

# From Aesthetic Virtues to God: Augmenting Theistic Personal Cause Arguments

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**Abstract:** I argue that the aesthetic theoretical virtues of beauty, simplicity, and unification, as well as the evidential virtue of explanatory depth, can transform theistic-friendly personal cause (PC) arguments—like the kalām cosmological argument (KCA) and the fine-tuning argument—into stand-alone arguments for monotheism. The aesthetic virtues allow this by providing us with the grounds to rationally accept a perfect personal cause (i.e., God) as the best PC to believe in given the success of some PC argument. Using the KCA as an example, I argue that, once the KCA is accepted and a PC believed in, then a theory that posits a perfect PC as the cause of the universe is more beautiful, simpler, and has more unification and explanatory depth than the imperfect PC normally posited by the KCA’s standard conceptual analysis. And the same would hold true for *any* imperfect PC. Thus, once a PC argument has been accepted, the perfect PC theory is preferable to hold over any other PC theory. Finally, I address various objections to this reasoning.

**Keywords:** Theoretical virtues, Beauty, Simplicity, Theistic arguments, Kalām cosmological argument

## 1. Introduction

Using arguments like the kalām cosmological argument (KCA) and/or fine-tuning, theists routinely argue that the universe’s existence, or the existence of one of its features, has a personal cause (PC). The problem, however, is that such arguments fail to move beyond a mere god-like PC to the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God of monotheism. To see this, consider the KCA.

The KCA argues that the universe (meaning all of contiguous space-time reality) began to exist, and, because it did, then it has a cause of its beginning (Craig 2015). A conceptual analysis of that cause then yields a god-like creator PC who is

uncaused, beginningless, changeless, immaterial, timeless, spaceless, and unimaginably powerful (*Ibid.*). But, as noted, this is not God. Thus, even if the KCA and its conceptual analysis are sound—and, *from this point forward, we shall assume the soundness of PC arguments like the KCA*—its failure to reach God is a weakness, as it is for other PC arguments. Granted, such arguments might have only ever been meant to serve as part of a cumulative case for theism and/or a refutation of commonsense atheism,<sup>1</sup> but if this weakness could be overcome, that would increase the theistic value of such PC arguments, even making them viable *stand-alone* arguments for God. In this paper, I argue that the theoretical virtues of beauty, simplicity, and unification allow us to overcome the aforementioned weakness, thereby providing the means to rationally move from a mere PC to God via arguments like the KCA.

## 2. Theoretical Virtues & Theory Choice

Theoretical virtues “are the traits of a theory that show it is probably true or worth accepting” and which many scholars agree “help us to infer which rival theory is the best explanation” (Keas 2018, 2761–2762). They are the tools of rational theory choice, giving us the grounds to accept one theory over another.

In his comprehensive—even landmark—examination and systemization of the theoretical virtues as used in various disciplines, Michael N. Keas argues that good theories contain twelve major virtues that can be categorized into four classes with three virtues in each. He describes these virtues and their classes as follows:

### Evidential virtues

1. *Evidential accuracy*: A theory (T) fits the empirical evidence well (regardless of causal claims).
2. *Causal adequacy*: T’s causal factors plausibly produce the effects (evidence) in need of explanation.
3. *Explanatory depth*: T excels in causal history depth or in other depth measures such as the range of counterfactual questions that its law-like generalizations answer regarding the item being explained.

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<sup>1</sup> Articulating this point, William Lane Craig (2010) says: “[i]t would be a bizarre form of atheism—indeed, one not worth the name—that conceded that there exists” a cause of the universe with the attributes posited by the KCA.

## Coherential virtues

4. *Internal consistency*: T's components are not contradictory.
5. *Internal coherence*: T's components are coordinated into an intuitively plausible whole; T lacks ad hoc hypotheses—theoretical components merely tacked on to solve isolated problems.
6. *Universal coherence*: T sits well with (or is not obviously contrary to) other warranted beliefs.

## Aesthetic virtues

7. *Beauty*: T evokes aesthetic pleasure in properly functioning and sufficiently informed persons.
8. *Simplicity*: T explains the *same facts* as rivals, but with *less* theoretical content.
9. *Unification*: T explains *more kinds of facts* than rivals with the *same* amount of theoretical content.

## Diachronic virtues

10. *Durability*: T has survived testing by successful prediction or plausible accommodation of new data.
11. *Fruitfulness*: T has generated additional discovery by means such as successful novel prediction, unification, and non ad hoc theoretical elaboration.
12. *Applicability*: T has guided strategic action or control, such as in science-based technology. (Keas 2018, 2762–2763)

Note, moreover, that these virtues (or at least many of them) can be employed in various fields for theory choice. For example, Keas (2018, 2762, emphasis added) says that the “most widely accepted theories *across the academic disciplines* usually exhibit many of the same theoretical virtues” that he lists above. Devon Brickhouse-Bryson (2020, 7–19)—in a monograph on beauty’s role as a theoretical virtue—argues that theoretical virtues like those described by Keas apply to all types of theory evaluation, including in philosophy and ordinary reasoning. L. A. Paul (2012, 21–22) agrees, contending that theoretical virtues similar to those above (including aesthetic virtues like simplicity and elegance) are not only truth conducive in

science, but in metaphysical and ordinary reasoning as well. And Richard Swinburne (2010a, 32–43; 2010b) has previously used virtues like those above—albeit a reduced number of them—within the philosophy of religion to choose between different explanations, including different personal theistic explanations. Specifically, Swinburne (2010a, 32) employs the following virtues for his arguments: explanatory power (a theory “leads us to expect the phenomena which we would not otherwise expect to find”), fit with background knowledge (the theory fits with our knowledge of how things operate in neighboring areas of inquiry), and simplicity.<sup>2</sup> Explanatory power is like Keas’ evidential virtues (Keas 2018, 2774), and fit with background knowledge is similar to Keas’ universal coherence virtue, with simplicity being roughly the same for both. Given all this, this paper accepts that theoretical virtues like those articulated by Keas can indeed be used for theory choice in various fields, including religious philosophizing. The virtues should thus not only be understood as theoretical virtues, but as *explanatory* or *hypothesis-selection* ones as well. This also means that, moving forward, the term “theory” should be understood broadly: namely, as a system of thought that explains whatever phenomenon is being examined, regardless of field.

Now, concerning the relative importance of Keas’ virtues when choosing the best theory, Keas (2018, 2788) states that “the first three classes of theoretical virtues are arranged in order of decreasing epistemic weight,” meaning that the aesthetic virtues are the least epistemically significant of the three (although there is some nuance to this that will be discussed below). Keas (2018, 2772; 2788) adds that the aesthetic virtues have historically been the most controversial (in terms of their epistemic value) and admits the possibility that they have no epistemic value at all, or possibly no *intrinsic* epistemic value (even if they have such value extrinsically).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Keas argues that the aesthetic virtues of simplicity and unification likely “carry at least some epistemic weight” (2018, 2774) and are “more epistemically relevant in theory choice” (2018, 2775) while beauty likely has extrinsic epistemic value in that it “inclines researchers toward recognizing and cultivating simplicity and unification” (2018, 2775). Brickhouse-Bryson—who views beauty as being comprised of a theory’s simplicity, unification, elegance, coherence, etc. (2020, 17)—argues that “a theory’s beauty is part of what makes it better” (*Ibid.*) and that “we need beauty to help us discover which of all the competing theories is true”

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Oppy (2013, 7–8) is another philosopher of religion who uses similar virtues for his arguments, though he argues for atheism.

<sup>3</sup> A virtue has intrinsic epistemic value if it indicates “the likely attainment of approximate truth” or is “a requirement for truth” (Keas 2018, 2772), while it has extrinsic epistemic value if it helps one attain truth without being an indicator or requirement of truth (Keas 2018, 2777).

(2020, 19). Moreover, many of the greatest scientists and philosophers have “attached central importance [. . .] to the aesthetic merit of their proofs, explanations and theories” while viewing beauty as “an indication of the truth of theories” (Breitenbach 2013, 83).

Concerning simplicity specifically, Simon Fitzpatrick (2022) and Alan Baker (2022) note that simplicity has been and still is recognized by many philosophers as an important theoretical and explanatory virtue; one that is useful in deciding which theory is better when everything else is equal.<sup>4</sup> Swinburne (2010b, 5–7) has also argued that—whether in science or broader reasoning<sup>5</sup>—simplicity is not only evidence of truth, but is sometimes the only virtue that can be used to decide between two otherwise equivalent explanations. Even cognitive research underscores simplicity’s ubiquity in human decision-making when the probability of different explanatory options is either absent or ambiguous (Lombrozo 2007, 252).

Moreover, because “simplicity and unification are complementary artistic styles of how theoretical content relates to evidence,” they are therefore “significantly entangled with the evidential virtues” and this “helps support the conclusion that the aesthetic virtues are not merely pragmatic” but “might also have modest epistemic credentials (at least extrinsically, and maybe even intrinsically)” (Keas 2018, 2788). Supporting this, Brickhouse-Bryson (2020, 88) argues (as noted above) that an aspect of beauty is coherence, and so beauty is linked to the coherential virtues that Keas deems to be epistemically significant. Consequently, it is difficult to remove aesthetic considerations from the other elements of theory choice, arguably making the former a key tool in determining which theory or explanation is best. And though it is beyond the scope of this paper to argue for these points in detail, moving forward, it will be accepted that the aesthetic virtues have at least some epistemic weight in theory choice and are thus important in deciding which theory should be rationally accepted as true.

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<sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick (2022) also articulates the worry that weighing simplicity is a somewhat subjective phenomenon. However, this worry, though real, strikes me as no more concerning than weighing a concept like “beyond a reasonable doubt.” The latter may have fuzzy edges, and so it may sometimes be difficult to decide if, say, a criminal is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. But other times it is obvious, like when a criminal was observed by thirty eyewitnesses, was recorded, had physical evidence incriminating him, and freely confessed. I contend that the same is true with weighing simplicity: some cases are fuzzy, whereas others are clear. As such, weighing simplicity is little different from other “weighing” activities that human beings routinely engage in and which form a valid and *unavoidable* aspect of our lives.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Brenner (2017) has also defended the idea that if simplicity is deemed truth conducive in science, then there is no *special* problem with the notion that simplicity is truth conducive in metaphysics.

Given all the above, we now have the core elements needed for this paper's argument: namely, 1) aesthetic theoretical virtues that are epistemically relevant and which help indicate which theory is best, and 2) an understanding that because the theoretical virtues (including the aesthetic ones) have broad applicability, they can be used to determine which PC theory is best and should be rationally accepted.

### 3. Personal Causes, Perfection & the Virtues

Recall that, for argument's sake, we have already accepted that a PC exists (given that we are assuming the soundness of PC arguments like the KCA). Consequently, we are not using the theoretical virtues to determine *if* a PC exists, but rather *which* PC theory we should rationally accept.

To see how this would work, consider the KCA again as our example of a PC argument. The KCA's conceptual analysis demonstrates that the universe's cause must be a timeless,<sup>6</sup> spaceless, beginningless, changeless, immaterial, and uncaused personal creator with sufficient power and freedom to create the universe. So, a PC with those traits exists (or so we are assuming). But those are only the *minimum* traits that the PC needs to possess; it could actually possess much more than this. For instance, instead of just being immensely powerful, the PC could be omnipotent, as there is nothing in the KCA's conceptual analysis that restricts that possibility. And since being powerful enough to create a universe is entailed by omnipotence, then both options would account for the universe's creation. Thus, the power that the KCA's PC possesses could lie anywhere along the spectrum from being omnipotent to just being powerful enough to create a universe. Consequently, multiple theories about the PC's level of power could be legitimately postulated to account for the universe's creation. For example, Theory A might posit that the PC has sufficient power to bring about just our universe, whereas the PC in Theory B has a fraction more power than that, and so on until the limit of omnipotence is reached and posited as a final PC theory. Thus, there are a vast number of legitimate and potentially true theories concerning the PC's level of power that would all account for the universe's creation.

The same idea also extends to the other variable traits under consideration from the KCA's conceptual analysis. For instance, if the KCA's cause is personal and makes a free choice to create the universe (Craig 2010, 2015), then that cause would arguably need to possess some level of knowledge and self-awareness (although

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<sup>6</sup> Whether the KCA's cause must be timeless before the universe's creation is debatable (see Reasonable Faith 2020 for a temporal option).

proponents of the KCA usually do not mention these traits explicitly). This is because a free choice to create something implies, at the very least, an awareness of making that choice and the knowledge that one can do so (if not some idea of what one is choosing to create). But again, the cause could actually have any level of knowledge and self-awareness from that minimal standard all the way to omniscience and perfect self-awareness. Any of those options would provide the cause with the knowledge and self-awareness necessary to freely decide to create a universe.

This means that the data being considered (i.e., the universe's creation via a free choice) underdetermines which PC theory should be rationally accepted (and something similar would be the case for other PC arguments, like fine-tuning). Put another way, all theories about which PC caused the universe via a free choice are equivalent in their fulfilment of the evidential and coherential virtues; thus, the aesthetic virtues can (and should) be deployed to break the epistemic stalemate.

But before doing so, it is worth noting that there are only two PC theories that we are *ultimately* assessing. Granted, there are a vast number of possible god-like PCs that could account for the KCA's data and match the traits of the KCA's minimal PC (as determined by its conceptual analysis). However, if such PCs are somehow lacking in power, knowledge and/or benevolence, even if only slightly, then they are all arguably imperfect in some way, and that allows them to be grouped together into one overarching "Imperfect PC" (IPC) theory. Contrasting this is the "Perfect PC" (PPC) theory, which posits a perfect/greatest possible being (i.e., an omni-God) as the PC in question. Thus, the aesthetic virtues are ultimately being used to decide between two PC theories that encompass all others: one positing an IPC (of some kind) and the other positing a PPC. And because all potential PC theories are being implicitly considered, the so-called "bad lot" objection to this type of reasoning is avoided. (Moreover, for those concerned about it, note that the internal coherence and consistency of a PPC/greatest possible being is being assumed, not only because it is beyond this paper's scope to argue that point, but also because much that this paper agrees with has already been written to show that a PPC is internally coherent and consistent.<sup>7</sup>)

Now, in speaking of a PPC, understand that we are speaking of Perfection itself, with all the other traits that this entity has being entailed by this one primitive trait. As T. J. Mawson notes:

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see Erasmus (2022, 122–125) for a recent attempt to argue for the metaphysical possibility of a PPC existing, and thus for the coherence of the PPC theory.

all of the attributes which go to make God be the particular thing that He most fundamentally is are not merely consistent, but also cohere; they all derive from the 'uber-attribute', if you will, of being the most perfect being possible. Even if not all of God's uniquely identifying essential attributes mutually entail one another, they are all entailed by what it is to be the most perfect being possible. (Mawson 2019, 51)

Mirroring Mawson, Yujin Nagasawa (2017, 30) states that perfect being theists attribute great-making properties to God, like omnipotence, as well as other properties, like aseity and incorporeality, because they "assume that the property of being something than which no greater is metaphysically possible subsumes or entails these great-making properties." Thus, to speak of God or a PPC is to speak of an entity with the core trait of perfection (or greatness) which entails all the other traits ascribed to Him.<sup>8</sup> And it is only with this understanding in mind that we can properly compare our two PC theories against the aesthetic virtues, to which we now turn.

#### 4. Beauty

Keas (2018, 2773) defines a beautiful theory as one that evokes aesthetic pleasure in properly functioning and sufficiently informed persons. And, to me, a theory whose PC is Perfection itself—with all its sub-traits flowing out of its perfection—evokes greater aesthetic pleasure and seems all-around lovelier than any theory that posits a less-than-perfect PC, with traits that are grouped together but not entailed (or not wholly entailed) by a more fundamental or singular trait. I also suspect that many other properly functioning and sufficiently informed individuals would agree with this assessment.

An objector could, however, retort that beauty is merely relative, and so personal assessments of this virtue are irrelevant. Yet Keas (2018, 2773) notes that humans "often make aesthetic judgments and take them to be at least approximately correct," meaning that "aesthetic relativism is out of step with common practice." Reinforcing

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<sup>8</sup> Granted, the claim that perfection entails certain other attributes may ultimately be based on intuitions. But many of those intuitions are powerful, like the idea that being a rational entity is more perfect than being a rock, and thus that a perfect being, by virtue of being perfect, will be a rational being. Still, worries exist that such intuitions are skewed by cultural or value considerations that do not reflect a true picture of what perfection entails. But such worries strike me as little different than worrying about how such considerations might affect the weighing of simplicity or the assessment of whether a criminal is guilty beyond a reasonable doubt (see footnote 4). Ultimately, such potential cultural or value biases should be acknowledged, but they should not halt the making of decisions in cases like simplicity or about the attributes of a PPC.



this, Nick Zangwill (2022) notes how this is true even for professed relativists about beauty, whom one can “almost always catch [. . .] making and acting on non-relative judgments of beauty—for example, in their judgments about music, nature and everyday household objects.” Brickhouse-Bryson (2020, 27–47) adds that a rigorous examination of the concept of beauty shows that even if disagreements about beauty cannot be decided with precise principles, such disagreements can be arbitrated and do not entail relativism; at the same time, he argues that relativism about beauty leads to various absurdities, like the view that random and inchoate white noise is as beautiful as the music of Bach or Beethoven. Consequently, such relativism should be rejected.

There are, therefore, good reasons to reject relativism about beauty, and someone could thus rationally accept that the PPC theory is objectively more beautiful than any IPC one, which I contend most properly functioning and sufficiently informed persons would do, thereby giving the PPC theory the advantage for this virtue.

## 5. Simplicity

After beauty is simplicity, and the weighing of this virtue is not foreign to PC arguments. For instance, proponents of the KCA already contend that adding a series of causal events beyond the universe’s origin or invoking a plurality of personal entities as the causes of the universe, or both, is unnecessary to account for the universe’s creation. They thus argue that one universe-creating PC is sufficient for the KCA, as entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity (Craig 2010). And similar reasoning could apply to the designer posited by teleological arguments. Yet beyond just how many PCs to accept, simplicity can also be used to determine the *type* of PC to believe in.

Keas (2018, 2775) notes that theoretical simplicity is often weighed by considering parsimony (how many entities a theory posits, with fewer being better) and elegance (how many basic theoretical principles are posited, with fewer or more concise ones being better). And, in his book *The Best Argument Against God*—where simplicity plays a major role—Graham Oppy broadly concurs with Keas but gives a more fulsome definition of simplicity and its employment in theory choice:

If everything else is equal, we should prefer the more simple theory to the less simple theory. If everything else is equal, we should prefer the theory that postulates fewer (and less complex) primitive entities. If everything else is equal, we should prefer the theory that invokes fewer (and less complex) primitive features. If everything

else is equal, we should prefer the theory that appeals to fewer (and less complex) primitive principles. (Oppy 2013, 7–8)

By “primitive,” Oppy (2013, 6) means an entity, feature, or principle that is not susceptible to further explanation, and where other entities, features, and principles are fully explained by the earlier primitive.

Using this understanding, we can thus compare different PC theories for their simplicity.

As noted early, the PPC (i.e., God) is Perfection; it is a singular entity whose sole primitive feature is perfection (or greatness), for all the PPC’s other traits flow from and are explainable by its perfection. Thus, the PPC theory posits only one primitive entity and only one primitive feature: perfection (or greatness). By comparison, the IPC theory posits only one PC as well, and so is equal in terms of quantitative parsimony,<sup>9</sup> but it is qualitatively more complex as its features are not entailed or explainable by a singular primitive feature like perfection (or greatness). For example, a PC that lacks omnipotence will not be perfect writ large, and so cannot be labeled as a perfect or greatest possible being, meaning that this IPC’s level of power and knowledge, along with its immateriality, personality, etc. would *all* be primitive features, for they are not explained by any feature that is more primitive, like perfection or greatness.

Against this, however, an objector might question if perfection actually grounds the PPC’s other traits rather than just entailing them, as the latter does not guarantee the former. But if this is indeed a concern, then several responses are available. First, since perfection acting as the PPC’s singular primitive grounding trait (from which all its other traits stem) is a coherent and defensible idea/theory, then the aesthetic virtues offer a reason to prefer *that* theory over any PPC theory where the traits are not so grounded, because the “Grounded PPC” theory is more beautiful, simpler, and more unifying (more on this virtue below) than any non-grounded PPC theory. Thus, the very virtues used to argue for a PPC could also be used to argue for a specific type of PPC: namely, one whose traits are all grounded in its perfection, making that PPC synonymous with Perfection itself. Second, whether or not perfection grounds the PPC’s other traits, the PPC’s traits remain simpler *at an individual level* than those of an IPC. This is because, as Calum Miller (2016) has

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<sup>9</sup> Some may argue that quantitative simplicity is irrelevant as a theoretical virtue. But this seems incorrect, especially for personal explanations. For instance, if all the data at a murder scene can be accounted for by positing only one culprit, detectives consider it superfluous and even irrational to posit a second murderer. In a similar fashion, if one PC can account for the universe’s creation (as per the KCA), it would be superfluous and irrational to posit more.

argued, scientific practice provides good grounds to claim that hypotheses which posit exceptionless laws and maximal degrees of certain properties are simplest. Miller (2021, 454) then notes that “since theism involves the positing of maximal degrees of power, knowledge, and goodness, it is considerably simpler than a parody positing only large, finite (and therefore exception-admitting) degrees of these properties.” Thus, even if—for the sake of argument—perfection does not ground the PPC’s other traits, the PPC theory is still simpler than IPC theories. Finally, third, consider that Swinburne (2016, 172–174) has previously argued that God’s other properties—such as His omniscience, goodness, etc.—can all be grounded in and derived from the trait of omnipotence (as Swinburne understands it). Using this idea, Joshua Sijuwade (2021)—in an attempt to provide a new interpretation of the doctrine of divine simplicity—argues that there is a way of understanding God *as just being omnipotence*, and that all other “traits” that God has are just *aspects* of that omnipotence.<sup>10</sup> Under this view, God still only has one property—omnipotence rather than perfection—and also has no parts, making Him the simplest being possible. So, if the grounding issue for perfection is deemed a concern, then a theist could pivot to the “omnipotent personal cause” (OPC) theory, which would still be simpler and less complex when compared to other PC theories (and would arguably be more beautiful and more unifying as well). Moreover, Miller’s point above would also apply to the OPC, as it too would have maximal degrees of power, knowledge, etc. Thus, there are multiple ways to counter the grounding objection.

Beyond parsimony, elegance (i.e., syntactic simplicity) also merits consideration given that positing a PC theory that can be described with one primitive term, namely “perfection (or omnipotence),” is simpler than positing any PC theory that must be described using multiple primitive terms, like powerful, immaterial, etc. Now, measuring elegance can be difficult, but a “perfect” PC theory appears substantially more elegant than theories that are descriptively more complex, as would be the case for IPCs. Elegance also touches on what Sam Cowling calls qualitative ideological parsimony, where he argues that it is an epistemic virtue for theories to minimize the number of kinds of ideological primitives—concepts that resist definition in terms of other concepts—in a theory (Cowling 2013, 3892–3907).

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<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge that some theists may be uncomfortable with Swinburne’s conception of God, given, for instance, that Swinburne (2016, 195–196) denies God’s foreknowledge. However, it is possible that Swinburne’s claim that the other divine attributes stem from omnipotence can still lead to a more traditional conception of God. Moreover, if other conceptions of divine simplicity can be used—such as those of classical theism—then the God theory would still be simplest and issues with Swinburne’s conception of God could be avoided.

Since perfection (or omnipotence) is the only primitive concept posited by the PPC (or OPC) theory, it is as ideologically simple as possible.

Given the above, therefore, there are good reasons to hold the PPC theory as both more parsimonious and more elegant than any IPC theories that oppose it.

## 6. Unification

For Keas, a theory exemplifies the virtue of unification—sometimes understood as *explanatory* simplicity—if it explains more kinds of facts than other theories, but with the same amount of theoretical content. And for this virtue, the PPC theory has an immediate advantage. To see why, consider, for instance, the universe’s creation as per the KCA. Both the PPC and IPC theories explain that fact, but there is another fact in this situation that needs explanation: the existence of the PC itself. Yet, whereas the PPC theory plausibly explains why the PPC exists—because a PPC, *to be perfect*, would have to exist necessarily and have self-existence, meaning that “its existence is independent of everything else and explained by the [PPC’s] very nature” (Erasmus 2022, 119)—IPC theories offer no such internal explanation. Perhaps an IPC’s existence is a brute fact, and therefore has no explanation, which in turn undermines its ability to unify. Or maybe an IPC’s existence is uncaused; it just popped into existence from nothing. Either way, the PPC theory has an automatic unification advantage over IPC theories because the PPC not only explains the thing under consideration—i.e., the universe’s creation, fine-tuning, etc.—it also explains its own existence.

Things shift even further in the PPC’s favor if additional facts are considered. For instance, imagine that a person is not only convinced by the KCA that a PC exists, but also by fine-tuning that a cosmic designer exists and/or by the moral argument that a transcendent moral agent exists. The IPC normally posited by the KCA’s conceptual analysis does not possess the traits necessary to explain fine-tuning and/or morality, and if that PC was given the traits to do so, then they would be added to it in an *ad hoc* manner. By contrast, the PPC, given its traits, can explain all those facts—the universe’s creation, fine-tuning, and transcendent morality—plausibly and without *ad hocness*. Thus, the PPC theory not only has a unification advantage from the start, it also displays greater unification as more theistic-friendly facts are considered.

Given all the above, the PPC theory is arguably more beautiful, simpler and has greater unification than its IPC rivals, which provides the rational grounds to tentatively accept it as the best PC theory. But before this conclusion can be fully accepted, several objections need to be addressed.

## 7. Objections

### *Objection 1: Matching Elegance*

If a theory's syntactic simplicity is measured by how many terms are required to articulate its claims, then, to counter the PPC theory's greater syntactic simplicity, an equally elegant label could be created for an IPC theory. For instance, for the KCA, perhaps the label "kalam-being" could be given to the IPC that creates the universe, thereby allowing an objector to claim that this IPC's one primitive "kalam" feature entails all the attributes that are normally postulated by the KCA's standard conceptual analysis. And this, in turn, would make this particular IPC theory as elegant as the PPC one. But this move is arguably *ad hoc*, and thus of questionable legitimacy. Moreover, a label like "kalam-being" is different from the perfect being approach, in that merely knowing that a being is perfect (or greatest) can be used to reason to the type of traits that such a being must possess independent of any arguments for the existence of such a perfect being. By contrast, hearing of a "kalam-being" – with no further context or without the KCA behind it – offers no insight into the type of being that it is or the traits that it would possess, and so the two labels are not on par. Yet even if such *ad hoc* additions were permitted, the PPC theory would maintain maximal syntactic simplicity, as it can be expressed in one term: perfection (or greatness (or even omnipotence)). Thus, it would at least have parity even against the syntactically simplest *ad hoc* PC theory.

But such *ad hoc* theories need not be permitted. For instance, William G. Lycan and George N. Schlesinger (1992, 276) argue that, concerning the elegance of different theistic hypotheses, "one postulate is simpler than another if its statement requires fewer nonadventitious predicates," with an adventitious predicate being defined as one that is "just *made up* by the theologian, in the manner of 'grue,' to abbreviate a longer complex expression."<sup>11</sup> Thus, Lycan and Schlesinger avoid the problem of *ad hoc* hypotheses while arguing that "perfection" is the simplest nonadventitious predicate, as it implies all the others traditionally ascribed to God and fully explains them (*Ibid.*). Lycan and Schlesinger further argue that, since any non-perfect predicate would provide incomplete information about its subject, then additional specification would be needed to describe the full extent of its properties (*Ibid.*). For instance, a "universe-creator" would have sufficient power and

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<sup>11</sup> Lycan and Schlesinger (1992) argue that, just as simplicity is used in science to solve the underdetermination problem and choose from amongst the near infinite number of theories that could be posited for some range of data, simplicity can also be used to choose between numerous PC options, with a PPC being the simplest, a conclusion which supports the argument in this paper.

knowledge to create a universe, but would it have more power and knowledge than that? Could it create *any* possible universe or just some of them? Such questions would need clarification, and, unlike the predicate of “perfection,” nothing in the universe-creator label answers those questions. Thus, from a syntactic simplicity perspective, such theories would be more complex than the PPC theory. Indeed, as Lycan and Schlesinger note: “a statement of the existence of any deity other than the absolutely perfect being will inevitably be more complex” than a perfect being (*Ibid.*).

*Objection 2: Uncertainty About God’s Perfections*

Could uncertainty about which traits count as perfections undermine the claim that all the PPC’s attributes are entailed by its one primitive trait of perfection? And would this increase the complexity of the PPC theory? For instance, is temporality or timelessness a perfection? The lack of a clear answer generates doubt about which applies to the PPC.

This objection, however, can be countered by arguing that this uncertainty is merely epistemic, not factual. Nor should this be surprising given our cognitive limitations and the fact that we are speaking about a *perfect* being, where disagreement would be expected concerning at least some of the traits that such a being would possess. And this answer seems correct, for consider how we have epistemic uncertainty concerning, say, which interpretation of quantum mechanics is correct, even though there is a right answer to that question. Or consider criminal cases. Some are obvious, with overwhelming evidence making the accused’s guilt clear beyond a reasonable doubt. Others, however, are uncertain; in such cases the evidence for the accused’s beyond-a-reasonable-doubt guilt is neither overwhelming nor so obviously insufficient as to warrant an acquittal. But such uncertainty is epistemic; it does not mean that there is no objective fact concerning the matter. Human jurors might never determine clear answers to such cases, but an omniscient person, for instance—someone who knew how to perfectly apply all the legal concepts, the precise weight to give the evidence, etc.—would know the objectively right answer to such ambiguous cases. In a similar way, it may be obvious that, say, omnipotence is a perfection, even if it is epistemically unclear *to us* whether being timeless or temporal is.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Moreover, this answer’s plausibility is augmented by the fact that some potential perfections/great-making properties, like power or knowledge, are just singular traits with maximal levels; thus, if a trait is great-making, then, plausibly, its maximal level is a perfection, which makes deciding whether it is a perfection relatively easy. By contrast, timelessness and temporality are two

Thus, epistemic uncertainty about some of the traits entailed by perfection is insufficient to contend that perfection does not entail all the traits necessary for something to be a PPC.

*Objection 3: Adding Omnibenevolence*

Another objection would be to claim that a PPC would possess omnibenevolence, but since common PC arguments—the KCA, fine-tuning, etc.—say nothing about the benevolence (or lack thereof) of the PC, then positing a PC that was omnibenevolent would add a feature to that PC and make it more complex than other PC options. However, if only *primitive* features of the PC are being examined (as is being done here), then, since omnibenevolence is entailed by perfection, adding omnibenevolence to the PPC does not increase its complexity.

Moreover, all IPCs would have some relation to benevolence, so this feature would be present in them as well. For instance, consider the minimal IPC usually posited by the KCA. Though not explicitly stated, such a cause, being personal, would have some relationship with benevolence: it might be omnibenevolent; it might be partially benevolent; or it might be omnimalevolent.<sup>13</sup> Either way, being a PC, it would possess some feature related to benevolence, meaning that it would gain no advantage in simplicity over the PPC theory. In fact, since an IPC that was, say, only partially benevolent would be arguably more complex — both qualitatively and syntactically (as noted above)—than a PC that was wholly benevolent, then, once again, the PPC would be the simpler hypothesis.

But might a perfectly evil-god be as simple as a perfect but good God, thus creating parity between the two theories? Miller (2021, 463) answers this question negatively, noting that a good God is simpler given “the difficulty of coming up with a simple and coherent conception of a perfectly evil-god” and because “the mixture of positive and negative properties that an evil-god would have to have” would increase its complexity. Thus, simplicity itself provides a reason to prefer a perfect but omnibenevolent PC over a perfect but omnimalevolent one (assuming that the latter is even a coherent concept). Furthermore, it has been plausibly argued that a perfectly evil-god would never create anything at all (see Miksa 2022), meaning that

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mutually exclusive options, making it unsurprising that it would be more difficult to determine which of those two options is a perfection when compared to something like omnipotence. Thus, it is quite plausible that some perfections/great-making properties would be obvious, whereas a few others would be less clear.

<sup>13</sup> Arguably, a PC could also be neither benevolent nor malevolent; but, in that case, it would still plausibly possess a comparative trait: namely, indifference or apathy.

in a world with such a god, there would be no theories or theoretical virtues to consider.

*Objection 4: Not all Features Entailed*

A further objection against the simplicity (and even beauty) of the PPC theory is to argue that while perfection entails certain attributes that such a PC possesses—the essential attributes, for instance—it does not entail all the PPC’s attributes. For example, perhaps perfection does not entail whether the PPC has a favorite color or other such subjective preferences. Thus, the PPC theory might not be as simple as it appears, for while the PPC’s primitive attribute of perfection entails many of its other attributes, it would also have other primitive attributes—such as certain subjective preferences—that would not be entailed by anything else. This would also mean that the PPC theory would become more syntactically complex (less elegant), as it would take more terms to fully describe all its primitive features.

However, even if the above objection is correct, it would not undermine the PPC’s simplicity when *compared* to other PC theories. For if the subjective preferences of the PPC must be included among its primitive features, then the same would hold true for every other IPC theory as well. And since the features of the PPC that would be subsumed under the latter’s primitive feature of perfection—its omnipotence, omniscience, personhood, etc.—would *not* be subsumed under something equivalent for the IPC theories, then the IPC theories would still be comparatively less simple than the PPC theory. Moreover, the greater simplicity of the PPC’s exceptionless and maximal attributes—as discussed above—would also maintain its greater simplicity in comparison to other IPCs.

Furthermore, arguments can be made that perfection either entails the subjective preferences of a PPC or that such a being has no such preferences. For instance — and as just one example of a brief argument to that effect—consider that perfection entails being perfectly just, and perfect justice avoids even the *appearance* of partiality; but since having subjective preferences can create the appearance of partiality,<sup>14</sup> then a perfect being would not have such preferences in order to maintain his *perfect* justice (which, as noted, includes maintaining the *appearance* of perfect impartiality and justice). Next, for the view that perfection entails subjective

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, even a genuinely impartial judge would not be allowed to preside over the trial of his own son. This is because everyone recognizes that people’s natural preference towards family members would create at least the appearance of partiality, thus tainting the appearance of “perfect objectivity/justice” strived for by the judicial process, which is meant to maintain public trust in that process.



preferences, consider that perfection plausibly entails omnirationality, and the latter entails that whenever a perfect being does or refrains from doing anything—like choosing something—he does so for all and only the unexcluded reasons that favor the action, and he always acts for reasons (Pruss 2013, 1–8). So, if a perfect being has a preference like a favorite color, that choice will be based on his omnirationality,<sup>15</sup> which is entailed by his perfection. Thus, perfection would entail a perfect being’s seemingly subjective preferences. And if there was no reason to prefer something like one color over another, then the perfect being would not have a preference in that case. Either way, perfection, via omnirationality, entails the PPC’s preferences, or lack thereof. Consequently, some potential arguments do exist for the claim that *all* the features that a PPC possesses, including its subjective preferences (or lack thereof), are entailed by its singular primitive feature of perfection.

Simplicity itself can also assist here. Swinburne (2010b, 19), for instance, has argued that positing an absence of something is simpler than positing something actual, meaning that a being who lacked subjective preferences would arguably be simpler than one with such preferences. Thus, a PPC with no subjective preferences would be all-around simpler than a PPC with various primitive subjective preferences, and the former would also remain simpler than any IPC, whether the IPC had subjective preferences or not. Consequently, simplicity itself could motivate the choice of a PPC without subjective preferences.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Objection 5: Non-Derivable Attributes*

Another objection comes from Jeff Speaks, who argues that “there is just no way to derive interesting claims about God from the principle that God is the greatest possible being” (Speaks 2018, 2). Now, it is impossible to articulate Speaks’ various arguments in detail here. However, it is sufficient to note that if his arguments are correct, then this would weaken the claim that the PPC theory is simplest due to the PPC’s attributes being derivable and entailed from its perfection or greatest possible nature. Nevertheless, Speaks’ claims are disputed. Ryan Mullins, for instance, contends that Speaks has “ignored some obvious moves that perfect being theologians traditionally make”; moves which would allow for the derivation of the

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<sup>15</sup> Granted, this may require what Pruss calls *strong* omnirationality, as weak omnirationality is “compatible with there being reasonless choices where there are no reasons.” However, Pruss admits that claiming that God only has weak omnirationality is controversial, as it is very plausible that God has the strong variety (Pruss 2013, 5, 7).

<sup>16</sup> And given the independent arguments for the “PPC with no subjective preferences” theory, it is not *ad hoc*.

divine properties from the singular primitive property of being perfect or the greatest possible (Mullins 2019, 390–391). Brian Leftow argues that Speaks’ concerns are really aimed at an idealization of the perfect being project and they do not match the historical reality of how perfect being theologians have approached the issue; as such, Speaks’ critique may not be much of a concern for those pursuing perfect being theology based on those historical approaches (Leftow 2021). And Joshua Rasmussen notes that Speaks’ arguments focus on a modal analysis of perfection, and so they could be avoided via a non-modal analysis, such as thinking of perfections as idealizations of different excellences, like knowledge. Thus, absolute perfection would include all perfections, and would be the idealization of excellence itself (Rasmussen 2020, 1318–1320). Perfect being reasoning could thus still proceed by noting that if some excellence, like knowledge, had an ideal, like omniscience, then it would be a perfection, and a perfect being would have it. Most importantly, this approach allows a proponent of the PPC theory to maintain that that being’s attributes are entailed by his singular primitive attribute of absolute perfection—or idealized excellence—thereby keeping that theory beautiful and simple. For such reasons, the argument in this work could survive Speaks’ critique.

But even if Speaks’ analysis is accepted and a PPC’s attributes cannot be derived from its perfection/greatness, the PPC theory would still arguably remain simpler than IPC theories given that—as Miller argued—the former posits unlimited or maximal amounts of all its properties (omnipotence, omniscience, etc.), whereas IPC theories do not. Moreover, the PPC theory could even be dropped and replaced with the omnipotent cause theory—as noted earlier—which would allow Speaks’ objection to be avoided while still leading to God.

#### *Objection 6: Background Knowledge*

When comparing theories, the aesthetic virtues (like simplicity) usually merit consideration only if everything else is equal in terms of the evidential and coherential virtues (or what others, like Swinburne, call explanatory power and fit with background knowledge). So, if the PPC and IPC theories are not equivalent in those respects, then the PPC’s greater beauty, simplicity and unification might be irrelevant to choosing which PC theory is best.

Now, as argued earlier, for PC arguments like the KCA, both the PPC and IPC theories appear equivalent concerning the evidential virtues as both can account for the data under consideration (i.e., the universe’s creation via a free choice); they are also internally coherent and consistent (or so we are assuming). Moreover, concerning their universal coherence or fit with background knowledge (i.e., how a

theory fits with our knowledge of how things operate in neighboring areas of inquiry (Swinburne 2010a, 26)), they are also equivalent, but for a different reason.

Because we have no background knowledge concerning immaterial, spaceless, etc. personal causes or designers of universes—be they omnipotent and omniscient or just sufficiently powerful and knowledgeable to create/design a universe—then this virtue is irrelevant in this case. As Swinburne notes: “The criterion of background knowledge [. . .] does not operate when we do not have knowledge of how things work in any neighbouring fields of enquiry” (Swinburne 2010a, 27). But human fields of inquiry — science, history, etc. — deal with causes *in* the universe (all of contiguous space-time reality), not universe creating or designing causes. Thus, there are no neighboring fields of knowledge for that area, and so fit with background knowledge does not apply. This is not to say that we cannot deductively argue (as per the KCA or fine-tuning argument) that there is a PC responsible for the universe’s creation (or design); nor is it to say that we cannot determine the attributes that such a PC must minimally possess via a conceptual analysis. It simply means that fit with background knowledge will not apply when considering *which* of the potential PC theories is the one that is likely true and rationally preferable. Additionally, remember that we are assuming the deductive soundness of arguments like fine-tuning or the KCA, which means that there *is* a designer to the universe or a creator PC with at least the power and knowledge needed to create a universe.<sup>17</sup> So, fit with background knowledge is not being applied to the issue of whether such a PC exists, but rather which theory concerning the PC’s level of power, knowledge and benevolence is likely true. Yet, as noted, because there are no neighboring fields of inquiry concerning such a cause and its attributes, then fit with background knowledge would not apply in this case.

Swinburne also argues that the criterion of background knowledge is fundamentally a facet of simplicity, so considering the latter addresses the former (and this supports Keas’ observation that the aesthetic virtues are intertwined with the evidential/coherential ones). To illustrate this point, Swinburne (2010a, 27–28) notes that “a law for a narrow area fits well with laws of a neighbouring area [meaning it fits with background knowledge], in so far as they support a simple rather than a complex law for the whole area.” Thus, fit with background knowledge for a narrow explanation or law ultimately “boils down” to judging the simplicity of the wider explanation or law, and so simplicity is the key virtue that needs to be considered, not background knowledge (Swinburne 2010a, 28).

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<sup>17</sup> Also note that assuming the *deductive* soundness of arguments like the KCA addresses the concern that simplicity could be used against such arguments, as simplicity considerations would be irrelevant against the deductive portions of those arguments.

Furthermore, even if fit with background knowledge needs consideration, it would be plausibly equivalent when comparing the various PCs that could exist. For consider that our experience informs us that personal beings with causal abilities—i.e., other rational people—have variable levels of knowledge and power. Moreover, we also plausibly know that different personal beings' possession of truths about reality (understood broadly as knowledge) and their ability to bring about states of affairs (power) may vary in degree and in the manner in which they are acquired, possessed, or employed, but, at a fundamental level, they do not vary in kind. This means that, fundamentally, a human being's limited power and knowledge could nevertheless still be plausibly considered to be on the same spectrum as an omnipotent and omniscient being's level of power and knowledge, even if there are differences concerning how that knowledge and power is acquired, possessed, or exercised.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, this background knowledge fits equally well with all the potentially true theories concerning PCs, even the theory that the PC is omnipotent and omniscient, for those are merely the maximal levels of power and knowledge that a personal being can possess (and since we have no more experience with immaterial PCs that are sufficiently powerful and knowledgeable to create/design a universe than we do with omnipotent and omniscient ones, there is no experiential difference here either).

Additionally, since all the different hypothesized PCs would be consistent with the non-variable traits derived from something like the KCA's conceptual analysis—being immaterial, spaceless, etc.—then no option would receive an advantage in background knowledge concerning those traits. Thus, again, fit with background knowledge would be equivalent in all cases; so, for this argument, that virtue is either irrelevant or equivalent, meaning that the aesthetic virtues can indeed be used to decide which PC is likely true.

#### *Objection 7: The PPC & Evil*

A final objection—which is similar to the one above—stems from the worry that the aesthetic virtues should only become a factor in theory choice once *all* the relevant evidence is accounted for. This means that we cannot just consider the universe's creation or its design as our relevant data when choosing between PC theories; rather, we need to consider things *in* the universe as well, like the evil it contains.

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<sup>18</sup> Granted, God may possess truths about reality in a different (analogous) manner from us, for God, being omniscient, may possess those truths in a direct manner all at once (although we possess some truths in a direct manner as well). But again, both we and God possess truths about reality, arguably making our knowledge the same at a fundamental level.

Only then will we be properly weighing all the data that we should. Thus, the question is not whether the aesthetic virtues show us that a PPC is the likely PC of *a* universe, but whether it is for *this one*, with all its additional factors like evil, divine hiddenness, etc. Consequently, if the PPC theory cannot explain such things as evil, then the aesthetic virtues are irrelevant, for that theory would fail at the evidential level.

As an initial response, we could bracket our consideration of the evidence and only consider such things as the universe's creation and/or design. We could then tentatively conclude, based on the aesthetic virtues, that the PPC theory is likely the correct one, even if that conclusion might change upon consideration of our total evidence.

Next, theodicies could be appealed to, thereby demonstrating the PPC's compatibility with evil, hiddenness, etc. And if such theodicies are deemed compelling, then the PPC theory can account for that data. However, even if such theodicies work, perhaps they add complexity to the PPC theory. Yet such complexity concerns arise for every PC theory in some way. For instance, an omnimalevolent creator PC might be compatible with the existence of good in the universe, but complexity-adding "theodicies" would still be needed to explain why such a being would allow good (or so much good) to exist. Moreover, since it is highly doubtful that such a being would create anything at all, then it would not explain the universe's existence well, which would be a problem for that theory (a problem not shared by the PPC theory given that, on the latter, it would be very likely, if not certain, that an omnibenevolent being would create (see Miksa 2022)). Or consider a PC that was somewhat, but not wholly benevolent. Any theory positing such a PC would still need to explain—in a non-*ad hoc* manner—why that PC allows this universe's particular concentration of good and evil, hiddenness, etc. And that would add complexity (or *ad hocness*) to that theory. Or what of a PC that was wholly indifferent to human concerns. Such a PC might explain evil, hiddenness, etc., but then questions would arise as to why it decided to create a universe at all or not destroy it on a whim, given its total indifference to human issues. Furthermore, even if it did create the universe, why did it fine-tune the universe in a way that life (and especially conscious life) could exist given that PC's total indifference to concerns like the creation of life. The chance of such a PC doing so seems no more likely than if the fine-tuning occurred by chance. So even the indifferent PC theory would have issues that would add complexity to it and which it would need to explain and account for. Consequently, all potential PC theories have complexity-adding issues, yet the PPC theory retains its advantage in terms of the aesthetic virtues.

Additionally, a PPC proponent could argue that things like the existence of evil would be expected and entailed by a PPC's existence, and because of that, no complexity would be added to the PPC theory as the existence of evil would still flow out of the PPC's one primitive trait of perfection. For instance, perhaps the only rational creatures that a PPC would create are free-willed ones, and this would entail some evil existing. Alternatively, perhaps an omnibenevolent PPC would want to create, and create all kinds of things (the principle of plenitude), meaning that a PPC would create persons who would only freely choose salvation via the contemplation and experience of evil and suffering. Thus, a PPC would necessarily permit evil to exist to allow for the creation and salvation of such individuals, so long as things remained salvifically-equal (meaning no one else freely lost their salvation due to the existence of that evil and suffering who otherwise would not have already lost it (which the PPC could ensure given His foreknowledge)). Thus, evil and suffering would be entailed by the PPC's omnibenevolence. And other such arguments could be made, which, if successful, would show that the PPC theory has no issues entailing aspects of reality which may, at first glance, seem problematic for it.

Finally, a PPC proponent could claim that the PPC theory is so superior in terms of its aesthetic virtues—especially simplicity—that those virtues override the evidential lapses or concerns that the theory may have. Brickhouse-Bryson (2020, 17), for instance, notes that “we are sometimes justified in losing some fit with the data for the sake of a greater gain in simplicity.” Such reasoning could thus be applied to the PPC theory, perhaps alongside the claim that any problems for that theory — be it evil or something else — are merely epistemic in nature rather than actual (i.e., the issues have a solution, even if it is unknown to us).

## 8. Other Virtues

Although we have focused on the aesthetic virtues, in closing, it is worth mentioning that the PPC theory may also have an evidential advantage over its PC rivals.

Concerning the evidential virtue of explanatory depth, Keas (2018, 2766) notes that a theory “exhibits explanatory depth when it excels in [. . .] the range of counterfactual [i.e., what-if-things-had-been-different] questions that its law-like generalizations answer regarding the item [i.e., the same kind of phenomena] being explained.” If I am reading Keas correctly, this means that if a theory could account for the way that the data under consideration could have *possibly* been different, then it has more explanatory depth than a theory that cannot. So, consider the KCA again. Although the KCA's usual conceptual analysis arrives at a PC that has the power to create a universe, technically speaking, all the argument shows is that that PC has

the power to create *this* universe. After all, maybe it lacks the power to create a bigger one, or the knowledge to create a different one, etc. Thus, based on the KCA's minimal conceptual analysis alone, we do not have the grounds to conclude that the minimal PC posited by the KCA could account for anything other than *this* universe. And if someone did claim this, then it would be an *ad hoc* addition to the theory, thus weakening it in terms of other theoretical virtues. But this means that that PC theory lacks explanatory depth (or its depth is grafted on in an *ad hoc* manner). By contrast, since a PPC is omnipotent and omniscient, it could account for the creation of almost any possible universe (bigger, smaller, a multiverse, etc.), while also explaining why certain universes would not be created (i.e., because an omnibenevolent being would not do so). Similar reasoning would apply to the universe's fine-tuning. For instance, a minimal cosmic designer could account for the fine-tuned parameters that we know of, but perhaps not others. The PPC, however, could achieve any type or level of fine-tuning, thus giving it greater explanatory depth.

If the above is correct, then the PPC theory is not only superior to IPC theories in terms of the aesthetic virtues, but also concerning explanatory depth, and that gives us further grounds to prefer it over any IPC theory.

Finally, concerning the diachronic virtues—durability, fruitfulness, and applicability—the PPC and IPC theories are likely equivalent, although it is possible that the PPC theory may have some advantage in these virtues, or at least some advantages against *certain* IPC theories. To see why, imagine someone who believed in an IPC based on the KCA, but then information about the fine-tuning of the universe appeared. It is questionable if that IPC theory could plausibly accommodate the new fine-tuning data (apart from adding new traits to the IPC in an *ad hoc* manner). By contrast, a PPC could plausibly accommodate that new data, thus potentially showing its greater durability as a PC theory. An individual might also assess the PPC theory as durable if he thinks the latter has survived recent philosophical challenges, like the challenge from divine hiddenness arguments. The PPC theory is potentially fruitful as well. For instance, a theist might contend that a perfect being, given His overflowing creative and loving nature, would very likely create a multiverse (for an example of this, see O'Connor 2012, 116–122). Thus, if solid evidence for a multiverse materializes, then someone who already holds that a PPC exists could see the PPC theory as somewhat more fruitful than PC theories that do not make such a prediction. These points, however, are speculative, and further work needs to be done to determine how much additional weight (if any) the diachronic virtues give to the PPC theory.

## Conclusion

If we accept the arguments that posit that the universe or one of its features were caused by a PC—arguments like the KCA—then aesthetic theoretical virtues, as well as explanatory depth, give us the rational grounds to conclude that a PPC (i.e., God) is the best PC theory to believe in. If this is correct, then a key weakness inherent in PC arguments is overcome, as such arguments can now be treated as stand-alone arguments for monotheism. Moreover, by positing a PPC, two other problems that previously beset traditional PC arguments are solved: namely, that there are now grounds to hold that the PC is still existent and is omnibenevolent, something which standard PC arguments (like the KCA or fine-tuning) were unable to show through their minimal conceptual analyses.<sup>19</sup>

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