Natural Theology and Divine Freedom

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Abstract: Many philosophers of theistic religions claim (1) that there are powerful *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence that make it rational to believe that He exists and at the same time maintain (2) that God always has the freedom to do otherwise. In this article, I argue that these two positions are inconsistent because the empirical evidence on which the *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence rest can be explained better by positing the existence of a God-like being without the freedom to do otherwise.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, philosophers of theistic religions have held different positions about the modal status of the divine will. Roughly, we can distinguish between two camps that I propose to call 'necessitarians' and 'anti-necessitarians'. On the one hand, necessitarians about God's will claim that "things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than they have been produced" (Spinoza 2018: 1p33). In other words, they argue that God generally *lacks* the freedom to do otherwise. Apart from Spinoza, this camp includes Islamic Aristotelians such as Al-Fārābī, Averroës, and Avicenna who likely influenced Spinoza's understanding of the divine will (cf. Manekin 2014). On the other hand, anti-necessitarians about God's will argue that things *could* have been produced by God in some other way than they have been produced. In other words, they argue that God *does* have the freedom to do otherwise. For instance, Al-Ghazālī and Aquinas are two famous proponents of this position.

The position of necessitarianism has been met with harsh criticism in the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian tradition. Spinoza was famously excommunicated by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam in 1656 for promoting 'abominable heresies'. Al-Ghazālī put forward a harsh criticism of Avicenna's necessitarianism in his influential work *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (Al-Ghazālī 2000). Similarly, to crack down on the influence of Avicenna and Averroës, the medieval University of Paris prohibited teaching the position 'that God acts of necessity and not freely' in 1277, which had a huge impact on the development of medieval Christian theology (Miles 2005: 207–210). Today, anti-necessitarianism still is a popular position among contemporary philosophers of theistic religions (e.g., Swinburne 1993: 129–152, Craig 2008: 186).[1]

Even though many philosophers of theistic religions accept anti-necessitarianism about the divine will, it has a serious disadvantage: namely, as I will argue in this article, anti-necessitarianism is at odds with the

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[1] However, there are some outspoken critics of this position in contemporary philosophy of religion as well (e.g., Daeley 2022).

claim that there are successful *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence that make the belief in His existence rational. This is a problem for philosophers such as Richard Swinburne and William Lane Craig.

More precisely, in this article, I will argue that the following two propositions are inconsistent:

(1) If we consider all successful *a posteriori* arguments for and against God's existence, then the belief that God exists turns out to be rational because of the *a posteriori* arguments for His existence.
(2) God always has the freedom to do otherwise.

My argument is based on comparing the modal status of two gods (or God-like beings): one with the freedom to do otherwise and one without. I will argue that we should – in the light of the arguments mentioned in proposition (1) – increase our credence in the existence of a God-like being without the freedom to do otherwise *more* than we should increase our credence in the existence of God (who, according to proposition (2), does have the freedom to do otherwise). Furthermore, I will argue that because the existence of God and the existence of a God-like being without the freedom to do otherwise have similar prior probabilities, we end up with a higher posterior probability for the existence of a God-like being without the freedom to do otherwise than for the existence of God. Therefore, if these assumptions are correct, the belief that God exists will *not* turn out to be all things considered rational, i.e., proposition (1) will turn out to be false. For this reason, it will turn out that propositions (1) and (2) give rise to a contradiction.

I will proceed in the following way. First, I will explain the position that I aim to criticize in this article, the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence. Second, I will put forward an argument that is meant to show that this position is inconsistent. I call this argument 'the modal status objection'. Third, I will respond to four anticipated objections against the modal status objection. Fourth, I will end with an attempt to explain why this shortcoming has been overlooked so far.

2. The Anti-Necessitarian Position on *A Posteriori* Arguments for God's Existence
Henceforth, I will refer to the conjunction of the following two propositions as 'the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence':

(1) If we consider all successful *a posteriori* arguments for and against God's existence, then the belief that God exists turns out to be rational because of the *a posteriori* arguments for His existence.
(2) God always has the freedom to do otherwise.

To understand proposition (1), we need to get clear on the general form of successful *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence.[2] First, we need a couple of definitions. Henceforth, I will take for granted the definition of God that we find at the beginning of Swinburne's seminal *The Existence of God*:

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[2] In this article, I wish to remain neutral on the question whether there actually are any successful *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence.

> I take the proposition 'God exists' (and the equivalent proposition 'There is a God') to be logically equivalent to 'there exists necessarily a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things'. I use 'God' as the name of the person picked out by this description. (Swinburne 2004: 7)

Henceforth, let G be the proposition that God exists. Accordingly, let ¬G be the proposition that God does not exist. Furthermore, let E* represent the proposition that there is a specific piece of empirical evidence that can be employed in an *a posteriori* argument for God's existence. For example, if we are dealing with the moral argument, then E* would be the proposition that stance-independent moral truths exist. If we are dealing with the fine-tuning argument, then E* would be the proposition that the universe is fine-tuned for intelligent life. $P(E^*|G)$ is the probability that the empirical evidence in question exists given that God exists and $P(E^*|\neg G)$ is the probability that the empirical evidence in question exists given that God does *not* exist.[3]

In general, *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence consist of an instance of the following two assumptions:[4]

(3) E* is true (premise).
(4) $P(E^*|G) > P(E^*|\neg G)$ (premise).

The moral argument for God's existence (e.g., Craig 2008: 172-183) is a simple example. In this case, the respective version of premise (3) states that stance-independent moral truths exist. The respective version of premise (4) claims that the probability that stance-independent moral truths exist given that God exists is greater than the probability that stance-independent moral truths exist given that God does not exist. Why should we accept this claim? On the one hand, the proponents of the moral argument claim that the probability that stance-independent moral truths emerge given that God does not exist is *low* because, if He would not exist, we may at best expect to end up with "a sort of 'herd morality' which functions well in the perpetuation of our species in the struggle for survival" (Craig 2008: 174). This stance-dependent 'herd morality,' however, does not qualify as knowledge of a stance-independent moral truth. On the other hand, the probability that stance-independent moral truths emerge given that God exists is *high* because an omnipotent and perfectly good being may be expected to provide moral guidance for His creatures. For this reason, $P(E^*|G)$ is larger than $P(E^*|\neg G)$ in the case of the moral argument.

There is a simple proof that shows that (4) entails the following inequality (cf. Lemma 1 of the formal appendix):

(5) $P(G|E^*) > P(G)$ (from (4)).

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[3] $P(E|G)$ and $P(E|\neg G)$ are only defined if we make the (harmless) assumption that $P(G) \neq 0$ and $P(\neg G) \neq 0$. Furthermore, E is only relevant for assessing the probability of G and ¬G if we make the (equally harmless) assumption that $P(E) \neq 0$ and $P(E) \neq 1$.

[4] Thus, an *a posteriori* argument for God's existence is what Swinburne calls a "C-inductive argument" (Swinburne 2004: 17).

Thus, according to (5), the *posterior* probability that God exists is higher than the *prior* probability that He exists. In other words, the evidence in question gives us a reason to *increase* our credence in the existence of God. This is what an *a posteriori* argument for the existence of God is supposed to show.

Note that conclusion (5) does not state that the existence of God is probable all things considered. So, even if (5) is true, there might be other evidence that gives us a reason to *reduce* our credence in the existence of God again (e.g., the existence of gratuitous evil or the hiddenness of God).

Let us get back to explaining proposition (1). This proposition states that if we take all successful *a posteriori* arguments *for* and *against* God's existence into account, then the belief that God exists turns out to be rational because of the successful *a posteriori* arguments for his existence. So, even if there are successful *a posteriori* arguments *against* His existence, then (2) states that these arguments are outweighed by the powerful *a posteriori* arguments *for* His existence. We can reformulate proposition (2) in a more precise way by introducing another variable: henceforth, let E represent the total relevant evidence, i.e., let E be the conjunction of all propositions that state that there is a specific piece of empirical evidence that can be employed in an *a posteriori* argument *for* God's existence and all propositions that state that there is a specific piece of empirical evidence that can be employed in an *a posteriori* argument *against* God's existence. For instance, E might look like this: E = 'There are stance-independent moral truths' $\land$ 'The universe is fine-tuned for intelligent life' $\land$ … $\land$ 'There is gratuitous evil'. Now, we can see that proposition (1) states that the posterior probability that God exists given the total evidence E is higher than the prior probability that He exists:

(6) $P(G|E) > P(G)$ (from (1)).

However, proposition (1) does not only state that the total evidence gives us a reason to *increase* our credence in the existence of God but, rather, that the resulting credence $P(G|E)$ counts as 'rational'. I do not want to dwell too long on the meaning of the vexed term 'rational'. At this point, suffice it to say that (1) states that those who are familiar with all the evidence for and against the existence of God but still refuse to believe that He exists on these grounds commit some kind of intellectual shortcoming.[5]

I believe that, for instance, Craig and Swinburne are committed to proposition (1). Craig argues for the even stronger claim that "the evidence for God's existence which we have surveyed makes it more probable than not that God exists" (Craig 2008: 189). Similarly, Swinburne argues that "on balance the various arguments taken together show that it is more probable than not there is a God" (Swinburne 2005: 1). Craig recommends to state the overall objective of his attempt to make the case for the existence of God in a more modest way:

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[5] Even if proposition (2) turns out to be false, one might still maintain that believing in God's existence is rational on other grounds that have nothing to do with arguments for God's existence. For instance, proponents of *reformed epistemology* such as Wolterstorff (1976) and Plantinga (1983) have argued that believing in God's existence would be rational even if there were no compelling arguments for His existence. Craig himself professes sympathies for reformed epistemology (e.g., Craig 2008: 43–51) but, nevertheless, argues that natural theology alone is sufficient to make the case that believing in God's existence is rational. Thus, Craig remains vulnerable to the argument of this article despite his sympathies for natural theology.

It's a better strategy to set the bar low and then really exceed all expectations. So we should simply claim that 'There are good arguments for the existence of God' or 'In light of the evidence it's more probable than not that God exists' or even more modestly, 'The arguments *make it rational to believe that God exists.*' (Craig 2008: 189; my emphasis)

Thus, I take for granted that both Craig and Swinburne are committed to proposition (1).

Finally, let me explain proposition (2). This proposition states that God has the freedom to do otherwise. In other words, according to (2), God always could have acted differently than He actually does.

The concept of free will is notoriously controversial. There are compatibilists and libertarians who argue that one can have free will even if one lacks the ability to do otherwise (e.g., Dennett 1984, Zagzebski 2000). Whether they are right is a question that goes beyond the scope of this article. If one is inclined to think that God counts as 'free' despite lacking the ability to do otherwise, then one is not committed to proposition (2) and the modal status objection is of no concern. Yet, many prominent philosophers of religion do think that God is free in a way that involves the ability to do otherwise. For instance, Craig commits himself to proposition (3) when he writes:

> a maximally great being must have the power to freely refrain from creating anything at all, so that there must be possible worlds in which nothing other than the maximally great being exists. (Craig 2008: 186)

Similarly, Swinburne sets himself apart from the necessitarian tradition of "Islamic philosophers following Avicenna, who claimed that God acts of necessity" (Swinburne 2004: 145n). He argues that the following version of the principle of alternative possibilities is "surely true" (Swinburne 2013: 204):

> "A does x freely at t only if he could have done not-x at t instead" (Swinburne 2013: 204)

Since Swinburne claims "that all God's actions are free" (Swinburne 2004: 145), he is committed to claim that God always could have acted differently than He actually does.[6] Thus, Swinburne is committed to proposition (2) as well.

3. The Modal Status Objection

In this section, I develop a challenge to the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence. I call this argument 'the modal status objection'. The aim of this objection is to show that propositions (1) and (2) are inconsistent.

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[6] Hunt (2014) argues that Swinburne fails to make a compelling case for the aforementioned version of the principle of alternative possibilities because his preferred understanding of free will remains vulnerable to modified Frankfurt cases. For this reason, Hunt points out that Swinburne would have been better off with a sourcehood account of free will that does not incorporate this version of the principle of alternative possibilities. The argument of this article can be understood as yet another way of pointing out the problems that beset Swinburne's understanding of free will.

Suppose the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence is correct. Thus, according to proposition (2), God always has the freedom to do otherwise. For this reason, God can always refrain from bringing about any evidence that can be employed in an *a posteriori* argument for and against His own existence. Thus, if we keep in mind that we defined E as the conjunction of all propositions that state that there is some evidence that can be employed in an *a posteriori* argument for God's existence and all propositions that state that there is some evidence that can be employed in an *a posteriori* argument against His existence, we can see that proposition (2) entails the following statement:

(7) God, if He exists, always has the freedom to refrain from bringing about the truthmakers of E (from (2)).

In other words, proposition (2) entails that it is possible that God exists but that E is false at the same time. So, if we suppose that God exists, we *cannot* be absolutely certain that E is true as well:

(8) $P(E|G) < 1$ (from (7)).

Now, let me introduce the idea of a God-like being that completely lacks the kind of freedom mentioned in proposition (2). Henceforth, let 'God*' designate a being that is just like God with the only difference that it lacks the freedom to do otherwise entirely. Thus, God* does not have a choice but to do the things that he does. As I pointed out earlier, Avicenna, Averroës, and Spinoza defend an account of the divine along these lines. Keep in mind that God* may still count as 'free' as long as we understand freedom in a different way than the freedom to do otherwise. For example, Spinoza himself agrees that "God alone is a free cause" (Spinoza 2018: 1p17s2). However, he defines freedom in a different way that does not involve the ability to do otherwise: "A thing is said to be free if it exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone" (Spinoza 2018: 1def7).

Henceforth, let G* represent the proposition that God* exists. Thus, by definition, God* necessarily brings about the things that he brings about. So, we know that God* must have necessarily brought about all the evidence that we can observe. This applies to the total evidence that can be used to argue for and against God's existence as well:

(9) God*, if he exists, necessarily brings about the truthmakers of E (premise).

In other words, it is impossible that God* exists but that E is false at the same time. So, if we suppose that God* exists, we *can* be absolutely certain that E is true as well:

(10) $P(E|G^*) = 1$ (from (9)).[7]

Furthermore, there is good reason to assume that the existence of God and the existence of God* are mutually exclusive events. At the beginning, I pointed out that I follow Swinburne's definition of the term

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[7] Again, please note that $P(E|G^*)$ and $P(E|\neg G^*)$ are only defined if we make the (harmless) assumption that $P(G^*) \neq 0$ and $P(\neg G^*) \neq 0$.

'God' in this article. Swinburne introduces the label "'God' as the name of the person picked out by [a certain] description" (Swinburne 2004: 7). Swinburne's use of the definite article 'the' presupposes that there is exactly *one* being which falls under this description. Now, because God* is modeled after God, the existence of God and God* are mutually exclusive by stipulation. However, even if we adopt a less demanding definition of God than Swinburne, this remains a plausible assumption. For example, Oppy has argued that "the description 'the one and only god' is the canonical reference-fixer for the name 'God', and it gives expression to the concept that is properly associated with the name" (Oppy 2014: 14). Thus, if he is right, then it is a conceptual truth "that it cannot be that there are two Gods" (*Ibid.*, 3). Again, because God* is modeled after God, Oppy's definition of God entails that the existence of God and God* are mutually exclusive. Therefore, I take the following premise for granted:

(11) $P(G \cap G\ *) = 0$ (premise).

In the next subsections, I would like to show three things. First, that we should – in the light of the total evidence – increase our credence in the existence of God* *more* than we should increase our credence in the existence of God. Second, that we ultimately end up with a higher posterior probability for the existence of God* than for the existence of God. And, third, that the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence is inconsistent.

3.1. Comparing Explanatory Power

We know that, according to proposition (1), the total evidence makes the belief in God's existence rational. The underlying reason was that it is likely that this evidence can be observed if God exists while it is unlikely that this evidence can be observed if naturalistic atheism is true. After all, God is omnipotent and has good reasons for creating a universe in which this evidence can be observed. Thus, in more formal terms, we can say that the probability that E is true given that (only) God exists is higher than the probability that E is true given that *neither* God nor God* exists:

(12) $P(E|G \cap \neg G\ *) > P(E|\neg G \cap \neg G\ *)$ (from (1)).

The same is true for God*. God* is omnipotent as well and we may expect that God* has the same good reasons for creating a universe in which the total evidence can be observed. Thus, in more formal terms, we can say that the probability that E is true given that (only) God* exists is higher than the probability that E is true given that *neither* God nor God* exists:

(13) $P(E|G\ * \cap \neg G) > P(E|\neg G \cap \neg G\ *)$ (premise).

It is relatively easy to see that the following inequation follows from (8), (10), (12), and (13):

(14) $P(E|G*\cap \neg G) > P(E|G \cap \neg G*) > P(E|\neg G \cap \neg G\ *)$ (from (8), (10), (12), and (13)).

After all, we know that the left part of this inequation must equal 1, that the middle part of this inequation must equal something less than 1, and that the right part of this inequation equals even less than that. If we divide this inequation by the (positive) term P(E), we obtain the following result:

(15) $\frac{P(E\,|\,G^*\cap\neg G)}{P(E)} > \frac{P(E\,|\,G\cap\neg G^*)}{P(E)} > \frac{P(E\,|\,\neg G\cap\neg G^*)}{P(E)}$ (from (14)).

We can simplify this inequation a little to make it easier to understand: because of (11), G*∩¬G is identical to G* and $G\cap\neg G$ * is identical to G. Thus, we can simplify (15) in the following way:

(16) $\frac{P(E\,|\,G^*)}{P(E)} > \frac{P(E\,|\,G)}{P(E)} > \frac{P(E\,|\,\neg G\cap\neg G^*)}{P(E)}$ (from (11) and (15)).

The left part of (16) represents the "explanatory power" (Swinburne 2004: 69) of G* (with respect to E), the middle part represents the explanatory power of G (with respect to E), and the right part represents the explanatory power of neither G nor G* (with respect to E). In other words, this inequation tells us that E provides more support for G* than for G and more support for G than for $\neg G\cap\neg G$ *. Thus, when we update the probability of these three hypotheses based on the information that E is true, the probability of God*'s existence is raised more than the probability of God's existence while the probability of God's existence is raised more than the probability that neither God nor God* exists. In other words, we may conclude that E gives us a reason to increase our credence in the existence of God* (alone) *more* than our credence in the existence of God (alone).

3.2. Comparing Posterior Probability

I believe that we can even go one step further and show that the posterior probability that (only) God* exists is ultimately higher than the posterior probability that (only) God exists.

We have to begin by comparing the prior probability of God's existence and God*'s existence. Keep in mind that God and God* only differ in a single respect: God has the freedom to do otherwise while God* lacks it. Thus, G and G* seem to be approximately equally simple. (I will justify this assumption in more detail later.) Therefore, we may assume that G and G* approximately have the same prior probability:

(17) $P(G\ *) \approx P(G)$ (premise).

Now, if we multiply the left-hand side of (17) with the left-hand side of (16) and the right-hand side of (17) with the middle part of (16), we obtain the following result:

(18) $\frac{P(E\,|\,G^*)}{P(E)}P(G\ *) \gtrapprox \frac{P(E\,|\,G)}{P(E)}\ P(G)$ (from (16) and (17)).

By Bayes's Theorem, we can simplify this inequation as follows:

(19) $P(G\ *\,|\,E) \gtrapprox P(G\,|\,E)$ (from (18)).

Furthermore, because the existence of God and God* are mutually exclusive, we can rephrase this result in the following way as well:

(20) $P(G * \cap \neg G \mid E) \gtrapprox P(G \cap \neg G * \mid E)$ (from (11) and (19)).

Thus, we may conclude that the posterior probability that (only) God* exists is higher than the posterior probability that (only) God exists.

3.3. Proving the Inconsistency of the Anti-Necessitarian Position on *A Posteriori* Arguments for God's Existence

At this point, we have everything that we need in order to show that the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence is inconsistent. We showed that if these arguments show anything, then it is that God* (without the freedom to do otherwise) exists and not that God (with the freedom to do otherwise) exists. Furthermore, we know that the existence of God* and God are mutually exclusive. Therefore, we may conclude that in the light of the total evidence, a rational person must come to the conclusion that God* exists but *not* that God exists. So, the belief that God exists *cannot* turn out to be rational in the light of the total evidence. For this reason, proposition (2) must be false, which contradicts our initial assumption that proposition (1) and (2) are true. In other words, the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence gives rise to a contradiction. Therefore, the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence must be mistaken.

The only way in which proponents of the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence could resist this conclusion is to come up with an argument that favors the existence of God over God*. However, in the next section, I will point out why I believe that the prospects for coming up with such an argument are grim.

4. Objections and Responses
First Objection: Swinburne briefly anticipates an objection that resembles the argument that I develop in this article:

> Note also a further interesting feature of good C-inductive arguments [i.e., what I simply called *a posteriori* arguments]. […] It may be the case that also for some contrary hypothesis h* there is a good C-inductive argument from *e* […]. The fact that certain evidence confirms a hypothesis does not mean that it does not also confirm a rival hypothesis. Once again, this should be immediately clear if one thinks about it. Suppose that a detective has background information […] that either Smith, Brown, or Robinson did the crime, and that only one of them did. Then evidence (*e*) turns up that Robinson was somewhere else at the time the crime was committed. *e* adds to the probability that Brown did the crime, and it also adds to the probability that Smith did the crime. Despite this, one sometimes reads writers on the philosophy of religion dismissing some consideration that is adduced as evidence for the existence of God on the grounds that it supports a rival hypothesis equally well. (Swinburne 2004: 19–20)

Response: I agree that the modal status objection would not be very impressive if it merely managed to show that the existence of God* and the existence of God are supported 'equally well' by the available evidence. However, this is not what the modal status objection shows. I pointed out that the rival hypothesis that God* exists supports the evidence *better* (and not merely equally well) than the hypothesis that God exists.

For clarity, let me adjust Swinburne's illustration so that it reflects the structure of the modal status objection: suppose that either Smith, Brown, or Robinson committed a crime and that only one of them did. Also, suppose that the evidence supports the hypothesis that Smith committed the crime *more* than that Brown committed it. In this case, we are well-advised to believe that Smith committed the crime (at least, if the prior probability that Smith did it is identical to the prior probability that Brown did it). Indeed, this would be a problem for anyone who believes that it is all things considered rational to believe that Brown committed the crime. Similarly, my argument shows that there is a problem for proponents of the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence who believe that it is all things considered rational to believe that God exists.

Second Objection: Perhaps, one might argue that *a priori* arguments tip the scale in favor of the existence of God rather than the existence of God*. Thus, even if *a posteriori* arguments favor the existence of God* over the existence of God, then taking both *a posteriori* and *a priori* arguments into account yields the result that believing that God exists ultimately is still not irrational.

Response: To my knowledge, the only commonly used *a priori* arguments for the existence of God are versions of the ontological argument. These support the existence of God* just as well as the existence of God. The ordinary version of the ontological argument is based on the assumption that God bears the predicate 'being'. The modal version of the ontological argument requires the assumption that God bears the predicate 'necessary existence'. However, *ex hypothesi*, God* is just like God with the only difference that God* does not have a choice but to do the things that he does. Thus, there is no reason to assume that God* lacks the predicate 'being' or 'necessary existence'. For this reason, both versions of the ontological argument favor the assumption that God exists and the assumption that God* exists to the same extent. Therefore, *a priori* arguments do not tip the scale in the direction of either God's or God*'s existence. This is not particularly surprising if we keep in mind that a common objection against the ontological argument is that it can be used to argue for the existence of a parody of God, as, say, Graham Oppy has pointed out on numerous occasions (e.g., Oppy 1995b).[8]

Third Objection: We saw that the modal status objection presupposes that every *a posteriori* argument for God's existence can also be used to argue for the existence of God*. However, one might argue that there is an argument that gives us a reason to favor God over God*: the *kalām* cosmological argument. This argument (allegedly) shows that the universe has an external cause that possesses the freedom to do otherwise, as, say, Craig (2008: 152–154) has argued.[9] This argument can be traced back to John

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[8] That being said, it is worth mentioning that Swinburne (2004) himself denies that his case for the existence of God rests on any *a priori* arguments.

[9] I thank Andrew Ter Ern Loke for raising this objection.

Philoponus, a fierce critic of Aristotle's cosmology (and, arguably, it is no coincidence that Aristotle's cosmology later became an important inspiration for Avicenna and other necessitarians).

The *kalām* cosmological argument is typically presented in the following deductive way:

> (21) Whatever begins to exist has a cause [(premise)].
> (22) The universe began to exist [(premise)].
> (23) Therefore, the universe has a cause [(from (21) and (22))]. (Craig 2008: 111; enumeration adjusted)

Furthermore, proponents of the *kalām* cosmological argument usually claim that the cause of the universe mentioned in conclusion (23) must have the freedom to do otherwise. For instance, Craig states this step of the argument in the following way:

> The cause [of the universe] is in some sense eternal, and yet the effect which it produced is not eternal but began to exist a finite time ago. How can this be? If the necessary and sufficient conditions for the production of the effect are eternal, then why is not the effect eternal? […] The best way out of this dilemma is agent causation, whereby the agent freely brings about some event in the absence of prior determining conditions. Because the agent is free, he can initiate new effects by freely bringing about conditions which were not previously present. For example, a man sitting changelessly from eternity could freely will to stand up; thus, a temporal effect arises from an eternally existing agent. (Craig / Sinclair 2009, 193–4)

Thus, because of the *kalām* cosmological argument, one might object that there is at least one reason to favor the existence of God over the existence of God*.

Response: I will confine myself to two remarks on this objection.

First, I am happy to concede that the *kalām* cosmological argument is potentially problematic for the modal status objection. However, I must admit that I find this argument highly implausible. Many arguments have been proposed to show that the *kalām* cosmological argument fails to demonstrate either that the universe has a cause or that this cause has the freedom to do otherwise (e.g., Oppy 1995a, Morriston 2000, Swinburne 2004: 138n–139n, Wielenberg 2021). A thorough assessment of these counterarguments would exceed the limits of this article but I believe that they provide plenty of good reasons to remain unimpressed by the *kalām* cosmological argument.

Second, even though the *kalām* cosmological argument is usually stated as a deductive argument, it is important to note that it has only limited evidential force. We can reformulate this argument in probabilistic terms as well (cf. Miller 2014). This form of presentation has the advantage that it makes apparent that the *kalām* cosmological argument at best only favors the existence of God over the existence of God* to a *limited* extent. Thus, even if none of the aforementioned arguments against the *kalām* cosmological argument turn out to be successful, there is a good chance that the advantage that arises for God's existence due to the *kalām* cosmological argument is ultimately outweighed.

Fourth Objection: We saw that my argument took for granted that the existence of God and God* have approximately the same prior probability. This was codified as premise (11). Perhaps, one might challenge this assumption by arguing that the claim that God exists fares better in terms of theoretical simplicity than the claim that God* exists. For this reason, one might argue that even if *a posteriori* arguments favor accepting the existence of God* over the existence of God, then this difference is outweighed by the fact that God's existence has a higher *prior probability* than God*'s existence. In particular, I can imagine two ways to flesh out this objection. First, say, Miller argues that "the theistic omni-properties – omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence – are plausibly very simple properties" (Miller 2016: 47). Perhaps, one might argue that perfect freedom is an 'omni-property' as well and claim that perfect freedom involves the ability to do otherwise. In this case, the claim that God exists would turn out to be simpler than the claim that God* exists. Second, Swinburne argues that "[a] person with an inbuilt detailed specification of how to act is a much more complex person than a perfectly free one" (Swinburne 2004: 335). Now, since God* seems to have an 'inbuilt detailed specification of how to act' while God does not, it might appear as if the hypothesis that God exists is simpler than the hypothesis that God* exists.

Response: In general, I believe that we have reason to assume that we generally tend to overestimate the prior probability of the existence of God. Manley (forthcoming) has argued that our assessment of the prior probability of God's existence is subject to several biases that are well-known phenomena in cognitive psychology. For example, according to him, we tend to overestimate the prior probability of the hypothesis that there is a God with the freedom to do otherwise because most of us are more familiar with this conception of God ('availability heuristic'). Similarly, Spinoza has argued that our tendency to believe in a God with the freedom to do otherwise stems from our "prejudices" (Spinoza 2018: 1p36a) that ultimately "depend upon a single one: that human beings commonly suppose that, like themselves, all natural things act for a purpose" (*Ibid.*). Thus, Spinoza argues that we tend to anthropomorphize and, thereby, misconstrue the nature of the divine. If Manley and Spinoza are right, then we are well-advised to distrust our intuitions about the prior probability of the existence of God or God*. This is a problem for the objection at hand because it depends on a very specific verdict about the prior probability of God's existence and God*'s existence.

Furthermore, let me say a couple of things in response to the two anticipated ways to flesh out this objection from simplicity:

First, even if we concede that perfect freedom is an 'omni-property', it is no easy task to establish that perfect freedom involves the ability to do otherwise. For instance, we could understand freedom in Spinoza's alternative sense as being "determined to action by [one]self alone" (Spinoza 2018: 1def7). This response might not be dialectically effective against anti-necessitarians who insist that 'freedom' generally involves the ability to do otherwise but it also shows that the critics of the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence are not without theoretical resources to stand their ground.

Second, let me turn to Swinburne's suggestion that a being "with an inbuilt detailed specification of how to act is a much more complex person than a perfectly free one" (Swinburne 2004: 335). In response, I would like to make two points. First, even though comparing the simplicity of two persons seems to be an incredibly vague affair in general, I am not convinced that we have reason to believe that the freedom to do otherwise adds to the simplicity of a person. In general, a person strikes me as simpler the more predictable his or her behavior is. Therefore, we may argue that God* is maximally predictable and, therefore, simpler than God. Second, suppose we grant Swinburne that having 'an inbuilt detailed specification' adds to the complexity of a person. In order to show that God* is more complex than God, Swinburne would also need to establish that God*'s actions are determined by 'an inbuilt detailed specification'. However, I believe that this is far from easy to show. For instance, it seems reasonable to suppose that God* necessarily choses the best possible action because all of his decisions are determined by *reason*. If we accept the doctrine of divine simplicity, then God* and reason are identical and, yet, maximally simple. If this is right, then God*'s actions are determined in a maximally simple way as well. Of course, the doctrine of divine simplicity is not uncontroversial but if this line of argument is plausible, then it illustrates that we do not need to suppose that all of God*'s actions are determined by some complex inbuilt specification.

In any case, even if the aforementioned responses should turn out to be inadequate, God is (at best) minimally more simple than God*. God and God* are identical with the exception of a single property. Therefore, the existence of God and the existence of God* are approximately equally simple and we may assume that their prior probabilities are very close to each other. Thus, even if the existence of God has a slightly higher prior probability than the existence of God*, there is a good chance that this difference is ultimately outweighed by the fact that the God*'s existence explains the evidence better than God's existence.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I argued that the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence is inconsistent. The proponents of this position face the following choice: either (a) to accept that *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence do not make the belief in His existence rational or (b) that God does not have a choice but to do the things that He does. This conclusion is no reason to worry if we endorse option (a) and give up on the very project of *arguing* for God's existence (as, say, Kant and many other modern theologians have suggested). Furthermore, we might not find this conclusion particularly troubling if we endorse option (b) and accept necessitarianism about the divine will, as Avicenna, Averroës, and Spinoza have suggested. However, I suspect that most proponents of the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence would be reluctant to accept such a heterodox understanding of the divine.[10]

Let me end with a speculation as to why this shortcoming has been overlooked so far. At the moment, the proponents of the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence primarily

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[10] I think that it is a legitimate question whether belief in God*'s existence still counts as theism in a meaningful sense. For related reasons, there has been a vivid debate in late 18th and early 19th century Germany on the question whether Spinoza and others who were influenced by him (e.g., G.E. Lessing and G.W.F. Hegel) should be classified as atheists (cf. Gerrish 1987).

argue by comparing two positions: an anti-necessitarian version of theism and naturalistic atheism (which denies the existence of anything divine). However, if the argument of this article is correct, then this juxtaposition of these two positions is oversimplified.[11] If we are solely concerned with anti-necessitarian theism and naturalistic atheism, we are prone to (mistakenly) believe that the anti-necessitarian theism fares best because there seems to be evidence that is easy to accommodate for anti-necessitarian theism and less easy to accommodate for naturalistic atheism. However, if the argument that I developed in this article is any good, then this is a serious mistake. There are other, less traditional positions about the divine that might be able to accommodate the evidence in question even better than both anti-necessitarian theism and naturalistic atheism. For this reason, I believe that a more diverse approach towards philosophy of religion that pays attention to the full spectrum of possible positions about the divine would have allowed us to recognize this shortcoming of the anti-necessitarian position on *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence earlier.[12]

6. Formal Appendix

Lemma 1: Suppose $P(E|G) > P(E|\neg G)$. In this case, $P(G|E) > P(G)$.

Proof: $P(E|G) > P(E|\neg G)$

$\Leftrightarrow \frac{P(E \cap G)}{P(G)} > \frac{P(E \cap \neg G)}{P(\neg G)}$

$\Leftrightarrow P(E \cap G)P(\neg G) > P(E \cap \neg G)P(G)$

$\Leftrightarrow P(E \cap G)(1 - P(G)) > (P(E) - P(E \cap G))P(G)$

$\Leftrightarrow P(E \cap G) - P(E \cap G)P(G) > P(E)P(G) - P(E \cap G)P(G)$

$\Leftrightarrow P(E \cap G) > P(E)P(G)$

$\Leftrightarrow \frac{P(E \cap G)}{P(E)} > P(G)$

$\Leftrightarrow P(G|E) > P(G)$

7. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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[11] This is not the first time that contemporary philosophy of religion has been accused of an overly narrow research agenda that ignores countless religious traditions (Draper / Nichols 2013, Schilbrack 2014, Leftow et al. 2015: 442–3). The argument developed in this article can be understood as a way to flesh out this general objection.

[12] For helpful feedback on previous drafts of this paper, I would like to thank Andy Sullivan, Jakob Vikner, as well as the attendees of the 2022 Pluralistic Philosophy Workshop at Georgetown University and the 2021 Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion Conference at the University of Oxford.

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