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INTRODUCTION

Michael J. Murray

In the early 1990's the Society of Christian Philosophers (SCP) began a substantial endeavor to engage in dialogue with scholars in non-English language countries on topics at the intersections of philosophy and religious belief. The two most successful of these endeavors have focused on China and Russia. The ongoing relationship with scholars and institutions of higher learning in Russia began with two conferences, in 1993 and 1997, held in St. Petersburg and organized by Dr. Melville Stewart. Each of the two conferences included approximately sixteen presenters, with equal representation of Anglo-American and Russia scholars. The Anglo-American scholars were largely SCP members while Russian scholars were selected and invited by the host institution, the Higher School of Religion and Philosophy at St Petersburg. The first meeting of these conferences was funded by the International Institute of Christian Studies. The second was funded by the Baptist General Conference.

There were a substantial number of interested students and scholars from many parts of the former Soviet Union in attendance at both conferences and each resulted in significant advances in understanding between scholars from these cultures.

As a result of these successes, the Society of Christian Philosophers established a standing committee to continue to foster this relationship and these significant cross cultural exchanges. This initiative led to an important conference in 2001, on the topic of the Trinity, which was graciously co-sponsored by the Theological Commission of the Russian Orthodox Church. The meeting opened with a message of welcome from Patriarch Alexii II, the head of the Church. Presiding over the conference was the Chair of the Commission, Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk.

Through 2001, all of the SCP-Russia conferences had been held in Russia. However, in 2003, the SCP, in conjunction with the Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame, and with the sponsorship of the Templeton Foundation, the Societies of St. Sergius and St. Albans, and the Paul and Dawn Sjolund Foundation was proud to host a delegation of Russian scholars for a three day conference at the University of Notre Dame on the topic of the intersections between theology and physical cosmology.

As in the past, the aim of the 2003 conference was to provide a forum for cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural discussions on a topic of central importance at the intersection of philosophy and religious thought. This particular conference brought together six Russian scholars, led by Metropolitan



Filaret of Minsk, and nine Anglo-American scholars, including theologians, philosophers, and scientists, to discuss a variety of issues in science and religion, with a specific focus on the connections between religion and cosmology. This volume contains the proceedings of that conference.

The Conference

The conference was held from January 31 through February 2 at McKenna Hall on the Notre Dame campus. This gathering of scholars reaffirmed the fact that mutual interchange between the disciplines of contemporary cosmology and Christian philosophy can be fruitful. The conference papers focused on a variety of issues from the apparent fine-tuning of the universe, to the relation of God and time, to the interpretation of Genesis and contemporary cosmology. On the issue of cosmic fine-tuning, it is clear that the conference advanced the issue beyond what might be seen as a current impasse. So far as using the facts of physical cosmology as a way of arguing for intelligent design is concerned, both the problems that must be faced and the prospects for success were clarified.

There were fifteen sessions in all, and attendance for them in McKenna Hall varied between a low of some fifty and a high of one hundred thirty (excluding participants). Several scientists from different universities were in the audience, along with many philosophers. Indeed, twelve or thirteen eminent American philosophers of religion were in attendance. There were also students, both graduates and undergraduates, from Notre Dame, Calvin College, Wheaton College, Taylor University, and other institutions.

As in past conferences, participants were heavily dependent on translators. However, translation issues intruded less than at previous SCP-Russia conferences. This was undoubtedly due to the substantial expertise of our translators, Yuri Balashov and Nataliya Pukha, both of whom are Russian natives living in the United States and who have Ph.D. degrees in philosophy and religious studies, respectively. (Indeed, Balashov teaches philosophy at the University of Georgia).

The SCP and the members of the Russia Committee would like to express their sincere gratitude to the sponsors of the conference: The John Templeton Foundation, The Notre Dame Center for Philosophy of Religion, The Society of St. Sergius and St. Albans, and the Paul and Dawn Sjolund Foundation. In addition, thanks are due to Ashton Sperry and Samuel Murray for assistance in the editing of the proceedings and to Ali Oduncu for his tireless work during the conference itself. Finally, special recognition is due to the Russia Committee of the SCP which organized the event. Members of that Committee are Richard Swinburne, Melville Stewart, Stephen T. Davis, and Michael Murray.¹

The Present Volume

Of the fifteen papers presented at the conference, thirteen are represented here. In addition, one set of comments offered at the conference has been included.

As noted above, the topics of the conference papers ranged widely over

the general issues of theology and physical cosmology. The first essay here, "God and Physical Cosmology" by Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk, sets out various ways in which naturalism provides a grossly incomplete picture of the cosmos and of the place of human beings in that cosmos. At the level of cosmology this inadequacy becomes evident since naturalism fails to see the universe as something which is created and which results from the free choice of the creator. But there are further issues as well, Metropolitan Filaret argues. For example, the naturalist scientist fails to grasp important notions such as the fact that the universe is made, in part, for its human inhabitants, that the laws which govern the cosmos are contingent on the divine will, and that decay in the universe must be understood as something more than, for example, entropy.

In "Cosmology of the Cappadocian Fathers: A Contribution to Dialogue between Science and Theology Today," Professor Shmaliy looks at the development of theology in the early church as it sought to construct a distinctively Christian understanding of the cosmos. The Christian conception of cosmos was in many respects radically discontinuous with extant philosophical trends. On the Christian view, the cosmos was created *ex nihilo*, by a contingent act of divine will, for the purpose of creating persons in the divine image, in a cosmic framework that facilitated interpersonal relations between God and creatures. Professor Shmaliy argues that this notion of the cosmos as deeply infused with the personal grew naturally out of the theological reflection of the Cappadocian fathers who focused specifically on the personal nature of God and the Trinity. This conception of the cosmos as personal developed from distinctively theological roots, quite independently of the cosmology of the day. As a result, he argues, it stands to provide us with a fruitful starting point for theologically sensitive reflection on the nature of the cosmos, in stark contrast to the naturalism which pervades contemporary cosmology.

The next three essays claim that some recent discoveries in physics and cosmology show that the current scientific picture of the world coheres remarkably well with the Biblical picture of cosmos. William Lane Craig argues, in "Divine Eternity and the General Theory of Relativity," that despite the claimed denial of absolute simultaneity entailed by relativity, there is room for the notion of absolute, cosmic time which represents both real time for the universe as well as divine time. In addition, in "Physical Cosmology in Relative Units" Professor Pervushin provides a two part argument that the evidence of contemporary cosmology is consistent with, and even suggestive of, an account of creation akin to the one endorsed in typical Western theism. He first begins by noting the fact that cosmologists utilize two different measurement standards depending on which class of cosmological problems they address. One standard regards the fundamental physical metrics as absolute, the other regards them as relative. Pervushin argues first that the relative measure should be given physical priority. He then goes on to claim that once we adopt a description of the cosmos cast in relative physical units, the evidence for divine activity is even more powerful, and on two fronts. First, the underlying symmetries present in the relative or conformal cosmologies are striking in a way that seems inexplicable absent a cosmic designer. In addition, all competing naturalist theories

ignore the deep conceptual issues raised concerning the origin both of space-time and the matter the universe contains. Finally, in "Cosmological Contingency and Theistic Explanation," Philip Quinn takes up a variety of issues surrounding the legitimacy of questions which concern the explanation both of the existence of the universe and of its nomological structure. The essay is inspired by some work by Adolf Grünbaum in which Grünbaum argues that questions of this sort illicitly rely on mere pseudo-problems. Quinn argues, on the contrary, that these sorts of questions do not differ in kind from other explanation-seeking contrastive questions we ordinarily encounter. To demonstrate this, Quinn commends a strategy whereby we think of these questions in terms of questions concerning why a particular possible world is actual as opposed to some other possible world. In this way, the similarity between cosmological contrastive questions and ordinary ones becomes evident.

Seven of the essays treat issues centering largely on the apparent fine-tuning of the universe. This set of seven begins with a programmatic essay by Ernan McMullin. McMullin reviews the origins of the fine-tuning discussion dating back to the discovery of the flatness of the universe by Collins and Hawking. Rather than arguing for one conclusion on the issue, McMullin shows that there are four broad categories of available options. We must conclude that the apparent fine tuning is ultimately explained either by appeal to chance, design, the existence of many universes, or some underlying factor which unifies the apparently disparate facts constituting the apparently fine tuned arrangement.

The next two essays are authored by American cosmologists who argue against theism as an explanation for the cosmological data. The first essay by Joel Primack provides a broad overview of the relationship between religion and cosmological reflection from ancient Greece to the present. Primack defends the common but controversial claim that since the Enlightenment, scientific cosmological accounts gained autonomy from religious cosmological myths. After providing a brief description of the state of contemporary scientific cosmology, Primack explains that such views can, like religious myths, still provide us with controlling metaphors for thinking about human beings and their collective fate. For example, he claims, reflection on cosmic inflation can lead human beings to consider how our global civilization must transition from our current trajectory of inflating consumption to a sustainable level of resource use.

Sean Carroll continues in a manner congenial to Primack's position by arguing that the materialist or naturalist conception of the cosmos is simpler than the theistic picture since theism adds an additional entity, namely, God. In light of this, he claims, only two things could lead us to favor the more complex theistic picture. The first would be the discovery of some feature of the world which could not possibly be explained in terms of natural facts, as emphasized in God-of-the-gap style arguments. The second would be a discovery that the universe turns out in fact to be explained more simply by postulating the existence of God, as, for example, design arguments have typically held. Carroll claims that, with respect to the first, we simply do not know of any phenomenon which we can say with confidence cannot be explained by appeal to natural facts. With respect to the second, Carroll

considers the argument from fine tuning as an example. However, he argues that we simply do not know enough about what the universe would be like were the fundamental parameters to be different, nor do we know what conditions are necessary in order for intelligent life to exist. Further, there are facts about the universe that seem at odds with the claim that the universe is intelligently designed, such as its utter spatial vastness.

At the conference, Peter van Inwagen provided comments on Carroll's paper and those comments are included here. Van Inwagen takes issues with Carroll's argument, claiming that even if we were to grant Carroll's major claims, the most we could conclude is that we should be agnostic about whether the universe has a supernatural creator/designer. But what's worse, he argues, is that Carroll relies on an epistemological premise we should reject in principle, and do reject in practice, something like: "Don't believe in anything not present to the senses unless it's required by the most compact and elegant and effective theories of the physical world; visible and tangible things aside, believe only in what figures in the best scientific theories (unless the best scientific theories reveal themselves as in some significant way incomplete, in which case it may be permissible to believe in certain things that don't figure in them but whose postulation somehow mitigates that incompleteness)."

The next three papers in this series offer arguments favorable towards theism. In the first, Richard Swinburne provides us with another look at the alternative explanations for the fine tuning of the cosmos. Most of the essay focuses on comparing theism with single universe naturalism as competing explanations for fine tuning. Swinburne argues that such large scale "Theories of Everything" have no contingent prior background information which would allow us to assess their relative probabilities. As a result, we are forced to rely on *a priori* considerations alone, specifically, scope and simplicity. Since the views have equal scope, considerations of simplicity are thus of central importance. Swinburne then argues, in direct contrast to Carroll, that theism, postulating a single, infinitely knowledgeable and powerful person as the cause of the universe, is vastly simpler than any naturalistic explanation which must postulate the various laws and constants necessary for humanoid life as brute facts.

In "The Many-Worlds Hypothesis as an Explanation of Cosmic Fine-tuning: An Alternative to Design?" Robin Collins considers a common rejoinder to the argument from fine-tuning, noted by both Primack and Carroll. On this rejoinder, if there are a very large number of universes with varying physical parameters, the surprisingness of fine-tuning at one universe proportionately diminishes. Advocates of this "many-universe" objection have proposed two types of multiple universes as possibilities here: physical and metaphysical, and Collins considers each. Physical types are those that postulate a physical process to bring the multiple universes into existence. Collins argues that these many-universe scenarios fail to undermine design since a multiple universe generator would also have to be fine-tuned in important respects. Metaphysical multiple world generators, which do not require a serial process of universe creation, encounter other difficulties. First, it seems that postulating metaphysical many-universes violates the principle that our explanations should, all other things being equal, seek to invoke only entities

which are observable or which are natural extensions of the causal powers of things we know or experience. Second, Collins provides an ingenious argument that it is highly unlikely, if this scenario were correct, that we would be observing a universe that is uniformly non-chaotic, since most life-sustaining universes would not be. This provides us with good reason for thinking that there are not in fact other actually existing universes.

In the final paper in this group, Del Ratzsch argues that the attempt to defeat the fine-tuning inference to design by appeal to the existence of many universes is a strategy that faces some crucial difficulties. He notes that many-universe advocates adopt what Ratzsch calls a "saturation" approach to explain fine-tuning. Since the many-universes saturate all of the state spaces that possible universes could occupy, there is nothing about fine-tuning in *our* universe that demands a designer. Ratzsch claims that these appeals to saturation (a) do not immediately undercut appeals to design, and (b) certainly are not inconsistent with the possibility of design. The former is true for a variety of reasons. For example, the existence of many universes seems to require appeal to a universe generating mechanism which may itself require fine tuning, as Collins points out in his essay. The latter is true since intelligent agents often use saturation strategies to achieve their aims. Perhaps, he claims, a cosmic designer has done so as a means to universe design as well.

The final two papers focus on the connections between cosmology and the Christian interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis. In "The Six Days of Creation: Some Disregarded Dimensions," Professor Shokhin argues that attempts by some Protestant thinkers, as well as certain Orthodox thinkers who have followed their lead, to defend a reading of Genesis 1 and 2 as literal cosmological history fail in two respects. First, their accounts are grossly incompatible with contemporary science, and second, their hermeneutical principles are flawed. Following the lead of certain Orthodox thinkers, most notably Saint Filaret, Shokhin offers an interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis as a mythical redescription of the story of Christian redemption. On this view, the days of creation refer not to twenty-four hour periods of time nor to geologic epochs. Rather they refer to various stages of man's alienation from and reconciliation with God.

Finally, in "The Place of God in Modern Cosmology," Professor Shimbalev argues that recent attempts to verify the truth of Scripture by appeal to cosmology misunderstand the practices of both science and hermeneutics. Instead, he claims, we should view the early chapters of Genesis as largely allegorical. Nonetheless, we can find in Scripture certain general affirmations about the nature of the universe. Those affirmations consist of at least the following: creation *ex nihilo*, that creation constitutes the beginning of time, that the creation is perfect and harmonious, that the aim of creation is made manifest in the incarnation of Christ, and that God continually participates in the life of his creation.

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NOTES

1. Thanks to Stephen T. Davis for providing this summary of the conference.