

An apophatic response to the evidential argument from evil

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I argue that Christian apophaticism provides the most powerful and economical response to the evidential argument from evil for the nonexistence of God. I also reply to the objection that Christian apophaticism is incoherent, because it appears to entail the truth of the following contradiction: it is both possible and impossible to know God's essential properties. To meet this objection, I outline a coherent account of the divine attributes inspired by the theology of the Greek Father's and St. Gregory Palamas.

Keywords: apophatic theology, problem of evil, real essentialism, essence-energies distinction

The evidential argument from evil (EAE) attempts to show the existence of a being exemplifying certain essential properties—i.e., omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence—is highly improbable given the fact of gratuitous evil. EAE only works, therefore, if one adopts a *cataphatic* approach to God; one that entails God is a cluster of essential properties that can be grasped by the human intellect. This conception of God is what Yujin Nagasawa calls the 'omniGod thesis'.¹

The most economical response to EAE is to reject the omniGod thesis and adopt an *apophatic* approach to God; one that entails God's essence is not a cluster of essential properties and cannot, in principle, be grasped by the human intellect. Adopting this approach, however, is problematic for Christian theists. Namely, because all the major Christian traditions affirm we can know many (if not all) of God's essential properties. It is, thus, argued that Christian theists who adopt apophaticism are committed to the following logical contradiction:

P1: It is both possible and impossible to know God's essential properties.

If Christian apophatic theologians are committed to P1, then Christian apophaticism is incoherent and does not provide a convincing response to EAE.

In this article, I defend apophaticism as the ideal Christian response to EAE. In section (1) I briefly outline EAE, emphasizing that it is specifically designed to undermine the omniGod thesis. In section (2) I explicate Christian apophaticism and use it to show EAE does *not* give us reasonable grounds for adopting atheism. Finally, in section (3), I argue Christian apophaticism is not committed to P1 and offer a coherent account of the divine attributes inspired by the theology of the Greek Fathers and St. Gregory Palamas.

1.0. The evidential argument from evil

The literature surrounding EAE is immense and there have been multiple formulations of the argument by its exponents over the years.² It is beyond the scope of this article to summarize everything written in defence of EAE the past twenty years. Instead, I'd like to focus on the basic structure of EAE; specifically looking at the kind of entity the argument is intended to prove the nonexistence of.³ To that end, I will limit myself to summarizing the argument as it was originally put forth by William Rowe. Let us begin, therefore, by looking at the general structure of contemporary arguments from evil.

1.1. A general outline of EAE

Hickson provides a nice summary of the general structure of the problem of evil, as it is understood by contemporary philosophers:

Today, the problem of evil basically argues: *If there is a God, then He must possess attributes X, Y, Z. But evil shows that the first cause of the universe positively cannot (or probably does not) possess attributes X, Y, or Z. Therefore, there is (probably) not a God.* Evil calls God's existence into question only if God's nature can be pinned down ("He must possess attributes X, Y, Z").⁴

Hickson's summary directs our attention to the fact that contemporary arguments from evil are specifically aimed at undermining modern proponents of Anselmian 'perfect being theology', the core of which is the 'omniGod' thesis: the idea that God just *is* an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being.⁵ This conception of God is precisely what Hickson is alluding to when he states that, "if there is a God, then He must possess attributes X, Y, Z."

Before canvassing Rowe's argument, it is crucial to highlight two features of the omniGod thesis that I shall discuss in greater detail in sections 2.2 and 3.1. First, the omniGod thesis owes a lot to the revival of essentialist thinking ushered in by Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam in the 1970's. That is to say, most ardent defenders of the omniGod thesis today assume God's essence is a cluster of essential or *necessary* properties exemplified by Him in all possible worlds.⁶ The second important feature of the omniGod thesis, is that it assumes God's essence can be grasped by the human intellect—that, like created beings, we can positively state *what* God is.

With these two points out of the way, we may now return to EAE. Originally, Rowe put forth the evidential argument as follows:

- (1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- (2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
- (3) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.⁷

As I stated before, the literature surrounding this argument is immense. A lot of ink has been spilled over the truth of the first two premises. For the purposes of this article, however, it is enough to focus our attention on the fact that Rowe's argument follows the basic structure canvassed by Hickson above. Namely, the argument assumes that *if* God exists he possess the omniGod attributes (implicitly assuming God is a composite object that can be defined). It then looks at the world to see if there is anything about our experience that might cause us to conclude an omniGod being does not exist. According to Rowe, there is: the fact of intense, gratuitous, human and animal suffering. Given this fact, Rowe believes it is highly improbable an omniGod being exists and that we have reasonable grounds for embracing atheism.⁸

2.0. An apophatic response

Now that we have canvassed Rowe's argument and determined the type of God it is concerned with, we are in a position to develop an apophatic response. In this section I *first* explain what I mean by Christian apophaticism (as there are other approaches to apophatic theology), *second*, I show how it works as a powerful response to EAE, and *third*, I argue it is the ideal Christian response to EAE.

2.1. Understanding Christian apophaticism

Apophatic theology—sometimes referred to as the *via negativa* or *way of negation*—is not unique to Christianity; but is also a component of Judaism, Neoplatonic philosophy, and some streams of Islamic thought.⁹ Its fundamental thesis is that God's essence is unknowable or beyond human understanding. Hence, the primary way of approaching knowledge of God's essence is by way of negation; that is, by stating what the divine essence is *not*.

Christian apophaticism (CA) shares this crucial thesis in common with other forms of negative theology. As Henny Fiskå Hägg explains,

In the theology of the Greek Fathers and of Eastern Orthodoxy generally the question whether, or in what sense, man can know God is of primary importance. Christian apophaticism, or Christian apophatic theology, may be seen as a response to this question. In the Greek Orthodox tradition the primary way of approaching the divine is through negation (Gr. *apophasis*), not affirmation (Gr. *kataphasis*). What is denied or negated, then,

is the possibility both to know and to express the divine nature: God is both greater than, and different from, human knowledge and thought. It also follows that human language is incapable of expressing him¹⁰

It should be made clear, however, that CA is not peculiar to Eastern Orthodoxy; but is expounded by proponents of Classical Theism in the West as well.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is in the writings of the Greek Fathers and the broader Eastern Christian tradition that apophaticism finds its strongest and most articulate proponents.

Before we go any further, I must explain the logic that leads one to embrace apophaticism. Those who embrace the *via negativa* do not do so arbitrarily. Rather, they are led to this approach by the same arguments that entail God exists.

Traditional arguments for the existence of God start with some feature of the universe (e.g., change, causation, beauty, order, etc.) and move to the existence of an ultimate, transcendent, simple, sustaining cause of the universe.¹² Proponents of CA maintain we are unable to obtain knowledge of God's essence precisely because He is completely transcendent.

Transcendence entails God is neither part of the universe nor the universe considered as an ordered whole.¹³ It also entails the universe is not a part of God. According to St. Maximus the Confessor: "God is not a being either in the general or in any specific sense of the word . . . on the contrary, He is the author of being and simultaneously an entity transcending being."¹⁴ For St. Maximus only finite, limited, immanent objects—those that make up the interconnected set of objects that populate the universe—can be grasped by the human intellect. We could formalize this argument thus:

- (1) The human intellect cannot grasp the essences of objects outside the universe.
- (2) God, being transcendent, is an object outside the universe.
- (3) Therefore, the human intellect cannot grasp the essence of God.¹⁵

If God is transcendent, and this argument is sound, it necessarily follows that it is epistemically impossible for the human intellect to grasp the essence of God. Thus, there is no possible world in which we know what God's essential properties are.

At this stage, we might wonder how CA differs from other expressions of apophatic theology? The difference lies in the fact that Christian apophatic theologians do not altogether reject cataphatic statements about God. They paradoxically maintain we can come to know God's properties and that we can have direct experiences of him. By way of example, consider that two of the most influential ancient Greek theologians—St. Maximus the Confessor (whom we have just cited above) and St. John of Damascus—argued both that God is unknowable *and* that we can know things about him.

St. Maximus considered the pursuit of the knowledge of God a sure sign of our love for him. "The person who loves God," he insists, "values knowledge of God more than anything

created by God, and pursues such knowledge ardently and ceaselessly.”¹⁶ Yet, he also insists attaining knowledge of God’s essence is impossible:

When the intellect is established in God, it at first ardently longs to discover the principles of His essence. But God’s inmost nature does not admit of such investigation, which is indeed beyond the capacity of everything created.¹⁷

In yet another, of numerous, perplexing statements St. Maximus says that:

Divinity and divine realities are in some respects knowable and in some respects unknowable. They are knowable in the contemplation of what appertains to God’s essence and unknowable as regards that essence itself.¹⁸

St. John of Damascus speaks similarly, stating that:

Now, one who would speak or hear about God should know beyond any doubt that in what concerns theology and the Dispensation not all things are inexpressible and not all are capable of expression, and neither are all things unknowable nor are they all knowable.¹⁹

But later proclaims:

Thus, it is clear that God exists, but what He is in essence and nature is unknown and beyond all understanding.²⁰

A *prima facie* reading of these statements might lead one to assume CA is completely incoherent. Christian theists, therefore, who adopt this approach must respond to this objection. Namely, they must show how apophaticism, regarding God’s essence, is compatible with cataphatic statements regarding the divine attributes. As we shall see, when I develop an apophatic account of the divine attributes in section 3, this objection can be met.

2.2. Applying Christian apophaticism to EAE

Now that we have canvassed CA, we are in a position to apply it to EAE. It should be evident, by now, that CA is antithetical to the omniGod thesis EAE is intended to render implausible. Where the omniGod thesis treats God as a composite object (i.e., a cluster of essential omni-properties), apophatic theologians understand God to be simple. Likewise, proponents of the omniGod thesis believe it is epistemically *possible* to know God’s essence and to define what He is, but apophatic theologians maintain it is epistemically *impossible* to know God’s essence because He is transcendent.

In short, EAE seeks to undercut belief in a “God” that adherents of CA also believe to be nonexistent; i.e., a God composed of essential parts whose nature, like the natures of created beings, can be circumscribed by the human intellect and defined. Unlike other responses to EAE, apophaticism neither denies the existence of intense, gratuitous, human and animal suffering, nor contests that it is truly evil; rather, it suggests the fact of gratuitous evil has no bearing on whether or not God exists. As Hickson pointed out: “evil calls God’s existence into question only if God’s nature can be pinned down.”²¹ From the perspective of CA, God’s nature *cannot* be pinned down. In which case, the cogency of EAE poses no challenge to the question of God’s existence.

2.3. Christian apophaticism as the ideal response to EAE

There are three primary reasons why apophaticism is the *ideal* Christian response to EAE: (1) it changes the nature of the current debate over God and evil, (2) its core thesis, that God’s essence is unknowable, does not commit the fallacy of special pleading, and (3) it is more amenable to biblical revelation.

Regarding (1), as we have just seen, apophaticism provides the most powerful and economical response to EAE because it rejects the omniGod thesis (which the argument is intended to undermine). This is ideal, because it *changes the nature of the current debate*. Even if EAE is cogent, the proponent of CA need not embrace atheism. Gratuitous evil does not lead us to doubt the existence of an ultimate, transcendent, simple, sustaining, cause of existence (i.e., God); it merely leads us to question contemporary Anselmian perfect being theology’s conception of ‘omnibenevolence’. What is really on the line when theologians defend various theodicies (or sceptical theism, or whatever) to account for gratuitous evil is *not* the existence of God but, rather, the nature of God’s goodness.²²

Regarding (2), apophaticism is not an *ad hoc* response to EAE—deployed merely for the sake of avoiding a serious obstacle to faith—but, as I demonstrated in 2.1., follows logically from the traditional arguments that justify our belief that God exists. This is ideal because it means proponents of EAE (and arguments like it) cannot simply dismiss the arguments put forth by Christian apophatic theologians as special pleading.

With regard to (3), I have in mind such Old Testament passages as Moses’ encounter with God on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:16-21 and 33:18-23; or New Testament one’s like John 1:18, Matt. 11:27, or Colossians 1:15. I realize some theologians will argue these passages (and numerous others like them) do not support apophaticism. It is, however, far beyond the scope of this essay to defend (3). At present, I can only assert it is possible to make a strong case that apophaticism is more amenable to the Biblical witness than contemporary cataphatic approaches. This is ideal because any Christian response to EAE would need to be rooted in biblical revelation.

Having said all this, we must now turn our attention to the most formidable objection facing Christian proponents of apophaticism: the charge that it is incoherent.

3.0. A coherent apophatic account of the divine attributes

In this section I respond to the objection that CA is incoherent by providing a coherent account of the divine attributes, inspired by the theology of the Greek Fathers and St. Gregory Palamas.²³ In 3.1 and 3.2, I lay the groundwork for my account of the divine attributes, discussing two important metaphysical distinctions. First, I discuss the nature of ‘properties’ as they are understood by *modal essentialism* versus *real essentialism*. *Second*, I explicate St. Gregory Palamas’ famous essence/energies distinction. Finally, in 3.3, I utilize these distinctions to respond to our objection and outline a coherent apophatic account of the divine attributes.

3.1. *Real essentialism and the nature of properties*

In 1.1 I noted the omniGod thesis owes a lot to the revival of essentialist thinking ushered in by Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam in the 1970’s. Specifically, I pointed out that most ardent defenders of the omniGod thesis today adopt *modal essentialism*: the idea that an *essence* is a cluster of essential or *necessary* properties exemplified by an object in all possible worlds. They, therefore, conceive of God as a complex object whose essential properties are exemplified in every possible world. On this understanding, knowing God’s essential properties is synonymous with knowing God’s essence.

Given this metaphysical framework, CA is obviously incoherent. For, on a modal essentialist reading, the apophatic theologians cited in 2.1 are saying:

P1: It is both possible and impossible to know God’s essential properties.

Modal essentialism, however, is a relatively recent philosophical innovation and is not the version of essentialism historically held by proponents of the *via negativa*. Apophatic theologians have, classically, held to what David Oderberg calls *real essentialism*. Real essentialism is merely the traditional or classical approach to essentialism. As Oderberg explains:

By ‘traditional’ I mean, somewhat tendentiously, to qualify that method of thinking and those doctrines which, despite occasional interludes and conflicting interpretations, embodied the prevalent school of philosophy for nearly two thousand years. That is the school of Aristotelianism and its followers . . .²⁴

The Eastern Christian proponents of apophaticism cited in this paper—i.e., St. Maximus, St. John, and St. Gregory—were all students of Neoplatonist philosophy (which was heavily influenced by Aristotelianism). As such, they were all real essentialists.²⁵ Hence, to understand

how it is that we can know some of God's essential properties, without knowing his essence, we must understand how a real essentialist conceives of 'properties'.

W. Norris Clarke provides a precise definition of 'properties' as they are understood by real essentialists. According to him, a 'property' is:

An attribute or characteristic of something that does not signify the essence itself of the thing but something that follows immediately from the essence and is necessarily connected with it.²⁶

Oderberg provides further clarification, stating that, "No property of a thing is part of a thing's essence, though properties flow from the essence."²⁷

Unlike modal essentialism—which views essential properties as *part* of the essence itself—real essentialism does not consider a property to be part of the essence of a thing. Rather, it understands a property to signify or flow from the essence of a thing. To be sure, properties are necessarily connected to the essence of a thing; that is, they are uniquely characteristic of and metaphysically dependent on the essence from which they flow; but are *not* the specific difference of the thing itself.²⁸

To further clarify this point, consider an example. The essence of man, according to the classical tradition, is that he is a rational animal.²⁹ In virtue of the fact that human beings are animals, they have the property 'being mortal' (i.e., being subject to bodily death and dissolution). Mortality is necessarily connected with, and directly flows from, the animal nature of man. Yet, 'being mortal' is not part of the essence of man. Likewise, human beings—in virtue of the fact that they are rational—can have the property 'being knowledgeable'. Being knowledgeable is necessarily connected with, and directly flows from, the rational nature of man. Yet, being knowledgeable, is not part of the essence of a human being. On this view an object's essence provides the ultimate grounding and explanation of its properties; as such, the essence of an object is not explained by any other, more fundamental, characteristics of that object.³⁰

Some real essentialists maintain properties are *distinct* from accidents.³¹ In other words, they believe a property is neither part of the essence of a thing nor one of its accidental qualities. The difference being, according to those who hold this view, a property is necessarily connected with the essence of a thing and an accident is not. To go back to our example, the property 'being mortal' is necessarily connected with the essence of man; i.e., it is in virtue of the fact that man is an animal that he is mortal. In contrast, the accidental quality 'being red' is not necessarily connected with the essence of man. It is *not* in virtue of the fact that man is a rational animal that some men have red hair. Many other things, with completely different natures, (e.g., fire hydrants, apples, flowers, etc.) exemplify the accidental quality 'being red.'

A lot more can be said about the real essentialist view of properties. However, it is beyond the scope of this essay to explain and defend real essentialism.³² For now, it is enough to point out that, given real essentialism, properties are not part of the essence of a thing; but, rather, flow from the essence and are uniquely characteristic of it. As such, it is possible we

might come to know the properties of something without knowing its essence. For example, it is possible for me to know human beings are mortal, and that some human beings are knowledgeable, without knowing a human being is a rational animal.

However, before we utilize this view of properties to respond to our objection, we must first turn our attention to another key metaphysical distinction: the essence/*energies* distinction.

3.2. *The essence/energies distinction*

The Greek word, *energeia* (activity or operation), was coined by Aristotle and further developed by his commentators and Christian theologians. Throughout its history it has taken on a diverse, but close knit, range of meanings.³³ Its most important usage, for our purposes, came when St. Gregory Palamas appropriated the term to synthesize several seemingly disparate elements of Patristic theological reflection. Some of these elements we have already discussed: e.g., apophaticism with regard to God's essence and the insistence that we can come to know God and make cataphatic statements about his divine attributes. Unmentioned thus far, however, is the Patristic affirmation of God's real presence in creation (through divine providence), and the notion that human beings can directly experience God. It is all of these elements that St. Gregory seeks to draw together and explain through the use of the term *energeia*.³⁴

Primarily, St. Gregory uses the term in the same way as Aristotle and his predecessors; namely, to signify the natural activities, powers, or operations of an essence.³⁵ To get your head around this idea, consider the renowned physicist Stephen Hawking. Thinking and writing about theoretical physics is a natural energy—or activity—Stephen Hawking often engages in; and, it is in virtue of Dr. Hawking's energies that we say he is a theoretical physicist.

The energies, thus, *reveal and ground a particular essence's properties*. As I write these words, I am engaging in the act of philosophizing. This natural energy—the act of philosophizing—grounds the property 'being a philosopher' I exemplify and is a characteristic activity of many rational animals.

The energies, from St. Gregory's perspective, also guarantee the real existence of an essence. Which is to say, all really existing essences, will be engaged in some sort of natural activity—i.e., manifesting some sort of natural power. We know Stephen Hawking exists by experiencing his energies. In fact, if I wanted to participate in Stephen Hawking's energies, directly, I might take the train to Cambridge and sit in on one of his lectures on theoretical physics.

The above appropriation of the term is in line with *energeia's* general usage among ancient philosophers (and, most importantly, the Church Fathers). What is unique about St. Gregory's appropriation of the term is: (1) his special emphasis on the presence of the *subject* in the energies, and (2) his use of the term *energeia* to reconcile cataphatic statements about God with apophaticism. Consider this important passage:

Neither the uncreated goodness, nor the eternal glory, nor the divine life nor things akin to these [i.e., the other divine attributes] are simply the superessential essence of God, for God transcends them all as Cause. But we say He is life, goodness and so forth, and give Him these names, because of the revelatory energies and powers of the Superessential . . . *But since God is entirely present in each of the divine energies, we name Him from each of them, although it is clear that He transcends all of them.*³⁶

The idea St. Gregory is trying to convey is incredibly simple. Allow me to illustrate.

Imagine I'm playing football with my son and, in an unusual moment of skill, kick the ball into the goal and score a point. Or, to state this in terms of the metaphysical jargon we've been using: imagine I engaged in the act of kicking a football (i.e., I manifested a certain natural power to play football that flows from my essence). Clearly, in this scenario, *I* am the one kicking the football; and the football is directly participating in my *energeia*. Yet, the act of kicking a football is distinct from me (the subject engaging in the act). This is precisely the distinction St. Gregory is applying to God. The primary difference being: God's essence (unlike mine) is completely transcendent and perfectly simple. Thus, while my various energies (e.g., the act of kicking) are made manifest by my various physical parts (e.g., my leg and foot), God's various energies flow forth from his one, transcendent, and simple essence. This is why St. Gregory emphasizes the fact that God is *fully* present in his various energies. For, given God's simplicity, it could not be the case that only part of God is present in any given *energeia*.

Furthermore, just like my energies are revelatory of my properties, the various divine energies (e.g., creating and sustaining the world, appearing to Moses on Mt. Sinai, becoming flesh and dwelling among us, etc.) are revelatory of his divine properties. It is, for example, in virtue of the fact that God created and sustains the world that we refer to him as 'being the creator' or as 'being life', etc.³⁷ Hence, God's energies ground the various cataphatic names we apply to God. Just as the property 'being a football player' is not part of my essence, so the divine property 'being the creator' is not part of God's essence. Nevertheless, God is fully present in his various energies. When we participate in them, we are directly participating in him (not, merely some created sign of his presence).

Now that we've outlined these important distinctions—between God's essence, properties, and energies—we can formulate a response to the objection that CA is incoherent.

3.3. Tying it all together

Put simply, the divine names (which identify God's properties or attributes), can be grouped into two basic categories: (1) those that apply to God's *essence*, and (2) those that apply to God's *energies*. The names in (1) are negations because we cannot directly grasp or participate in the divine essence; hence, we can only state what it is not. The names in (2) are positive affirmations because we can (and, arguably, do) directly participate in God's energies; hence we can describe them cataphatically. We can represent this with the following table:³⁸

<i>(1) Essence (apophatic)</i>	<i>(2) Energies (cataphatic)</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Timeless (i.e., not in time) 2. Simple (i.e., not compound) 3. Transcendent (i.e., not a being among other beings) 4. Incorporeal 5. Immortal 6. Eternal (i.e., not temporary) 7. Unoriginate 8. Unlimited 9. Uncircumscribed 10. Infinite (i.e., not finite) 11. Unchanging 12. Invisible 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Good 2. Beautiful 3. Just 4. Love 5. Powerful 6. Intelligent 7. Truth 8. Knowledge 9. Personal 10. Life 11. Wisdom 12. Creator

Utilizing everything we've discussed in 3.1 and 3.2—i.e., the real essentialist understanding of properties and the essence/energies distinction—we are now in a position to respond to the charge that CA is obviously incoherent. For, given real essentialism and the essence/energies distinction, we can interpret the apophatic theologians cited in 2.1 as saying:

P2: It is impossible to know God's essence (i.e., what he is), and possible to know God's properties (i.e., that which flows from or is characteristic of what he is).

On this reading, apophatic statements refer to God's essence, and cataphatic statements refer to properties that are grounded in the natural energies that flow from God's essence.

Conclusion

EAE is one of the most powerful contemporary arguments for the nonexistence of God. It maintains the fact of ongoing, gratuitous, human, and animal suffering makes it highly improbable that an omniGod being exists. However, EAE only counts against belief in God if we embrace the omniGod thesis.

If we adopt an apophatic approach to God—one that maintains the divine essence cannot be grasped by the human intellect (i.e., that we can't define God) and that God's properties are not part of his essence—EAE does *not* provide reasonable grounds for embracing atheism. At best, the cogency of EAE may lead us to question, redefine, or even reject the concept of 'omnibenevolence'.

Christian theists who adopt apophaticism, however, must square this approach with the fact that all major Christian traditions affirm we can know many (if not all) of God's attributes. In other words, they must show apophaticism with regard to God's essence is compatible with cataphatic accounts of God's attributes. I met this challenge; outlining and defending an apophatic approach to the divine attributes inspired by the Greek Fathers and the theology of St. Gregory Palamas. Drawing on the real essentialist view of properties and St. Gregory Palamas' essence/energies distinction, I showed it is logically possible to know God's properties without knowing his essence; thus, rendering CA coherent.

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Notes

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- ¹ Nagasawa, "A new defence of ...," 577.
- ² See Howard-Snyder, *The evidential argument from*; Rowe, *God and the problem*.
- ³ "The argument from evil is often regarded as a criticism of theism in general, but that is not correct. The argument is directed specifically against theists who believe in the existence of God as defined in the omniGod thesis (or theses which are sufficiently similar to it)" Nagasawa, "A new defence of ...," 583.
- ⁴ Hickson, "A brief history of," p16 emphasis his.
- ⁵ Nagasawa, "A new defence of," 577.
- ⁶ See Richard, *The untamed God*, 63-81; 94-99; Plantinga, *The nature of necessity*, 56; 165; and Moreland, *Philosophical foundations for a*, 157; 196-199.
- ⁷ Rowe, "The problem of evil," 336.
- ⁸ Every formulation of EAE is designed to undermine the omniGod thesis; which is why I have not canvassed other, more recent, formulations of the argument.
- ⁹ See Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and*, 3; Remes, *Neoplatonism*, 162-165; Rudavsky, *Maimonides*, 36-57; Ormsby, 'Islamic theology', 433-434.
- ¹⁰ Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and*, 1.
- ¹¹ See, for example, *The cloud of unknowing*.
- ¹² I am here considering the family of arguments for God's existence which find their origins in Pre-Socratic thought, were explicated by Plato and Aristotle, rigorously developed by Stoic and

Neoplatonic philosophers, and eventually appropriated and developed further by early Christian thinkers.

¹³ ‘Transcendence’ should be interpreted apophatically: God is *not* an object among other objects inhabiting our universe.

¹⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *The philokalia volume II*, 114-115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁹ John of Damascus, *Writings*, 166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

²¹ Hickson, “A brief history of,” p16.

²² In section 3 I explain how the proponent of CA can coherently say God has the property of goodness, love, etc. without embracing the omniGod thesis.

²³ My account is *inspired* by them; I am not merely exegeting their writings on this subject. Rather, I am drawing on their insights, and the rich philosophical tradition from which they flow, to present a coherent account of the divine attributes that is logically consistent with apophaticism.

²⁴ Oderberg, *Real essentialism*, x.

²⁵ Support for this can be found in Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, 164-165.

²⁶ Clarke, *The one and the*, 319.

²⁷ Oderberg, *Real essentialism*, 157.

²⁸ Saying that a property is necessarily connected to the essence of a thing does *not* entail all the individuals within a given species will exemplify that property. For example, the property ‘being a scientist’ is necessarily connected with the essence of man. It is in virtue of the fact that man is rational that a particular man is a scientist. Nevertheless, not all men are scientists for various reasons; e.g., physical or mental ailment, lack of training or education, choosing to become an artist instead of a scientist, etc. *Ibid.*, 159.

²⁹ I’m using the term ‘man’ in the generic universal sense to denote both male and female human beings.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

³¹ Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, 165.

³² For those interested in such a defence, I highly recommend David Oderberg’s book, *Real Essentialism*, which I have cited extensively in this section.

³³ For a comprehensive historical survey of the philosophical and theological development of the term ‘energeia’ see David Bradshaw’s important work *Aristotle East and West*.

³⁴ Bradshaw, *Aristotle east and west*, 238-239.

³⁵ St. Gregory, citing the Cappadocian Fathers, states: “As Basil the Great says, ‘The guarantee of the existence of every essence is its natural energy which leads the mind to the nature.’ And according to St. Gregory of Nyssa and all the other Fathers, the natural energy is the power which manifests every essence, and only nonbeing is deprived of this power, for the being which participates in an essence will also surely participate in the power which naturally manifests that essence” Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 95.

³⁶ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 95-96.

³⁷ Given real essentialism and the essence/energies distinction, the assertion that God has various properties does not undermine divine simplicity. Because properties, on this view, are *not* parts of God's essence.

³⁸ This list is by no means exhaustive; to be sure, there are other divine names we could add to it.