

ON PREFERRING GOD'S NON-EXISTENCE

Klaas J. Kraay, Ryerson University
Chris Dragos, Ryerson University - University of Toronto

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For many centuries, philosophers have debated this question: “Does God exist?” Surprisingly, they have paid rather less attention to this distinct – but also very important – question: “Would God’s existence be a good thing?” The latter is an axiological question about the difference in value that God’s existence would make (or does make) in the actual world. Perhaps the most natural position to take, whether or not one believes in God, is to hold that it would be a very good thing if such a being were to exist. After all, God is traditionally thought to be perfectly powerful and good, and it might seem obvious that such a being’s existence would make things better than they would otherwise be. But this judgment has been contested: some philosophers have held that God’s existence would make things *worse*, and that, on this basis, one can reasonably prefer God’s non-existence. We first distinguish a wide array of axiological positions concerning the value of God’s existence which might be held by theists, atheists, and agnostics alike. We next construe these positions as comparative judgments about the axiological status of various possible worlds. We then criticize an important recent attempt to show that God’s existence would make things worse, in various ways, than they would otherwise be.

Throughout the history of philosophy, many arguments concerning the existence of God have been proposed. Some philosophers have defended theism, others atheism, and still others agnosticism. Today, a large and very technical literature surrounds these arguments. Surprisingly, while philosophers have been thus preoccupied in attempting to determine whether or not God exists, they have largely neglected this entirely distinct – but nevertheless very important – question: “Would God’s existence be a good thing?”. This question is not about the putative advantages or disadvantages of some individual or society having religious beliefs or engaging in religious practices. It is, instead, a question about the difference in value that God’s existence would make (or perhaps does make) in the world. It is a question that should greatly interest theists, atheists, and agnostics alike.

In an important new paper, Guy Kahane argues that (a) God’s existence would make the world far worse *in certain respects*, though probably not overall, and that (b) there are people whose lives, through no fault of their own, would be *far worse overall* if God were to exist.¹ We begin by distinguishing a wide array of axiological positions concerning God’s existence which might be held by theists, atheists, and agnostics. We then attempt to clarify exactly what claims like (a) and (b) assert. Next, we show that Kahane has failed to establish both claims. We conclude with some suggestions for further exploration of the axiological consequences of God’s existence.

¹ Kahane (2011). He also discusses related issues in Kahane (2012).

1. CLARIFICATION OF THE AXIOLOGICAL ISSUES

In sections 1.1. and 1.2., we briefly distinguish various combinations of existential and axiological positions relevant to theism. In section 1.3., we discuss the evaluation and comparison of possible worlds, and in section 1.4., we attempt to construe precisely the axiological view that Kahane calls “anti-theism”.

1.1. EXISTENTIAL JUDGMENTS AND AXIOLOGICAL JUDGMENTS

Surprisingly, given his overall aims, Kahane does not say what he means by ‘theism’. Here is a typical definition, which we will call *restricted theism* (RT):

RT: There necessarily exists a being, God, who is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, and who is the creator and sustainer of all that (contingently) is.

This claim could, of course, be expanded in various ways, including those suggested by the major monotheistic religions. Three broad doxastic stances are possible with respect to RT: one can be a theist, an atheist, or an agnostic. We call these *existential* judgments, since they concern one’s view about whether God exists. They are displayed in the horizontal rows of the table below. Orthogonal to these are various *axiological* judgments about the *value* of God’s existence. Provisionally following Kahane’s initial formulation, we take *pro-theism* to be the view that *it would be far better if God exists than if he does not* (2011, 676).² *Anti-theism*, accordingly, will be the position that *it would be far worse if God exists than if he does not*.³ *Indifferentism*, we will say, is the claim that *it would neither be far better nor far worse if God exists*; and *agnosticism* is the position of being unsure about this axiological issue.⁴

² This conditional (along with the three which follow) is problematic, since the antecedent is indicative and the consequent is subjunctive. We rectify this in section 1.4.

³ Surprisingly, this is not quite how Kahane defines *anti-theism*. He instead takes it to be the view that we should *want* God not to exist (2011, 674); that it is *justified* to *wish* that God not exist (2011, 679). As Kahane recognizes, such a desire or wish would be justified if there is good reason to believe that *it would be far worse if God exists than if he does not*. How else might such a desire or wish be justified? Kahane’s paper doesn’t say, but in conversation he has emphasized that it can sometimes be reasonable to desire or wish for the worse over the better. We agree, but since most of Kahane’s paper constitutes attempts to show that God’s existence would make the world worse in various ways, we restrict our focus to this claim.

⁴ Indifferentism is thus compatible with thinking that God’s existence makes things slightly better or slightly worse. In one place, Kahane expresses a similar view, saying that indifference would be justified “only if it made little or no [axiological] difference whether God exists” (2011, 678). But Kahane also uses the notion of indifference in two rather different ways. On the same page, he suggests that indifference could be justified by the belief that the proposition ‘God exists’ is either clearly false, extremely improbable, or impossible. But

The table below includes a vertical column for each of these axiological positions. Each of the twelve cells, then, represents a unique combination of existential and axiological judgments.

		AXIOLOGICAL JUDGMENTS			
		<i>Pro</i> -Theism	<i>Anti</i> -Theism	Indifferentism	Agnosticism
EXISTENTIAL JUDGMENTS	Theism				
	Atheism				
	Agnosticism				

Let’s begin with the *pro-theism* column. Most theists are also, presumably, pro-theists, so the top cell in this column is well populated with actual proponents of this particular combination of views. Kahane offers Albert Camus and Julian Barnes as examples of atheists who are also pro-theists (2011, 677-8); Michael Tooley is another.⁵ And doubtless there are agnostics who are also pro-theists.⁶ Next, consider the *anti-theism* column. While it is perhaps difficult to imagine there being actual proponents of *theistic* anti-theism, this does not show that such a combination of views is incoherent: indeed, it seems that someone could consistently believe that God exists, while also maintaining that God’s existence makes things far worse. (Whether such a view is plausible is another matter.) As for *atheistic* anti-theism, Kahane offers Thomas Nagel as a clear example of this view; Christopher Hitchens is another.⁷ And certain remarks by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon may

this wrongly suggests that one cannot be a theistic or agnostic indifferentist, and in so doing, unnecessarily conflates the axiological and existential issues, which Kahane himself believes should be kept distinct (as do we). Elsewhere, Kahane suggests that indifference might be justified by our failure to reach a comparative estimate after serious reflection (2011, 687). We reply that *agnosticism* is a better term for such a position.

⁵ Tooley says: “... I also think that it would be very good if it turned out, contrary to all probability, that God did exist, for while the existence of such a deity would not entail that this was the best of all possible worlds, it would ensure that the world was very good indeed” (2009, 311).

⁶ Sir Anthony Kenny defends the rationality of an agnostic who nevertheless prays to God, comparing him to “a man adrift in the ocean, trapped in a cave, or stranded on a mountainside, who cries for help though he may never be heard or fires a signal which may never be seen” (1979, 129). Such a person could well be an *agnostic pro-theist*.

⁷ Kahane (2011, 678-9). Nagel writes: “I want atheism to be true ... It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that” (1997, 130). Hitchens says: “There are, after all, atheists who say that they wish the fable were true but are unable to suspend the requisite disbelief, or have relinquished belief only with regret. To this I reply: who wishes that there was a permanent, unalterable celestial despotism that subjected us to continual surveillance and could convict us of thought-crime, and who regarded us as its private property even after we died?” (2007, *xxii*).

display *agnostic* anti-theism.⁸ Finally, there are the columns for *indifferentism* and *agnosticism*. Here it is not easy to find actual proponents of all six combinations of judgments, but again, this is no reason to think that these combinations cannot coherently be maintained.⁹ Having distinguished this array of sixteen apparently possible combinations of positions, we now narrow our focus to the second column: *anti-theism*.

1.2. TWO DISTINCTIONS; FORTY-EIGHT UNIQUE COMBINATIONS OF JUDGMENTS

So far, we have understood anti-theism to maintain that *it would be far worse if God exists than if he does not*. Kahane distinguishes between things being worse *in certain respects* and things being worse *overall*. Let's call the former *narrow* anti-theism, and the latter *wide* anti-theism. Kahane also distinguishes between *personal* and *impersonal* construals of these value judgments. (Roughly, the former primarily concerns the consequences of theism for some individual's life, while the latter does not.) These distinctions cut across each other, and generate four varieties of anti-theism:¹⁰

- Wide Impersonal Anti-Theism: (7) It would be far worse *overall* if God exists than if He does not.
- Wide Personal Anti-Theism: (8) It would be far worse *overall for me* if God exists than if He does not.
- Narrow Impersonal Anti-Theism: (9) It would be far worse *in certain respects* if God exists than if He does not.
- Narrow Personal Anti-Theism: (10) It would be far worse *in certain respects, for me*, if God exists than if He does not.

In principle, at least, one might maintain any of the axiological judgments (7)-(10) together with any of the three existential judgments: theism, atheism, or agnosticism. In other words, the anti-theism column in the table above should be sub-divided in the following fashion, generating twelve unique combinations of anti-theistic views:

⁸ Proudhon writes, "The true remedy... is to prove to humanity that God, in case there is a God, is its enemy" (as quoted in Schweizer, 2011, 27).

⁹ Kahane cites Jonathan Barnes as an example of an atheistic indifferentist, but the evidence is unpersuasive. Kahane appeals to Barnes' claim that he is "content with the way things are", apparently referring to the non-existence of God (2011, 678). But this only shows that Barnes is content to be an atheist, not that he thinks that God's existence would make little axiological difference. As for the final column, the actor Charlie Chaplin was an agnostic about God's existence, and may also have been an agnostic about the axiological import of God's existence. Chaplin's son describes his father's religious views: "Dad's opinion of this Supreme Force varied with his moods. Sometimes, reading the headlines of the bloody battles raging in Europe, he would shake his head and say, 'It must be Something very vicious that permits people to kill one another in this way.' Sometimes in the solitude of seashore or mountain he would speak of the Supreme Force almost tenderly, as of Something sublimely beautiful, mirroring itself so eloquently in rushing waves or snowdrifts, solemn rocks and ancient trees" (Chaplin, Rau, and Rau, 1960, 239-240).

¹⁰ Here we follow Kahane's numbering for (7) and (8), and his wording for (7). (See his 2011, 685.) We have added the modifier 'overall' to Kahane's (8), for consistency with (7). (See his 2011, 688.)

		AXIOLOGICAL JUDGMENTS						
		Pro-Theism	Anti-Theism				Indifferentism	Agnosticism
			Impersonal		Personal			
			Narrow	Wide	Narrow	Wide		
EXISTENTIAL JUDGMENTS	Theism							
	Atheism							
	Agnosticism							

These distinctions can also be applied to each of the other axiological positions (pro-theism, indifferentism, and agnosticism), generating twelve distinct variants for each, for a grand total of forty-eight unique combinations.¹¹ Kahane means to defend both *narrow impersonal anti-theism* and *wide personal anti-theism*. We consider his argument for the former in section 2, and his argument for the latter in section 3. First, however, we attempt to express these positions more precisely, as explicit judgments about possible worlds.

1.3. ARE THE RELEVANT COMPARISONS INTELLIGIBLE?

Kahane takes (7)-(10) to express comparisons between worlds that contain God and worlds that do not (2011, 676). But immediately a problem looms. If RT is true, then God necessarily exists: there simply aren't any possible worlds which lack God.¹² And equally, if certain arguments for atheism are successful, there are no possible worlds which contain God.¹³ So, how can comparison proceed when the very existence of both comparates is under dispute, and, in particular, when so many philosophers assert that existence of either comparate would preclude the other from being possible? Kahane offers three suggestions: (1) perhaps we *can* intelligibly evaluate impossibilities (2011, 677);¹⁴ (2) perhaps we should treat both atheism and theism as *epistemic* possibilities, which can then be evaluated (2012, 36); and (3) perhaps we should evaluate closely-related states

¹¹ Some of these forty-eight combinations of existential and axiological positions can consistently be held together with other pairs. For example, consider an atheist who thinks that God's existence would make things worse for her in certain respects, but who is unsure about the overall axiological import of theism. Such an atheist would be both a *narrow personal anti-theist* and *wide impersonal agnostic*.

¹² A referee and a CJP board member have expressed concern about the view that if theism is true, God is a necessary being who exists in all logically possible worlds. While there are some prominent dissenters (e.g. Swinburne, 1994, and Leftow, 2012) this position is widely taken for granted in contemporary philosophy of religion, perhaps because of the influence of Plantinga (1974). In what follows, we work within this tradition. For a survey of reasons why God has generally been thought to be a necessary being, see Leftow (2010).

¹³ For a collection of such arguments, see Martin and Monier (2003).

¹⁴ In the newer paper, however, Kahane seems to express doubt about this move (2012, 37).

of affairs whose possibility is not disputed, and extrapolate from these judgments to our target (2012, 38). Kahane's third strategy may be driven by the following sort of example. S might judge that her life is far better than it would have been, had she been born in the middle ages. But, assuming the necessity of origins, there is no possible world in which S is born in the middle ages. So perhaps S' judgment is grounded in a comparison of her actual life with the medieval life of someone distinct from S, but sufficiently similar in the relevant ways. (The trick here, of course, is to identify what the relevant ways are, and to clarify what 'sufficiently' means.)

It is very difficult to know whether any of these strategies can be made to work, or which strategy is best.¹⁵ Before adopting (3), we would surely require reasons to think that this extrapolation method is reliable. Why should we believe that our axiological judgments about other deities (such as contingently existing deities, say, or necessary beings who are limited in power or knowledge or goodness) are well-founded, or indeed that they can reliably be extrapolated to an axiological assessment of RT? As for (2), Kahane notes that this strategy has limited relevance: it will not be available to those who claim to *know* that theism is true, or that atheism is true. More seriously, (2) may not ultimately be distinct from (1). Epistemically possible worlds are not further worlds, distinct from the metaphysically and logically possible, which are available for axiological scrutiny. They are, instead, expressions of our epistemic situation with respect to (putative) logical or metaphysical possibilities. And as for (1), evidently a plausible account of the relevant counterpossible judgments will be required.¹⁶

So, further work is clearly needed here. That said, Kahane seems content to note that many standard debates in the philosophy of religion – such as the Problem of Evil and Pascal's Wager – appear to presuppose that the axiological difference between God's existing and otherwise can be assessed (2012, 36). We agree, and so we follow Kahane in assuming, for the sake of argument, that an intelligible account of comparative axiological judgments concerning RT can be given.

¹⁵ And there are still other strategies. In conversation, Brian Leftow has suggested that this debate can be construed as comparing two rival conceptions of the total character of logical or metaphysical space. Space does not permit exploring this intriguing proposal.

¹⁶ Mawson (2012) offers the beginnings of such an account. He tentatively proposes treating both theism and atheism as *logical* possibilities, but only one as *metaphysically* possible (and hence metaphysically necessary); the other would then be metaphysically impossible.

1.4. ANTI-THEISM EXPRESSED USING POSSIBLE WORLDS

We now attempt to construe *wide impersonal anti-theism* in the language of possible worlds.¹⁷

Recall Kahane's formulation:

(7) It would be far worse *overall* if God exists than if He does not.

Kahane says that he intends (7) to express a comparison between the actual world and the closest possible world in which "God exists" has the opposite truth value (2011, 676). This suggests that we should replace (7) with:

(7') If God exists, the actual world is *far worse overall* than the closest possible world in which God does not exist; if God does not exist, the closest possible world in which God exists is *far worse overall* than the actual world.¹⁸

But (7') faces four serious difficulties. First, it may not properly pick out the comparator worlds Kahane has in mind. Perhaps, if God exists, the closest world to ours in which God does not exist is governed by some lesser deity. Kahane, however, wants to compare the actual world (if theistic) with the closest possible *naturalistic* world.¹⁹ Second, there may not be a unique closest possible world to the actual world.²⁰ Third, this formulation does not lay the "axiological blame" (so to speak) at God's feet in the way that the anti-theist wants, since the judgment it expresses could be true in virtue of factors completely unrelated to God. Fourth, (7')'s focus on the actual world is too narrow. Kahane sometimes seems to suggest that anti-theism is really a view about the axiological difference that God's existence makes in a world, *whether or not* it is actual.²¹ Kahane may have the

¹⁷ What we say here can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other variants of anti-theism, and to pro-theism, indifferentism, and agnosticism.

¹⁸ Like (7), (7') does not entail that all (or any) theistic worlds are *bad overall*: Kahane does not intend such a strong judgment (2011, 686).

¹⁹ This is clear in Kahane's discussion of Nagel (2011, 689). Accordingly, we will confine ourselves to examining Kahane's arguments to the effect that (certain) God-containing worlds are better than (certain) naturalistic worlds. But it is worth noting that someone might attempt to defend anti-theism by comparing (certain) God-containing worlds to (certain) worlds in which (a) God does not exist and also (b) naturalism is false. Such arguments lie beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁰ Perhaps two or more distinct worlds are equally – and unsurpassably – close to the actual world. If so, it is unclear which of these 'tied' worlds should be compared with the actual world. Perhaps, instead, worlds *asymptotically* approach ours in degree of similarity. Moreover, the term 'closest' is ambiguous – and even if one clear overall sense of 'closest' can be agreed upon, it may be vague which world is closest. All of these suggestions must be ruled out in order for (7') to be plausible, and we see no easy way of doing so.

²¹ See, for example, 2011, 686.

following thought in mind. The more the debate about anti-theism is carried out with reference to the actual world, the more likely it is to be conflated with the orthogonal debate about whether or not God actually exists. For example, a pro-theist might say that the actual world, with all the inscrutable evil it contains, is much worse than some theistic world in which God prevents all gratuitous evil. This defence of pro-theism clearly presupposes some contentious claims in the debate about the problem of evil, and accordingly fails to be independent of the distinct debate about God's existence.

In our view, (7') should be replaced with:

(7*) For each theistic world which is *sufficiently similar* to the actual world in the *relevant* ways, *all else equal*, the "axiological downsides" of God's existence suffice to make that world *far worse overall* than it would otherwise be, on naturalism.

This claim easily avoids the first three objections levelled against (7'): it involves a comparison between theistic and *naturalistic* worlds; it does not assert that there is a unique closest world to the actual world; and it captures the anti-theistic conviction that God is responsible for the diminished axiological status of the target worlds. It also avoids the fourth objection to (7'). Instead of an unduly narrow focus on the actual world, (7*) ranges over many worlds, but not too many: the embedded similarity restriction aims to ensure that the target worlds all lie within the reach of our modal and axiological intuitions and judgments.

That said, a full defence of (7*) will obviously require the anti-theist to unpack several key phrases rather more fully. Just what are the "relevant ways", and what makes the target worlds "sufficiently similar" to our own?²² Exactly what does the *ceteris paribus* clause hold fixed? What are the "axiological downsides" of God's existence, and precisely how do they make these worlds worse overall?²³ How should the comparative phrase "than it would otherwise be" be understood in terms of possible worlds? These are very, very difficult questions, but, for the sake of argument, we

²² As we'll see below in section 2.1., one important respect in which the worlds under consideration must be similar to the actual world, at least for Kahane's arguments, is by containing human beings.

²³ Kahane concedes that: "It will often be difficult, even impossible, to assess the total evaluative impact made by some metaphysical difference, a task that might require us to track numerous causal consequences. But the question of the *direct* difference in value made by some metaphysical [difference] seems tractable" (2012, 42). But Kahane neither defends his distinction between direct and indirect differences, nor his claim that the former can be evaluated.

will grant that they can be answered.²⁴ And so we now turn to four specific downsides of theism posited by Kahane.

2. IMPERSONAL ANTI-THEISM

Before considering *wide* impersonal anti-theism, Kahane defends *narrow* impersonal anti-theism. In section 2.1., we clarify his defence, and in section 2.2., we show that it fails. In section 2.3., we outline two formidable obstacles to arguing from *narrow* to *wide* impersonal anti-theism. Then, in section 3, we address Kahane’s argument for *personal* anti-theism.

2.1. KAHANE’S ARGUMENT (-SKETCH) FOR NARROW IMPERSONAL ANTI-THEISM

Based on the results of section 1.4., we can understand *narrow* impersonal anti-theism as follows:

- (9*) For each theistic world which is sufficiently similar to the actual world in the relevant ways, all else equal, the “axiological downsides” of God’s existence *constitute respects in which* that world is worse than it would otherwise be, on naturalism.

Kahane does not advance a complete argument for *narrow* impersonal anti-theism: he simply offers “a sketch of how [such an] argument might go” (2011, 684), as follows:²⁵

A world in which God exists is a world where human beings stand in a distinctive and inescapable relation to another person. It is a world where we are the subordinates of a moral superior, a superior that deserves our allegiance and worship, and where we have been created to play a part in some divine cosmic plan. It is a world where everything about us is known and fully understood by another, a world where even our innermost thoughts and feelings are not entirely private. It is a world in which we are never truly alone, away from the presence and attention of another. And if the true nature of God is beyond human comprehension, it would also be a world that we can never hope to fully understand. The idea is that God’s existence is logically incompatible with the full realization of certain values. Thus a world in which God exists is a world where we would not be the moral equals of all other rational beings – equal members of a kingdom of ends that has no ruler. Such a world seems incompatible with complete independence, or with complete privacy and genuine solitude. And it might also be a world where it would be pointless for us to strive for a complete and unqualified understanding of the universe (2011, 681-2).

Before evaluating this sketch, some clarifications are in order.

²⁴ While more work evidently remains to be done here, we share Kahane’s view that much philosophizing assumes that these kinds of issues can be resolved. Kahane notes that similar issues quickly arise when we attempt to precisify the question “Which political system is best?” (2012, 41). And, perhaps more obviously, they also arise when we attempt to precisify plausible counterfactual value judgments such as: “It would have been better had the Holocaust never happened.”

²⁵ Of course, others might offer different considerations in support of narrow impersonal anti-theism. Here, however, we confine ourselves to evaluating Kahane’s remarks.

Concerning *understanding*, Kahane seems to mean that, on RT, some important true propositions about God or ultimate reality cannot, in principle, be known by creatures.²⁶ As for *privacy* and *solitude*, Kahane thinks that if RT is true, creatures cannot have completely private thoughts, and they can never be truly alone.²⁷ (We will treat these together under the category of *privacy*.) It is a bit more difficult to see what Kahane intends by the “distinctive and inescapable relation” that humans have to God, on theism. Perhaps this means that, on RT, creatures cannot have complete *ontological independence*: they have been created by God, and are at every moment of their lives sustained in existence by God.²⁸ But Kahane also seems to have in mind the idea that creatures cannot have perfect *moral autonomy* on RT. The worry seems to be that, on RT, creatures are subordinate to God’s demands, including the demand for allegiance and worship.²⁹ In what follows, we take Kahane to be suggesting, in favour of narrow impersonal anti-theism, that theism is logically incompatible with the full realization, by creatures, of *understanding*, *privacy*, *ontological independence*, and *moral autonomy*. These, then, are the “axiological downsides” of God’s existence referred to in (9*).

Three further points are worth noting. First, Kahane concedes that theism is compatible with the *partial* realization of these values: it’s just that they cannot *fully* be realized on theism (2011, 682-3). Second, in order to ground (9*), there must be at least some – and presumably rather many – naturalistic worlds in which these downsides do not obtain. These worlds must be sufficiently similar in the right ways to the actual world, but, since they are naturalistic worlds, they

²⁶ The Book of Job expresses this idea. Job’s friend Zophar asks, rhetorically: “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below – what can you know?” (Job 11:7-8). After being sternly rebuked by God, Job concedes: “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know” (Job 42:3).

²⁷ Psalm 139:1 says: “O Lord, you have searched me and know me ... You perceive my thoughts from afar”. The Psalmist continues: “Where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in the depths, you are there!” (139:7-8). Lackey (1984) and Falls-Corbitt and McLain (1992) raise related worries for theism’s restriction on human privacy.

²⁸ This thought finds expression, for Christians, in Acts 12:27, which characterizes God as Him in whom we “live and move and have our being”.

²⁹ In conversation, Kahane has indicated that this is the claim he intended to make. James Rachels (1997) wields related considerations in an argument for atheism: he thinks that the existence of autonomous moral human agents precludes the possibility of there being an individual who is worthy of worship, where worship is taken essentially to involve total moral subservience.

cannot contain *creatures* – individuals created by God. They instead feature *human beings* who are *not* prevented by God’s existence from fully realizing the relevant values.³⁰ Finally, it’s important to see that these purported downsides of theism have nothing to do with subjective creaturely preferences. No doubt some creatures in theistic worlds would become frustrated or disappointed or angry on coming to know, or reasonably believe, that the truth of RT limits their ability to realize these values. But the dissatisfaction of some creatures is irrelevant to an argument for *impersonal* anti-theism based on the four “axiological downsides” featured in Kahane’s argument-sketch.³¹

2.2. OBJECTIONS

First, it is not clear that these four values can *perfectly* or *completely* be realized in *naturalistic* worlds by the relevant individuals. Consider, for example, understanding. On naturalism, could there be one or more human beings who possess perfect or complete understanding? This is doubtful.³² As for ontological independence, it is true that on naturalism, human beings do not depend ontologically upon God, but it hardly follows that such beings could perfectly or completely realize this good. Human beings are contingent, and it is extremely plausible to suppose that no contingent being can possess *complete* ontological independence.³³ Similar points apply to privacy and moral autonomy. (Moreover, it seems plausible to suppose that *privacy* and *understanding* vary inversely: all else equal, the more one of these values can be realized in a world, the less the other can be!) So if Kahane’s four values cannot perfectly or completely be realized by human beings in the relevant naturalistic worlds, no reason has yet been given for narrow impersonal anti-

³⁰ We here refrain from supposing, as some theists might, that being human essentially involves being created by God. We also stress that the human beings in the relevant naturalistic worlds need not be identical to, nor counterparts of, the human creatures in the relevant theistic worlds: we are here concerned, after all, with *impersonal* antitheism. Such a requirement will, however, be needed for the discussion of *personal* antitheism. (See section 3.1, below.)

³¹ One might reply that such dissatisfaction is a *further* respect in which the truth of RT makes things worse than they would otherwise be on naturalism. We doubt that such an argument can succeed, but in any case, we here confine ourselves to Kahane’s arguments.

³² Perhaps, though, the idea is that on naturalism, a complete scientific account of reality is possible, and that this constitutes the perfect or complete realization of the value of understanding. If so, argument is needed for both claims.

³³ The traditional theistic idea, of course, is that since only God exists *a se*, God alone depends upon nothing else for his existence.

theism. But Kahane can easily avoid this objection by moderating the narrow anti-theistic complaint to say the following: on theism, there are *significant limits* on the ability of creatures to realize these values – limits which are not present for individuals in the naturalistic comparator worlds. In what follows, we interpret the argument in this fashion.

The second objection turns on the distinction between *restricted* theism (RT) and *expanded* theism. Perhaps the truth of RT places a significant limit on creatures' *privacy* and *ontological independence*. In the former case, God's omniscience does the limiting, and in the latter case, it is God's role as creator and sustainer of all that is. But it is far from clear that the truth of RT alone places significant limits on the ability of creatures to realize the values of *understanding* and *moral autonomy*. It does not follow from RT alone that there are important true propositions about God or ultimate reality that cannot be known by creatures. Nor does it follow from RT alone that creatures are morally subordinate to God's demands. So Kahane seems to have some *expansion* of theism in mind. Accordingly, in what follows, we will take Kahane's anti-theistic arguments to concern, not RT, but instead:

ET: There necessarily exists a being, God, who is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, and who is the creator and sustainer of all that (contingently) is. Necessarily: (a) creatures are morally subordinate to God's demands; and (b) some important propositions about God or ultimate reality cannot be known by creatures.

This narrows the target of Kahane's argument-sketch, since not all theists subscribe to ET. But, that said, we will grant that ET significantly limits the creaturely realization of the four values that interest Kahane.

So, is Kahane right to assert that the limitations placed by ET on the creaturely realization of these four values constitute four respects in which the relevant ET-worlds are *far worse than they would otherwise be*, on naturalism? In the remainder of this section, we cast doubt on the prospects for Kahane's argument-sketch. We begin with a general point: to establish this claim, Kahane would have to show that there are not functionally equivalent limitations in the relevant naturalistic worlds – and he does not do this. But we will waive this point, for the sake of argument, and examine each of these values in turn.

Consider understanding. There is no reason to suppose that the truth of ET prevents creatures from gaining significant – perhaps even complete – knowledge of the natural world. Nor

does ET prevent creatures from acquiring many justified beliefs – even justified, *true*, beliefs – about God or ultimate reality. Nor does the truth of ET prevent creatures from acquiring significant *knowledge* of God. In fact, in an important sense, the truth of ET *expands the horizons of discovery* for creatures.³⁴ *Complete* knowledge of God or ultimate reality is impossible for creatures on ET, but Kahane has done nothing whatsoever to show that this is a respect in which the relevant worlds are far worse than they would otherwise be (on naturalism). Moreover, perhaps this limitation on creaturely knowledge is in fact a good thing on theism, insofar as it tends to inhibit epistemic hubris, or makes possible certain valuable experiences of mystery,³⁵ or makes possible certain goods involved in individual and cooperative investigation into God’s nature, attributes, and actions.³⁶

Next, consider privacy. Is this a respect in which, all else equal, worlds in which ET is true are far worse than they would otherwise be on naturalism? It’s not clear whether Kahane intends privacy to be understood as an *intrinsic* good or as an *instrumental* good (or both). In the former case, we must remember that some restrictions on privacy are not bad at all, but entirely appropriate and justified. (Consider, for example, certain restrictions that parents may place on their children’s privacy.) Kahane must show that the divine case is not, like these cases, appropriate and justified. Turning to privacy as an *instrumental* good, it has been argued that the truth of ET prevents creatures from performing perfectly private acts of self-sacrifice, thus compromising this good.³⁷ But privacy is also needed for performing perfectly private acts of appalling evil. And since ET prevents such actions too, perhaps this blocks the conclusion that ET’s restriction on privacy is a respect in which things are far worse if God exists. So it is not clear that the limitation on creaturely privacy imposed by ET can support narrow impersonal antitheism.

Next, consider ontological independence. Is it obvious that the relevant theistic worlds are

³⁴ Consider, for example, that theological traditions span several millennia, and that understanding in these traditions should be taken as immensely valuable if ET is true. One might say the same for understanding in the philosophy of religion.

³⁵ Albert Einstein, for instance, held that: “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science” (as quoted in Patrick and Chapman, 1935, 44).

³⁶ Swinburne (1998, 210-212) uses considerations like these in his response to the argument from divine hiddenness.

³⁷ Wielenberg (2005, 91-92).

far worse than they would otherwise be (on naturalism) in this respect, since creatures in them are created and sustained by God, and therefore are significantly limited from realizing this value? Here we are meant to compare creatures in ET-worlds with relevantly similar naturalistic worlds featuring human individuals who are neither created nor sustained by God. But it is far from obvious that the former worlds are far worse in this respect. Theists typically believe that it is *good* that they live and move and have their being in God, and that things would be *far worse* if there were no such creatures. The narrow impersonal anti-theist must address these concerns.

Finally, we turn to moral autonomy. The claim here is that the relevant theistic worlds are far worse than they would otherwise be (on naturalism) in this respect, because creatures in them are morally subordinate to God's demands. But it is not always bad to be morally subordinate to demands not of one's own making. Only the most extreme anarchists hold that it is always bad to be morally subordinate to the demands of the law, for example. Nor is it always bad to be morally subordinate to some *person's* demands. Children, for example, are properly considered moral subordinates to their parents. The narrow impersonal antitheist must again show why ET's restriction on moral autonomy is, unlike these cases, a worse-making feature of the relevant worlds.

All in all, it is very difficult to see how God's existence makes the relevant worlds far worse, in these four ways, than they would otherwise be on naturalism. So it is doubtful that Kahane's argument-sketch can be developed into a plausible case for (9*). At the very least, rather more argument is needed than Kahane provides.

2.3. ON MOVING FROM NARROW TO WIDE IMPERSONAL ANTI-THEISM

Suppose, however, that Kahane defeats these objections, or successfully argues that there are *other* respects in which theism makes the relevant worlds far worse than they would otherwise be, on naturalism. Either move would support narrow impersonal anti-theism. In this section, we discuss two significant impediments to moving from narrow to *wide* anti-theism.

The first concerns evil. Philosophers typically maintain that while it may be morally acceptable for God to permit some evil to occur, God cannot permit any *gratuitous* evil to occur: on theism, any evil that occurs is permitted either for the sake of *obtaining a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unobtainable* good, or for the sake of *preventing a sufficiently significant, otherwise-*

unpreventable evil.³⁸ Let's call this view NGE, for 'no gratuitous evil'. This is no *ad hoc expansion* of RT; instead, it is generally taken to be a logical consequence of the essential divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness.

Kahane sees that NGE has some bearing on anti-theism, but in our view, he fails to appreciate just how serious an impediment to establishing *wide* impersonal anti-theism it is. *En passant*, he asks: "why shouldn't it ... be possible for God to provide enough good to outweigh the badness of our being deprived of goods like full independence or privacy?" (2011, 686). We answer with NGE: given this view, it is not just possible, but *logically necessary* that on theism, evils are permitted either for the sake of obtaining a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unobtainable good, or for the sake of preventing a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unpreventable evil. This also applies to any other "axiological downside" of theism posited by the anti-theist (to the extent that it counts as an evil). But now recall our articulation of wide impersonal anti-theism:

- (7*) For each theistic world which is sufficiently similar to the actual world in the relevant ways, all else equal, the "axiological downsides" of God's existence *suffice to make* that world far worse overall than it would otherwise be, on naturalism.

NGE blocks the anti-theist from establishing (7*): any "axiological downsides" of RT or ET cannot *suffice* to make the relevant worlds far worse overall than they would otherwise be, on naturalism, because these downsides, insofar as they are evils, are permitted either for the sake of obtaining a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unobtainable good, or for the sake of preventing a sufficiently significant, otherwise-unpreventable evil. We might call this a philosophical 'judo move', for the following reason: just as judo moves turn the force of one's opponent's blows against him, NGE takes the force of any axiological downside urged by the anti-theist, and turns it against anti-theism. So, if NGE is true, as many philosophers maintain, wide impersonal anti-theism is false.

Four clarifications concerning this judo move must be made. First, we stress that the axiological import of NGE for (7*) is entirely distinct from the question of whether it is reasonable to believe that the requirement expressed by NGE is satisfied in the actual world. The latter is an important question for students of the problem of evil, but it is completely irrelevant to (7*³⁹).

³⁸ Important exceptions include William Hasker (1992) and Peter van Inwagen (2006).

³⁹ For good introductions to contemporary debate about whether it is reasonable to believe that there is

Second, the critic of anti-theism is not required to identify reasons why God might permit these or other downsides; it is sufficient to show simply that NGE guarantees that, if theism is true, there *are* such reasons. Third, the critic of wide impersonal anti-theism is not required to maintain that God's justifications would suffice to make the relevant worlds *better*; all she needs is the more modest claim that the downsides of theism *fail* to make the world *far worse* than it would otherwise be, on naturalism. Fourth, while this objection could be evaded by denying that the alleged downsides are *evils*, this move would greatly diminish the seriousness of these downsides, and would thus weaken the support they could offer for (9*) in the first place.

The second impediment to establishing wide impersonal anti-theism is this: the anti-theist must show that the axiological *upsides* of theism do not outweigh the downsides, and it is difficult to imagine that this can be done. Kahane says very little about these upsides of theism, but they are generally thought – by theists, atheists, and agnostics alike – to be considerable. Consider the value added to a world by God's very existence. Many would urge that the presence in a world of an unsurpassable being itself adds enough value to the world to establish *wide impersonal pro-theism*, and certainly to defeat *wide impersonal anti-theism*. And much more than God's *existence* must be considered. The axiological upsides of theism include whatever disvalue is displaced (so to speak) in a world by God's existence, including gratuitous evil, and perhaps other forms of disvalue. And any increases in value that are causally downstream (so to speak) from God must also be considered. Some may be *guaranteed* by God's existence, others may be *rendered likely* by God's existence, and still others may be *made possible* by God's existence.⁴⁰ These benefits may include many things that theists typically regard as extremely good, including there being personal and communal relationships with God, there being lives structured around faithfulness to God, the goods of worship, and many more. Such benefits have been celebrated in theology, philosophy, and in the visual, literary, and musical arts for millennia. Any argument for wide impersonal anti-theism must address these. In short: even if narrow impersonal anti-theism could adequately be

gratuitous evil in the actual world, see McBrayer (2010) and Dougherty (2011).

⁴⁰ There may also be second-order goods to consider: it may be good that first-order goods are made possible, likely, or actual by God's existence.

supported, it is extremely difficult to see how *wide* impersonal antitheism could be established.⁴¹

3. PERSONAL ANTITHEISM

Perhaps because of these serious impediments to establishing wide *impersonal* anti-theism, Kahane turns to wide *personal* antitheism. As noted, Kahane expresses this view as follows:

(8) It would be far worse overall *for me* if God exists than if He does not.

Applying the results of the discussion from section 1.4, we can now state this view more precisely:

(8*) For each theistic world which (i) is sufficiently similar to our world in the relevant ways, and (ii) *in which I exist*, all else equal, the axiological downsides of God's existence suffice to make the world far worse overall *for me* than it would otherwise be, on naturalism.

The key idea, adapted from Bernard Williams' objection to utilitarianism, is that theism might be *too demanding* for some people, in that it unreasonably requires them to sacrifice what makes their lives *meaningful*. Kahane explains:

If a striving for independence, understanding, privacy, and solitude is so inextricably woven into my identity that its curtailment by God's existence would not merely make my life worse but rob it of meaning, then perhaps I can reasonably prefer that God not exist ... The thought is that in a world where complete privacy is impossible, where one is subordinated to a superior being, certain kinds of life plans, aspirations, and projects cannot make sense ... Theists sometimes claim that if God does not exist, life has no meaning. I am now suggesting that if God does exist, the life of at least some would lose its meaning (2011, 691-2).

Kahane thinks that this view is coherent (2011, 688); that there are actual people who could be justified in holding it (2011, 691); and that this is the strongest defence of anti-theism for such people (2011, 692).

3.1. CLARIFICATIONS

Before evaluating Kahane's argument, six clarifications are needed. First, Kahane refers to "life plans, aspirations, and projects" (2011, 691). In what follows, we abbreviate this to "life plan". The second clarification concerns the goods that Kahane lists in this passage. It's not clear whether he means to identify *ontological independence* as a good which could not reasonably be pursued in one's life plan, on theism. But whether or not he intends this, it's difficult to know what it would mean to have a life plan devoted to pursuing unlimited (or greatly increased) ontological

⁴¹ Kahane does appear to agree, tentatively, with this judgment (2011, 687).

independence. What actions could one perform – on either theism or naturalism – in order to pursue the unlimited, or greatly increased, realization of this good? Since we can think of no way to make this intelligible, in what follows we will concentrate only on the other goods identified by Kahane: *understanding*, *privacy*, and *moral autonomy*.

Third, Kahane misspeaks when he states in the passage quoted above that God's existence will curtail such individuals' *striving* for unlimited (or significantly increased) understanding and privacy. There is no reason to suppose that such individuals cannot *strive* for such things on theism. Presumably, however, Kahane means to say that while such people can indeed strive, their goals are impossible to achieve. These are, we might say, Sisyphean tasks. We will construe the argument in this manner.

Fourth, it is important to stress that Kahane's argument is not merely designed to show that, on theism, some people's lives are worse *in certain respects*: this would be a defence of mere *narrow* personal anti-theism. Instead, Kahane's argument runs as follows. There are certain individuals whose life plan involves the pursuit of unlimited (or at least greatly increased) understanding, privacy, and moral autonomy. Since, on theism, these goals are impossible to achieve, such people's lives are *absurd* (2011, 691, 692, 693) and *meaningless* (2011, 691, 692, 693, 694), and hence their lives are worse *overall* than they would be on naturalism. Kahane does not explain what it would be to have a life that is absurd or meaningless, nor does he defend the tacit inference from the premise that certain goals are impossible to achieve to the conclusion that lives structured around pursuing these goals are absurd and meaningless. (We will say more about this below, in section 3.2.)

Fifth, it is important to note the extremely limited scope of Kahane's argument for personal anti-theism. At best, the considerations adduced only provide certain individuals a reason for preferring atheism: those who, in fact, have a stable life plan that involves the pursuit of unlimited (or greatly increased) understanding, privacy, or moral autonomy. But even this is too broad. A life plan can presumably involve the pursuit of many goods and goals. The fact that *some* of these are impossible to achieve (or significantly increase) provides little reason for thinking that such a person's *overall* life is absurd or meaningless. Hobbes, for example, devoted considerable time trying to prove a logical impossibility (that π is a fraction), and Newton avidly pursued a physical

impossibility (alchemy).⁴² But presumably both Hobbes and Newton did not lead fundamentally absurd or meaningless lives, in part because their life plans also involved pursuing *other* goods and goals. So, at most, Kahane's considerations can make personal anti-theism reasonable only for those whose life plan *exclusively* or *primarily* involve the pursuit of unlimited (or significantly increased) understanding, privacy, or moral autonomy. For the sake of argument, let's suppose – or pretend – that there really are such people.

Finally, someone might hold that *being created by God* is an essential property of the relevant human beings on theism, so that no such person could have existed on naturalism. For *personal* antitheism to be intelligible, however, it must be the case that a person's life on theism can sensibly be compared to how that person's life would be on naturalism. This is a variant of the problem discussed in section 1.3: it's just not clear how comparison can be done when the logical possibility of at least one of the items being compared is under dispute. But in what follows, we likewise assume that such comparisons can be made intelligible.

3.2. OBJECTIONS

In this section, we offer three objections to Kahane's argument for wide personal anti-theism. First, the argument appears to require the following implausible claim: that having the relevant life plan, for such individuals, is an *essential characteristic*. Otherwise, for some such person S, there would be at least one theistic world in which S exists and has a *different* life plan – one which is possible to achieve. And if this were true, then it would not follow that in *all* worlds in which she exists, S's life is rendered worse *overall* than it would otherwise be by theism. Kahane's argument, then, requires the life plan of S to be fixed in all worlds in which S exists. But this is highly implausible. Actual life plans are causally shaped by a wide array of *contingent* features, such as the influences, opportunities, limitations, motivations, beliefs, desires that one has (or lacks). Being contingent, these features vary across possible worlds in which an individual exists. But the assumption under examination requires that one's life plan *always* turns out (exclusively or primarily) to involve striving for understanding, privacy, or autonomy, *no matter what* contingent features causally shaped it. This is a deeply implausible form of fatalism.

⁴² Thanks to John Bigelow for these examples.

Perhaps, however, the *ceteris paribus* clause in (8*) can plausibly be construed as picking out only worlds in which S turns out to have the relevant life plan. If so, then Kahane's argument need not depend on the implausible claim that one's life plan is an essential characteristic. Let's grant that this reply can be made to work, and turn to our next objection. Here we contest Kahane's tacit claim that S' having a life plan that is impossible to achieve provides sufficient reason for thinking that S's life is meaningless or absurd. Kahane takes this claim to be obvious, but it is not. Hobbes, as noted earlier, devoted considerable effort trying to prove that π is a fraction. Now consider Hobbes' lesser-known contemporary, Schmobbes, who, in the relevant worlds, had a life plan *exclusively* devoted to proving this mathematical impossibility. Must we conclude that Schmobbes's life is, *overall*, meaningless or absurd? We see no reason to think so. Schmobbes might, it seems to us, lead a rich, fulfilling, non-absurd, and meaningful life in pursuit of his impossible dream. Generalizing the point: even if some S has an impossible life plan on theism, this does not suffice to show that S's life is overall meaningless or absurd, for there may be *other respects* in which S's life is *less* absurd or *more* meaningful overall on theism. Note that it needn't be the case that S's life is non-absurd or meaningful in *all* theistic worlds in which S exists. To defeat (8*), all that is needed is for there to be *one* theistic world that includes S – with her Sisiphean life plan – and in which S's life *fails* to be absurd or meaningless.⁴³

Suppose we waive this objection too. We are now granting, for the sake of argument, that there is at least one person, S, who, in all relevant theistic worlds in which she exists, has a life plan devoted to the pursuit of unlimited (or significantly increased) understanding, privacy, or moral autonomy, and who, for this very reason, is living a *meaningless* or *absurd* life. Is *this* enough to establish (8*)? Kahane presumably thinks it obviously is, since he does not explicitly defend the inference from the premise that a life is rendered meaningless or absurd on theism to the conclusion that this life is worse overall than it would otherwise be, on naturalism. But the critic of anti-theism can resist the argument even here. Let's stipulate, as seems plausible, that S' life being meaningless or absurd is an *evil*. As we saw earlier, many philosophers take NGE to be a

⁴³ In response, Kahane might concede that his argument fails to provide enough reason to think that S's life is absurd or meaningless, but he might point out that it is still a pretty bad thing to have a life plan that is impossible to achieve. This may be so, but withdrawing to this more secure ground comes at a cost: it would mean that Kahane's arguments would only support *narrow* personal anti-theism. But his stated goal is to defend *wide* personal anti-theism.

consequence of God's attributes. In addition to NGE, many philosophers – theists, atheists, and agnostics alike – accept some version of a *patient-centred restriction* (PCR) on the divine permission of evil. Strong forms of this restriction hold that God can permit someone to suffer evil *only if* that suffering *ultimately benefits* that very individual.⁴⁴ This is no *ad hoc* expansion of theism: like NGE, it is thought to follow from God's essential attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness. Here we have another philosophical 'judo move': the force of any argument for *wide personal* anti-theism can be used against that very position. How? Strong forms of PCR guarantee that S – whose life, we're supposing, is rendered absurd or meaningless by theism – *ultimately benefits* from suffering this very evil. And this blocks the wide personal anti-theist from establishing what (8*) requires: that the "axiological downsides" of theism *suffice* to make S' life *worse overall than it would otherwise be*, on naturalism.

Four clarifications concerning this judo move must be made. First, we stress that the axiological import of PCR for (8*) is entirely distinct from the question of whether it is reasonable to believe that the requirement expressed by PCR is satisfied in the actual world. The latter is an important question for students of the problem of evil, but it is completely irrelevant to (8*). Second, while PCR guarantees that S will ultimately benefit from suffering evil – in this case, the evil of having an overall meaningless life – it needn't be the case that this benefit makes her life *better overall* than it would otherwise be. To defeat (8*), it just needs to be the case that in at least one relevant theistic world, S is *not far worse off overall than she would otherwise be*. Third, PCR does not require that S be *aware of* the ways in which her suffering ultimately benefits her. Fourth, while it may be difficult for us to imagine how the posited *meaningless* or *absurdity* of someone's life can ultimately benefit her, this in no way undermines the objection. The critic of wide personal anti-theism is not required to offer actual examples of individuals whose meaningless or absurd

⁴⁴ Michael Tooley, for example, maintains that "... it is morally permissible for an omnipotent and omniscient being to allow a morally innocent individual to suffer only if that suffering will benefit the individual in question, or, at least, if it is sufficiently-likely that it will do so" (1991, 113). William Rowe quotes this passage approvingly (1996, 92). Eleonore Stump says that "...it seems morally permissible to allow someone to suffer involuntarily only in case doing so is a necessary means or the best possible means in the circumstances to keep the sufferer from incurring even greater harm" (1990, 66). Jeff Jordan (2004) criticizes strong forms of the PCR.

lives were to their ultimate benefit, nor even “just-so” stories about how this might be the case. It is sufficient, in this dialectical context, to show that strong forms of PCR block the anti-theist from claiming that the posited downsides *suffice* to make such individual’s lives *worse overall than they would otherwise be*, on naturalism. Indeed, if a strong version of PCR is plausible, as many believe, then any defence of (8*) that invokes evils caused by God’s existence will fail.

4. CONCLUSION

In section 1, we distinguished a wide range of axiological positions concerning God’s existence, and we attempted to clarify exactly what anti-theism asserts. In section 2, we raised worries for Kahane’s argument-sketch for *narrow impersonal* anti-theism, and we identified two significant impediments to moving from narrow to *wide impersonal* anti-theism. In section 3, we offered objections to Kahane’s arguments for *wide personal* anti-theism. But we do not wish to end on a negative note. Kahane has performed a great service for the philosophy of religion by directing attention to the important – and neglected – question of the axiological effect of God’s existence on a world and on the creatures in it. In closing, we suggest four topics for further work:

- (1) In section 1.3, we discussed the problem of how to assess the axiological effects of God’s existence, given that theism is either necessary or impossible. We followed Kahane in supposing that the axiological status of (certain) theistic worlds and (certain) naturalistic worlds can intelligibly be compared. But how, exactly, should this comparison be construed? Should it be construed similarly in all disputes in the philosophy of religion where such comparisons (implicitly or explicitly) occur, or might different construals be appropriate in different dialectical contexts?
- (2) In section 1.4, we identified several important ways in which (7*) – our articulation of wide impersonal anti-theism – requires further elaboration. Similar elaboration of the other variants of anti-theism, including our (8*) and (9*), is also needed. Ultimately, of course, the burden is on the defenders of these positions to explain just what they mean.
- (3) While we have criticized Kahane’s arguments for anti-theism, there may be other ways to defend this view, and these should be explored and evaluated.
- (4) We believe that philosophers of religion should also attend to the other three axiological judgments about theism. It may well be that *pro-theism* is tacitly assumed by most theists, and perhaps by most philosophers of religion. But how exactly should it be understood, and can it plausibly be defended? How should *indifferentism* and *agnosticism* about these axiological questions be understood, and what can be said about the merits of these views?

We hope that Kahane’s important work will have the salutary effect of encouraging philosophers of religion to consider these matters.

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