

Platonic Atheism

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ABSTRACT: Platonic atheism is an affirmative atheism. It affirms modern analytic metaphysics and ethics. The platonic atheist is a metaphysical and moral realist. Reality is lawful. The Law includes the laws of logic, mathematics, actuality, and morality. All things fall under the Law. Gods exist only if the Law permits them to exist. The existence of any god is a scientific question. And if any gods do exist, they are subject to the Law. Hence science decides what the gods can and cannot do. Any actions of any gods can be evaluated using the moral laws. Platonic atheism allows the soul to be defined as the form of the body. It allows for life after death via lawful resurrection in other universes. Since all persons are equal before the law, platonic atheists are committed to justice. For the platonic atheist, the Law is divine. The projection of any King above the Law is idolatry. The platonic atheist has a rich system of atheological concepts (piety, impiety, eschatology, soteriology, etc.). Platonic atheism liberates religion from theism.

1. Introduction

At the close of the *Euthyphro*, Socrates presents a famous dilemma. Suppose the gods command P. Socrates offers two alternatives concerning the relation between P and the godly command: for any P, if the gods command P, then either (1) P is right because the gods command P; or (2) the gods command P because P is right.

On the one hand, if P is right because the gods command P, then the command of the gods define morality; those commands might be inconsistent or arbitrary or violent. For instance, if the gods give the command “Sacrifice your first-born child to us!”, then it is right to do that – it is morally *obligatory* to do it, and you *ought* to do it. On the other hand, if the gods command P because P is right, then the gods are following some standard of morality (the moral law). They look to it to guide them when they give commands. Since child-sacrifice is objectively morally wrong, the gods cannot morally command it.

The Euthyphro dilemma can be framed in legalistic terms. Either (1) the gods are above the moral law or (2) the moral law is above the gods. On the one hand, if the gods are above the moral law, then they make the moral law and they can break it. They can make exceptions to it either for themselves or others. For any reason, or for no reason at all, they can change right into wrong and wrong into right. On the other hand, if the moral law is above the gods, then the gods did not make it and cannot break it. They are subject to it. Thus Zeus cannot make adultery right just by declaring that he wills it to be right. The gods are powerless to change the structure of morality – goodness has an objective necessity.

It is also possible to pose the Euthyphro dilemma for assertions. Suppose the gods assert that P. The Socratic alternatives are these: (1) P is true because the gods assert P; or (2) the gods assert P because P is true. This version of the dilemma can also be put in legalistic terms. There are laws that define the truth – the laws of logic, of mathematics, of actuality. Either (1) the gods are above the laws that define the truth; or (2) the laws

that define the truth are above the gods. Suppose we put the laws of morality and the laws of truth together. The result is the *Law*. The most general version of the Euthyphro dilemma is this: either (1) the gods are above the Law or (2) the Law is above the gods.

The *platonic atheist* says that, if there are any gods, then the Law is above the gods.¹ To know the good, the gods must do moral reasoning just like other persons. They are subordinate to the moral law and their behaviors can be judged accordingly. Even lowly humans can evaluate the commands and actions of the gods. To know the truth, the gods must reason as we reason. And to know any truths about contingent matters (e.g. the physical universe), the gods must do science. They must use the same scientific method we use. The laws of actuality are above the gods – they did not invent them, they merely discover them. And they do not have the power to violate them. They may be superhuman, but they are not supernatural. They may perform mighty feats, but not miracles. And it gets worse. The laws of logic, mathematics, and actuality determine whether or not the gods even exist. If the definitions of the gods are inconsistent, they are ruled out by the laws of logic and mathematics. Or if the existence of some god conflicts with the laws of nature in some universe, then that god cannot exist in that universe. Whether or not the gods exist is a matter to be decided by logic, mathematics, and empirical science.

Platonic atheism affirms the reality of the Law. And it affirms that all persons are subject to the Law. Consequently, platonic atheism opposes theism. Theism says that there is a king above the Law – a king who made the Law and who can break the Law. To be sure, platonic atheism denies that there is any such king. But platonic atheism goes far beyond the denial of theism. Platonic atheism is *affirmative atheism*. Platonic atheism is *affirmative with respect to metaphysics*. It is not materialism, extreme naturalism, or nominalism. On the contrary, it affirms both abstract and possible objects (Quine, 1990). Platonic atheism is *affirmative with respect to morality*. It denies moral relativism, subjectivism, skepticism, and nihilism. On the contrary, it entails moral objectivism. Finally it is *affirmative with respect to reverence*. Platonic atheism supports a variety of forms of personal and social piety. Religion does not require theism. According to the platonic atheist, theism is a primitive way of thinking. Theism produces bad results in science, in ethics, and in politics. And it produces bad results in religion. Platonic atheism is deeply religious. One of the main tasks of platonic atheism is to liberate religion from theism.

2. The Law

2.1 The Laws of Logic

There are laws of logic. If any skeptic wants to deny that there are such laws, then he or she will need to make arguments; but those arguments will presuppose the very laws that the skeptic aims to deny. Skepticism about the laws of logic is self-refuting. The platonic atheist says that the laws of logic regulate certain features of *propositions*. Propositions are the abstract meanings of sentences. Sentences *express* propositions. But propositions are not material or physical objects. They do not exist in any space-time; they are eternal. They can act as formal causes but not as efficient causes (they do not

transmit forces). They exist necessarily. Propositions are mind-independent – they exist objectively. Propositions are true or else false. The laws of logic regulate the ways that truth-values are distributed to propositions. For instance, if P is true, and P implies Q is true, then Q is true.

The skeptic may want to argue that there are no abstract propositions – the laws of logic apply only to sentences that people write or speak. But there is a cost to this way of thinking: it sacrifices objectivity. To say that the laws of logic are objective is to say that they are binding on all possible rational agents – at any time, any place. The skeptic has no standard of correctness that is universally and necessarily binding. Once again, skepticism undermines itself. It cannot tell us that we *ought* to believe the better argument. Who's to say? For the skeptic, there is no objective standard of truth. There is only truth-for-me and truth-for-you. Skepticism degenerates into subjectivism and relativism. Theists typically assert that there are absolutely objective standards of truth and rationality. Any atheism that aims to successfully compete with theism cannot be satisfied with less.

The laws of logic are objective, necessary, universal, formal, exact. They are *transcendental*. We do not make the laws of logic. On the contrary, we make rules of reasoning. Over time, as our cultures evolve, our rules of reasoning more and more accurately represent the laws of logic. For example, Aristotelian logic represents the laws of logic; but the predicate calculus represents those laws even more accurately. Our rules of reasoning also include rules of scientific reasoning (e.g. inductive reasoning). And just as we do not make the laws of logic, so we do not make the objects governed by the laws of logic. The very possibility that atheism *is truer than* theism presupposes an abstract and ideal system of true propositions. One of those propositions is that there are no gods.

2.2 The Laws of Mathematics

There are laws of mathematics. According to platonic atheism, these laws are justified by science: (1) scientific theories depend on mathematical laws; (2) if scientific theories depend on some laws, then those laws are true; (3) therefore, the laws of mathematics are true. Since the laws of mathematics contain existential quantifiers (e.g. there exists an empty set; for every number, there exists a successor), the platonic atheist is a *mathematical realist*. The platonic atheist affirms the existence of objects like sets, numbers, vectors, functions, and so on. Mathematical objects are not mythical or supernatural. They are not like elves, immaterial minds, or gods. Scientific theories do not refer to elves, immaterial minds, or gods. However, since scientific theories depend on mathematical laws, they also refer to mathematical objects. So the platonic atheist says mathematical objects fall within the scope of scientific naturalism. They belong to the platonic conception of nature.

The platonic atheist bases mathematical existence on logic. Logic deals with consistency and with definability. Many writers have identified consistent definability with mathematical existence. Hilbert wrote to Frege that “if the arbitrarily given axioms do not contradict one another with all their consequences, then they are true and the things defined by the axioms exist” (in Frege, 1980: 39-40). Poincaré writes that “in

mathematics the word exist . . . means free from contradiction” (1913: 454). An extensive development of this idea can be found in Balaguer (1998). For the platonic atheist, this is the basic law of mathematics: to be is to be consistently definable. All the other laws of mathematics are expressions of the meaning of this basic law. This law is a principle of plenitude. It entails that mathematical reality is *complete*. It is maximally inclusive. To use a familiar formula: mathematical reality is that than which no greater is logically possible.

The skeptic may want to argue against the objective truth of the laws of mathematics – after all, the objective truth of those laws is a matter of considerable debate. The platonic atheist does not aim to settle this debate. On the contrary, the platonic atheist merely claims that any atheism that denies mathematical realism is inferior to any atheism that embraces it. By surrendering mathematical objectivity, the skeptical atheist hands over to the theists the single most impressive source of *obligatory rationality* in human history. And by saying that mathematical reality is that than which no greater is logically possible, the platonic atheist has the resources to develop profound alternatives to theism. It will be helpful to illustrate the difficulties of any atheism that denies mathematical realism.

Theists have developed mathematical arguments for God. Augustine (1993: 40-64) reasons like this: (1) Mathematics is obviously effective in science and engineering. (2) The best explanation for this effectiveness is God. For God has arranged all thing “in measure, number, and weight” (Wisdom 11:20). (3) By inference to the best explanation, God exists. Another argument goes like this: (1) Mathematics obviously attracts universal human assent. Nobody disagrees with the rules of arithmetic. (2) The best explanation for this attraction is that we are made in the image of some divine mathematician, namely, God. (3) Therefore, God exists, and we are made in His image. Since the skeptical atheist thinks that the laws of mathematics are merely subjective conventions, it is difficult to see how the skeptical atheist can offer better alternative explanations. However, the platonic atheist can offer better alternative explanations: the laws of mathematics are true without God. God plays no role in the axioms of any mathematical theory.

Many theistic arguments involve infinity. On the one hand, many theistic arguments depend on denials of infinity. Aquinas’s Second and Third Ways depend on the denial of infinite sequences (*Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Q. 2, Art. 3). Anselm’s Argument from Degrees of Perfection depends on the denial of infinite sequences (*Monologion*, ch. 4). On the other hand, some theistic arguments depend on the affirmation of infinity. Descartes’ version of the Ontological Argument reasons from his knowledge of infinity to the existence of God (*Third Meditation*). Locke’s Degrees of Perfection argument reasons from infinity to God (1690: III.6.12). By abandoning mathematical objectivity, the skeptical atheist abandons the standards that are needed to engage these arguments. However, the platonic atheist has the resources needed to engage those arguments. The platonic atheist can say where these arguments go wrong, or propose alternative explanations.

Theists often wonder why there is something rather than nothing. They propose God as the only rational answer. God serves as a sufficient reason for the existence of all things (Leibniz, 1697). It is hard to see how the skeptical atheist can give any rational answer. But the platonic atheist has an answer: (1) to be is to be consistently definable;

(2) there are consistent definitions; (3) therefore, there are existing things. Finally, the platonic atheist can mathematically challenge theists. Theists spend considerable energy showing that God is consistently definable. But if that's right, then there is some mathematical model of God. However, no such models are known. The platonic atheist says that the best explanation for the absence of these models is that God is not consistently definable. God is like a round square. God is an impossible object – and thus does not exist.

The platonic atheist says that the laws of mathematics are *transcendental*. They are objective, necessary, universal, formal, exact. They are not made by us. We make mathematical theories. These theories are the subject-matter of mathematics. The history of mathematics has been positive: over time, our mathematical theories more and more accurately represent the laws of mathematics. Our best mathematical theory today is probably maximal set theory. Maximal set theory is ZFC plus all consistent large cardinal axioms. It is plausible that all known theorems of mathematics can be derived from the axioms of maximal set theory (Horsten, 2001). But maximal set theory is merely an approximation to the mathematical laws. There are many open problems in set theory – e.g. the cardinality of the continuum. Mathematical research is based on reasoning. Through reasoning, we can continue to improve our mathematical theories.

There are laws of possibility. They define the system of possible objects. Leibniz says possibility is consistent definability: to be possible is to be consistently definable.² But this entails that possible objects are mathematical objects. Following Leibniz, the platonic atheist agrees that to be possible is to be mathematical. Among the possible objects are all *possible universes*. Possible universes are abstract physical structures. As merely possible, they are not concrete. They are mere mathematical universe-forms. Possible universes are not supernatural. Many scientific theories refer to possible universes (see Tegmark, 1998, 2003). So the platonic atheist says possible universes fall within the scope of scientific naturalism. They belong to the platonic conception of nature.

The platonic atheist recognizes a distinction between the merely possible and the actual. To be possible is to exist; but it does not imply actual existence. To exist actually is to be concrete (to be physical). Clearly, our universe is actual. Once upon a time, it was thought that only one universe could be actual. But current physics supports the idea that many universes are actual. Following Kraay (2010), the platonic atheist distinguishes between possible universes and *possible worlds*. Following Lewis (1986: 103), the platonic atheist says that the collection of possible universes is a set rather than a proper class. It follows that a possible world is a set of possible universes. The *null world* does not contain any possible universe – it is empty. Every *singleton world* contains exactly one possible universe. Every *plural world* contains many possible universes – it contains a *multiverse*. There is exactly one actual world. It contains all and only the actual universes.

2.3 The Laws of Actuality

There are laws of actuality. These laws include the laws that determine which possible universes are actual. Since possible worlds are sets of universes, these laws

determine which possible world is actual. These laws are absolutely necessary. They are objective; abstract; eternal; absolutely universal. They are mind-independent. We do not make these laws. On the contrary, we make theories of actuality that represent these laws. Our theories are based partly on empirical evidence. We know that at least one universe is actual – our universe. So we know that the null world is not actual. It is not the case that there are no contingent things. Hence the laws of actuality explain why there is something actual rather than nothing actual. We know that our universe has certain features – it is finely tuned for life. So the laws of actuality explain this fine-tuning.

A long tradition – known as *axiarchism* – says that the laws of actuality are based on value. Why is there anything actual rather than nothing actual? Leibniz answers that all possibilities have a tendency to actuality that is both natural and proportional to their value (1697). Leslie says that there is an abstract ethical principle that necessarily actualizes the best (1970, 1979). Rescher says that actuality is defined by a *law of optimality* (2000). He puts it like this: “whatever possibility is for the best is ipso facto the possibility that is actualized” (2000: 815; see also pp. 814-821). The law of optimality explains why there is something actual rather than nothing actual. It also explains the orderliness and biological congeniality of our universe (Leslie, 1979, 1989: chs. 6-8). So the law of optimality is justified by inference to the best explanation. Other arguments for the law of optimality can be found in Rescher (2000: 816-817). The law of optimality is not a causal law (Rescher, 2000: 821-823). The law of optimality does not involve any god (Rescher, 2000: 822-833). Both Leslie and Rescher note that the law of optimality might entail the actuality of gods. But the law is ontologically prior to any gods it might produce. All this is consistent with platonic atheism. So the platonic atheist is an axiarchist.

The laws of actuality include the laws operative at each actual universe. Since our universe is actual, the laws of actuality include the laws of our universe. These are the laws of our local nature. They are objective. We do not make these laws; we make *scientific theories* that more or less accurately represent these laws. However, these local laws are not necessary. They can't be justified a priori. So to learn about them, we need to reason from local evidence. History shows that the scientific method is the best way to learn about these laws. The scientific method is justified by its success. The history of science is highly positive: over time, science makes progress. Our scientific theories more and more accurately represent the laws of logic. The scientific method guarantees progress: less accurate theories are discarded in favor of more accurate theories.

Platonic atheism acknowledges that the large-scale structure of our universe may be very complex. Linde (1986, 1994) argues that our universe might be an eternally branching genealogical tree of cosmic domains. Maternal domains give birth to daughter domains in an endless process. Smolin (1992, 1997) suggests that domains are generated by a process of super-cosmic evolution. Dawkins likes this too (2008: 174-175, 188-189; hereafter GD). Writers like Moravec (1988) and Bostrom (2003) argue that some domains may contain engineers who program computers to simulate other domains. If that is right, then the system of domains is governed by a simulation relation. Simulations may be nested indefinitely, even infinitely. Gardner (2003) says that sufficiently advanced civilizations may have the technical power to design and create cosmic domains.

2.4 The Laws of Morality

There are laws of morality. These laws are necessary and universal. They include all laws governing the relations among persons of any sort. They cover the relations among human persons and non-human persons (e.g. chimps, dolphins, sentient robots, extraterrestrial aliens, gods, or persons in other universes). The moral laws include laws governing relations between pairs of persons (e.g. do not murder; do not steal; tell the truth; keep your promises). But the moral laws also include laws regulating larger systems of persons. They include social and political laws. The moral laws include the ideal legal system as well as the ideal constitution. They define the ideal commonwealth.

The platonic atheist is a moral realist. The laws of morality are objective. They are mind-independent. We do not invent them; we discover them. As our cultures evolve, we produce representations of the moral law. These include various moral and legal codes (from Hammurabi on down). They also include blueprints for ideal states (e.g. Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia*). For the most part, we have made moral progress: our representations of the moral law have become more and more accurate. But there have been significant failures (e.g. fascism, communism, fundamentalism).

3. Laws and Persons

3.1 The Formal Laws are above all Persons

The platonic atheist says that the laws of logic and the laws of mathematics are above all persons. The existence of any gods depends on those laws. If the definition of some god is inconsistent, then that god does not exist. If there is no way to make a mathematical model of some alleged god, then that god is impossible; it does not exist. For example, if the concept of the trinity is not logically or mathematically coherent, then no triune god is possible. For example, set theory shows that omniscience is mathematically impossible (Grim, 1988); hence there cannot be any omniscient god. If any gods exist, they cannot violate or change the formal laws. They must obey those laws.

3.2 The Natural Laws are above all Persons

Persons are, by definition, agents. They are involved in spatial, temporal, and causal relations. They exist in actual physical universes. Persons are subordinate to the laws of the universes in which they exist. Our universe obviously contains human persons. But we are subject to the laws of our local nature. Our universe may contain super-human aliens; if it does, they are subject to the laws of local nature (GD 96-98).

Various writers have recently suggested that there may be persons of such extreme power that they can design and actualize entire universes. There are two ways for such persons to design and produce universes. On the first way, they use physical objects like black holes to produce universes (Gardner, 2003). On the second way, they use physical objects like computers to produce universes (Moravec, 1988).³ The second way has seen

considerable interest (Bostrom, 2003; GD 98). This second way is deeply intriguing: suppose we are living in a computer simulation that was engineered by some person in some other universe (and that person might be a corporate person). That person would have many of the features of the theistic deity – it would be an intelligent designer; it would be a first cause; it would be (relative to our universe) a necessary ground of being.

Nevertheless, if our universe is the product of super-human technology, the Engineers are entirely natural things occupying their own home universe. The Engineers fall under the laws of mathematics – specifically, the laws of probability. Those laws say that complex things evolve from simpler things. Thus Dawkins writes that “the simulators themselves would have to come from somewhere. The laws of probability forbid all notions of their spontaneously appearing without simpler antecedents.” (GD 98-99). And Dawkins writes again that “the designer himself must be the end product of some kind of cumulative escalator or crane, perhaps a version of Darwinism in another universe.” (GD 186)⁴ If any godlike computer programmer exists, it falls under the laws of evolution. It falls under natural laws of its own universe or of all universes. And thus under the Law itself.

Theists say that our universe contains gods. If it does, they are subject to the laws of our local nature. van Inwagen writes: “If there are such things as the following, they are concrete: cabbages, kings, bits of sealing wax, electrons, tables and chairs, angels, ghosts, and God” (2007: 199). So God falls under the same laws as cabbages, kings, bits of sealing wax, electrons, and tables. As expected, Dawkins argues that religion is not a domain apart from science (GD 77-85). All religious statements are scientific hypotheses that can have their truth-values decided by the scientific method (GD 82-83). This is an old idea. For the Stoics, theology is a branch of natural science (Algra, 2003). The platonic atheist agrees. Of course, theology may be an *empty* branch of physics.

Since gods are subordinate to the laws of their universes, they cannot alter those laws. They cannot violate those laws or produce exceptions to them. If miracles involve the violation of some natural laws, then there are no miracles (GD 82-85). For example, if some story in the Bible is not consistent with natural law, as revealed by science, then it is false. If gods do interact causally with other things in our universe, then those interactions are regulated by physical laws. For instance, if gods act, then they act using physical forces. Their actions are just like our actions. And since the actions of the gods are subject to natural laws, they can be evaluated scientifically. We can use the scientific method to decide whether or not some hypothesized godly action is real. For example, the scientific method shows that prayer does not help to cure disease (GD 85-90). Or consider the claims that “Only God can create life” or “Only God can direct the development of life”. Such claims are scientific hypotheses. Darwinian evolution shows they are false.

Since all persons (human or godlike) are subordinate to the laws of their local natures, all persons must use the same methods for discovering those laws. This is the scientific method. For all we know, there may be super-human intelligences in our universe. These may even have infinite powers. But they are subject to the laws of local nature. Alleged deities like Yahweh and Zeus did not invent the laws of local nature – on the contrary, they must use the scientific method to discover those laws. Hence human persons can use the scientific method to test and evaluate any revelations they allegedly provide.

Since gods are subject to the laws of their universes, the existence of any god is a purely scientific hypothesis. The existence of the theistic deity is a thesis that can be settled by the scientific method (GD 68, 70, 72-73, 82, 85). There are no explanatory gaps in which the theistic deity can hide (GD 151-155). Science shows that theistic deities like Yahweh and Zeus do not exist (Stenger, 2007). And the platonic atheist agrees.

3.3 The Moral Laws are above all Persons

The platonic atheist says that the moral laws are above all persons. No persons can alter the moral laws. They are beyond the power of any god. This idea is found in the Stoics. For instance, Aurelius writes “Wherever something can be done as the *logos* shared by gods and men dictates, there all is in order.”(*Meditations* 7.53) This idea is even affirmed by certain theists. For example, Swinburne (1977: ch. 11) is a moral realist. He argues that the moral law is objective and necessary. Hence not even the theistic deity can change it: “If it is logically necessary, as we have claimed, that certain actions, e.g. genocide, are wrong, then God can no more make them right than he can make a man both married and a bachelor at the same time” (Swinburne, 1977: 203).

Since all persons (human or godlike) are subject to the moral law, all persons can use the moral law as a standard to judge one another. Thus humans are free to use the moral law as a standard to judge the behaviors of any alleged gods. For example, gods like Zeus or Yahweh can be judged according to the moral law. Focus on Yahweh. The behaviors of Yahweh are described in detail in the Old Testament. It is increasingly well-known that most of those behaviors are depraved (Nelson-Pallmeyer, 2003; GD ch. 7; Johnston, 2009: 57-64). Yahweh frequently directly participates in or commands his followers to participate in mass murder (including infanticide and genocide).⁵ Yahweh endorses rape, pillage, slavery, polygamy. Judged by the moral law, Yahweh is evil. The platonic atheist says that if anyone worships Yahweh, then they are worshipping an evil god.

Since all persons (godly or not) are subordinate to the moral law, all persons are free to use the moral law as a standard to evaluate all legal codes, party platforms, ideologies, and political constitutions. For example, behavioral codes proposed by the Bible can be evaluated using the moral standard. More specifically, consider the codes in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Mostly, those laws are primitive and unjust.

4. Applications

4.1 The Soul

Platonic atheism has many immediate atheological applications – it can be used to make atheistic revisions of traditional theistic doctrines. As an illustration, consider *human persons*. The platonic atheist, following our best natural science, says that persons are entirely material things – we are strictly identical with our *bodies*. But what about *souls*? Cartesians say that souls are immaterial thinking substances. However,

such substances are not consistent with laws of nature in our universe. Since Cartesian dualism is not consistent with our local laws of nature, it is false. We do not have Cartesian souls.

Many types of atheism (e.g. those based on materialism or extreme naturalism) do not have the metaphysical resources to consider alternatives to Cartesianism. If Cartesianism is false, then those atheists must say that persons do not have souls at all. However, for the platonic atheist, the failure of Cartesian dualism does not entail that persons lack souls. Platonic atheists can consider affirmative alternatives to Cartesianism. For example, Aristotle said that the soul is the form of the body (*De Anima*, 412a5-412b21). One way to think about this says that the body-form is a mathematical object. Computational biology suggests that living things are programmed machines. The body-form is something like a computer program – an abstract function from numbers to numbers. On this view, your soul is your *body-program*. Since platonic atheists are mathematical realists, they can endorse the thesis that every person runs a body-program. Every person has a soul.

Your soul is your body-program. All programs have variable features. These features are the inputs to the program. Different sequences of inputs drive the same program through different histories. Any program defines a set of possible histories. Your soul defines a set of possible lives. Souls are *essences*: any life in the set defined by *your* soul is one of *your* lives; any life not in that set is not one of your lives. For any one of your possible lives, there is some possible universe that contains that life. Anything that lives one of your possible lives is one of your *counterparts*. Counterparts share souls: x is a counterpart of y iff (if and only if) the soul of x is the soul of y . Some of your possible lives are better than others (there is a partial order by value on possible lives). Hence some of your counterparts have better lives than others: x is a better counterpart of y iff x is a counterpart of y and the life of x is better than the life of y . Conversely, some counterparts have worse lives than others. Clearly, there are worse and better versions of your present earthly life. Some of your counterparts live better lives than your life – others, worse.

4.2 Life After Death

Many types of atheism (once again, those based on materialism or extreme naturalism) do not have the metaphysical resources to develop any atheist theories of life after death. But platonic atheism has considerable resources – and the platonic atheist can use them to develop theories of life after death. Note that life after death does not imply *survival*. Persons are bodies; bodies do not survive their own deaths; hence no person survives death. If immortality is indefinite post-mortem survival, then platonic atheism rules out immortality (Lamont, 1935: 2). But it does not rule out life after death. There are many ways for platonic atheists to argue for life after death. Two ways are sketched here.

The first way is based on John Hick's resurrection theory (1976: ch. 15, 20, 22). Hick posits a sequence of distinct physical universes. These universes are strung out like beads on a super-cosmic time line. The universes are spatially distinct. There is no way to travel from one universe to another. Our universe is one of these – call it Universe-1.

It is followed by Universe-2; then Universe-3; and so on. Each universe is entirely natural – it is governed by its own natural laws. But the laws that operate inside of universes are not the only laws. Universes are connected by super-cosmic laws. These are not super-natural laws. They are just natural laws at a larger scale. For Hick, resurrection is the result of the operation of a super-cosmic law. He says it is a law of nature that when an a body dies in one universe, a replica of it appears in the next universe (1976: 287). Each next universe is more congenial to life. Your replica will lead a better life in the next universe. Your replica is one of your counterparts – it has your soul; it has your essence. Of course, Hick’s replica theory suffers from various flaws. Dille (1983) and Steinhart (2008) have worked to repair the problems with Hick’s theory and to extend it.

The second way is based on the premise that our universe is computer-generated (that it is a simulation). On this view, our universe is a software process running on some computer in some higher level universe. This higher level universe is a physical system – it runs according to its own natural laws. Let’s refer to this computer as the *Engine*. Presumably, the Engine was designed and built by some *Engineers*. Although the Engine and the Engineers are natural within their own universe, they look supernatural with respect to us. From our perspective, they look like gods (Bostrom, 2003: 253-254). The Engineers have super-human power and intelligence. Surely they are personal in some highly abstract sense: they are rational moral agents. But what is their morality? If axiarchism is right, then greater rationality entails greater benevolence. Hence it is reasonable to think that they have super-human benevolence. They are both cognitively and ethically interested in the persons that appear in their simulations. The Engine is able to perfectly record every detail of every human life. And this record can be used for the sake of *promotion* (Moravec, 1988: 152-153; Bostrom, 2003: 253-254; Leslie, 2007: 61-65). The Engineers promote you iff they recreate you after your death (either in some other simulated universe or in their own higher level universe). Any promoted version of you is one of your counterparts – it has your soul. Promotion is an entirely naturalistic theory of life after death.

Some platonic atheists will want to further develop the accounts of life after death that have been sketched here. Others will want to develop other accounts. For the platonic atheist, there are many ways to develop accounts of life after death. There are many ways to develop *atheistic eschatologies* and *atheistic soteriologies*. These doctrines show that the affirmative existential content of platonic atheism is at least as great as the affirmative existential content of theism (see Martin, 2002: ch. 13; Craig, 2008: ch. 2). If theism can make life meaningful, then so can platonic atheism. These doctrines show that, just as the gods are not needed for either the creation of the universe or the development of life, so also they are not needed either for life after death or for salvation.

4.3 Justice

Since the Law is above all persons, all persons are equal before the Law. For the platonic atheist, this means commitment to every form of justice – every form of fairness and equality. The platonic atheist opposes racial, sexual, economic, social, and political

injustice. Perhaps surprisingly, platonic atheism agrees with the liberal Protestant conception of the common good in many ways. This opens intriguing ways for platonic atheists to work together with liberal Christians to pursue the goal of justice.

5. Divinity

5.1 The Law is Divine

There are two reasons to say that the Law is divine. First, the Law has many classical divine attributes. The Law is transcendental, universal, necessary, eternal, etc. It defines every platonic ideal: the true, the good, the just, the beautiful. Second, if there are any gods, the Law is above those gods. Since gods are traditionally said to be said to be divine, the Law has even more right to be called divine. For the platonic atheist, the Law is divine. It is holy and sacred. But the Law is an abstract form – it is the Logos.⁶ Hence it is not a thing among things. Hence it is not a divine person – it is not a god.

Since platonic atheism says that the Law is divine, platonic atheism entails two opposed attitudes to the Law. The negative attitude is *irreverence* or *impiety*. For the platonic atheist, anyone who takes an inappropriate or incorrect attitude towards the Law is impious. The positive attitude is *reverence* or *piety*. For the platonic atheist, anyone who takes an appropriate or correct attitude towards the Law is pious.⁷

5.2 Devotion to the Law

Atheistic piety is *devotion* to the Law; hence the platonic atheist can be *devout*. Devotion to the Law is primarily devotion to truth and justice. For the platonic atheist, it is pious to pursue truth and justice. The *sacred duties* of the platonic atheist include service to the truth and to justice. For example, doing math and doing science are pious activities. Honesty is a pious virtue. Promoting justice is a pious activity. Devotion to the Law is a source of existential meaning for the platonic atheist – it makes life meaningful.

Of course, devotion to the Law does not imply worship. The Law is an abstract logical structure – the form of the possible and the actual, the form of being and goodness. It would make no sense at all to worship an abstract logical structure. By repudiating theism, the platonic atheist repudiates all forms of worship that are directed to supernatural persons. The platonic atheist rejects all forms of worship that are intended to curry favor from or ask favors of some supernatural person. It is absurd to try bargain with the Law. It is absurd to pray to the Law – it makes no sense to ask the Law for favors or to give thanks to the Law. It makes no sense to make sacrifices to it; to sing hymns of praise to it.

Although the platonic atheist rejects the forms of theistic worship, the platonic atheist affirms that atheistic piety can be expressed socially. It is worthwhile for platonic atheists to develop *atheistic rituals* and *atheistic liturgies*. Platonic atheists can develop ceremonies for atonement and forgiveness. They can develop ceremonies for healing and cleansing of guilt. They can develop ceremonies for marking life passages (e.g. birth,

adulthood, marriage, death). And while there will never be atheistic priests or prophets, there may well be *atheistic celebrants* – leaders of atheistic communities of reverence.

There is no contradiction in saying that atheistic communities of reverence would be religious. Atheism and religion are not incompatible (Martin, 2007). There are several Eastern atheistic religions; but such religions could also emerge in the West. To say that atheism cannot be religious is to assume that religion requires theism. Unfortunately, many atheists agree with theists on this point.⁸ This agreement grants to theism what it does not deserve. *Religion does not require theism*. On the contrary, just as theism hindered the progress of science, so also theism hinders the progress of religion. Platonic atheists can work together to build new atheistic religious institutions.

5.3 Sinning against the Law

Sin against the Law is impiety; it is irreverence. Sinning against the Law includes the promotion of untruth and injustice. The promotion of untruth is *blasphemy*. For example, the promotion of creationism or intelligent design is blasphemy. The promotion of any type of injustice is wickedness. Sinning against the Law can rise to the level of the *demonic*. With respect to both truth and justice, fundamentalism is demonic. The platonic atheist is obligated by the moral law to avoid sinning against the Law.

Sinning against the Law includes *idolatry*. Idolatry is inappropriate reverence – it is incorrectly treating something that is not divine as if it were divine. An idolatrous person or social institution reveres some corrupt or perverse version of the divine. Theism is idolatrous. Theistic idolatry involves the projection of some person behind or above the Law (Feuerbach, 1841). It involves the projection of a King behind the Law. But this King is always attached to the people who project it – to their families, tribes, customs, values. On the basis of this idolatry, tribal myths, customs, and values are projected into the divine. Hence theistic idolatry naturally tends towards worship of political leaders and political orders. It becomes worship of the emperor and of the nation. For example, in the USA, it becomes Christian Nationalism (Boyd, 2006).

It is idolatrous to say that the Law is somehow incorporated into any god. Hence it is idolatrous to say that the Law is the structure of ideas in a divine mind or the structure of dispositions in a divine will. It is idolatrous to say that the Law is the nature of any god (contra Plantinga, 1980). It is idolatrous to say that the Law is produced by any god. If the Law is identified with the ancient Logos, then it is idolatrous to say that the Law is the child of some god (contra Philo of Alexandria and John 1:1-7). And it is both idolatrous and incoherent to say that the Law is both identical to some god and that the Law is grounded in that God (contra John 1:1-7 and Tillich, 1951: 238-239). The platonic atheist says that Christians worship a mere human being. But that is extreme idolatry.

Atheists are good for the sake of goodness itself. They are not good for the sake of some future compensation – e.g. to gain some future reward or avoid some future punishment (Anthony, 2009). Atheists have pointed out that to be good for the sake of future personal compensation is not goodness, it is merely selfishness. According to Rahner, some atheists are so good that they are *anonymous Christians* – and, as such,

they merit salvation (Pasquini, 2000). But the pious atheist turns this around: some Christians are so good that they are *anonymous atheists*. They are not sinners.

6. Conclusion

On the one hand, platonic atheism is negative. It constantly fights against theistic idolatry. It constantly fights against theistic perversions of truth and justice. For example, platonic atheism serves as the *conscience* of theism (Kay, 2008). On the other hand, platonic atheism is not merely negative. Platonic atheism amounts to far more than merely saying no to gods. It is affirmative. Platonic atheism has enormous positive content. For platonic atheists, reverence for the Law is the good news. It is the atheist *gospel*. Atheist *apologetics* defends this gospel. Atheist *evangelism* spreads this gospel.

Platonic atheism aims to provide existential alternatives to theism. Theists today have a near monopoly on institutional services for emotional and communal support. Churches provide many social services (including marriage counseling; grief counseling; assistance with legal issues; assistance with financial issues; all sorts of charitable services, etc.). Platonic atheism aims to develop a full atheistic praxis, including institutions. As an affirmative atheism, platonic atheism has the resources to beat theism at its own game.

Notes

¹For many in the ancient world, the Law is the *Logos*. The *Logos* is the rational order of existence. The *Logos* probably first appears in Heraclitus (Kirk & Raven, 1957: ch. 6). Leucippus uses the term *logos* for reason when he writes that “Nothing happens in vain, but everything from reason and by necessity” (Taylor, 1999: 3). The *Logos* is further developed by the Stoics (e.g. Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus). And the *Logos* plays a strong role in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (Hays, 2002).

²Leibniz defines possibility in terms of consistency. He quotes Bayle as offering the maxim that “All that which implies contradiction is impossible, and all that which implies no contradiction is possible” (*Theodicy*, sec. 173). He then says “I will only add that what has just been indicated as a maxim is in fact the definition of the possible and the impossible” (*Theodicy*, sec. 174).

³Following Moravec (1988), there is an inference from Biblical Christianity to simulationism. If Biblical Christianity were true, the best explanation for that truth would be that we are living in a computer simulation. For Biblical Christians, the way the universe appears is false. The universe appears to be billions of years old; really, it is only a few thousand years old. Life appears to have evolved; really, life emerges through intelligent design. If we were living in a simulation, those claims could be true. The simulators would have miraculous powers relative to us. The simulators might send messengers into the simulation. They might even send a messiah. If we were living in a simulation, then miracles, prophets, revelations, and the incarnation could be true.

⁴For Dawkins, science (not religion) explains the origin and development of physical reality itself. Dawkins says that there must be a first cause (GD 184). But the first cause is purely simple and is not God (GD 184). He says “The first cause that we seek must have been the simple basis for a self-bootstrapping crane which eventually raised the world as we know it into its present complex existence.” (GD 185).

⁵Here are a few cases in which Yahweh directly participates in mass murder: the flood of Noah (Genesis 5-6); the massacre of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19); the massacre of the first-born of Egypt (Exodus 7, 12); the massacre of the 42 little children (2 Kings 2:23-24); Yahweh helps Asa slaughter the Cushites (2 Chronicles 14). Of special note: Yahweh himself kills the fleeing Amorites by throwing stones down from heaven onto them (Joshua 10:11). Here are a few cases in which Yahweh commands his followers to perform mass murder: the murder of the Canaanite cities (Numbers 21:1-3); the murder of the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-31; Deuteronomy 2:24-35); the murder of the Bashanites (Numbers 21:32-35); the murder of the Midianites (Numbers 25:16-17; Numbers 31:1-18); the murder of the seven nations (Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 20-24; Deuteronomy 20:16-17); the murder of the city of Jericho (Joshua 6); the murder of the city of Ai (Joshua 8:1-29); the murder of many cities (Joshua 10, 11). These cases are selected because they almost all involve total destruction: men, women, and children are murdered. They involve infanticide. They involve total holocaust. They are stories of genocide.

⁶The *Logos* is divine, sacred, holy. The Stoics frequently affirmed the divinity of the *Logos*. For instance, Aurelius writes: “Everything is interwoven, and the web is holy; none of its parts are unconnected. They are composed harmoniously, and together they

compose the world. One world, made up of all things. One divinity, present in them all. One substance and one law – the *logos* that all rational beings share.” (*Meditations* 7.9)

⁷Dawkins appears to have the reverence of a platonic atheist. Since Dawkins has an ecstatic appreciation for nature, he often hears himself “described as a deeply religious man” (GD 33). Dawkins gives quotes from Einstein and Sagan that suggest that they revere the Law (GD 36, 39, 40-41). But such reverence is platonic atheism.

⁸One sometimes hears this sort of declaration from atheists: if atheism is a religion, then not playing baseball is a sport. Such declarations are naïve.

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