Number 15, June 2005

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• **Things Happening (1)**

It has been a busy year for the Theology Forum. We have hosted several events over the past two semesters, most notably a very successful conference devoted to “The Hiddenness of God.” The conference took place in October and featured keynote speakers Daniel Howard-Snyder, C. Stephen Evans and J. L. Schellenberg. Audio recording from some of the speakers is available on our website: www.TheologyForum.net.

• **Things Happening (2)**

Next fall, the Theology Forum Seminar will focus on an interesting book by Thomas Morris entitled “Making Sense of it All – Pascal and the Meaning of Life.” Professor Wes Morriston will lead what promises to be a lively discussion on a number of topics ranging from gambling on the existence of God to the human condition and the meaning of life. To find out more about this course log on to our website.
● O, Can it Be?
In a stunning reversal, the prominent British philosopher and “atheist,” Anthony Flew (University of Reading), has decided that there is a God after all. For years, and especially in the hey-day of philosophical theology, Flew has been hailed as one of the most influential atheists in the world. Among other things, he was a noted contributor to the debate over religious language, arguing that theological propositions (“God loves us”) have no cognitive meaning since they are compatible with every conceivable state of affairs. He has now taken this back. He proposes, instead, a quite meaningful belief in theism, based on the indisputable fine-tuning and coherence of nature. Admittedly, Flew’s new perspective falls short of the traditional one, but, hey, theists can use all the help they can get. The fact is, though, Flew never was an atheist—maybe an agnostic, but not an atheist. He told me so, many years ago when he gave a Theo Forum Lecture followed by dinner at the Red Lion Inn. (ELM)

● In Memoriam
The Theology Forum was saddened to learn of the sudden death of Dr. Stanley J. Grenz, Prof. of Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. He was an undergraduate at the University of Colorado, a graduate of Denver Seminary, and a student of Prof. Wolfgang Pannenberg at the University of Munich. (The two were first introduced, literally, during a Pannenberg visit to Boulder.) Grenz was an influential, prolific, evangelical theologian who was cut-down in the midst of a brilliant career. He will be missed by the Theology Forum.

● The Rapture Index – Fasten Your Seat Belts
The Rapture Index is an online index that examines the current state of the world in relation to several prophesied apocalyptic signs. The index standardizes this relationship into a single number that apparently tells us precisely where we currently stand in relation to doomsday. We’re not making this up. While the index does not claim to predict when the alleged rapture will take place, it does claim to be a sort of “prophetic speedometer.” The higher the number, the faster we are approaching the apocalypse. The index gives the following key to help us determine our current state based upon the current standardized number.

Rapture Index of 85 and Below: Slow prophetic activity
Rapture Index of 85 to 110: Moderate prophetic activity
Rapture Index of 110 to 145: Heavy prophetic activity
Rapture Index above 145: Fasten your seat belts

As it turns out, our current rapture index is 152.
See if for yourself: http://www.raptureready.com/
• Too Much and Too Little
In the course of a few months we have witnessed events of almost apocalyptic proportions: the mind-numbing deaths of thousands at the hands of the tsunami; the death of a single woman, Terri Schiavo, who, without lifting a finger, stunned the world into moral sensibility; and the death of Pope John Paul II, an exceptionally good man who allegedly said, “Give me a God who knows how to dance!” What’s next? (ELM)

• Terri Schiavo, The Catalyst

She brought out the best in our thinking.
She prompted the best of our honesty.
She stirred the best of our passions.
She called into question our motives.
She fostered gut-wrenching emotion.
She helped us clarify our language.
She helped us decipher our duties.
She taught us about wills and such.
She taught us about drawing the line.
She summoned us all to good-will.
She drove us to inward reflection.
She expanded the meaning of caring.
And she taught us to live, and then die.
Thank you, Terri.

(ELM)

• Reading for the Day
Thomas à Kempis, Imitatio Christi, I, 2:

Certe adveniente die iudicii, non quaeretur a nobis quid legimus sed quid fecimus, nec bene diximus sed quam religiose viximus.

Be certain that when the judgment day comes, it will not be asked of us what we have read but what we have done, not how well we have spoken but how religiously we have lived.

(Here, to live the religious life means to live the life of a “religious,” that is, a member of a religious or monastic order.)
Reflections on the Current Interest in Philosophy of Religion

Arnold T. Guminski

During the last few decades, there has been a remarkable resurgence of interest in philosophy of religion in secular colleges and universities. And there has also been an increasing recognition in the philosophy departments of these institutions that there is much value in the contributions of theologically conservative philosophers. Among those especially worthy of mention are Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, William Hasker, William P. Alston, and Stephen Davis. Perhaps all this is due to talented theologically conservative philosophers having multiplied and filled the earth. There is a refreshing intellectual hospitality among these philosophers who are keen to seriously and respectfully take up and into account the responses by atheologically oriented philosophers. Contemporary conservative Protestant philosophers demonstrate considerably more sympathetic interest in the writings of Catholic philosophers than several decades ago. The same applies mutatis mutandis to contemporary theologically conservative Catholic philosophers. The fact that there has been a renaissance of theologically conservative philosophy of religion and philosophical theology is clearly evidenced by the flourishing of respected academic journals such as *Faith and Philosophy* and *Philosophia Christi*, and the appearance of *Philo* and the scholarly papers library of the Secular Web in which the “other side” finds expression.

The current great interest in philosophy of religion is quite different from the time (1948-1952) when I was a student at the University of Buffalo, majoring in philosophy and history. During that time, I experienced my fair share of waffling on philosophy-of-religion issues, generally reverting to an agnostic position. However, I remember being troubled and even vexed on how what so interested me was dismissed, often rather peremptorily, as unimportant by most philosophy faculty members and students. I retained my interest in philosophy throughout the following years, as a law school student, later as an attorney first in the Army and then as a deputy district attorney for Los Angeles County. Eventually, my general philosophical stance settled into being what I call that of a metaphysical naturalist. A metaphysical naturalist, as I use the term, is one who either denies the existence of any supernatural agent (i.e., any disembodied personal being including the God of traditional monotheism), or holds (as I do) that the existence of any supernatural

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agent is antecedently improbable and that such improbability has not yet been
overcome by purported evidences of God’s existence. ¹

What I have noticed is that there is a widely shared opinion that in recent
years it is the atheological stance that is on the defensive. Some stalwart
naturalists appear to frankly acknowledge (in so many words) that those who
adhere to the atheological stance are rightly viewed as being so. ² Even if this view
is erroneously held, it is nevertheless the case that many reasonable people think
so, including some who would much prefer it to be otherwise. Many people are
impressed by the deliverances of the natural science in recent decades including,
but not limited to, big bang cosmology and the so-called fine-tuning of the
universe. To be sure, by a long shot the god posited as the best ultimate
explanation of the universe and its features is not necessarily the God of Abraham,
Isaac, and Jacob, nor even the God of perfect-being-theology whose essential
properties have been intellectually distilled (as it were) by theologically
conservative adherents of monotheistic religions. No, it is a long way, a very long
way, to Tipperary. But it is nevertheless popularly thought (rightly or wrongly)
that to acknowledge the more or less probable existence of the god posited as
providing the best explanation of deliverances of the natural sciences is but a skip,
hop, and a jump away from acknowledging the existence of the God of Abraham,
Isaac, and Jacob. Not only it is odd that humanity had to wait until the last half of
the last century for what is widely regarded as the most persuasive evidences of
God’s existence, but a thorough appreciation of these evidences which perhaps call
for a considerable amount of detailed mathematical and scientific knowledge.
Perhaps some readers are not particularly impressed by these modern versions of
the teleological argument, but think (but erroneously so in my opinion) that some
traditional philosophical arguments (the various ontological, cosmological, and
teleological arguments) are sound and should be accepted by the rightly disposed
mind. The fact remains that in the United States theism is alive and well, as is also
(to a somewhat lesser extent) monotheistic religions (particularly Christianity).

Permit me to be the profane disturber of the peace among my fellow infidels.
In my view, what has happened is that too many metaphysical naturalists and
nontheists have given to their adversaries the keys to the kingdom, having
successfully boxed themselves within the confines of (what to very many people
are) fundamentally unacceptable versions of naturalism.

The current theistic argument based upon big bang cosmological models
posit that this universe began to exist \( m \) years ago (plus or minus \( n \) years), and it
seems that many metaphysical naturalists agree. I submit, however, that all that we

¹ All metaphysical naturalists (as I define the term) are atheists; but not all atheists are metaphysical naturalists since
some atheists can consistently believe that there are disembodied minds or spirits.
actually have is that the history of this universe cannot be traced before $m$ years ago (plus or minus $n$ years). Several respectable theologically conservative philosophers are quite willing to concede this point. One problem is that the notion of time implicitly used in the physical cosmological models pertains to something that must be operationally or empirically verifiable for scientific purposes; and it is then rashly concluded that any notion of time is meaningless. Similarly, the theistic argument based upon fine-tuning ultimately depends for its plausibility upon the notion that this universe began $m$ years ago (plus or minus $n$ years) in a big bang singularity with utterly unpredictable outcomes. But, as I understand it, “there are now and will be many competing [physical] cosmological theories, all of which are both observationally equivalent and underdetermined by the observational evidence.”

So also it is complacently conceded by all too many metaphysical naturalists: we do not know or reasonably believe that every event must have been temporally preceded by another event; whereas metaphysical naturalists of former times were quite adamant in insisting that *ex nihilo nihil fit* (out of nothing nothing comes). What is commonly understood as metaphysical naturalism is actually one or another version that professedly eschews a *first* philosophy. A *first* philosophy is one which embodies some robust metaphysical principles. The empirical sciences, and ordinary factual inquiry, are presupposed by principles that are not therefore just more or less probable empirically verifiable hypotheses. These principles include, but are not limited to, one which C. D. Broad expressed as follows: “[W]hatever I may *say* when I am trying to give Hume a run for his money, I cannot really *believe in* anything beginning to exist without being *caused* (in the old-fashioned sense of *produced* or *generated* by something else which existed before and up to the moment when the entity in question began to exist.” This principle itself is subsumed within a broader and equally robust one: that every natural event is necessarily temporally preceded by some other event to which it is causally related. Nevertheless, it frequently appears that those who take an atheological stance maintain that these principles cannot override scientific theories that appear to contradict or undermine them. By doing so, the Kalam Cosmological Argument for God’s existence appears *prima facie* to be plausible to many people.

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4 C. D. Broad, *Kant: An Introduction* [ed. C. Lewy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 218. Broad explains that he suspected that his “difficulty about [admitting the possibility of] a first event or phase in the world’s history is due [to the just stated principle]” (ibid.).
5 Neither principle should be confused with epistemic or ontic determinism.
Indeed, consider the widespread appeal of that argument, especially as expounded and defended by William Lane Craig, claimed by him to be the most plausible of the several philosophical arguments for God’s existence. The argument ultimately concludes with affirming the existence of a supernatural agent (of at least great knowledge and power) who created this universe a finite time ago. However, the argument itself concededly falls short of proving that the personal creator of the universe is the God of traditional monotheistic religions. Essential to the argument is that it is metaphysically impossible for the universe to not have a first event. Craig, in his scholarly and popular writings, vigorously argues that the application of Cantorian set theory (of transfinite arithmetic) to the real world of concrete entities (whether material or spiritual) generates counter-intuitive absurdities. I well remember how reading Craig for the first time awakened me from my dogmatic slumbers. I could not help but admire Craig’s gallant persistence in pressing those who insisted that there was really no problem except that of the inability to boldly shed oneself of commonsense presuppositions. Years ago, I had too quickly dismissed whatever was the equivalent of the Kalam Cosmological Argument as presenting at worse something like Zeno’s famous paradoxes against motion. Moreover, learned men such as Bertrand Russell and others were (and are) quite emphatic that one just has to get used to the idea an infinite set of real entities as being metaphysically possible and that any alleged counter-intuitive absurdities are simply due to the limitations of our feeble comprehension. And, further, such great philosophers as St. Thomas Aquinas held that the doctrine that this universe had a beginning in time was a matter of faith in a divinely revealed truth and not also the conclusion of a sound philosophical argument. Aquinas’ arguments for God’s existence did not presuppose that the history of the universe had a first event.

After several years of study and reflection, I concluded that Craig was right: the attempted application of Cantorian set theory to the real world of concrete entities indeed generated such counter-intuitive absurdities and that it should be concluded that any infinite set of real entities is metaphysically impossible; provided that one accepted certain implicit assumptions as to how Cantorian set theory should be deemed to apply to the real world. I developed a different metatheory which I contend does not generate the counterintuitive absurdities cited by Craig. The results of my analysis and criticism of the Kalam Cosmological

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6 Craig’s principal work on the argument is *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), and has since expounded it in numerous writings. His version of the argument depends upon the universe necessarily being of finite duration because an infinite temporal series of events is metaphysically impossible.
Argument are published in *Philo*.\(^7\) This article and two follow-up articles were electronically published by the Secular Web.\(^8\) I eagerly await Craig’s response to my articles; but I shall not hold my breath. The bottom line is that the Kalam Cosmological Argument is in shambles, at least for the time being.\(^9\)

Craig’s version of the Kalam Cosmological Argument is compelling to many reasonable people, and it seems to them to be amply confirmed by the real and supposed deliverances of natural scientists concerning big bang cosmology and so forth. The standard responses to his argument are likely to be perceived as woefully inadequate by its critics because they deny the causal principle (as defined by C. D. Broad and which Craig professedly adopts) and/or affirm that the standard application of Cantorian set theory to the real world of concrete entities does not generate counterintuitive absurdities. But if, as I contend, the Kalam Cosmological Argument is unsound, I think that the confirming evidence provided by the alleged deliverances of the natural sciences are themselves quite insufficient to swamp the antecedent improbability that there is any supernatural agent.

I should like to attest to how intellectually stimulating it has been to study Craig’s exposition of the Kalam Cosmological Argument. His construction of the argument involved the astute criticism of how it has been commonly thought that Cantorian set theory can possibly apply to the real world. In responding to his argument and its defense, I believe I have been successful in defeating the same. But I thoroughly enjoyed the enterprise of responding to some excellent philosophizing by this theologically conservative Christian. Moreover, an interest in the Kalam Cosmological Argument led me to develop an interest (however limited) in metamathematical theory for its own sake, quite apart from concerns pertaining to the philosophy of religion. Historically, and we see this happen in our time,

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\(^9\) Besides my own, I should like to call the reader’s attention to Professor Wes Morriston’s excellent papers on the Kalam Cosmological Argument, available online on his website (www.stripe.colorado.edu/~morristo/Home.html).
that it is often the case that philosophy-of-religion controversies have a marked
tendency to spill over and (hopefully) result in progress with respect to other
philosophical issues – in this case the philosophy of mathematics and of time.

So I am pursuing my philosophical studies as an independent scholar, doing
so from the perspective of being a metaphysical naturalist of a rather old-fashioned
variety; one much more in accord with the philosophical presuppositions of
commonsense (but critically so), sharply differing from those naturalists who
consciously eschew a first philosophy. In my opinion, the widespread resurgence
of theistically oriented philosophy is in part due to perception (or, rather,
misperception) that metaphysical naturalism involves assumptions contrary to the
fundamental philosophical presuppositions of critical commonsense.

Among those presuppositions are some pertaining to humans. Some
versions of metaphysical naturalism in effect falsely assert or imply that mental
states (beliefs, purposings, sensations et al.) are not causally efficacious. Moreover,
human thinking at its best is not just computational; it involves
reasoning. The version of metaphysical naturalism that I maintain is robustly
humanist. Every human person by virtue of his humanity has fundamental rights,
liberties, and immunities deserving of constitutional protection. Every mentally
competent human person also has moral duties to all his fellows (whether mentally
competent or not); as well as also having moral duties with respect to nonhuman
animals.

It is a puzzling thing that people can be equally certain but sharply differ
about important issues. That reasonable people differ may very well provide a
motive for inquiry; but it should not lead to intellectual paralysis. Intellectual
exchange is a great engine for the discovery of truth and liberation from error. In
that spirit I value the contributions of gifted theologically conservative
philosophers, as well as of those metaphysical naturalists (and also of other theists
and nontheists) with whom I disagree. As John Henry Newman put it so well in
his Apologia Pro Vita Sua (1864, part 7):

Be large-minded enough to believe, that men may reason and feel very differently
from yourselves; how is it that men fall, when left to themselves, into such
various forms of religion, except that there are various types of minds among
them, very distinct from each other?

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Existence, The Natural Moral Law, and Conservative Metaphysical Naturalism.” The lecture, as fleshed out with
notes, is available on the Theology Forum website (www.theologyforum.net). In this paper I expound to some
extent my version of metaphysical naturalism.

11 Reasoning involves the intuition of the logical relation among propositions. For instance, that \( p \) implies \( q \) is true
and that \( p \) is true entails the truth of \( q \).
Given our common humanity, the only way to deal with those with whom we disagree is to persuade rather than to coerce; perhaps to discover in some cases that it is we who are persuaded.

The Activist Pope

The death of Pope John Paul II presents a poignant moment for self-evaluation. The enormous multi-media coverage of this event—the funeral, commentaries, and eulogies—forces our reflection on his life, and, in doing so, our own as well.

His influence is evident, yet his work in politics, that is, his concern for social justice, hunger, peace-making, and human rights deserves more attention. What is interesting is the opinion he held on these world affairs, beyond his advocacy for conservative church doctrine. From supporting unions in Poland to facilitating the collapse of the Berlin wall, we witness his turning of Christian values into the positions he held regarding numerous international controversies. The late Pontiff was a contemplative man attempting to practice Christian love while serving, also, as the Vatican head of state. In both capacities he stood in bold opposition to the impulse to wage war as foreign policy. He understood that, taking a lesson from his native land, there are non-combative ways to democratize a country. He found killing to be repugnant to the Christian conscience. This came into prominence with his very public chastising of the United States action in Iraq. According to recent news accounts he thought this was “unjust,” “illegal,” and a “defeat for all humanity.”

Returning home from paying his respects to John Paul II, President Bush told reporters on Air Force One that the funeral was among the most “profound” experiences of his presidency. How ironic that these two leaders came to such opposite conclusions using the same Christian premise. Politically, the Pontiff was always ready to rumble.

The gentle Pope was adamant about addressing other things too—the fact that an average of 34,000 children die of hunger every night, and the 10 million who die of preventable diseases annually. For him, faith requires response.

It was as though he was eager to interject his views on world conflicts. We came to expect that from him. We sought his perspective in order to help shape our own—even if that meant disagreement. He was, after all, champion of the old-school church dogma. In fact, among Roman Catholics there is vigor-
ous debate on the treatment of women in the church, contraception, homosexuality, abortion, and the bungling of the pedophilia crisis. On the whole, though, we would trust the motivations that led him to his conclusions. His influence, it seems, came from our reverence for him.

"Be not afraid," he exclaims, "to open—rather open wide the doors to Christ." This will be his greatest legacy—his living impact. In this sense, his death is a wonderful thing, awakening us to new possibilities—inspiring new confidence in Christian values, confronting violence by governments, and inviting self-assessment. In dying he calls us individually to activism by merging our faith, morality, and politics into practice. Timothy II 4:7 comes to mind: "I have fought the fight, I have stayed the course, I have kept the faith.” Rest now John Paul II, we will take it from here.

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(Under) The Table Talk

“... there was a discussion [at Luther’s table] about breasts, which are an ornament to women if they are well proportioned. Large and flabby breasts cause unhappiness... because they promise much and produce little.”

Martin Luther
Table Talk, No. 4105 tr. Theodore G. Tappert