From a cosmic fine-tuner to a perfect being

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In this journal, T. Ryan Byerly (2019) recently proposed a novel strategy for solving the so-called gap problem that confronts cosmological arguments for the existence of God. I think his strategy can be used to strengthen a wide range of other theistic arguments as well, and also to stitch them together into a cumulative case for theism. In what follows, I will illustrate this by applying Byerly's idea about cosmological arguments to teleological arguments.

But first let me sketch Byerly's proposal. Cosmological arguments typically aim to show that a perfect being (God) exists by first showing that a necessary being exists. The gap problem is the problem of getting from the latter thesis to the former (after the latter has been established). Byerly proposes that this gap between necessity and perfection can be bridged by an abductive inference.

Once we've established that there is a necessary being, we can go on to ask why it has the property of necessary existence. Byerly contends that the best available explanation is one that makes use of the intuitive thought that universal generalizations can explain their instances. Just as there is a sense in which the universal generalization *all ravens are black* explains why that raven over there is black, Byerly suggests that the universal generalization *the necessary being has all perfections* explains why it has the perfection of necessary existence. In short, the necessary being is necessary because it is perfect.

At a certain level of abstraction, Byerly's gap-bridging strategy is simply an abductive inference from a being with some perfections to a being with all perfections. This is important because most theistic arguments proceed by arguing for a being with (at least) one or two of the traditional divine attributes; there are arguments for an omniscient being, for an omnipotent being, for a morally perfect being, for an eternal being and so on.[1] And each faces the problem of bridging the gap between a being with some perfections and a being with all perfections. So, Byerly's strategy is potentially applicable not only to cosmological arguments but to many other theistic arguments too. To illustrate this point, let's apply Byerly's idea to the gap problem that confronts teleological arguments.

Teleological arguments attempt to demonstrate that God exists by showing that there is a being that designed the natural world. Contemporary versions of the argument tend to be based on discoveries of modern cosmology such as the fine-tuning of the initial entropy of the universe and physical constants such as the cosmological constant (Collins 2009, Roberts 2012, McGrew

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1 A wide variety of theistic arguments are discussed in Dougherty and Walls 2018.

2016). Now, a being capable of creating a fine-tuned universe would have to have an impressive amount of knowledge and power, not to mention at least some interest in creating life, but it's not clear that we can know much more about this being simply by making inferences from the fine-tuning data. So, at this point, the teleological argument is confronted with a gap problem – one famously pressed by Hume via his character Philo in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (2007 [1779]). Suppose we grant that our cosmos was designed by some agent. Why think it was a perfect being? A being with the knowledge and power to create our cosmos might still fail to be omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, eternal, necessary and so on. In short, how do we get from a cosmic fine-tuner to a perfect being?

Here, we can avail ourselves of Byerly's abductive inference from a being with at least some perfections to a being with all perfections.[2] A designer of our cosmos would have to have the knowledge and power requisite to create a fine-tuned universe. And if we construe perfections in the right way, e.g. as positive properties (Rasmussen and Pruss 2018: Ch. 8), or as properties which are intrinsically better to have than to lack (Morris 1987: 12) etc., then it is intuitively very plausible that the knowledge and power to make a fine-tuned universe are perfections. So – following Byerly – we can ask: why does the designer of the universe have these perfections? And we can answer: because it has all perfections. The instances can be explained by positing a corresponding universal generalization. And obviously, positing that the designer has some, but not all, perfections would be a weaker explanation.[3]

One might object that this reasoning would license all sorts of absurd inferences. For example, suppose I hear about some object, x, that can lift 50 pounds, and I know virtually nothing else specific about x. It doesn't seem rational to infer that x is perfect. But I submit that the inference only seems poor because we have so much evidence from ordinary experience that all sorts of objects in our world are imperfect. The cosmic fine-tuner/perfect being inference seems stronger, perhaps because a cosmic fine-tuner is so far outside of our ordinary experience, and perhaps because, once we arrive at the gap problem, we have already established that the fine-tuner has a much, much greater degree of perfection than any object in ordinary experience.

2   A similar move has been suggested with respect to specific divine attributes. Swinburne (2004) claims that the omni-attributes are simpler than their finite counterparts; Draper (2016) suggests that Swinburne's insight is undergirded by the same theoretical virtue that undergirds inductive generalizations. And similar thoughts surface in Miller (2016), who at one point likens hypothesizing omni-attributes to hypothesizing universal generalizations such as *all electrons are negatively charged*.

3   This is Byerly's point, but applied to teleological rather than cosmological arguments. And as he observes, it's hard to see any other way a finite deity hypothesis might explain the necessary being's necessity better than the perfect being hypothesis can. I think the same point applies to other divine perfections.

Another natural objection, famously pressed by Hume himself, is that the finite deity hypothesis turns out to be a better explanation than the perfect being hypothesis, given the evil in the world. But we can assess the fine-tuning evidence in abstraction from facts about the moral status of the designer's creation. The former may be evidence for a perfect being even if the latter is evidence against a perfect being.[4]

So, Byerly's gap-bridging strategy can be used to strengthen not only cosmological arguments but also teleological arguments. Moreover, applying his strategy to both sorts of arguments has the added benefit of unifying them into a cumulative case for theism. For although cosmological arguments are arguments for a necessary being and teleological arguments are arguments for a cosmic designer, Byerly's strategy shows that both arguments, if successful, also provide some evidence that there is a perfect being.

Though I've focused on the teleological argument, I offer this brief discussion as an illustration of the more general point that Byerly's strategy can potentially be adapted to bridge gaps in all sorts of theistic arguments, and also stitch them together into a cumulative case for theism. For as we've seen, most theistic arguments face the challenge of bridging a gap from a being with some perfections to a being with all perfections. And Byerly has given us just such a bridge.[5]

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4   Byerly makes a similar point in response to a similar worry.

5   For helpful comments, I thank the Editor, two referees and Chris Meacham, who (*inter alia*) provided the first objection I consider in the main text.

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Temporal *indexicals are essential*

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It is typically assumed that the issues raised by *de se* thought – about an agent – and *de nunc* thought – about a time – are parallel. Moreover, the *de se* is the case typically discussed in detail, with the possibility of an extension to the *de nunc* being taken as read. In this paper, I argue that this is a mistake, and I show how the mistake has had a distorting effect in particular on the debate about whether indexical attitudes are essential for the rationalization of intentional action. Whether the *de se* is thus essential is, I claim, an open question. That the *de nunc* is essential is much clearer. If we want to know whether *any* species of indexical attitudes is essential, the *de nunc* case is already conclusive.

Herman Cappelen and Josh Dever have challenged fans of the view that indexical attitudes are essential for the rationalization of intentional action to offer an argument for the following claim:

> Impersonal action rationalizations are necessarily incomplete because of a missing indexical component (IIC). (2013: 37)

An action rationalization is 'impersonal' if it doesn't involve an *indexical* component that refers to the *agent* of the action, that is, if it isn't *de se*.

José Luis Bermúdez takes up Cappelen and Dever's challenge.[1] He breaks his task up into two. First, he argues that impersonal action rationalizations are incomplete (IICa). Second, he argues that, if they are, the only reason they can be is that they are missing an indexical component (IICb). (IICb) seems clearly correct to me. My focus in the critical part of the paper is, therefore, on Bermúdez's argument for (IICa):

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1   See Bermúdez 2017a. The same argument is also offered in Chapter 7 of Bermúdez 2017b.