

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 16 | Issue 1

Article 10

1-1-1999

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Recommended Citation

Gale, Richard M. and Pruss, Alexander (1999) "Smart & Haldane, ATHEISM AND THEISM," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol16/iss1/10>

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BOOK REVIEWS

Atheism & Theism by J.J.C. Smart and J.J. Haldane. Blackwell Publishers, 1996. Pp. 234 (indexed) \$54.95 (cloth).

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The participants in this debate are less intent to win the debate than to promote their own favored version of atheism or theism, for Haldane that being Thomistic Roman Catholicism and for Smart a scientific species of atheism. The debate would have had more meaning for the students to whom it is supposed to be directed according to the book's cover if the debaters had defended a more generic version of their respective theses, thereby freeing them from having to make use of controversial metaphysical doctrines that are not familiar to students and which the debaters do not have sufficient space to explain and defend properly. This would have made it more of a real debate. By tying his atheism to a reductive materialistic metaphysics, Smart gives away a significant advantage that the atheist has over the theist in the debate; for whereas theism is committed to a metaphysics that requires the existence of nonembodied spiritual substances, namely God and finite souls, atheism is not committed to any specific metaphysics and thus is less vulnerable than theism. Smart would have done better to base his atheism on the inductive argument from the apparently gratuitous evils of the world rather than the more vulnerable reductive physicalism.

The God whose existence is in dispute is that of traditional Western theism—a self-existent and essentially omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, sovereign being, who moreover, they both agree, should be viewed as timelessly rather than omnitemporally eternal. They have no interest in the big brother type finite deity of process theology. They also agree in espousing *metaphysical realism*—"that there is a world independent of human thought and language which may yet be known through observation, hypothesis and reflection." (5) This world is "independent of our human concerns and categories." (215) Thus, they will have no truck with language-game fideisms, especially of the noncognitivist variety. The format of the debate has Smart leading off and Haldane following, this giving Haldane the advantage of being able to respond to many of the issues raised by Smart. A valuable round of responses follows in which their points of disagreement are brought into bold relief, with Haldane again having the advantage of going last.

Smart gives a two pronged defense of atheism, both prongs being based on his underlying scientific principle that "an important guide to meta-

physical truth is plausibility in the light of total science" (6), together with Ockham's Razor requiring that "entities should not be multiplied...without more than compensating explanatory advantage." (20) It turns out that a "compensating explanatory advantage" must be in terms of scientific explanations, and thus the Sweeney Todd like manner in which Smart wields the Razor (on pages 26, 28, 49, 50, 172, 179, 181-2, and 186) makes Ockham's Razor dependent on the former metaphysical principle. One prong consists in attempts to undermine theistic arguments and theodicies, and the other in a positive argument for atheism based on his beloved reductive physicalism. Were he to have confined himself to the former task, he would have been arguing only for agnosticism.

The first prong is an exercise in demolishing strawmen. Smart invariably considers only the worst version of any given theistic argument. He writes like a Rip Van Winkle who has slept through the past forty years, as he ignores almost all of the important arguments for theism given during this period. Smart cannot give the excuse of a lack of space, because it takes no more space to give a good rather than a bad formulation of an argument and he wastes much space with pointless digressions on pages 21, 36-7, 42-6, 52, 58, 72-6, 175, 180-1, and 184 that have as their sole purpose the advancement of one of his pet philosophical theses rather than a defense of atheism. Probably the most flagrant example of Smart's strawman approach is his divide and conquer criticism of theistic arguments in which each is considered in isolation and argued to be wanting as it does not render it more probable than not that God exists, thereby failing to consider what results when these arguments are agglomerated in Swinburne's manner.

Smart considers the teleological argument in its new form that is based on the fine tuning of the laws of the universe in respect to the relative values of the fundamental constants of physics that were necessary for the emergence of intelligent life. The improbability of this happening by mere chance supposedly calls for an intelligent designer-creator. Smart attempts to neutralize the fine tuning argument by appeal to Ockham's Razor. For Smart, the "ontological extravagance" in invoking God as the intelligent designer-creator is "not outweighed by its value in explaining these coincidences." (28) Furthermore, the fine tuning might be amenable to explanation by some future cosmological hypothesis, and the mere hope of a scientific explanation in the bush is to be preferred to a theistic explanation in hand.

John Leslie's axiarchism, which argues for a creative ethical principle at the back of the universe, is criticized by Smart on the grounds that modern anthropology and sociobiology make it implausible that there are objective moral truths. This manner of refutation seems to violate the principle of minimal ordinance enjoining us to use the weakest premises that are needed to establish a desired conclusion, for there should be a refutation that does not need to commit itself to a highly controversial nonobjectivist theory of ethics.

Smart considers only one version of the ontological argument, Descartes', which is one of the worst versions ever given. After demolishing it, he makes the wild generalization that "The upshot of all these considerations is that the ontological argument...does not work, which is as much as to say that there is no logical contradiction in denying that God exists." (38)

What makes this generalization suspect is that the sort of fallacy that he finds in Descartes' argument is escaped by the modal version of the ontological argument, which version he conveniently overlooks.

Smart's next polemical target is the cosmological argument's attempt to deduce the existence of a necessary being from that of contingent ones. He rejects this argument, because he thinks that proper sense cannot be made of the concept of necessity, a conclusion that he reaches after criticizing prominent theories of necessity. What is not made clear is why the theist must be able to give an analysis of the sort of necessity that is involved in God's necessary existence. Why can't it be taken as a primitive, in the way in which Plantinga takes as primitive the notion of "broadly logically necessary," which admits of elucidatory examples but no definition? Alternately, theists could explain their sense of necessary existence in terms of the sort of existence enjoyed by a being whose existence can be deduced from its essence, giving the ontological argument as an example.

Smart argues against the cognitivity of religious experience "because there are clearly no special religious sensations as there are visual, auditory and tactual sensations." (48) This denial that God can non-naturalistically operate on the mind presupposes naturalism, which merely begs the question against the theist. Furthermore, God could be the remote cause of religious experiences by employing naturalistic causes as middlemen. Smart also claims that "The sceptic can say...that religious experience provides no objective warrant for religious belief unless the *possibility* of a naturalistic explanation of the experience can be ruled out as implausible." (49. Our italics.) This requires too much, since all the theist needs to establish is that religious experience is more of a problem under naturalistic hypotheses than under religious ones.

Smart objects to pragmatic arguments because they enjoin persons to "brainwash" themselves into believing that God exists, since rational methods are not available to self-induce belief. This objection applies only to a strawman pragmatic argument, since both Pascal and James made it clear that one is permitted to self-induce a belief on nonepistemic grounds only if the question does not admit of epistemic resolution. Thus, the pejorative term "brainwashing" does not apply to their arguments, since one gets brainwashed into believing something only when the issue is epistemically decidable, and, furthermore, only if it is another who does the brainwashing. Smart's discussion of the argument from miracles is used as a lead-in to theistic arguments based on a "Sacred Book." Not surprisingly, his naturalistic commitments lead him to be unimpressed by such arguments.

Smart next considers the problem of evil but does not do much in the way of mounting a positive atheistic argument from evil, instead confining himself to refuting theistic efforts to neutralize the problem. Smart attacks a strawman version of the Free Will Defence, because he burdens this defence with a burlesque version of incompatibilism that equates a free act with an indeterministic one! (70) Furthermore, his claim that "Because free will is compatible with determinism God could have set up the universe so that we always acted right, and so for this reason alone the free will defence does not work" (71), fails to realize that such determining of human behavior on God's part could be seen to be freedom-canceling, and for reasons

accepted by his own brand of soft determinism, since it involves one person completely determining all of the actions of another person. It is not the fact that the latter's actions are determined that is freedom-canceling but the manner in which they are.

In an apparent frolicsome effort to find the worst theodicies and defenses he can, Smart presents one based on Cantor's set theory in which the total goodness of a world containing an infinity of goods is not diminished by the inclusion of some evil, thereby excusing God for creating some evil. (72) Smart must have heard this one off the second commode in the men's room of his favorite pub, for he did not find it in the writings of any respected theist.

It is not until his "Reply to Haldane" that Smart considers the really powerful argument from evil, the inductive argument from apparently gratuitous evil (184), but he fails to develop it adequately, which would require defending its highly controversial "presumption of atheism" premise—that failure, after a properly conducted inquiry, to find an adequate justification for the known evils of the world disconfirms theism. Smart's failure to properly press this argument would justify withholding his royalties pending an investigation into whether he threw the debate. Smart's only positive argument for atheism is based on his reductive physicalism, but it never gets spelled out: Its key premise, the contingent identity theory, never is presented no less defended. A lot of critical water has passed under the bridge since he first published it in 1959. Given the manner in which it was savaged by the likes of Cornman, Kim, Brandt, Shaffer, Malcolm, K. Baier, and Kripke, Smart cannot expect his opponent to grant him this theory, especially since he does nothing toward meeting their objections. He is preaching to the converted, primarily his materialistically inclined countrymen who approach philosophy like fugitives from a Foster's beer commercial. Throughout he appeals to his own gut intuitions in favor of scientific theses without giving any argumentative support for them, prompting the response that what Jack Smart finds reasonable or acceptable, while of interest to his loved ones, has no more philosophical relevance than that he prefers hiking in the bush to climbing mountains. (See 21, 29, 34, 46, 69, 178-80, 182, and 187 for these scientific autobiographical credos.) The most blatant example of this is his underlying scientific principle that "an important guide to metaphysical truth is plausibility in the light of total science." Because this principle, as Haldane ably points out (192), finds no support from science, it appears to be self-refuting when applied to itself.

Maybe the most serious shortcoming in Smart's defense of atheism is its lack of passion. Unlike the great atheists and agnostics, who portray a worldview that they see as ennobling because appeal is made to basic human values of integrity, courage, and human solidarity, Smart gives too thin a motivation for becoming an atheist. The best that he can muster is that an atheist will avoid a clash with his *metaphysics* of reductive physicalism.

John Haldane, in contrast, presents an impassioned defense of theism that will stir his readers even if they do not agree with him. And, unlike Smart, who does little more than give us a wet sweatshirt, Haldane finds ways of arguing for philosophical commitments about which he is sweating with conviction. His formulation of what he calls "analytic Thomism" is an important contribution to the on-going debate about theism and deserves to

be given very serious consideration.

All of Haldane's attempts to prove the existence of God (these being restricted to the teleological and cosmological arguments) are based on there being explicanda that require God or a being very much like God for their explanation. The explicanda for his teleological arguments are the presence of living organisms, reproducing organisms and minded beings capable of using language to represent the world, and, for his cosmological argument, the mere existence of contingent beings that are causally efficacious. After establishing the existence of an intelligent and powerful creator who explains these explicanda, he tries to support the claim by which St. Thomas ends each of his Five Ways—"et hoc dicimus Deum." This requires showing that the unmoved mover, first cause, etc. possesses all of the essential properties of God, which is no mean feat.

Haldane's teleological arguments require acceptance of anti-reductionism in respect to the states of affairs described by their explicanda. He contends that if talk about Xs cannot be replaced by talk about Ys without loss of information or explanatory power, then Xs are not ontologically reducible to Ys. Unfortunately, Haldane's argument for this appears to be nothing more than the asking of the rhetorical question, "If some class of entities does not really exist why are there terms purportedly referring to them?" (94)

To defend this, Haldane needs to face such apparent counterexamples as *nations*, talk about which probably cannot be replaced by talk about their citizens, though an ontological reduction surely is possible, *pace* Hegel. Haldane loads the dice in favor of his anti-reductionism by requiring that the reducing sentences *entail* the reduced sentence. (cf. 107-110) This strong demand is nowhere justified by him, *nations* again being an apparent counterexample. Smart's defense of reductionism is equally opaque, since he never gives any criterion for an adequate reductive analysis, ducking the issue of when a correlation, say between mental and physical events, becomes an identity, and when an identity becomes a directed or reductive identity—say lightning being nothing but a flow of ionized particles—and when a directed identity becomes eliminative—some demons being nothing but germs.

On the basis of his nonreductionism, Haldane argues that life, reproduction, and mind are not things that could have arisen by degrees, because their presence involves the emergence of some irreducible *qualitative* novelty. For instance, Haldane argues that there is no such thing as partial reproduction which could start off an evolutionary process that would lead to full-scale reproduction (102-3, 105) and that it is conceptually impossible that proto-conceptuality would develop by degrees into conceptuality. (103-4) Haldane denies that his is a "God of the gaps" and argues accordingly that it is not a contingent but a necessary fact that there cannot be a natural or scientific explanation for the emergence of a novel property, the reason being that "this gap is one of kind not quantity." (199) Only a personal explanation in terms of the intentional actions of an agent can explain such emergence, a paradigm of which is the explanation of a painting in terms of "a painter [who] brings together quantities of powder suspended in oil and fashions the likeness of the sitter...[T]he emergence of life...like the portrait...is the work of creative intelligence." (199)

Haldane is committed to humanistic or personalistic style explanations that conform to the Aristotelean paradigm of "the stick moves the stone and is moved by the arm which is moved by the man." (*Phys.* 256a6-8) Facts are explained in terms of substances that cause them. Either the explaining substance has the quality whose emergence was to be explained or else it is a personal being which has this quality as an idea in its mind in the sense of it being an intentional accusative of one of its thoughts. In Descartes' terminology, a cause must have either formally or eminently all the reality contained in the effect. Thus, if the effect has X (e.g., life or mind), then the cause must either formally or eminently have X, otherwise it is incapable of explaining the emergence of X. An infinite sequence of contingent entities that all merely formally have X is impossible, since it leaves unexplained from whence this quality has originated. Only if the sequence originates with an entity that eminently has X, i.e. an agent with the idea of X in its mind that is capable of deliberately producing instances of X, will there be a satisfactory explanation for the emergence of X.

Haldane's teleological and cosmological arguments rest on the Principle of Sufficient Reason. His argument for it consists in pointing out that "a first principle of enquiry [is:] given something that is not self-explanatory look for an explanation." (137) The slippage here is painfully clear: It must be shown that there *is* an explanation, but Haldane's "proof" shows only that we *look* for an explanation, that his explanada "call" for or "invite" explanations. (106, 128, 138)

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.
 Hotspur: Why, so can I, or so can any man;
 But will they come when you do call for them?
 (Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part I, act III, scene 1*)

Inference from a call for an entity to the entity's existence (or coming) is invalid. And Kant's distinction between regulative and constitutive use of the ideas of pure reason is very much to the point here. Perhaps Haldane's best strategy is to direct a circumstantial *ad hominem* argument against his scientific opponents to the effect that they too assume the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

Skipping past Haldane's efforts at exegesis of the historical St. Thomas Aquinas, especially his Third Way, we come to Haldane's cosmological argument. Haldane makes the Thomistic distinction between a causal ordering *per se* and *per accidens* but does not put it to any use, since he winds up arguing against the possibility of an infinite regress of either sort, unlike Thomas who thought that an infinite regress was impossible only with respect to the former. Haldane softens up his reader by first arguing against a circle of causal explainers. His example of a real-life example of such a circle from his home institution of St. Andrews is delightful and alone worth the cost of the book. He then tries to apply the same reasoning to an infinite regress of causal explainers. That there should now exist any contingent being at all is not explainable by other contingent beings, not even if there is an infinite regress of them extending into the past. "Contingent existence or natural causal efficacy is derived from, and hence explicable by, reference to

something else" that is not itself a member of the natural order. (137) The "something else," given Haldane's commitment to personal style explanations, must be a rational agent who intentionally brings about the sequence. Thus, Haldane's reason for rejecting the possibility of an infinite regress, whether of the *per se* or *per accidens* sort, is that it would preclude a personal explanation. If there should be an infinite regress of simultaneous movers, say of pickup trucks such that the first is moved over the edge of a cliff by another truck that in turn is moved by another one, and so on *ad infinitum*, there wouldn't be any truck that we could single out as being the culprit. It would be like a group of youths who attempt to get into the movies free by having each person point to the person immediately behind him: the manager of the theatre would be justifiably angry if there were no first lad who has the money to pay for his predecessors' admission. A system of credit must come to an end, regardless of what pyramiders say. For Haldane, it wouldn't make any difference if this regress were an ordering *per accidens* of successive youths or a *per se* simultaneous ordering. Herein is a key point of convergence between Haldane's teleological and cosmological arguments: Both rest on the controversial demand for a personal explanation.

With regard to the problem of evil, in addition to standard free will and soul-building defenses and theodicies (neither Haldane nor Smart properly distinguishes between a defense and a theodicy), Haldane holds that "In general there cannot be a world of living things developing in accord with their inbuilt teleologies...without interactions that are to the detriment of some individuals and species." (155) Why? Perhaps there is here a Thomist intuition to the effect that "detriment" should be analyzed as "failure to be in act (in some respect)." But the principle that the good is to be in act and the bad is to be in passivity is controversial and difficult to sustain in the face of apparent counterexamples. Receiving pain and pleasure can both be equally passive. Moreover, Haldane's notion that evil is a privation has to be defended in the face of obvious counterexamples such as floods. (Is a flood a privation of the good of well-orderedness of the water?) Furthermore, it seems God is ultimately responsible and blameworthy for creating a world in which the good of one type of being can be secured only at the disadvantage of another type of being; he could have devised and executed a better plan for creation.

Haldane realizes that it is not enough for the theist to prove that there exists an intelligent and powerful being who explains the existence of the world and the purposeful systems found therein. It must also be established that this first cause has all the other essential properties of God. Haldane's valiant efforts to establish this often resemble a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat, especially with regard to the doctrine of the divine simplicity. Shockingly, no effort is made to deduce the benevolence of the first cause! We leave it to the reader to see if they can find more in Haldane's efforts on pages 141-8 than we could. One of the worries that is occasioned by Haldane's Thomistic metaphysicalizing of God is that it renders God religiously unavailable, especially since it is apparently denied that he even qualifies as an individual, because he is lacking in the required individuating matter. (147)

And, finally, Haldane gives an account of his particular brand of theism,

namely Catholicism. While the account is not unattractive, it is perhaps somewhat out of place in a book where the question is the general one whether there is or is not a God.

What emerges as the most salient feature of this “great debate” is that the ultimate parting of the ways between Haldane and Smart is due to their having rival “sentiments of rationality” in respect to what constitutes a rationally satisfying explanation. Haldane requires a personal explanation for the emergence of a novel property, say the evolution of a self-replicating molecule, in which the idea of this property is an idea in the mind of the person who intentionally brings about this emergence. Smart’s response is to ask rhetorically, “Why could not a self-replicating molecule come about through the coming together of a number of non-replicating molecules?” (169) This rests on the Humean intuition that the scientific laws that are employed in explanations ultimately rest on nothing more than the brute fact that certain constant conjunctions have manifested themselves in our experience. Haldane’s demand for a deeper intelligible connection between a cause and its effect is illegitimate from a scientific point of view. This clash between their rival “sentiments of rationality” appears to be an ultimate one in that we do not know any way to mediate it. The disputants themselves seem to recognize this ultimate parting of their ways and leave it to the reader to decide which of these rival paradigms of explanation is the more plausible one. Smart says “Perhaps we differ on what we find mysterious. Aristotelian teleology seems mysterious to me, but not to [Haldane].” (186) In apparent agreement with Smart, Haldane writes that “ontological commitments are tied to descriptive and explanatory theses....And as Smart notes...it is a highly contextual issue whether an explanation is simple or complex, economical or extravagant[;]...as opponents [we draw] different conclusions about the best direction in which to proceed.” (192) The relevant difference in their respective contexts, which is the basis for their rival paradigms of explanation, might be found in their different existential stances toward the world. The theist experiences the world as a “thou” and thus finds it natural to seek personal explanations for why the world is and is the way it is, whereas the nontheist experiences it as an impersonal “it,” and thus is quite satisfied with Humean style explanations in terms of brute constant conjunctions.

The seeming intractability of the clash between their rival paradigms of explanation calls into question their shared commitment to realism—that, in the words of Haldane, “we possess intellectual powers adequate to their [the things’] identification and description.” But is there sense in Smart and Haldane holding there to be a way in which the world really is that is independent of how people think and talk about it, if there is no way to mediate their disagreement about what is the proper way to determine the nature of reality? A realism that is cut loose from any possibility of determining the proper way to determine and explain the nature of reality seems hollow, a wheel spinning idly after the clutch has been disengaged. Can realism survive if disputes about the proper way to determine the nature of reality turn out to be intractable?