finite radius and beginning to inflate" (p. 180). This equivalence is patently mistaken. As Vilenkin's diagram on the same page illustrates, the quantum tunneling is at every point a function from something to something. For quantum tunneling to be truly from nothing, the function would have to have a single term, the posterior term. Another way of seeing the point is to reflect on the fact that "to have no radius" (as is the case with nothingness) is not "to have a radius whose measure is zero."

Vilenkin himself seems to realize that he has not really described the tunneling of the universe from literally nothing, for he allows, "And yet, the state of 'nothing' cannot be identified with *absolute nothingness*. The tunneling is described by the laws of quantum mechanics, and thus 'nothing' should be subjected to these laws" (p. 181). It follows that the universe described by those laws is not nothing. Unfortunately, Vilenkin draws the mistaken inference that "The laws of physics must have existed, even though there was no universe" (p. 181). Even if one takes a Platonistic view of the laws of nature, they are at most either mathematical objects or propositions, abstract entities that have no effect on anything. (Intriguingly, Vilenkin entertains a conceptualist view according to which the laws exist in a mind which predates the universe [p. 205], the closest Vilenkin comes to theism). If these laws are truly descriptive, then obviously it cannot be true that "there was no universe." Of course, the laws could have existed and been false, in which case they are non-descriptive; but then Vilenkin's theory will be false.

That Vilenkin has not truly grasped how radical being's coming from non-being is is evident from his incredulity at the claim of the Hartle-Hawking model that an infinite universe should arise from nothing. He exclaims, "The most probable thing to pop out of nothing is then an infinite, empty, flat space. I find this very hard to believe!" (p. 191). Vilenkin finds it easier to believe that an itchy-bitsy universe should pop into being out of nothing. He thereby evinces a lack of understanding of the metaphysical chasm that separates being from non-being. As A.N. Prior pointed out, if something can come out of nothing, then it becomes inexplicable why anything and everything—including an infinite universe—do not come into being out of nothing.

Vilenkin, then, cannot answer the paradoxes of creation as well as can the theist. In fact, the conjunction of theism with Vilenkin's model would be a congenial account of creation. We could have a complete, scientific description of the universe back to its beginning, at which God created the initial state of the universe. But naturalism on its own cannot do the job. If efficient causality apart from material causation seems difficult, then the origin of the universe without either efficient or material causation is even more so.

One might try to rescue a naturalistic quantum tunneling account by providing a mathematical description of it in terms of Euclidean, or what Hawking calls imaginary, time. In that case the universe does not come into being at all but exists timelessly as a non-singular, four-dimensional manifold having a shape analogous to that of a shuttlecock. Hawking, at least, famously took this to eliminate the need for a Creator. But it is interesting that Vilenkin will have no truck with such a realist construal of the Euclidean four-space. It is introduced "only for computational convenience" (p. 182). The Hartle-Hawking no-boundary proposal "lost much of its intuitive appeal" after switching to Euclidean time; in fact, "it instructs us to sum over histories that are certainly impossible, because we do not live in Euclidean time" (pp. 190-1). This is sensible metaphysics; but it precludes recourse to imaginary time as a way of avoiding the so-called paradoxes of creation.

Vilenkin has interesting things to say on other topics—physical eschatology, for example—, but his treatment of the central themes of fine-tuning and cosmic origins, discussed in this review, will be especially interesting to philosophers of religion interested in cosmological and teleological arguments for a Creator and Designer of the universe.

"What Can You Really Know?" by Freeman Dyson, *The New York Review of Books*

Nov. 8, 2012, (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/nov/08/what-can-you-really-know/?pagination=false>)

(*Why Does the World Exist?: An Existential Detective Story* by Jim Holt, Liveright, 307 pp., \$27.95)

Jim Holt's *Why Does the World Exist?: An Existential Detective Story* is a portrait gallery of leading modern philosophers. He visited each of them in turn, warning them in advance that he was coming to discuss with them a single question: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" He reports their reactions to this question, and embellishes their words with descriptions of their habits and personalities. Their answers give us vivid glimpses of the speakers but do not solve the riddle of existence.

The philosophers are more interesting than the philosophy. Most of them are eccentric characters who have risen to the top of their profession. They think their deep thoughts in places of unusual beauty such as Paris and Oxford. They are heirs to an ancient tradition of academic hierarchy, in which disciples sat at the feet of sages, and sages enlightened disciples with Delphic utterances. The universities of Paris and Oxford have maintained this tradition for eight hundred years. The great world religions have maintained it even longer. Universities and religions are the most durable of human institutions.

According to Holt, the two most influential philosophers of the twentieth century were Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Heidegger supreme in continental Europe, Wittgenstein in the English-speaking world. Heidegger was one of the founders of existentialism, a school of philosophy that was especially attractive to French intellectuals. Heidegger himself lost his credibility in 1933 when he accepted the position of rector of the University of Freiburg under the newly established Hitler government and became a member of the Nazi Party. Existentialism continued to flourish in France after it faded in Germany.

Wittgenstein, unlike Heidegger, did not establish an ism. He wrote very little, and everything that he wrote was simple and clear. The only book that he published during his lifetime was *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, written in Vienna in 1918 and published in England with a long introduction by Bertrand Russell in 1922. It fills less than two hundred small pages, even though the original German and the English translation are printed side by side. I was lucky to be given a copy of the *Tractatus* as a prize when I was in high school. I read it through in one night, in an ecstasy of adolescent enthusiasm. Most of it is about mathematical logic. Only the last five pages deal with human problems. The text is divided into numbered sections, each consisting of one or two sentences. For example, section 6.521 says: "The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem. Is not this the reason why men, to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?" The most famous sentence in the book is the final section 7: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

I found the book enlightening and liberating. It said that philosophy is simple and has limited scope. Philosophy is concerned with logic and the correct use of language. All speculations outside this limited area are mysticism. Section 6.522 says: "There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself. It is the mystical." Since the mystical is inexpressible, there is nothing more to be said. Holt summarizes the difference between Heidegger and Wittgenstein in nine words: "Wittgenstein was brave and ascetic, Heidegger treacherous and vain." These words apply equally to their characters as human beings and to their intellectual output.

Wittgenstein's intellectual asceticism had a great influence on the philosophers of the English-speaking world. It narrowed the scope of philosophy by excluding ethics and aesthetics. At the same time, his personal asceticism enhanced his credibility. During World War II, he wanted to serve his adopted country in a practical way. Being too

old for military service, he took a leave of absence from his academic position in Cambridge and served in a menial job, as a hospital orderly taking care of patients. When I arrived at Cambridge University in 1946, Wittgenstein had just returned from his six years of duty at the hospital. I held him in the highest respect and was delighted to find him living in a room above mine on the same staircase. I frequently met him walking up or down the stairs, but I was too shy to start a conversation. Several times I heard him muttering to himself: "I get stupider and stupider every day."

Finally, toward the end of my time in Cambridge, I ventured to speak to him. I told him I had enjoyed reading the *Tractatus*, and I asked him whether he still held the same views that he had expressed twenty-eight years earlier. He remained silent for a long time and then said, "Which newspaper do you represent?" I told him I was a student and not a journalist, but he never answered my question.

Wittgenstein's response to me was humiliating, and his response to female students who tried to attend his lectures was even worse. If a woman appeared in the audience, he would remain standing silent until she left the room. I decided that he was a charlatan using outrageous behavior to attract attention. I hated him for his rudeness. Fifty years later, walking through a churchyard on the outskirts of Cambridge on a sunny morning in winter, I came by chance upon his tombstone, a massive block of stone lightly covered with fresh snow. On the stone was written the single word, "WITTGENSTEIN." To my surprise, I found that the old hatred was gone, replaced by a deeper understanding. He was at peace, and I was at peace too, in the white silence. He was no longer an ill-tempered charlatan. He was a tortured soul, the last survivor of a family with a tragic history, living a lonely life among strangers, trying until the end to express the inexpressible.

The philosophers that Holt interviewed wander over a wide landscape. The main theme of their discussions is a disagreement between two groups that I call materialists and Platonists. Materialists imagine a world built out of atoms. Platonists imagine a world built out of ideas. This division into two categories is a gross simplification, lumping together people with a great variety of opinions. Like taxonomists who name species of plants and animals, observers of the philosophical scene may be splitters or lumpers. Splitters like to name many species; lumpers like to name few.

Holt is a splitter and I am a lumper. Philosophers are mostly splitters, dividing their ways of thinking into narrow specialties such as theism or deism or humanism or panpsychism or axiarchism. Examples of each of these isms are to be seen in Holt's collection. I find it more convenient to lump them into two big groups, one obsessed with matter and the other obsessed with mind. Holt asks them to explain why the world exists. For the materialists, the question concerns the origin of space and time and particles and fields, and the relevant branch of science is physics. For the Platonists, the question concerns the origin of meaning and purpose and consciousness, and the relevant science is psychology.

The most impressive of the Platonists is John Leslie, who spent most of his life teaching philosophy at the University of Guelph and is now living in retirement on the west coast of Canada. He calls himself an extreme axiarchist. The word "axiarchism" is Greek for "value rules," meaning that the world is built out of ideas, and the Platonic idea of the Good gives value to everything that exists. Leslie takes seriously Plato's image of the cave as a metaphor of human life. We live in a cave, seeing only shadows cast on the wall by light streaming in from the entrance. The real objects outside the cave are ideas, and all the things that we perceive inside are imperfect images of ideas. Evil exists because our images are distorted. The ultimate reality hidden from our view is Goodness. Goodness is a strong enough force to pull the universe into existence. Leslie understands that this explanation of existence is a poetic fantasy rather than a logical argument. Fantasy comes to the rescue when logic fails. The whole range of Plato's thinking is embodied in his dialogues, which are dramatic reconstructions of the conversations of his master Socrates. They are based on imagination, not on logic.

In 1996 Leslie published a book, *The End of the World*, taking a gloomy view of the human situation. He was calculating the probable future duration of the human species, basing his argument on the Copernican principle, which says that the situation of the human observer in the cosmos should be in no way exceptional. Copernicus gave his name to this principle when he moved the earth from its position at the center of the Aristotelian universe and put it into a more modest position as one of the planets orbiting around the sun.

Leslie argued that the Copernican principle should apply to our position in time as well as to our position in space. As observers of the passage of time, we should not put ourselves into a privileged position at the beginning of the history of our species. As Copernican observers, we should expect to be in an average position in our history, rather than close to the beginning. Therefore, we should expect the future duration of our species to be not much longer than its past. Since we know that our species originated about a hundred thousand years ago, we should expect it to become extinct about a hundred thousand years from now.

When Leslie published this prognostication, I protested strongly against it, claiming that it was a technically wrong use of the theory of probability. In fact Leslie's argument was technically correct. The reason I did not like the argument was that I did not like the conclusion. I thought that the universe had a purpose, and that our minds were a part of that purpose. Since the goodness of the universe was revealed in our existence as observers, we could rely on the goodness of the universe to allow us to continue to exist. I opposed Leslie's argument because I was a better Platonist than he was.

The antithesis of John Leslie is David Deutsch, whose book *The Beginning of Infinity* I recently reviewed in these pages.* Holt visited Deutsch at his home in a village a few miles from Oxford. The chapter describing the visit is entitled "The Magus of the Multiverse." Deutsch is a professional physicist who uses physics as a basis for philosophical speculation. Unlike most philosophers, he understands quantum mechanics and feels at home in a quantum universe. He likes the many-universe interpretation of quantum mechanics, invented in the 1950s by Hugh Everett, who was then a student in Princeton. Everett imagined the quantum universe as an infinite assemblage of ordinary universes all existing simultaneously. He called the assemblage the multiverse.

The essence of quantum physics is unpredictability. At every instant, the objects in our physical environment—the atoms in our lungs and the light in our eyes—are making unpredictable choices, deciding what to do next. According to Everett and Deutsch, the multiverse contains a universe for every combination of choices. There are so many universes that every possible sequence of choices occurs in at least one of them. Each universe is constantly splitting into many alternative universes, and the alternatives are recombining when they arrive at the same final state by different routes. The multiverse is a huge network of possible histories diverging and reconverging as time goes on. The "quantum weirdness" that we observe in the behavior of atoms, the "spooky action at a distance" that Einstein famously disliked, is the result of universes recombining in unexpected ways.

According to Deutsch, each of us exists in the multiverse as a crowd of almost identical creatures, traveling together through time along closely related histories, splitting and recombining constantly like the atoms of which we are composed. He does not claim to have an answer to the question "Why does the multiverse exist?" or to the easier question "What is the nature of consciousness?" He sees ahead of us a long future of slow exploration, answering philosophical questions that we do not yet know how to ask. One of the questions that we know how to ask but not to answer is: "Does quantum computing play an essential role in our consciousness?" For Deutsch, the physics of quantum computing is the most promising clue that may lead us to a deeper understanding of our existence. He theorizes, Holt tells us, that "all the different parallel universes in the multiverse" could "be coaxed into collaborating on a single computation."

There are many other kinds of multiverse besides the Everett version. Multiverse models are fashionable in recent theories of cosmology. Holt went to see the Russian cosmologist Alex Vilenkin at Tufts University in Boston. Unlike Deutsch, Vilenkin has multiple universes disconnected and widely separated from each other. Each arises out of nothing by a process known as quantum tunneling, spontaneously crossing the barrier between nonexistence and existence with no expenditure of energy. Universes spring into existence with precisely zero total energy, the positive energy of matter being equal and opposite to the negative energy of gravitation. Mass comes free because energy is zero.

The title of the Vilenkin chapter is "The Ultimate Free Lunch?" Holt describes a conversation between the young physicist George Gamow and the old physicist Albert Einstein when both of them were in Princeton. Gamow, the original inventor of the idea of quantum tunneling, explained to Einstein the possibility of the free lunch. Einstein was so astonished that he stopped in the middle of the street and was almost run over by a car.

Opinions vary widely concerning the proper limits of science. For me, the multiverse is philosophy and not science. Science is about facts that can be tested and mysteries that can be explored, and I see no way of testing

hypotheses of the multiverse. Philosophy is about ideas that can be imagined and stories that can be told. I put narrow limits on science, but I recognize other sources of human wisdom going beyond science. Other sources of wisdom are literature, art, history, religion, and philosophy. The multiverse has its place in philosophy and in literature.

My favorite version of the multiverse is a story told by the philosopher Olaf Stapledon, who died in 1950. He taught philosophy at the University of Liverpool. In 1937 he published a novel, *Star Maker*, describing his vision of the multiverse. The book was marketed as science fiction, but it has more to do with theology than with science. The narrator has a vision in which he travels through space visiting alien civilizations from the past and the future, his mind merging telepathically with some of their inhabitants who join him on his journey. Finally, this "cosmical mind" encounters the Star Maker, an "eternal and absolute spirit" who has created all of these worlds in a succession of experiments. Each experiment is a universe, and as each experiment fails he learns how to design the next experiment a little better. His first experiment is a simple piece of music, a rhythmic drumbeat exploring the texture of time. After that come many more works of art, exploring the possibilities of space and time with gradually increasing complexity.

Our own universe comes somewhere in the middle, a big improvement on its predecessors but still destined for failure. Its flaws will bring it to a tragic end. Far outside the range of our understanding will be the later experiments, avoiding the mistakes that the Star Maker made with our own universe, and leading the way to ultimate perfection. Stapledon's multiverse, conceived in the shadow of the approaching horrors of World War II, is an imaginative attempt to grapple with the problem of good and evil.

For most of the twenty-five centuries since written history began, philosophers were important. Two groups of philosophers, Confucius and Lao Tse in China, and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Greece, were dominant figures in the cultures of Asia and Europe for two thousand years. Confucius and Aristotle set the style of thinking for Eastern and Western civilizations. They not only spoke to scholars but also to rulers. They had a deep influence in the practical worlds of politics and morality as well as in the intellectual worlds of science and scholarship.

In more recent centuries, philosophers were still leaders of human destiny. Descartes and Montesquieu in France, Spinoza in Holland, Hobbes and Locke in England, Hegel and Nietzsche in Germany, set their stamp on the divergent styles of nations as nationalism became the driving force in the history of Europe. Through all the vicissitudes of history, from classical Greece and China until the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers were giants playing a dominant role in the kingdom of the mind.

Holt's philosophers belong to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Compared with the giants of the past, they are a sorry bunch of dwarfs. They are thinking deep thoughts and giving scholarly lectures to academic audiences, but hardly anybody in the world outside is listening. They are historically insignificant. At some time toward the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers faded from public life. Like the snark in Lewis Carroll's poem, they suddenly and silently vanished. So far as the general public was concerned, philosophers became invisible.

The fading of philosophy came to my attention in 1979, when I was involved in the planning of a conference to celebrate the hundredth birthday of Einstein. The conference was held in Princeton, where Einstein had lived, and our largest meeting hall was too small for all the people who wanted to come. A committee was set up to decide who should be invited. When the membership of the committee was announced, there were loud protests from people who were excluded. After acrimonious discussions, we agreed to have three committees, each empowered to invite one third of the participants. One committee was for scientists, one for historians of science, and one for philosophers of science.

After the three committees had made their selections, we had three lists of names of people to be invited. I looked at the lists of names and was immediately struck by their disconnection. With a few exceptions, I knew personally all the people on the science list. On the history list, I knew the names, but I did not know the people personally. On the philosophy list, I did not even know the names.

In earlier centuries, scientists and historians and philosophers would have known one another. Newton and Locke were friends and colleagues in the English parliament of 1689, helping to establish constitutional government in England after the bloodless revolution of 1688. The bloody passions of the English Civil War were finally quieted by

establishing a constitutional monarchy with limited powers. Constitutional monarchy was a system of government invented by philosophers. But in the twentieth century, science and history and philosophy had become separate cultures. We were three groups of specialists, living in separate communities and rarely speaking to each other.

When and why did philosophy lose its bite? How did it become a toothless relic of past glories? These are the ugly questions that Jim Holt's book compels us to ask. Philosophers became insignificant when philosophy became a separate academic discipline, distinct from science and history and literature and religion. The great philosophers of the past covered all these disciplines. Until the nineteenth century, science was called natural philosophy and officially recognized as a branch of philosophy. The word "scientist" was invented by William Whewell, a nineteenth-century Cambridge philosopher who became master of Trinity College and put his name on the building where Wittgenstein and I were living in 1946. Whewell introduced the word in the year 1833. He was waging a deliberate campaign to establish science as a professional discipline distinct from philosophy.

Whewell's campaign succeeded. As a result, science grew to a dominant position in public life, and philosophy shrank. Philosophy shrank even further when it became detached from religion and from literature. The great philosophers of the past wrote literary masterpieces such as the Book of Job and the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine. The latest masterpieces written by a philosopher were probably Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 1885 and *Beyond Good and Evil* in 1886. Modern departments of philosophy have no place for the mystical.



FotM NEWSLETTER #252 (Oct. 22, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20121022-00		SteveB	'Where Do We Come From, Grandpa?' by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Theistic Critiques of Atheism" & "Vilenkin's Cosmic Vision: A Review of <i>Many Worlds in One: The Search for Other Universes</i> by Alex Vilenkin" & "What Can You Really Know?")
20121019-01	09:34	Pam	Re: The Search for Truth & Certainty (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #251)
20121019-02	13:51	Art	Re: FotM Newsletter #250
20121019-04	14:05	Pam	Re: FotM Newsletter #250
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20121020-04	17:46	Pam	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to SteveB, above)
20121020-05	18:17	SteveB	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to Pam, above)
20121021-01	10:22	Pam	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to SteveB, above)
20121021-02	12:14	SteveB	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to Pam, above)
20121021-03	12:27	SteveB	"The New Pot Barons"
20121021-04	23:57	Bill	Photos: Einstein Was Right #3
20121021-05	23:58	Marci	Photo: Special Moments #6
20121021-06	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Beach on Zakynthos, Greece

20121019-01	09:34	Pam	Re: The Search for Truth & Certainty (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #251)
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The essay on Karl Popper is fascinating. I'd heard of him before, but it was nice to get his philosophy spelled out in clear and simple terms. I've always liked Thomas Kuhn's theory of "paradigm shift" too. It explains a lot. I think there was a paradigm shift when communism fell. Now it's the old geezers who cling to the "faith," and they'll all be gone soon, and communism will go the way of feudalism. Not everywhere, of course. Paradigm shifts are seldom global and not necessarily sudden. I believe we're in the midst of a paradigm shift of our own in this country. In my optimistic moments (few though they may be), I think we're moving toward a more completely scientific approach to "truth," which is made obvious by such comments as the one Michele Bachmann made about the HPV vaccine causing mental retardation. Even intelligent, educated people who have a faith of any kind, whether it be religious, political, psychological, or sociological find it next to impossible to let it go. Evidence has basically nothing to do with it. As Popper points out, evidence can be found to support just about anything. What I would really like to see, knowing it to be impossible, is a greater tolerance of ambiguity and a willingness to suspend final judgment. We humans have a rage for answers. I do too. I get what I call "signs from the universe" all the time, or at least when I'm at some crisis point in my life. I realize this is wholly subjective, but the lizard part of my brain finds comfort and validation in these fortuitous coincidences. I've always liked the expression "go with the flow." Intransigence is our greatest enemy, and there's plenty of evidence for that.

20121019-02 13:51 Art Re: FotM Newsletter #250

Wanted to say congratulations on issue number 250. Quite a benchmark and quite an achievement. You are amazing! We all need to say thanks more often for all your efforts.

Very well done SIR!

20121019-04 14:05 Pam Re: FotM Newsletter #250

Hear! Hear! or is it Here! Here! Now that I think about it, I'm not sure. But Art is so right. SteveB has done something truly incredible, and he's been so consistent. It's a ton of work, I know, and we are all grateful!!

20121019-03 14:01 Pam Fw: Interesting Thoughts...

[Source of original email unknown, but the points ring true with me. --SteveB]

A little more than a decade ago:

- Greece was strong.
- Russia was bankrupt.
- Oil cost \$13 a barrel.
- AOL dominated the Internet.
- Smart economists thought the government would pay off the national debt by 2009.
- Apple (Nasdaq: AAPL) was a joke.
- General Motors (NYSE: GM) was at an all-time high.
- Mark Zuckerberg was in middle school.
- Y2K was a major worry.
- Fortune named Enron one of America's "most admired corporations."

The coming decade will be filled with just as many shifts. Learning to deal with them is more important than being able to predict them. Because no one -- no one -- will be able to predict them all.

[...some of those paradigm shifts Pam was talking about, above... --SteveB]

20121019-05 14:42 Ben Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple

So much great food; so little time! Alas!

I opted today for Chef Kelli's Bistro production of Idaho ruby trout with bourbon pecan sauce, served with roasted Brussels sprouts and sweet potato puree. I enjoyed this meal to a warm sun and a light breeze, on the patio with my fair-weather buddy Al Fresco.

It was... delicious. Freshwater fish like trout needs to be cooked, of course, so it is always a delight to be served a freshwater filet that has a golden, crispy skin, and moist, flaky, tender fish inside. You can get there by frying more easily; it's easy to imagine that a slender trout filet would be easy to overcook if the skin needs to end up crisp. Chef Kelli has that nailed down: this was just as it should be, every bite the size my fork peeled away, every bite with a tasty skin tag. Her sweet potato puree looked like mashed, but was utterly smooth and evenly textured, stiff enough to pick up just the amount one wants on a fork, yet decadently smooth and creamy. The Brussels sprouts, too, were right on the dot: the edges charred a bit, caramelized on the exposed surfaces, still with a great roasted-veggie texture. Chef Kelli's bourbon pecan sauce was smooth, rich, flavorful, and slightly sweet, and worked well to tie the sweet potatoes and golden trout together.



Chef Kelli's Ruby Trout with Bourbon Pecan Sauce, Brussels Sprouts, and Sweet Taters

[20121019-06](#) 15:19 Pam Election Fraud

I just read an article in Harper's magazine about the widespread election fraud that has been going on for the last decade. Not voter fraud. Election fraud. Steve B. is right; we should have paper ballots, and they should be hand counted. The problem is with the voting machines that have been rigged, to summarize a plethora of corruptions. The two or three (Diebold is one) makers of voting machines are owned by two brothers, who have colluded with Karl Rove and the Koch brothers to make sure our elections push the country further and further to the right, toward Rove's desired 40-yr. GOP dynasty.

We have been distracted by the voter ID question, when the real question has gone completely unremarked. We all know the Gore-Bush election was stolen--the article cites facts and figures--but so have a lot of others, not a few in Florida. No one wants to be accused of being a conspiracy nut, and it's very hard to talk about this without people looking for the tinfoil hat, but the problem is real and if we don't do something about it, we will lose our democracy. I do believe we are at a crisis point in our nation's history. Obama is correct. The differences between the two parties' vision of the future could not be more different. The GOP has determined that end ends justify the means, and their agenda proves it. It's up to we, the people, to do something about this, but I fear that the people are a bunch of misinformed fools. It's not just Obama who has to win; it's enough Democrats to restore some sanity to Congress who are crucial as well. I hated Nixon, but I didn't fear him as I do Cardinal Richlieu-Rove. It wouldn't surprise me if the Republicans secretly want Obama to win, especially if they can keep control of Congress and gain control of the Senate. The U.S. will go to hell in a handbasket, people will blame Obama for the gridlock, and in their benighted disgust they will vote for Paul Ryan or whatever twisted capitalist is ascendent by the next election. You heard it here.

[20121020-02](#) 11:54 SteveB Re: Election Fraud (reply to Pam, above)

Ya, why would we risk our "freedom" by changing from paper ballots with a paper trail to anything else? Ever?

"Efficiency" trumps "security", "certainty", or freedom itself? Plus, somebody had to sell and buy all those untrustworthy computers... Why were they allowed to spend all that money just to make the country less democratic?

Weird! And not very conservative!

20121020-01 07:28 MarthaH Annenberg List of Lying Internet Rumors

The obvious subject of all the lies reflects, SADLY, our culture's state...

Don't get spun by Internet rumors

Just because you read it on somebody's blog or in an email from a friend or relative doesn't mean it's true. It's probably not, as we advised in our special report "[Is this chain e-mail true?](#)" back on March 18, 2008. On this page we feature a list of the false or misleading viral rumors we're asked about most often, and a brief summary of the facts. But **click on the links to read the full articles**. There is a lot more detail in each answer.

[Has President Barack Obama signed 900 executive orders, some of which create martial law?](#)

No. Obama's executive orders do not create martial law. And so far he has signed 139 executive orders — not 900. Sept. 25, 2012

[Did the government buy 79 percent of all vehicles sold by General Motors in June?](#)

No, that viral rumor is false. All fleet customers combined — including rental car companies and state and local governments — accounted for less than one-third of GM's June sales. Sept. 12, 2012

[Are Obama's early records "sealed"?](#)

No. Many records that presidential candidates don't ordinarily release do remain confidential, but they are not "sealed" by a court. The 16 claims in a widely distributed graphic are mostly false or distorted. July 31, 2012

[Does the Obama administration intend to "force gun control and a complete ban on all weapons for U.S. citizens" through a United Nations treaty?](#)

No. The administration plans to negotiate a treaty to regulate the international export and import of weapons. It says that it won't support any treaty that regulates the domestic transfer or ownership of weapons, or that infringes on the Second Amendment. June 27, 2012

[Did Barack and Michelle Obama "surrender" their law licenses to avoid ethics charges?](#)

No. A court official confirms that no public disciplinary proceeding has ever been brought against either of them, contrary to a false Internet rumor. By voluntarily inactivating their licenses, they avoid a requirement to take continuing education classes and pay hundreds of dollars in annual fees. Both could practice law again if they chose to do so. June 14, 2012

[Is General Motors becoming 'China Motors' using taxpayer dollars?](#)

No. The restructured GM is still based in Detroit and is still one-third owned by the U.S. government. But it sells nearly as many cars in China as in the U.S. and has continued expanding operations there. June 8, 2012

[Did President Obama secretly sign a law that makes it a crime to protest against him or ask him a question he doesn't like?](#)

No. He openly announced the signing of a bill overwhelmingly passed by Congress that slightly revises a 1971 law against trespassing into areas under Secret Service protection.

May 7, 2012

[Is the National Association of Realtors lobbying to repeal a 3.8 percent "sales tax" on homes before it takes effect in 2013?](#)

No. There's no such "sales tax" in the new health care law. And Medicare premiums aren't going to \$247 either. But these virulent falsehoods keep going around.

April 30, 2012

[Is "Obama's finance team" recommending a 1 percent tax on all bank transactions, as a chain e-mail claims?](#)

No. This idea was first floated in 2004 by one House member, who says it would replace the federal income tax and eliminate the national debt. So far it has gone nowhere.

Sept. 8, 2010, Updated: June 5, 2012

[Is there any truth in the e-mail claiming to give "a few highlights from the first 500 pages of the Healthcare bill"?](#)

Barely. We examined all 48 claims, finding 26 of them to be false and 18 to be misleading, only partly true or half true. Only four are accurate.

Aug. 28, 2009

[Are three former Fannie Mae executives "economic advisers" to Obama?](#)

No, claims made in a chain e-mail are false. Jim Johnson advised on non-economic matters but quit after a week. Franklin Raines says he took a "couple of calls" but was never an adviser. We find no evidence Tim Howard ever had a connection to the Obama campaign.

Oct. 9, 2008

[Will Muslim Americans be exempt from the mandate to have health insurance?](#)

The Muslim faith does not forbid purchasing health insurance, and no Muslim group has ever been considered exempt under the definitions used in the health care law.

May 20, 2010

[Is President Obama giving away several Alaskan islands to Russia?](#)

No. The U.S. has never claimed ownership of the islands identified in viral emails and websites. They lie far closer to the coast of Siberia than to Alaska.

March 27, 2012

[Is President Obama responsible for Chinese companies building U.S. bridges with stimulus money, as reported by ABC News?](#)

No. A viral email distorts an ABC News report. California officials hired a Chinese contractor and rejected federal money to avoid federal "Buy American" laws.

Feb. 17, 2012

[How much has the federal debt gone up under Obama?](#)

During his first three years in office, it rose \$4.7 trillion, an increase of 45 percent. Partisan graphics circulating via email and Facebook are both incorrect.

Feb. 2, 2012

[Did Obama issue a policy that "no U.S. serviceman can speak at any faith-based public event"?](#)

This claim in a chain e-mail is false. Army officials say there has been no change in policy regarding "faith-based" events. And the event the e-mail refers to wasn't a "faith-based" one.

June 10, 2009

[Does Obama plan to deny emergency brain surgery for patients over 70?](#)

No. A man claiming on a radio talk show to be a brain surgeon lied about that, and about a meeting of two associations of neurological surgeons, those associations say.

Jan. 5, 2012

[Is it true that members of Congress, their staffers and their family members do not have to pay back their student loans?](#)

Not true. Some congressional employees are eligible to have up to \$60,000 of student loans repaid after several years — just like other federal workers. But that's not the case for members of Congress or their families.
Jan. 6, 2011

[Did Obama order the military to drop the words "on behalf of the president of the United States" when presenting the flag to the next of kin at funerals?](#)

A chain email that makes that claim is wrong. Spokespersons for the Defense Department and the armed forces say that no change was ordered.
Oct. 10, 2011

[Does George Soros own the company buying many firms that make guns and ammunition?](#)

No. Contrary to a fanciful claim made in a viral email, the Freedom Group is not linked to the liberal billionaire. The National Rifle Association says the real owners are "strong supporters" of gun rights.
Oct. 21, 2011

[Did President Obama have his dog, Bo, flown to Maine in his own private jet for the family vacation?](#)

No. The family and staff took two small jets because the airport couldn't accommodate the usual presidential plane. Bo flew with several staffers.
Sept. 16, 2010

[Is it true that nobody remembers Obama attending Columbia University?](#)

At least one of his classmates remembers him well, and the university proudly claims Obama.
Feb. 16, 2010

[Was President Obama's tour bus made in Canada?](#)

The shell of the \$1.1 million bus came from Canada, but it was converted for the Secret Service by a company in Tennessee.
Aug. 25, 2011

[Is a chart claiming to show the "top 20 raises" to White House staffers accurate?](#)

It's misleading. The salary increases for 19 of the 21 employees listed resulted from promotions. Average pay for White House staff actually declined.
Aug. 4, 2011

[What about the "Congressional Reform Act of 2011"?](#)

A viral e-mail calls for fixing some abuses and excesses that don't exist, repeating misinformed claims that we've addressed before.
March 18, 2011

[Do statistics in a chain e-mail give an accurate "report card" of President Obama's first two years?](#)

Not exactly. The author made many minor mistakes and some major omissions in describing the terrible economic conditions he attributes to the president.
Feb. 25, 2011

[Does Illinois pay a grandmother \\$1,500 per month per child to be the foster parent to her eight grandchildren?](#)

No. State officials have no record of such a case, and state law would not allow it. This second-hand story spread by a Danville urologist isn't true.
Dec. 10, 2010

[Has President Obama canceled the May 6 National Day of Prayer?](#)

No. This widely circulated falsehood echoes similar claims made last year when the president issued a pro-prayer-day proclamation but didn't hold White House services as President Bush had done.
April 29, 2010

[Was Michelle Obama's brother's job saved with money from the stimulus act?](#)

This chain email is a hoax. It makes a ridiculously false claim about Craig Robinson, who is the head coach of Oregon State University's men's basketball team and the first lady's older brother.
March 22, 2010

[Did Obama loan \\$2 billion to Brazil's oil company to benefit China and George Soros?](#)

The president had nothing to do with the loan, which the Export-Import Bank approved for Brazil to buy U.S.-made equipment and services.
Sept. 18, 2009

[Is the ACLU suing to have cross-shaped headstones removed from military cemeteries?](#)

The ACLU has filed no such suit, and it hasn't sued to "end prayer from the military" either.
July 5, 2009

[Did Obama accuse veterans of "selfishness" and whining? Would he have forced them to "pay for their war injuries"?](#)

This chain e-mail contains fabricated quotes and misrepresents a budget idea that the White House scrapped.
May 12, 2009

[Has a "smoking gun" been found to prove Obama was not born a U.S. citizen? Did he attend Occidental College on a scholarship for foreign students?](#)

This chain e-mail is a transparent April Fools' Day hoax. It fabricates an AP news story about an nonexistent group, and makes false claims about Obama and the Fulbright program.
May 7, 2009

[Is Congress about to give Social Security to illegal immigrants?](#)

No. Congress hasn't voted on any measure to pay benefits to illegal immigrants, and has no plans for any such vote.
March 1, 2009

(This long-standing falsehood was bandied about back in 2006 and again during the 2008 presidential election.)

[Was Obama born in the U.S.A.?](#)

Yes. We give you the truth about Obama's birth certificate.
Aug. 21, 2008, Updated Nov. 1, 2008

[Is there a connection between FactCheck.org and Barack Obama or Bill Ayers?](#)

None, aside from benefiting at different times from the charity of the late publisher Walter Annenberg. We are a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and get funding from the Annenberg Foundation, created by Walter Annenberg in 1989. Ayers was one of three Chicago educators who applied for a grant from the Annenberg Foundation in 1995, which was one of 5,200 grants the foundation made during its first 15 years. That \$49 million grant, plus additional funds raised locally, funded the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, which sought to improve Chicago public schools. Obama was selected by Chicago officials (not Ayers) to chair the board set up to administer Annenberg Challenge funds, and he headed it until 1999. FactCheck.org came into being in late 2003. For other details see our [Oct. 10, 2008](#), article about Obama and Ayers, which includes a sidebar: "FactCheck.org and the 'Annenberg Challenge.'"

20121020-03	12:58	SteveB	"The Onion Endorses John Edwards for President"
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I particularly liked the 10-point list proving his...good character!?

Vote for...John Edwards!?

(Maybe this would be a good "sarcasm font" or "irony font"? Just end the sentence with: "!!?".)

Tom, it seems like *The Onion* is also endorsing guns to a big extent (or, at least, "the most extreme forms of violence.")

"*The Onion* Endorses John Edwards for President" by *The Onion*

Oct. 19, 2012, (<http://www.theonion.com/articles/the-onion-endorses-john-edwards-for-president,29989/>)

(*The Onion* firmly believes John Edwards is the right man for the job.)

Choosing who should be entrusted to lead our nation's government is not a responsibility that should be taken lightly, and never has that maxim been truer than in this current election cycle. Our economy is stagnant, our culture is dangerously stratified, and our way of life is threatened by a host of dangers both foreign and domestic. In this newspaper's more than two centuries of covering the national scene, few moments in history have felt more crucial or, indeed, perilous.

And so the time has come to decide who is best equipped to lead our country through this era of great crisis and great opportunity. America needs a leader who offers a coherent vision and who appeals to the better angels of our nature. We need a leader who is well-versed in the moral and legal foundations of our freedom and will work to uphold them. In short, this country needs the best man for the job.

And so it is without ambivalence or hesitation that *The Onion* endorses former U.S. senator John Edwards for president.

Mr. Edwards' career has not been without its missteps. He has, like all of us at one time or another, made his share of mistakes. His opposition to a nationwide military draft, for instance. In addition, his support for the expansion of immigrants' rights has angered this newspaper's editorial board. And yet at each turn, Mr. Edwards has recovered in full, with two feet planted firmly on the ground and his dignity and political acumen intact. He is a man who has learned from adversity, knowing, as any former attorney does, that the strongest individuals are forged through trials by fire.

Furthermore, Mr. Edwards conducted a protracted extramarital affair with a younger woman while his wife was dying of cancer, and we like that he did this. Our reasons for liking that he did this are tenfold:

1. It was a brave thing to do, given the possible consequences.
2. The woman in question was more attractive than Mr. Edwards' wife.
3. He did what he did without compromising his ideals, at least not to any illegal extent.
4. He enjoyed himself, and good for him.
5. *The Onion* believes sex is a natural and healthy biological function.
6. Women have a weakness for men in powerful positions, and Mr. Edwards expertly exploited that weakness.
7. Mr. Edwards' "Two Americas" premise is very appealing.
8. Again, his wife was dying of cancer, and thus was not an ideal partner for sexual intercourse.
9. Mr. Edwards is attractive, and it is pleasing to imagine him having sexual intercourse with another attractive person.
10. Every employee of this newspaper would have done the exact same thing, given the opportunity.

Those who oppose John Edwards' rightful ascent to our nation's highest office are, in no uncertain terms, cowards and hypocrites.

They are also fools.

Those who disagree with our editorial board on this issue have neither our respect nor our tolerance. Furthermore, let it be known that the political endorsement of *The Onion* is not a thing to be taken lightly. On the contrary, it should be viewed as a sort of line in the proverbial sand, and those who find themselves on the wrong side of that line will henceforth be marked as enemies of this newspaper, and will be taken out with the most extreme forms of violence.

Now, consider for a moment what you, the reader, would be up against should you decide to defy *The Onion*. You would be pitting yourself against a multinational conglomerate whose yearly earnings exceed \$200 billion. On top of that, you would also be taking on a media organization with nearly limitless control over information and public opinion. Pretend, if you must, that we live in a representative democracy, but the reality is that the planet is controlled by the makers of money and the makers of taste, and *The Onion* is both.

The Onion has had its fair share of political enemies in the past, but rest assured few have survived to tell the tale.

And so the editorial board of *The Onion* asks you to keep these points in mind as you enter the voting booth on Election Day. We urge you to elect John Edwards the next president of the United States. The consequences of doing otherwise are simply too dire.

Tu Stultus Es

20121020-04	17:46	Pam	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to SteveB, above)
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North Carolina's favorite son!

20121020-05	18:17	SteveB	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to Pam, above)
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Did you mean...

North Carolina's favorite son!?

20121021-01	10:22	Pam	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Exactly!?

20121021-02	12:14	SteveB	Re: " <i>The Onion</i> Endorses John Edwards for President" (reply to Pam, above)
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What??? ;-)

20121021-03	12:27	SteveB	"The New Pot Barons"
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I always thought conservative Republicans should, by rights, be for marijuana legalization so they could get more stoned voters into the polling booths. That would have to be a boost, eh?

"The New Pot Barons" by Tony Dokoupil, The Daily Beast

Oct. 22, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/10/21/will-pot-barons-cash-in-on-legalization.html>)

(Pot use in the United States is rising sharply, and voters may make it fully legal in two states this fall. Smart businessmen are banking on that happening.)

Full dark in downtown Denver, and inside one of the twinkling high-rises that make the skyline, drug dealers are putting money into envelopes. They're trying to be discreet. No one signed the security logbook in the lobby. All assume the room could be bugged. But if your image of the drug trade involves armed gangs or young men in parked cars, these dealers offer a surreal counterpoint. There's a finance veteran, two children of the Ivy League, multiple lawyers, and the son of a police chief. At their side is a Pulitzer Prize-winning communications consultant, two state lobbyists, and a nationally known political operative. And the guest of honor: a state senator who likes the look of those envelopes being stuffed.

"What's the maximum contribution?" one of the dealers asks. "Do you take cash?" wonders another. A third man breaks into a smile. "You better," he says, eyebrows dancing, "because the banks don't like doing business with us." Laughter fills the room as the envelopes are passed forward and slipped into a briefcase. "Huge thank you, everyone," the politician says, guiding the conversation back to the next legislative session and the kinds of legal changes this group would like to see. Here again, it's not what you'd expect: there's talk of a youth drug-abuse-prevention program and a bill to define "drugged" driving. When the politician finally rises to leave, after more than an hour, the dealers, in their pressed shirts and suit jackets, clap heartily. The average participant looks to be about 35, white and male, and on good terms with a barber. "Thank you," the politician says, bowing slightly. "Thank you for what you do."

What they do is sell marijuana. And not on street corners. Colorado is the developed world's only regulated for-profit cannabis market, and sales—to the 100,000 residents who have a thumbs up from their M.D.s—are closing in on \$200 million this year, a sum that generates tens of millions of dollars in local, state, and federal taxes. (Yes, the IRS taxes marijuana operations, even as the Justice Department attempts to shut them down.) Colorado is not the world's only experiment in free-market pot, but it's the most sophisticated, pushing beyond the Netherlands' confusing ban on wholesale and California's hazy nonprofit status. Denver's former city attorney has called it California "on steroids."

While the cannabis market remains illegal under federal law, attitudes are changing quickly, and it's that fact that the Colorado growers are banking on. The number of regular pot users is up by 3 million in the past five years, and the rate of high-school experimentation is at a 30-year high. When a kid first lights up at about age 16, it's usually not with a cigarette. Twelve states now treat a personal stash like a minor traffic offense, 17 allow medical marijuana, and this Election Day, if current polls hold, voters in Washington State and Colorado will vote to legalize marijuana—not for medical purposes but, as *Rolling Stone* recently enthused, "for getting-high purposes."

That would close out a 40-year fight launched by boomers and carried through by a big tent of talented reformers, growing bigger all the time. "Weed is the new gay," says Ted Trimpa, a Democratic strategist who helped engineer Colorado's flip from red state to blue. He's now focused on marijuana reform. But what I saw in Colorado was something altogether new: self-described "social entrepreneurs," the Sergey Brins and Mark Zuckerbergs of the Green Rush. They could have done almost anything with their lives—"my brother is a physician" is the kind of thing one hears from them—but they chose to enter the pot business because they see it as a boom market, miracle cure, and social movement decades in the making and suddenly, thrillingly, near.

"This is our Facebook," says one of my hosts, Norton Arbelaez, the owner of two dispensaries and a commercial grow. "This is the same kind of environment, the same kind of setting, and the same kind of people." He was a founding member of the Medical Marijuana Industry Group (MMIG), a powerful young lobby that's buried the age of drum-circle activism and instead strives to partner with law enforcement and politicians. It was their board meeting in the high-rise downtown, a weekly gathering two blocks from the Capitol dome. And it is their goal to dress legal pot in a style as conservative as their own.

That's why they offered Newsweek unprecedented access. While the organization is officially neutral on legalization, many of its members privately support it and believe their example demonstrates that the drug most of the world knows as "herbal cannabis" can be regulated, taxed, and safely sold. "This is a botanical blockbuster," says Arbelaez, with a half-ironic flourish. That is, if it's not shut down by the federal government before the lobby can win mainstream acceptance. "We're the tortoise, not the hare," says Arbelaez. "But the tortoise wins, eventually."

Heading West toward the Rocky Mountains, Denver rises like a city in a snow globe, but before you reach the exits for downtown, there's a stark industrial ring, a hard-hat zone of freight trains, heavy equipment, and all-purpose warehouse space. This is home to Colorado's pot business, housed in at least a million square feet—more than all the office space in the city's tallest skyscraper. Over the course of two bright, warm days this month, accompanied by members of MMIG's self-described "nerd herd" of pot entrepreneurs, I toured three of these warehouses.

They are each as boring as a soundstage until the moment one actually sees the plants. One second you're in the gray, empty cold of a warehouse, your mind hypnotized by the dull hum of electricity. The next you're standing in a perfect simulacrum of summer sunshine with hundreds of gorgeous green plants gently waving, stirred by fans and soothed by classical music (or energized by hard rock, depending on what the master grower says the plant "likes").

It's always harvest time in some of these rooms. Always processing time in others. A magic garden with no sun or bugs. Old-school American pot, smuggled in by boat or plane, was dirty: doused in ocean spray, soaked in fuel, or infested with spiders. This is a beautiful, and explicitly professional, product: hundreds of acorn-size buds flecked with crystals of THC, the chemical without which these plants might as well be ferns.

"Look at this fat boy," says Arbelaez, cupping the flowering buds of a short, stocky plant. "Ain't that beautiful?" I nodded. His whole operation had an aesthetic to it, with different seasons being replicated inside different rooms and a team of growers acting as botanical gods: thanks to sensors in each growing room, if the conditions slip, the plant minders get a text message.

But the most impressive space was the one in sync with the natural world, a stand of marijuana plants fed by natural light through the roof, the pot leaves looming up overhead, casting shadows. Arbelaez appears over my shoulder. "What are you writing down?" he asks. I show him the page. "BIG TREES," it says, and he laughs, bending down to wrap his hand around a three- or four-inch trunk. "That is a tree, bro."

Arbelaez came to Colorado with Jon Salfeld, a friend from Tulane Law School. The two are a bit of an odd couple. Arbelaez is tall, olive-skinned, and voluble. The son of a General Motors assembly-line worker, he went to the University of Oklahoma on scholarship and came out comfortable in a suit. Salfeld is shorter and more soft-spoken. The son of a lawyer, he went to Cornell—by way of Manhattan—and came out with hair to his collar. Walking around Denver with them, with Salfeld's eyes on his BlackBerry and Arbelaez's on everything else, sometimes felt like a night out with a tour manager and his talent.

But there's no doubt they have a bond. After meeting at Tulane, they recognized a shared enthusiasm for marijuana, and after graduation in 2006, they roomed together, working uninspiring jobs in medical malpractice and real estate. Then the economy collapsed. Salfeld lost his job. And in the hands-on-head discussions of what opportunities might emerge, Arbelaez suggested pot in Colorado. "I didn't even know if was legal out there," says Salfeld. They researched it and found a compelling case: good weather, a pot-friendly population, and a strong legal footing.

They arrived in the summer of 2009, just a few weeks before an Obama administration memo steered law enforcement away from medical marijuana shops in "unambiguous compliance" with state laws. Overnight thousands of people galloped into business. Colorado soon had more pot shops than Starbucks, and a two-mile stretch of Broadway became a thicket of smoke-in-your-face entrepreneurs. Bikini girls hawked \$5 joints, bums in sandwich boards advertised two-for-one ounces, and former black-market dealers reportedly dragged their trash bags of weed into the light.

It was as troubling a scene as Arbelaez and Salfeld could imagine. Unless legal weed was done properly—with rules and regulations and clean-shaven owners in suits—they knew the effort was doomed. So they joined up with other

marijuana entrepreneurs to help pass Bill 1284: a controversial, seed-to-sale framework for controlling the industry. It banned felons and in many cases put up six-figure barriers to entry. The licensing alone cost as much as \$18,000, necessary to help fund a special-enforcement division. As much as half the industry was wiped out by the new rules. Salfeld even lost a store, deemed too close to another that predated his. But it was all necessary. As even law-enforcement officials admit, it created the basis for safe and limited legal weed in America.

Owner operators like Salfeld and Arbelaez are now working hard to uphold those standards, each pouring more than a million dollars into their operations, much of it compliance-related. "There's no bulls--t," says Arbelaez. In the grow houses, there are security cameras, inventory reports, and detailed delivery systems accounting for every gram of pot, from every plant, all accessible to Colorado authorities 24 hours a day. Their biggest concern in agreeing to this article was an almost genteel respect for law enforcement. "We're about transparency," says Arbelaez. "We're about trust."

But there's only so much the industry can do to legitimize itself right now. Every morning outside the unmarked bottling factory, home to Dixie Elixirs, America's first multistate cannabis-infused-soda maker, men in suits hold the door for 20-somethings in spider-web-patterned skullcaps and sweatpants. I met Salfeld's highest-paid employee, his master grower, Joe, wearing flannel pajama pants and a "420 Weed" T-shirt, as he threw out a doughnut box. Arbelaez's careful tour was interrupted by the arrival of one of his trimmers, the wizard-bearded host of a Web show called "Tokin." All the best talent is de facto, developed in violation of federal law.

And this tension between the shadowy roots of pot and the direct light of legalization pervades the industry, which employs more than 4,000 people in Colorado, hundreds of them in six-figure jobs. At River Rock, Arbelaez's two-store operation, and Local Product of Colorado, Salfeld's upmarket boutique, more than 100 people are on staff. Fleets of contractors collecting checks cycle through, along with gardening wholesalers, business consultants, and software developers. The whole state has been buoyed by marijuana sales without evident decay.

But because Arbelaez and Salfeld, and the rest of the industry, are technically felonious under federal law, they struggle for basic business services. Banks and landlords hesitate to take their money. They can't get traditional loans, or insurance, or health coverage. Credit-card companies won't process transactions in their stores. Judges won't enforce their contracts. The IRS forbids normal business deductions, bankrupting many operations. But that's the only deduction allowed. "Not a whole lot of money is being made," says Arbelaez. "We've all had sleepless nights," adds Salfeld. "We've all had scares."

This in-between nature of the business is present in the very product, too. Does medicinal pot help people? Absolutely. It eases pain and nausea, generates appetite, encourages sleep, and generally comforts the seriously afflicted. Yet it's also a euphoric drug that parks itself in a part of the brain named after the Sanskrit word for "bliss." It's both—a medicine you like to take—which is why some patients with pot prescriptions have cancer or glaucoma, but others are young to middle-aged men with vague complaints of pain. "Skateboarders with bruises," is the running aside from critics.

The prescribing of medical marijuana is also a bit of a slapstick routine. Oh, you have cancer? Try this wonder medicine called Pineapple Grenade or Alien Dog or Face Wreck. Oh, you have a doctor's recommendation? Try smoking this dab of hash with a butane torch, some foil, and what looks like a crack pipe. And then there are the festivals, so-called cannabis cups that blend the sobriety of a bar crawl with the crowd behavior of the Adult Video News awards, all doctor-approved. Sometimes there's even a doctor on site writing scrips. "It can be very, very annoying," says Salfeld of these more antisocial aspects of his market. But just inside the door of his flagship store, two blocks from the Denver Art Museum, is a five-foot-tall bonglike trophy: an industry award for "patient" care.

The future can be perhaps be glimpsed in what's locally described as the biggest dispensary business in Colorado, a chain of MMIG-supported stores called the Clinic. It does an admirable job of trying to blend the medicine and lifestyle ends of the business. "Our patients live better" is its tagline, which one imagines being cut to just "Live better" if legalization passes. The Clinic has a presence at the festivals, but it's also expanding in an upscale direction that's reminiscent of liquor. Earlier this year it debuted Reserva Privada, a new strain of smokable bud branded like a faux-old style of rum or bourbon—it's not the Purple Kush of dorm block 12. Meanwhile, it's no coincidence that Salfeld's and Arbelaez's companies use brand names (Local Product, River Rock) that could work for any upscale, bourgeois bohemian product. The names can grow, in other words.

And ultimately that might be the biggest concern to have about Colorado's cannabis market: its growth. Even as they curtsy to law and politics, the new moguls of pot revel in their historic role, talking like the future subjects of a Ken Burns-style documentary, the pioneers who emerged from a dysfunctional prohibition. One framed the federal letter warning him that his store was too close to a school. Others brighten as they describe the signs of DEA surveillance—the clicks on the phone, unmarked vans in the lane.

They say that even if legalization passes in state, they'll respect the federal law and focus on "patients." But they also know big money awaits on the other side: at least 10 times the available market, an extra billion dollars in potential revenue. "I think we all saw dollar signs in our eyes," admits one board member, describing his entry into the business. "The horizon is bright," says another. Tripp Keber, owner of Dixie Elixirs, the marijuana-infused-soda company, is the most openly avaricious. He's in his 40s and wealthy, with two homes in Aspen, a preteen daughter, and less idealism than a younger man. "I make companies to sell companies," he says, a blue-faced Rolex on his wrist. "Make me an offer, and I'll ride off into the sunlight with saddlebags of gold."

He's not just blowing smoke when he talks about selling out to the highest bidder. It's already widely rumored that Philip Morris has leased warehouse space in the area. The company denies it, as do its top-tier competitors, but "I've heard a lot of talk about it," says Keith Burdick, a partner at Xcalibur, one of the biggest independent generic-brand tobacco companies in the country. "You're going to get cigarette companies in here. I'm sure of it," says John Wickens, a real-estate agent who has sold or leased acres of commercial space to marijuana growers. Peter Bourne, the drug czar under Jimmy Carter, recently told Newsweek that tobacco executives shared their marijuana contingency plans with him.

The alcohol and tobacco industries traditionally get 80 percent of their profits from heavy users, and there's every reason to believe that marijuana sellers will need the same ratio. That would mean Colorado's burgeoning pot business could be the basis for a third huge, blood-sucking vice industry, dependent on converting kids and supporting heavy users. "No way," says Arbelaez, when I raised this possibility with him. He talked passionately about medicine, and social progress, and it was moving, convincing stuff. "These people have families, and they employ families. They're about helping people, not hurting people," he said of his peers.

I want to believe him, but something happened after the board meeting. About eight of us went out for a drink. I found myself not in one of Denver's dive bars, but the Churchill Bar, a smoking club inside the city's poshest hotel, the Brown Palace. There, as a Bond-girl waitress delivered round after round of top-shelf conviviality and an electronic joint prototype appeared, it was easy to see my hosts 30 years from now, when legalization is here, sitting in the same woolly affluence—fatter, balder, and famously rich.

Appreciating the city in a convertible...



At the stadium supporting the team...





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