

Nicole Ferrari: response

One of the interesting questions that jumped out at me while I was reading this paper is the role of metaphysics and origins in both theism and atheism. While theism assigns God the role of creating and ruling over the universe, it seems the atheists assign this role to the universe itself. In other words, atheism has not succeeded in dispensing with metaphysics. It has simply reassigned it. On page 10, towards the end of the section on the cosmological argument, the paper explains,

“According to David Hume, ‘If you explain each individual, contingent thing in the universe, you have thereby explained the universe, and it is fallacy to suppose that you still have to explain the existence of the universe taken as a whole’ (qtd. Grayling 46). [...] ‘Why accept a priori that everything has a cause, given that we can conceive of effects independently of any putative cause ’(qtd. Grayling 46)? Contemporary cosmologists use contemporary scientific developments to assert that the universe has its own reason for existing.”

As the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principle of things, metaphysics includes abstract concepts such as being, knowing, substance, cause, identity, time, and space. Whether through science or through theology, the questions theism and atheism ask in the epistemological pursuit to understand our origins are the same. To whom do we assign the cause of our existence? How did we come about in the first place? What started this all? Assigning this role to the universe or to contingency does not shift the substance of our fundamental questions on origin/ does not shift the metaphysical paradigm. Atheism appears to eliminate God in favor of an equally sovereign universe with the power (and intelligence as indicated in the Goldilocks theory) in and of itself to create or destroy. As the thesis of the paper points out, atheism is not an absence of faith, or an unbelief in things unseen, but rather a reassigning of belief, a shift from an all-powerful God to an all-powerful universe which brought into being things unseen. It’s noteworthy that in our ordinary language, we refer to the universe as telling us things, e.g. the universe is “telling me” to do or not do something. Or in another example, the universe gives me signs whether to pursue a certain path or not. For Hume and current atheism, the universe does the work God used to do. In this sense, the beliefs underlying theism and atheism seem to have more in common than not. The fundamental epistemological pursuit of origins through a sovereign, metaphysical force is the same.