

# Heroical Apatheism: Mala Fide Bootstrapping Obligations

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**Abstract:** Discussions regarding hypothetical gods' virtually always focuses on their existence or nonexistence. These, however, are only the secondary questions. Heroical apatheism distinguishes these questions from the question about the gods' relevancy, which is the primary question. It is a deeply ingrained assumption, that if the gods' have created the universe and humankind, then this also implicitly entails the obligations that the gods' must be worshipped and obeyed. These relations between existence and acts and worship and obedience to the gods are so commonplace, that virtually no one questions whether they exist at all. The gods' rights are simply assumed at face value. However, the issue regarding these necessary relations are in no way trivial. In this article these relations will be illuminated through first formulating two cosmological models for the initial condition of the universe, and thereafter apply these in analyses of the claims regarding these relations. By doing so it is shown, that the justifications for these obligations always ends in a Münchhausen bootstrapping circularity or is ad hoc. There cannot be demonstrated any necessary relations between existence and worship, between acts of creation and obedience. Furthermore, these assumptions rest on an overlooked point. Arguing for or against obligations to the gods' assumes implicitly, that these gods' have a right to obligations to begin with. However, all that can be shown is power to enforce obedience. Thus, heroical apatheism is neither founded on doubt, nor on disobedience, because disobedience implies an authority, and an authority's right presupposes, that there is such a right. However, there is no such right, and we no longer equate might with right.

**Keywords:** gods', obligations, cosmology, astrobiology.

## Introduction

Natural science no longer concern itself with hypothetical gods' as explanations in its models, theories and actions. Instead it has handed over gods' entirely to the scientific discipline, Comparative religion<sup>1</sup>. Most of the disciplines of philosophy likewise no longer concern themselves with gods' and religions, and have mainly left it to the discipline philosophy of religion. However, the question of the gods' is nevertheless one, that continually reappears. As a matter of fact, hardly anyone move through life without being confronted with such questions. Hence regardless of one's personal point of view, the question of the gods' has had, and have, a profound importance and influence on the cultural and political direction of humankind.

Throughout most of humankind's recorded history many political laws and ethical dictates has been based on, what gods' is postulated to have said and wanted. To this very day there is still many countries around the world who's lawmaking enforces humans, regardless of their personal point of view, to give respect or submission to the gods' [von Hegner, 2016]. Hence, the concept of gods', irrespective of their existence or nonexistence, is important to discuss.

Before we continue, it is necessary to clarify, that historically, many abilities, actions and attitudes have been attributed to the gods', and there is no consensus regarding what godhood entails or what attributes gods' possess [Bullivant and Ruse, 2013]. Accordingly, there is no generic definition of the gods' which can claim to put a commitment on all religions. With this in mind and since it is a well-known fact in Comparative religion, that there are thousands of religions and gods' (the only empirical facts we have in this entire

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<sup>1</sup> The German term: Religionswissenschaft, or the Danish ditto: Religionsvidenskab, would be more adequate, since these clearly states that they are the scientific study of religions.

discussion), then let us for gods' sake use these facts. In my referral, I will henceforth consequently use plural and say gods'.

Throughout the course of history these questions have mainly been discussed between polytheists/theists, atheists and agnostics. However, this is regrettable, because there is obviously more in this matter than just the existence questions, which is the main focus in this article. For hypothetical gods' existence or nonexistence leads to more than just scientific or philosophical inquiries into this question. It also leads to questions regarding their importance or nonimportance. Hence, one further position next to polytheism/theism, atheism and agnosticism exist, namely apatheism.

A lack of interest in the existence of the gods' most likely has a long history. Thus wrote Diderot in response to Voltaire: "It is very important not to mistake hemlock for parsley; but not at all so to believe or not in God" [Herrick, 1985]. The term apatheism, a combination of two words: "apathy" and "theism" or "apathy and "atheism" is a relatively new term, seemingly first appearing in printing in 2003 [Rauch, 2003]. The term holds different definitions. Rauch defines it as: "a disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion, and an even stronger disinclination to care about other people's. Apatheism concerns not what you believe but how" [Rauch, 2003]. Budimir defines apatheism as: "the distancing from a passionate embrace of the religious. It is the default position taken by the bourgeois man of the world who doesn't necessarily deny the existence of a god but does not see how one could play any significant role in his life" [Budimir, 2008]. Hedberg and Huzarevich defines apatheism as: "an attitude of apathy or indifference to existence questions rooted in the belief that their answers lack practical significance" [Hedberg and Huzarevich, 2016].

And finally, there is heroic apatheism: where one is apathetic regarding hypothetical gods' due to the fact, that no adequate justifications, ontological, epistemological or existential, can be put forward for their rights towards humankind; where one is heroic regarding hypothetical gods' due to the fact, that their rights, normative or politically, do not obtain a preeminence next to the rights of humankind [von Hegner, 2016].

The first two definitions appear to draw their foundation in a normative justification, while the third appear to draw its foundation in a practical or epistemological way. The last definition takes its foundation in an ontological and epistemological way, and by doing so have a normative importance.

Hypothetical gods' existence or nonexistence is thus not all in question. Because it is commonly assumed, that the gods' have certain rights in comparison to humankind, and that humankind have certain obligations toward the gods'. Thus, it is implicit assumed, that there is a necessary relation between gods' attributes and worship of gods', or a necessary relation between the gods' supposed act of creation and obedience of gods'. Thus, worship and obedience is apparently virtues, and not for filling these is apparently vices. To quote Søren Kierkegaard: "the misfortune of our age – in the political as well as in the religious sphere, and in all things – is disobedience, unwillingness to obey." Its cause is not "doubt...but insubordination," which can assume two forms: "wishing to cast down the ruler [or authority] or wishing to be the ruler [or authority]" [Kierkegaard, 1995].

These assumptions regarding the gods' right to obedience is simply taken to be obvious. But is there such a right, such an obligation? What are these relations based on? Of course, Kierkegaard was incorrect. That we only deal with two forms is obviously not true. Other forms exist such as wishing freedom, wishing dignity, wishing justifications etc. As Kierkegaard wrote: "The question is really quite simple, however: Will you obey? Or will you not obey? Will you bow in faith before divine authority? Or will you be offended?" [Kierkegaard, 1995]. This of course begs even simpler questions: Why obey? Why bow for divine authority? A sentient being bowing for another sentient being, is this not offensive? Should it not be offensive?

It is not obvious that any of the supposed obligations to hypothetical gods' can be inferred from the mere existence of gods' without first accepting a number of assumptions. Further, this talk about obligations overlooks a simple, but overlooked primary point. Arguing for the gods' assumes implicit, that these gods' have a right to demand obligations to begin with, and this stated, but unjustified assumption make the claims about obligations exceedingly problematic. These questions of why and how humankind should have

obligations toward the gods' are virtually never asked, and that will be the goal in this article. I will deposit, that there are no such necessary relations between the gods' existence or acts and humankind's obligations towards them.

### **Cosmological models and relations**

Heroical apatheism shall not be understood as a sceptical position in a manner similar to that of atheism or agnosticism that question the existence of the gods' or what we can know about the gods'. Heroical apatheism is not founded on disobedience either, because disobedience necessarily imply an authority. As previously stated, there is more in this matter than just the discussion of the gods' existence or nonexistence.

As stated by one author: "For a theist, a man's duty is to conform to the announced will of God [Swinburne, 1974]. As stated by another author: "God is worthy of unreserved praise, admiration, and worship" [Rowe, 2005]. And as stated by yet an author: "Part of what it means to call something God is that it is an appropriate object of total devotion and unconditional commitment" [Wainwright, 2013].

The first statement justifies this well-known duty thus, that the gods' created human beings and the world: "and, not being known to have ceded ownership of it, is properly adjudged its owner" [Swinburne, 1974]. The second statement justifies unreserved worship thus, that a god: "is a person who is eternal, all powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), and perfectly good" [Rowe, 2005]. The third statement justifies this with that a god: "is more noble and more perfect than anything else besides him" [Wainwright, 2013]. These conjectures can more stringently be formulated as:

- i) There is a necessary relation between a gods' attributes, and worship of a god.
- ii) There is a necessary relation between a gods' existence, and worship of a god.
- iii) There is a necessary relation between a gods' act of creation, and obedience of a god.
- iv) There is a necessary relation between a gods' power and obedience of a god.

These relations have virtually always been assumed in discussions throughout history. The gods' right to worship and obedience are simply taken at face value. As stated by one author: "The question Why should I be moral? is not obviously a trivial question, whereas Why should I care about offending God? is foolish to anyone who understands the context in which such a question would be asked" [Zagzebski, 2005].

However, there is no such thing as foolish questions in philosophy. And no attempt is being made to explain why it is just foolish instead of being a non-trivial question to offending a god. That no attempts are made might be, that these questions are never being asked to begin with. This conjecture is simply taken to be obvious. The concept authority is ambiguous, possessing both a descriptive and a normative meaning. But to possess godhood appears to all to entail an authority, that they should be worshipped and be obeyed. The claims of such relations are so deeply ingrained in philosophy of religion, that virtually no one appears to put them into doubt. The gods' attributes is simply listed, and then it is claimed ad hoc, that humankind have obligations toward the gods'. But do they have such a right? What are these relations founded on?

That ought statements can't be validly deduced from is statements have long been a part of the philosopher's toolbox. The inference from "a god is worthy of admiration" to "everyone ought to admire that god" do not place humankind under any obligation at all. If an ought can't be validly deduced from an is then the gods' commands or wills humankind does not entail humankind is obligatory toward them. Thus, the questions regarding these relations are in no way trivial. It is not even a conscious neglect not asking about them. These assumptions have existed so long, that virtually no one pause to consider their validity and soundness. In the following will these relations by illuminated by the formulation of two cosmological models, which thereafter will be applied in analyses of the claims about these relations.

*Cosmological model 1.* All available data points to, that approximately 13.8 billion years ago, the cosmos was tightly packed into a small, but immensely dense point — a singularity [Planck Collaboration, 2015]. And

from this everything eventually hurdled into existence. Roger Penrose has proposed a twist on this, namely the hypothesis of Aeons, where the Big Bang was not the beginning but was instead only one in a sequence of cyclical Big Bangs. The history of this universe is thus only one Aeon in an infinite sequence of similar Aeons each of which begins a new page in the great book of the cosmos. Thus, this universe is not the first, nor will it be the last [Penrose, 2006]. There exist several beautiful scientific models for the universe, but that's not what's important here. Let us for the sake of argument assume, that Penrose's model of the universe is the correct one.

It supplies an explanation as to why and how a low entropy state existed at the start of this universe. The cosmic events were in motion before the Big Bang even occurred, and the universe has, and will again return to a similar state it was in at the Big Bang. The sequence of Aeons is infinite with no need for an origin. This dense mass of highly-ordered-everything there again and again spawn into a vast and magnificent universe is everything that is, was, and ever will be. The beginning on the present Aeon has led to the abiogenesis of life, to the evolution of humankind. Thus, an Aeon is so to speak the highest good.

However, despite all this even the most dedicated cosmologists and astrobiologists will properly not worship this new Aeon. There appears to be consensus that an obligation to worship or obedience cannot be inferred as a necessary part of the initiation of the Big Bang. It hardly requires any scientific or philosophical inclinations to see, why this is the case. It does not seem to follow that there is a necessary relation between a new Aeons existence, and worship of a new Aeon. It does not seem to follow either, that there is a necessary relation between a new Aeons attributes, and obedience of a new Aeon.

*Cosmological model 2.* All available data points to, that approximately 13.8 billion years ago, the cosmos was tightly packed into a small, but immensely dense point — a singularity [Planck Collaboration, 2015]. And from this everything eventually hurdled into existence. Many followers of the gods' believe in a twist on this, namely that this wasn't the first in existence, but was initiated by something preexisting, namely eternal gods'. The knowledge that the universe began to exist appeared to confirm or lend plausible support to the religious doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* [Smith, 1991]. That gods' have created the universe is a common belief in many religions, and the Big Bang cosmology has been relatively easy to incorporate. Hence, the notion that a god initiated the Big Bang has taken a hold on popular opinion and become a meme in the polythetic/theistic educated world view. Of course, not all followers of the gods' agree with this mixture of Big Bang cosmology with their specific gods'. And even among those that does is there a plurality of opinions. But that is not the important issue here. Let us just for arguments sake use the Big Bang as the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

It is unclear what is meant by possessing godhood. But for simplicity's sake we will here just follow the claim, that a god is: "an omnipotent, omniscient, goodness that is the creative ground of everything other than itself" [Wainwright, 2013]. The beginning of this universe is the beginning of everything there is, the emergence of life, of humankind. This leads the followers of the gods' to worship the preexisting cause of the Big Bang. There appears to be consensus that an obligation to worship or obedience can be inferred as a necessary part of the initiation of the Big Bang. It seems now to follow, that there is a necessary relation between the gods' existence, and worship of gods'. It seems now to follow that there is a necessary relation between the gods' attributes, and obedience of the gods'.

### **The hypothetical relation between perfection and worship**

As mentioned in the previous section, it is claimed that a hypothetical god is "more noble and more perfect than anything else besides him." Thus, humankind have an obligation to be totally devoted and unconditionally committed to that god [Wainwright, 2013]. This is supported by the claims, that a god is: "a person who is eternal, all powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), and perfectly good" [Rowe, 2005]. This greatness leads to that a god is: "worthy of unreserved praise, admiration, and worship" [Rowe, 2005]. Of course, these claims are blatantly not true. They are doctrines within some traditions within some religions, but is not valid for concepts about gods' in general. Plenty of gods' past and present do not for fill these claims and are still gods' [Saunders and Allen, 2015].

But for the sake of argument we will here go along with certain doctrines and say, that worship of a god is appropriate for the following reasons. First, a god is humankind's ultimate benefactor on whom humankind are dependent. Second, a god is greatness. By virtue of a gods' greatness and of humankind's dependence on this god and this gods' benefaction, humankind thus owe the god worship.

However, firstly, to worship something simply because it is greater than one self is not only an insufficient argument. It is furthermore not something noble either. To quote Bertrand Russell: "The slave is doomed to worship time and fate and death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour" [Russell, 1988]. Secondly, this argumentation can equally well be applied to the first cosmological model as well. We could say, that worship of an Aeon (or just the universe for simplicity's sake) is appropriate for the following reasons. First, the universe is the ultimate benefactor on whom humankind are dependent, and second, the universe is greatness. Thus, we could take the proper basis of worship to be the universes greatness and its beneficence to humankind, and humankinds dependence on it.

However, most polytheists/theists, atheists and agnostics alike, will properly not agree, that there is a necessary relation between the fact, that we depend on the universe and the universe possess greatness, and to that the universe must be worshipped by humankind. But why not? An Aeon is the existing period from a Big Bang to infinite expansion. The disappearance of the previous Aeon becomes the highly ordered Big Bang state of the next Aeon cycle. The sequence of Aeons is eternally existing. The current cycle has led to the abiogenesis of life and evolution of humankind. Hence, there should be a necessary relation between an Aeon and worship. However, this seems to be insufficient as justifications.

But then it follows, that greatness or dependence is inadequate. They are not the primary reasons to worship. One can admire the universe or the gods', or one can refrain from doing so. There is no necessary relation between the universe or the gods' beneficence or greatness, and worship of these. In both cosmological models, it is the case, that the Aeons or the gods' simply are. They have always been there, and will always be there. But no justifications regarding humankind owing worship to these can be derived from this. Claiming otherwise is ad hoc.

Furthermore, to worship something simply because its existence is a brute fact begs the question. There is something inherently unappealing about the demand that one should worship something that just happens to exist. Hence to take the worship of such an existence to be appropriate seems philosophically irresponsible. Something more is needed in the equation.

Some followers of the gods' might respond, that a god is not worshipped merely because the god exists or possess greatness compared to humankind, and humankind are dependent on that god. These followers conceive of a god as not only great, nor only good or perfect, but as goodness or perfection itself. Thus, to worship a god is simultaneously to worship goodness or perfection itself [Kretzmann, 1999]. Worship of a god, viewed this way, is then justified on other grounds than dependence and existence.

However, such a response can equally well be applied in the first cosmological model. The universe is not worshipped merely because it is greater than humankind and humankind are dependent on it. Hence, we could conceive of the universe as not merely existing, but as existence itself. The universe is everything there is, was and ever will be, the highest good so to speak, existence as the most perfectly imaginable.<sup>2</sup> Thus, to worship the universe is simultaneously to worship goodness or perfection itself. Worship of the universe, viewed this way, would then be justified on other grounds than dependence and greatness.

Of course, some might object, that goodness or perfection themselves is not attractive objects of worship because they are impersonal abstractions. However, some followers of the gods' do not take goodness or perfection themselves in the sense that serves as a description of the gods', to be merely impersonal abstractions, but the gods' are goodness or perfection themselves and also conveniently the ground of all existence and also someone that influence their followers personally [Kretzmann and Stump, 1988]. However,

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<sup>2</sup> It can be discussed, whether this universe is perfection. But it is all there is and will be. If perfection is not simply an empty phrase, then surely it can be applied on the universe?

this could once again be applied to the first model. Thus, one could perceive the universes existence as goodness or perfection itself and also the ground of all being and also something that influence humankind through the laws of nature.

However, most polytheists/theists, atheists and agnostics alike, will properly not agree, that there is a necessary relation between the claim, that the universes existence is goodness or perfection, and to the demand that the universe should be worshipped by humankind. We have respect for the forces of nature, respect for the awesomeness that is the universe, but we do not worship it. To state the perfectly obvious, goodness or perfection in itself do not demand anything. They simply are. There are no relations in them at all. Thus, in both models it is the case, that goodness or perfection is insufficient as justifications. They are not the primary reasons for worship. One can admire goodness or perfection, or one can refrain from doing so.

Of course, the followers of the gods' in the second cosmological model could be stubborn and insist, that making comparisons between the two models is insufficient, even when they give the same results. In their view, the existence of gods' as a brute fact is not a *non sequitur* as an object of worship. In their view the worship of such an existence is obligatory somehow. In the second model, where the universe was initiated by preexisting gods', the situation is apparently a different one than in the first model. Here, the beginning of the universe, the gods', can apparently demand worship. But how to justify the existence of a necessary relation between the existence of gods' and worship of gods'? Let us utilize a more rigorous procedure. Some might say humankind's obligation to the gods' emerge from the gods' perfection. But this presupposes some kind of independent standard obligating humankind to perfection. What can that standard be? Something more is needed:

A1. Is the Reason compelling to worship a god this, 'a god is perfection? Then what Reason compels to worship of perfection?

A2. Is the Reason compelling to worship of perfection this, 'perfection is a god? Then what Reason compels to worship a god?

This obviously becomes a circular argument. It is empty and tells us nothing. Then let us inspired of the cosmological models try it differently:

B1. Is the Reason compelling to worship a god this, "a god has initiated the act of creation? Then what Reason compels to worship the act of creation?

B2. Is the Reason compelling to worship the act of creation this, 'the act of creation is a conscious act?' Then what Reason compels to worship a conscious act?

B3. Is the Reason compelling to worship a conscious act this, 'a conscious act is the first cause?' Then what Reason compels to worship the first cause?

B4. Is the Reason compelling to worship the first cause this, 'the first cause is a god?' Then what Reason compels to worship a god?

This once again do not put us in a better position. We end up in a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario. Furthermore, a first cause will still give the exact same universe as in the first cosmological model. Thus, the gods' cannot make demand on worship simply through a first cause.

As seen so far in the two models, existence and the act of creation is not sufficient conditions for worship. The two models represent different origins, but the same universe. Of course, the followers of the gods' do not accept the first model. But that is not the point here. Many cosmologists and astrobiologists do not accept the second model either. The point is, that in both cases do we have an existing universe and an existing humankind. The existence relation is the same. But only in one model is there a demand on worship. It does not follow that humankind must worship a new Aeon, and it does not follow that humankind must worship the

gods'. Worship is ad hoc. The only difference between the two models is a conscious act, that we will return to in the next section. However, it is not easy to see how this makes a difference and gives necessary relations. We end up in the bootstrapping scenario where the gods', like Münchhausen, who pull himself and the horse he was sitting on out of a mire by his own hair, pull their rights up by their own hair.

But again, the followers of the gods' in the second model could once again insist, that the existence of gods' as a brute fact is not a *non sequitur* as an object of worship. That an obligation to worship of the gods' comes from the gods' themselves is in their opinion appropriate. Hence, one author deposits, that: "It appears to be a conceptual truth that God is unsurpassable .. if it is a conceptual truth that God is unsurpassable, he must be unique. An appeal to unsurpassability isn't really necessary, however, since God's uniqueness follows directly from his being an appropriate object of total devotion and unconditional commitment" [Wainwright, 2013].

However, it is not obvious how a necessary relation emerges here. It is only claimed that: "The obligations are indefeasible .. their indefeasibility appears to be part of the very concept of divine worship; part of what it means to be God is to be such that no other obligation can take precedence over our obligation to be totally devoted and unconditionally committed to him" [Wainwright, 2013]. Firstly, the definition of what it means to call something a god is as discussed blatantly not true [Bullivant and Ruse, 2013]. Secondly, the mere fact that a god is unsurpassable or unique do not *ipso facto* lead to, that there is a necessary relation between unconditional commitment or worship and the property of being unsurpassable. There is a number of ad hoc premises not put forward here, or not realized, that one must first assume. There is no explanation as to why there should necessary obligations her.

Other authors instead appeal to the gods' assigned status as supremely lovable and therefore deserving of worship [Adams, 1973]. However, deserving is not a necessary relation. Being lovable is properly a good thing. But it does not necessitate an obligation.

Must a gods' attributes such as greatness or perfection be worshiped? One could say, that a person is insensitive if he does not worship perfection. Like someone who do not appreciate a great piece of art or a beautiful equation. While this may have a point, it does not change the fact, that there is no necessary relation between worship and being perfect, so to tie obligations to the worship of a perfect god is to tie it to two distinct things. It's ad hoc. Humankind can admire the gods' supposed perfection, or they can refrain from doing so. There is no necessary relation here.

We emerge emptyhanded from all this. The arguments lack any strength. Only by stating, that the gods' directly create the act to worship, creates that humankind worship no matter what, only then will there be a necessary relation between the gods' and worship. However, firstly, in that case there will be no reason to talk about worship. It would not be obligations, because worship was performed by automatons, and the act simply takes place as a clockwork. And secondly, there is evidently many human beings past and present (like this author), that do not worship hypothetical gods'. So evidently there is no enforced worship here.

### **The hypothetical relation between the act of creation and obedience**

Worship of hypothetical gods' is not the only obligation that supposedly is required of humankind. Another perhaps more ancient, well known and widely distributed obligation is obedience toward the gods'. However, this traditional claim regarding the right to command and the correlative obligation to obey the one who issues the command, is not as easy to justify as its proponents appears to believe. Because obedience is not just a question of doing what someone tells us to do. It is a question of doing what someone tells us to do *because* someone tells us to do it. Where does that right to command come from?

Humankind's obligation to conform to the will of the gods' is some places justified as, that since the gods' are the creators of the universe and humankind, then the gods' are also its owners, that is, both everything and everyone are their property [Swinburne, 1974]. This line of thought seems obvious to many. But not so fast. Let us look at the following: "Φ is a slave" means "Φ is an unfree human being." Hence, "Φ is a slave" but "Φ is not an unfree human being" is false per definition; and "if Φ is a slave," "Φ is an unfree human being" and "if Φ is an unfree human being," "Φ is a slave" are tautologies. However, "Φ is property" but "the gods' do

not own  $\Phi$ " is not false per definition; and "if  $\Phi$  is property," "the gods' own  $\Phi$ " and "if the gods' own  $\Phi$ ," " $\Phi$  is property" are not mere tautologies. Hence, " $\Phi$  is property" do contrary to common belief not mean "the gods' own  $\Phi$ ." Thus, being property and being owned by the gods' do not contain the same semantic meaning.

However, despite this a claim of a necessary relation between the gods' act of creation and humankind's obligation to obedience is maintained. Hypothetical gods' have a right to demand obedience, because they can command or will over the universe and the humankind they have created. But how? For why do the gods' commands or will obligate? As already Cudworth pointed out, mere commands do not create obligations unless the commander possess some commanding authority [Cudworth, 1731]. However, this commanding authority cannot itself be founded on those very commands, that is, a command to obey commands, because then a vicious circle would emerge. If humankind already have an obligation to obey a gods' commands, then it is *ipso facto* meaningless for that god to command them to obey it. If humankind do not have an obligation, then the mere fact that a god command humankind to do something places them under no obligation at all.

Hence, the gods' commands or will cannot themselves be the source of humankind's obligation to obey them. So, in order for the gods' commands or will to obligate humankind, they must derive commanding authority from a different source than their own commands or will. So where does a necessary relation between the gods' right to rule and humankind's obligation to obedience come from? Let us rigorously examine whether there is such a relation. A first attempt could be the following:

P1. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward the gods' this, 'the gods' has a right to rule? Then what Reason compels to obedience with a right to rule?

P2. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward a right to rule this, 'a right to rule is dictated by the gods'? Then what Reason compels to obedience toward the gods'?

This is obviously a circular argument. Its empty and says nothing. Some might say humankind's obligation to the gods' comes from the gods' act of creation. But this presupposes some kind of independent standard obligating humankind to the act of creation. What can that standard be? Something more is needed. Hence, let us apply some components from the cosmological models. Then we can attempt the following:

Q1. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward the gods' this, "the gods' has initiated the act of creation? Then what Reason compels to obedience toward the act of creation?

Q2. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward the act of creation this, "the act of creation leads to divine property rights? Then what Reason compels to obedience toward divine property rights?

Q3. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward divine property rights this, "property rights is dictated by the gods'? Then what Reason compels to obedience of the gods'?

This do not provide a more adequate explanation than the previous one. We end up in a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario.

The claim is, that humankind's obligations to obedience toward the gods', is founded in an act of creation, because an act of creation should lead to a property right. But is an act of creation sufficient to a property right? In both cosmological models an act of creation takes place, whose cause is eternal. But in the first model no indication of a property right in relation to a new Aeon exist. In the other model a property right, a obedience to the gods' is claimed to exist. However, both models gives the same scenario, a creation of the universe and the emergence of humankind.

But this must then mean, that contrary to many traditional beliefs, an act of creation alone is not a sufficient condition to demand property rights, to demand obedience. The only difference in the two models is consciousness. Hence, the gods' rights toward humankind is not founded on their act of creation, but on their consciousness.

That the gods' consciousness or will, instead of an act of creation, are the one that gives them a right to obedience, is then apparently a sufficient condition. But not so fast. Let us look at the following: " $\Omega$  is the



universe” means “ $\Omega$  is everything there is.” Hence, “ $\Omega$  is the universe” but “ $\Omega$  isn’t everything there is” is false per definition; and if “ $\Omega$  is the universe,” “ $\Omega$  is everything there is” and if “ $\Omega$  is everything there is,” “ $\Omega$  is the universe” are tautologies. However, “ $\Omega$  is obedient” but “the gods’ consciousness do not wills  $\Omega$ ” is not false per definition; and if “ $\Omega$  is obedient,” “the gods’ consciousness wills  $\Omega$ ” and “if the gods’ consciousness wills  $\Omega$ ,” “ $\Omega$  is obedient” are not mere tautologies. Hence, “ $\Omega$  is obedient” do contrary to common belief not mean “the gods’ consciousness wills  $\Omega$ .” Thus, being obedient or obligatory and being willed by the gods’ consciousness do not contain the same semantic meaning (the same argument can be accomplished with the act of creation alone).

Of course, the followers of the gods’ in the second cosmological model could be stubborn and insists, that making comparisons between two such models are insufficient, even when they give the same results. For these followers, the existence of the gods’ and their consciousness as a brute fact is not a *non sequitur* as an source to obligations. For them can such an existence somehow demand obedience. So there is an implicit claim, that humankind’s obligation to the gods’ emerge from the gods’ consciousness. But this presupposes some kind of independent standard obligating humankind to the gods’ consciousness. What could that standard be? We could attempt the following:

R1. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward the gods’ this, "the gods’ has initiated the act of creation? Then what Reason compels to obedience toward the act of creation?

R2. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward the act of creation this, 'the act of creation is a consciousness act?' Then what Reason compels to obedience toward a consciousness act?

R3. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward a consciousness act this, 'a consciousness act comes from the gods'?' Then what Reason compels to obedience of the gods'?

This do not provide a more adequate explanation. Firstly, we end again in a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario, and secondly, a consciousness act will still give the exact same universe as in the first cosmological model.

Thus, a necessary relation between the gods’ conscious act and humankind’s obligations towards them is not present. A demand on obedience simply through a consciousness act is not obvious. At first sight it is not clear either, how mere consciousness can demand obligations. Could it be, that a higher intelligence can make demand on obligations? To quote Jefferson when asked about the relation between rights and intelligence regarding humans with dark skin pigmentation: “the grade of understanding allotted to them by nature, and to find that in this respect they are on a par with ourselves .. but whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights. Because Sir Isaac Newton was superior to others in understanding, he was not therefore lord of the person or property of others” [Jefferson, 1984]. Of course, this is a relation between human beings, and not between gods’ and humans. But that the gods’ can demand obedience because they are gods’ is of course a circular argument. We end again in the bootstrapping scenario where the gods’, like Münchhausen, who pull himself and the horse he was sitting on out of a mire by his own hair, pull their rights up by their own hair. We emerges emptyhanded. It is not obvious that any of the supposed obligations to hypothetical gods’ can be inferred from the mere existence of gods’, their attributes and act of creation without first accepting a number of assumptions.

An argument commonly encountered is, that if the gods’ commanding or willing  $\Phi$  is the only thing that make  $\Phi$  obligatory, then it is apparently impossible for the gods’ to command or will  $\Phi$  and  $\Phi$  not be obligatory. Hence, being obligatory is identical with being commanded or willed by the gods’. Because, if  $\Phi$  is identical with  $\Psi$ ,  $\Psi$  is  $\Phi$  is a necessary truth [Wainwright, 2005].

While this seems to be a tempting argument, it nevertheless presupposes what it attempts to demonstrate. It is commonly agreed on in philosophy, that causal sufficiency and necessity are distinct from logical sufficiency and necessity. The above argument is not a causal argument, but a logical argument.

However, this gives two clear cut problems. It is stated as a given in the second cosmological model, that the gods' causal activity is not governed by causal laws since the gods' is the architects of these very laws. However, the logical laws must necessarily also have been designed by the gods', since the gods' are the creators of everything. Thus, once again the argument fall in the same trap. It is again implicit presupposed, that the gods' have a right to give themselves rights. In other words, the gods' create the fact, that being obligatory is identical with being commanded or willed by the gods'. Thus, the gods' have a right to be obeyed because they have created a right to be obeyed. And this leads straight back to the Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario.

Thus, only by saying, that the gods' directly create the act to obey, creates the very event that humankind obey no matter what, will a necessary relation exist. This can more conveniently be formulated by the distinction between contingent beings and necessary beings. It is generally agreed that there are two kinds of existent entities: those that exist but could have failed to exist, i.e. is not necessary, and those that could not have failed to exist, i.e. is necessary. The first kind are contingent beings while the second kind are necessary beings [Davidson, 2015]. Whether any of this can said to be valid at all well be up to discussion elsewhere. But let us for the sake of argument follow it here.

Most phenomena appear to exist contingently. Even nature appears to be contingent, the cosmos itself might have evolved in such a way that no galaxies existed at all. Parents have so to speak created their children, these are contingent beings only existing because their parents united the information content in their DNA and brought them into this world. Parents has to take care of their children. But they do not own them. When children reach the legal age, the parents can no longer dictate their actions. But why is there then a kind of property relation between the gods' and humankind? In this case, it is claimed, that even though the parents have created their children, the parents themselves have been created by their parents. So the parents, like the children, are contingent beings.

Throughout history, many followers of the gods' have believed that anything that exists must depend on a god for its existence [Davidson, 2015]. Hence, humankind can according to this line of though follow its origin, step by step, back to the gods', who have created everything, but as necessary beings not themselves depend of anything prior existing. Accordingly, they own humankind, and humankind have an obligation to obey their owner's hypothetical commands. This scenario is essentially the second cosmological model again. And once again this could also be applied to the first cosmological model. We have the same scenario. We could say, that the cosmos in its entirety is contingent. Hence it might have been the case that nothing existed at all.

But the universe does indeed exist, which ultimately can be traced back to the beginning of the universe, to the beginning of the present Aeon. Whether the universes existence is a necessary truth can be discussed, just as the gods' existence as an necessary truth likewise can. Once again it does not seem to follow without making assumptions, that there is a necessary relation between that fact that humankind depend on the universe, and the assumption that the universe is a necessary truth, and to the claim, that the universe must be obeyed or that any obligations exist at all.

But if we for a moment anyway agree with the followers of the gods' in the second model, who insists that there is a difference, and that there are obligations as a consequence of this connection between contingent beings and necessary beings. Then we are dealing with two issues. We have that humankind are created contingent beings, that continuously owe their existence and sustenance to the gods' who is necessary beings. We also have causal necessity and logical necessity.

So we have a connection, where contingent beings in any way depends both causally and logically of necessary beings. Hence, it follows thereof, that the acts of contingent beings with necessity must follow the will of necessary beings. It is not possible for contingent beings to oppose necessary beings will. It is not even possible to have the thought to oppose their will (since this implies, that necessary beings must have willed, that contingent beings oppose their will).

To take an example. One of the commandments hypothetical gods' throughout many different religions is assumed to have given is, that a human being must not slay another human being. There is however sufficient

evidence to demonstrate, that it is in fact possible for a human being to slay another human being. This has happened many times past and present. So since it has happened many times, it follows that an obligation to obey a god not to slay another human being, is not a causally enforced obligation. And since it is possible to do it, then an obligation not to slay another human being is not a logical enforced obligation.<sup>3</sup>

So if an obligation to obey the gods' about not to slay another human being exist, then this obligation cannot be based on a causal or logical necessity. Because the fact that one can disregard that command, and contingent beings can do acts that necessary beings will obligates them not to do, then there *ipso facto* are no causal or logical relation her. But in that case, the attempt to create a necessary relation between contingent beings and necessary beings is thus insufficient. Because if contingent beings are continuously sustained by necessary beings, continuously is controlled by necessary beings, then it follows, that contingent beings cannot disregard any obligations at all. But evidently they can.

Hence, connecting a distinction between contingent beings and necessary beings to a property right, where an obligation to obedience exist, is not valid. Because no obligation can be enforced. This means the gods' act of creation do not lead to a necessary relation to obligations obeying them.

Importantly, by using the assumption about contingent beings and necessary being, it is realized, that one of the main problems about the idea about obligations are, that we have, that there are a number of entities that are considered necessary entities such as relations, propositions, properties, states of affairs, numbers ect. But while for example logical relations seems not to have could failed to exist, obligations are those that could have failed to exist. They do not appear to be necessary entities. Then what could obligations to the gods' be based on?

i) The gods' can enforce humankind to automatically do an act or a thought. This follows necessarily from the whole idea of contingent beings and necessary beings. However, this *ipso facto* undermines the whole idea of obligations, because this would be automatic acts, performed with clockwork precision by automatons. A light bulb is not obedient toward its creator. It simply does what it does. Saying that the light bulb has obligations to obedience would be meaningless. It might be said, that in the first model it is the case, that contingent beings automatically are being enforced to do things through e.g. the laws of nature. There simply are things one can and one cannot do as a consequence of being part of the universe. It might be said, that this is also the case in the other model. However, this is not obligations. That a heart beats is not an obligation. It is an automatic reflex. Thus, in short, there would not be a reason to discuss obligations along this line of thought, no reason to do philosophy. Humankind would be puppets, where every act and thought continuedly was bestowed.

ii) The gods' can threaten humankind to do acts. This follows sufficiently from the whole idea of beings with greater power. However, this *ipso facto* undermines the whole idea of contingent beings and necessary beings. If humankind already automatically follows the gods' will, it is pointless for the gods' to threaten humankind to do anything. Because someone in full control over others do not need to issue the threat, that their commands must be obeyed. However, the mere fact, that the gods' have to threaten or command shows, that they do not possess the full control over humankind.

iii) The gods' could have created a free will, such that humankind can choose to follow or not follow obligations. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between a gods' antecedent and consequent will. This means that a gods' consequent will is this gods' will absolutely considered, while the antecedent will is this gods' will considered with respect to a subset of actual circumstances [Murphy, 2014]. Hence, it should be possible to choose to follow or not follow a gods' commands (usually with consequences of some sort), even when everything depends on a god. However, firstly, free will do not escape the distinction between contingent

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<sup>3</sup> It is not possible to do something, that is not logically possible to do. A hypothetical god can properly change the logical possibility, but then it is this changed possibility one follows, and the overall situation remain unchanged.

beings and necessary beings. And secondly, obligations will still not be mandatory or justified here. And apart from that it is very questionable whether there truly are any free will in this scenario, it still does not answer what is inquired into here. Because this choosing or not choosing to follow obligations presupposes once again implicit, that there is a necessary relation between the gods' and obedience toward the gods'. We go one step further and inquire into the hidden presupposing, that the gods' have a right to obedience. A gods' antecedent and consequent will is irrelevant, since a justification to that will is asked for here.

iv) The gods' are not the only necessary beings. There exist other necessary entities. Hence, logical relations could exist independently of the gods'. There could be a necessary relation if there is an obligation independently of the gods' to obey the gods' commands about say, not to slay a fellow human being. So whenever the gods' give a command that a human being must perform some act, say, not to slay a fellow human being, it follows that a human being is obligated to perform the act. However, firstly, if we follow this approach, then why obey the gods'? Why not go directly to the obligations themselves? Thus, why equate obligations with the gods', rather than with the very reasons for obligations, regardless of their origins? If logical relations exist prior or independently of the gods', then why bother with the gods'? This brings us in on questions similar to Lavelle's dilemma [von Hegner, 2016b]. And secondly, humankind can evidently disregard these obligations, so there is still no necessary relation here regardless of the source.

v) It might be said that humankind's obligation to obedience come from gratitude to the gods' for creating the universe and humankind. Hence, one could say, that humankind is ungrateful if they do not appreciate what the gods' have done for them. Like someone who do not appreciate a gift or beneficence from someone else. However, firstly, one being receiving a gift from another being do not equate to letting the giver of the gift dictate the thoughts and actions of the gift acceptor. It is two distinct things. Secondly, while being a gift giver is properly an admirable thing, and being grateful for a gift is properly a decent thing, it does not change the fact, that gratefulness is not a necessary relation. There is no necessary relation between one being grateful and another being a commander, so to identify obligations with gratefulness to gods' is to tie it to two distinct things. The relation is ad hoc. Humankind can be grateful to the gods' supposed act of creation, or they can refrain from being so. There is no obligation here.

### **The hypothetical relation between power and obedience**

It is apparent, that no necessary relations between hypothetical gods' and humankind regarding obligations can be demonstrated without being circular or ad hoc. There are those like Hobbes, who do not consider this an issue. He believed that the gods' have created the universe and humankind, but justified specifically the demand on obedience with the gods' powers. To quote Hobbes: "The right of nature whereby God reigneth over men, and punisheth those that break his laws, is to be derived, not from his creating them (as if he required obedience, as of gratitude for his benefits), but from his irresistible power" [Hood, 1964].

He seems to have a valid point. Historically, many abilities, actions and attitudes have been attributed to godhood, and there is no consensus regarding what constitutes a god or what attributes gods' possess [Bullivant and Ruse, 2013]. However, one common denominator attributed to gods' by the majority of their followers throughout history seems *prima facie*, that the gods' possess greater power than humankind, and that human beings for that reason stand in a submissive relation to the gods'. Thus, it follows that hypothetical gods' have a right to interfere in the lives and existence of human beings and even to judge and punish them. This continuing right to influence the opinions and actions of human beings have been designated as "the gods' right to rule" [von Hegner, 2016]. Hence we can simplify the entire discussion in the previous sections down to an Hobbesian power argument and attempt the following justification:

S1. Is the Reason compelling to obey the gods' this, 'the gods' have power?' Then what Reason compels to obedience with power?

S2. Is the Reason compelling to obedience with power this, "the gods' power has initiated the act of creation? Then what Reason compels to obedience toward the act of creation?

S3. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward the act of creation this, "the act of creation leads to divine property rights? Then what Reason compels to obedience toward divine property rights?

S4. Is the Reason compelling to obedience toward divine property rights this, "divine property rights are created by the gods'?" Then what Reason compels to obedience towards the gods'?

And again we on one hand end up in a Münchhausen bootstrapping scenario, and on the other hand we again have the same result in the two cosmological models. A existing universe, an existing humankind. And in both scenarios have they been initiated by a eternally existing cause. But only in one model do we speak about obedience and power.

The argument is circular, but power do appear to be the only thing, that can put forward a kind of pragmatic demand. Beings with greater power can obviously enforce beings with less power. However, if no other justification exists than power enforces humankind, then it follows that we do not need to talk about obligations. Because then we are in the same situation as in a master slave relationship. Of course, this support to raw power is attempted softened up in the debate. Hence, it may be agreed that obligations result from authoritative demands, but only if it is agreed on that it is authoritative demands from authentic authorities that result in these obligations. Hence what makes the gods' into authentic authorities in this line of thought is not raw power but that the gods' can give reasons for obligatory acts.

It is not obvious what sort of reasons they must be, but following e.g. Raz give authentic authorities protected reasons by their authoritative demands, where a protected reason to  $\phi$  is a reason to  $\phi$  and a reason to disregard some reasons against  $\phi$ -ing [Raz, 1979]. But firstly. If we play along and agree that obligations emerge from authoritative demands. And a demand is authoritative if it constitutes a specific kind of reason, in this case a protected one. But then it is not obvious at all, why obligations should be identified with protected reasons that originates from authoritative demands, instead of the protected reasons themselves. Hence, if protected reasons exist in other ways than mere demanding, then why let the gods' give them? Why not proceed directly to the reasons themselves? And secondly. The supporters of slavery in previous areas were not all mindless thugs, some was indeed well versed in their eras science and philosophy. They could give well-argued reasons explaining that the gods' gave "protected reasons" by their authoritative demands, and slavery hence was legitimate. Of course, nowadays we will say, that these was insufficiently justified. But then why do so many think, that the gods' reasons is protected or justified at all? Thirdly. All this again implicit presupposes, that the gods' have a right to give demands to begin with. And it is the very foundation of this that is asked for here. That the gods' must be obeyed because they are gods' is obviously a circular argument. Only their power remains. But is 'might is right' a protected reason? To quote the great Homer: "Servants never do their work when their master's hand is no longer over them, for Jove takes half the goodness out of a man when he makes a slave of him" [Butler, 1900].

An attempt to get around this circular relation, or more precisely, to justify this circularity, has been to resorting to the doctrine of divine simplicity as we briefly discussed in the section on perfection. These attempts has among other things been used in an attempt to avoid Euthyphro's dilemma and Lavelle's dilemma [von Hegner, 2016b]. That a god is good is a fixed point among most followers of the gods' in general [Murphy, 2014]. In some supposed godly perfections, it is possible to obtain a distinction between their possession and their exercise. Thus, one can obtain a distinction between a gods' goodness and its manifestations.

Hence, resorting to the doctrine of divine simplicity means that the trope of perfect goodness can simultaneously be the source of morality and yet also have application to itself [Oppy, 2006]. Hence, a god is taken to be uniquely "being itself"; it is the god that is essentially goodness itself, and whatever that god commands regarding moral properties is identical with the god's nature [Kretzmann and Stump, 1988]. This basally takes form of an axiomatic point of view. One begin with a statement that is taken to be true: do the

gods' exist, yes? Are the gods' good, yes? These serve as a premise or starting point for deriving everything else. This can perhaps be adapted to also include the gods' power. Thus, it is possible to distinguish between a gods' creative power and its exercise. One begin the axiomatic statement taken to be true: do the gods' exist, yes? Do the gods' have power, yes? And this serve as starting point for the gods' power giving them a right to obedience.

Hence, one could claim, that power, authority, supervenes, similar to goodness, on every feature of a god, not due to some general principles being true but just because they are features of that god. To assert that the gods' stand for goodness or authority then, would be to assert that the gods' are as they will themselves to be, or, said differently, that the gods'' command what they want to command. This is what we fittingly could call the vacuity problem because this attempt entail the problem that the authority claims about the gods' are empty tautologies: A god is a standard for goodness, because a standard for goodness is a god. Surely, we can demand more of a justification for a necessary relation between gods' and obedience than this? Because there is a number of unstated assumptions in all this. One can still not demonstrate a necessary relation between the gods' existence and possession of these attributes, and to an obligation to obedience. That a god simply act as god is inclined to act is hardly grounds for treating the gods' as anything other than dictators. We end again and again in the bootstrapping scenario where the gods', like Münchhausen, pull their rights from their own hair.

There are obviously no cogent arguments for a necessary relation between these things. Then why has it been claimed for so long? More importantly, why is it claimed this day? That gods' exist, is powerful, knowledgeable, perfect and good, seem for many to entail, that they must be worshipped and be obeyed. This implication is so deeply ingrained, that no one put it to doubt. But why not?

Today, the term dictator has a negative meaning, but this has not always been the case. The concept originated as the designation of an extraordinary supreme magistracy in Rome, applied first in military crises and later in domestic ones. A dictator was publicly empowered by a magistrate following the authorization of the Roman senate [Hornblower, 1998]. Initially, it had an overall positive meaning. In an almost similar fashion, we have the concept tyrant, which was originally a more neutral title by which the Greeks referred to a person who had seized authority in a free state, where it mattered that: "There was in fact no absolute distinction between turannoi and orthodox leaders in Greek poleis. The former aimed to dominate established oligarchies, not to subvert them" [Anderson, 2005]. That said, over time, both tyrant and dictator have come to be used almost solely as a term for oppressive, even abusive rule. A dictator is a malevolent immoral ruler who wields absolute authority.

The concept of the gods' is likewise an old concept. It has been argued, that whereas the concepts dictators and tyrants have a changed meaning today, the concept of the gods' in the philosophical debate has avoided a similar redefinition, despite the fact that the concept of the gods' encompasses the same negation of rights and freedom as the modern concept of a dictator [von Hegner, 2016]. In heroic atheism the following question are being asked: is might the same as right? If might is not the same as right, then the gods' is fundamentally irrelevant when it comes to humankind's actions, purpose and ethics.

Of course, that might is not right do not prevent the hypothetical scenario, that the gods' in a practical sense impose themselves on humankind. But in that case the relation between the gods' and humankind becomes something very well known. A dark chapter in the history of humankind is the master slave relation. Here one being was another being's property, that could be treated anyway they wanted. At first sight this statement might appear extreme. But is it? Is this comparison unfair? As stated by one author: "no other obligation can take precedence over our obligation to be totally devoted and unconditionally committed to him" [Wainwright, 2013]. As stated by another author: "God can impose obligations by issuing commands .. even if his commands would not impose obligations which did not exist before, it remains the case that if God urged us to do something, necessarily the doing of it would not be evil" [Swinburne, 1974]. And yet another author states: "Gods' will is primary and the human response to it secondary .. any act of homicide, plunder or intercourse with a person other than one's spouse would be obligatory if it were divinely commanded .. Acts of virtue have

no merit in Gods' eyes unless they are done out of obedience to Gods' will" [Quinn, 1992]. So for most of the followers of the gods' there is a single narrow obligation, the obligation to obey the gods' whatever they say or does. This is clearly a master slave relation. And to add just one more quote, this time from Edmund Burke: "Slavery is a state so improper, so degrading, and so ruinous to the feelings and capacities of human nature, that it ought not to be suffered to exist" [Burke, 1853].

It is hardly unreasonable to say, that this last quote is the dominant attitude among most people today. The attitude is this, that no one may or can own other people as their property. And *prima facie* will most people if questioned say, that human beings cannot at all be someone's property. And yet many supports that attitude without implicit realizing it. The concept of the gods' has unlike the concepts dictators and tyrants avoided a redefinition [von Hegner, 2016].

Let us take a historical example. Kings ultimately justified their right to rule as "the divine right of kings", a political and religious doctrine of royal absolutism [Burgess, 1992]. Overall, this concept asserts that a monarch answer to no political authority, deriving the right to rule solely from the gods' award of temporal power. At the dawn of the Enlightenment, questions were asked about the monarch's superiority and legitimacy, and kings were slowly subject to punishment or removal for breaking the laws. Since the Enlightenment, the divine right justification has thus fallen out of favour. However, what is especially interesting here is that those who asked critical questions about kings' rights to rule not simultaneously asked critical questions about the gods' right to rule.

We have eliminated kings' right to rule, but are left with gods' principal right to rule. They still can hypothetically do whatever they want. All this embodies a Hobbesian understanding. The people in Hobbes' *Leviathan* had no rights whatsoever against their sovereign. This sovereign or dictator could do as he pleased with them, even deliberately harm them, and the people would have no valid grievance against the dictator [Hood, 1964]. Let us view a seventeenth-century plantation owner who decides to torture and kill a slave. If the slave were to succeed in slaying the plantation owner instead and fleeing to safety in another part of the world, then the ethical justification would for us appear to favour the ex-slave. In a Hobbesian understanding, however, this is not the case. According to Hobbes, the dictator had a certain obligation to treat people well, but this obligation was owed not to the people themselves but to a god, similar to how people might have an obligation to others to treat their property well. Of course, they would have no obligation to the property itself but merely to its owner. Depending on the outcome either the plantation owner or the ex-slave would stand accountable to the god for destroying its property.

If we simplify this situation by removing the middleman, that is, the human dictator or the plantation owner, and rerun the same argument again, have we not then still a master slave relation? How can we not have it? Thus, the concepts of gods', as opposed to dictators, have not kept up with modern times: hypothetical gods' demand on obedience clearly is a dictatorship. And that is the reason we still have the claims of a necessary relation between the gods' and obedience to this day.

### **The hypothetical relation between morality and gods'**

One of the reasons that so many discuss the gods' existence or nonexistence is among other things that they historically have been linked to ethical philosophy. One of the importance's thus given to the gods' are, that they are believed to be some kind of guaranty for the existence of objective ethics. But here an unjustified jump between the existence or nonexistence of the gods', and to ethical philosophy, takes place. In their excellent article on practical apatheism Hedberg and Huzarevich writes the following: "one of the long-term goals of ethical inquiry is the discovery of a moral code that could be rationally endorsed by everyone" [Hedberg and Huzarevich, 2016].

They state the valid point, that: "Religious pluralism provides a strong reason to be skeptical that any religious ethic could serve as the foundation for a universally accepted moral code. If achieving a broad moral consensus about right and wrong is desirable, then religious-based morality seems ill suited for this project because of the different ethical mandates contained in each religion" [Hedberg and Huzarevich, 2016].

This resonates with the well-known many gods' objection. With more than approximately 10,000 different religions in the world today [Barrett et al., 2001], and more than 4,000 documented gods' [Saunders and Allen, 2015], it is obviously not very creditable to apply one of these religions and gods' as a foundation of a universally accepted morality.

Hedberg and Huzarevich conclude that: "any attempt to ground ethics in a single set of religious beliefs would almost surely undermine the potential for creating a stable democratic society. Such societies are, after all, characterized by a plurality of incompatible religious doctrines .. religious pluralism suggests that the development of a universal ethical system must, in the absence of an extremely dominant and oppressive theocracy, be a secular endeavor" [Hedberg and Huzarevich, 2016].

This is of course a valid point. However, we can proceed one step further. Because the objection that any attempt to ground ethics in a single set of religious beliefs will undermine a stable democratic society, is based on the plurality of religious ethical traditions, but not on the religious ethical tradition itself. Let us for the sake of argument assume, that we somehow obtain absolute knowledge for, that one of these traditions is correct. One of the gods' from one of these religions might show itself for humankind tomorrow, and we thus conclusively get rid of the plurality of religious ethical traditions. We now know which gods' and which religion that is true. A universal moral code can thus be given by the god to humankind.

But even here, where this single set was demonstrated to be true, even here would it still undermine a democratic society. That a universal morality is better addressed by secular efforts is correct. But heroic atheism proceed one step further and point out, that it is better addressed by this effort precisely due to democracy, and not due to that we do not know which gods' are the supposed real ones. A moral code dictated by gods' is undemocratic in and with, that it is a dictum given by the gods', that no right have to give a moral code.

Leadership in a democratic system can be defined as follows: "Government is based on the consent of the governed. In a democracy, the people are sovereign—they are the highest form of political authority. Power flows from the people to the leaders of government, who hold power only temporarily. Laws and policies require majority support in parliament, but the rights of minorities are protected in various ways" [Diamond, 2004]. As mentioned in the previous section, the god concept originates from a time where being ruled by single individuals was commonly accepted. However, that has changed today. The gods' right to rule negates ethical autonomy and democratic rights. A world founded on what the gods' want will always be a dictatorial world. The gods' have not been elected and their commands do not have a valid constitution. Furthermore, there are no controls on their power. A democracy is a system of rule by laws passed by majority decisions, not by laws commanded from single beings, regardless of their power. Thus, the role of the gods' in a democracy violates the fundamental principles of democracy itself.

Furthermore, in a democracy, we might not have an absolute ontic or even an epistemic funded ethical system that is applicable at all times. However, this might *pro tanto* not be a necessity. Through rational debate, laws are chosen by elected politicians: these laws secure rights and protection to all citizens. Such rights and protection are the very foundation of moral commitment. Such laws are regularly passed independently of what hypothetical gods are postulated to command, and overall, they do that very well. In truth, democratic societies are forced to do so, otherwise a violation of freedom from religions would result. Freedom from religions also entails freedom from the gods'. Therefore, the very idea of gods' as rulers itself equates to dictatorship.

This putting aside of the gods' moral role, and the relaxed attitude toward et objective fundament e.g. regarding democracy, could be criticized as atheism having no interest in objective truths. One author writes, that: "Having no interest in whether what you are saying is true or false, shows an indifference to how things really are .. it is this quality of indifference to how things really are that is the key link with atheism's lack of concern for whether or not a god or gods really exist" [Budimir, 2008].

However, whether this is the point of view in the original formulations of atheism will here be left up to others to discuss. But heroic atheism is not indifference toward the gods' existence or nonexistence due to



a lack of interest in what is true or false. Quite the contrary. Heroical apatheism is indifference precisely due to the question of what is true or false. As previously mentioned, there is more in the discussion regarding gods' than just the question of whether the gods' exist or not exist. The god concept also leads to a discussion of the relevancy the gods' have, the relation between them and the rest of the citizens of existence. Heroical apatheism is precisely a concern with the objective. It emphases, that the gods' right to rule, to dictate morality, is without sufficient foundation and derives the normative consequences from this.

But could the gods be a source of morality at all? There exists a rich literature discussion this [Wielenberg, 2005]. However, all attempts to give a necessary relation between gods' and morality has been wanting. Such discussions start top down with the gods' since it is assumed, that the starting point in moral discussions begins with the gods'. However, the starting point in moral discussion is of course morality itself. Thus, the proper approach is to start down up, since morality necessarily is an interaction in a group of conscious individuals. This is actually a prime example on, that a one-way causality is insufficient. If only one conscious individual existed, then morality would be an empty concept. Morality is only meaningful in a circle of causal dependence (and perhaps also in a circle of logical dependence), when there is more than one conscious individual. An interaction in a group of conscious individuals leads to, that a common set of agreed rules is put forward, that consider every single individual's wellbeing and freedom in such a way, that the wellbeing and freedom of everyone else also is maintained. That is essentially what morality has always been. So, the very notion, that morality would be commanded or given by a single individual is *ipso facto* immoral.

Is this an absolute morality? Perhaps not. But this is *pro tanto* not necessary either. To use an Socratic approach: "Is what is morally good commanded by the gods' because it is morally good, or is it morally good because it is commanded by the gods'?" Either way, either moral properties are arbitrary or the gods', even if they exist, play no essential part in them [von Hegner, 2016b]. However, the gods' may still have a different view of what humankind must do. But it is irrelevant if they have a different view. Because they have no right to give them, and humankind have no obligations to follow it. If their view is trumpet through power, then we are back to the master slave relation again, then we have a dictatorship that we are obligated to oppose.

## Discussion

In heroical apatheism one is relaxed regarding hypothetical gods' due to the fact, that no justifications, ontological, epistemological, normative or existential, can be given for a necessary relation between the gods' existence and attributes and humankind's obligations towards them.

Some supporters of the gods' rights might consider this as representing defiance or rebelliousness. However, defiant entails that there is someone to be defiant against: the relation to be defied and to be a defier implies that the one being defied has a right resulting in being defied. This is the point that is questioned here. The apatheian principle marks that obligations cannot be established to begin with because this implies some sort of negotiations with the gods'. However, the gods' have no negotiation right.

Some might say humankind's obligations emerge from gratitude to the gods' for creating the universe and humankind. But this still presupposes some kind of independent standard obligating humankind to be grateful to the gods'.

Some might say the gods' are beyond human reasoning. However, this claim does not except one from the demand to justify why the gods' must be worshipped or obeyed. If such obligations are merely accepted, then in that case there will not only be no reason to do philosophy. There will be no reason either to dedicate any attention toward supposed obligations to the gods'.

Some might object that we cannot apply human standards to the gods'. However, this is an argument from authority that states that the gods' standards must be applied to humankind instead of the standards of human beings being applied to humankind, with no justification other than the gods' authority.

Some might say that despite all these arguments being valid and sound, the gods' power nevertheless enforces their will on everyone else. But in this case there will be no need to justify ones heroical apatheism either. All one need to do is stating, that one find abuse of power depictable and thus any time will oppose obligations to the powers that be.

Some might put forward a parent argument, meaning that the gods' are caretakers of humankind for its own sake. We already have that humans decides the destiny of many other species on this planet. Humankind may not have a fundamental right to do so, but they have it nonetheless due to their higher intelligence and power derived from that intelligence. So along the same line of thought can the gods', supposedly being more powerful and intelligent than humankind, be said to have a right to rule over humankind, almost as parents taking care of their children. However, this kind of argumentation is dangerous. Let us take an astrobiological approach and for the sake of argument assume, that the Earth one day is visited by an alien super civilization. The intelligence of this alien species is so evolved, their technology so advanced, that it is, to quote Arthur C. Clarke, indistinguishable from magic [Clarke, 1973]. So if higher intelligence and greater power gives rights over others, then it follows that these aliens have a right to rule over the life and destiny of humankind. Most of us will presumably not agree on this right. But then why do so many agree on that the gods' have that right? If we eliminate the middle man and instead of a powerful alien species have powerful gods', then we have in principle the exact same situation. Falling back on the difference between contingent beings and necessary beings will, as seen in the previous section, be irrelevant for the above argumentation.

In this article two cosmological models with different causes was put forward, but that nevertheless lead to the same results in order to analyze what obligations could be founded on. The only difference in the two cosmological models were, that a conscious act existed in the second model, while none existed in the first. In the first model, there appeared to be consensus, that worship or obedience cannot be inferred as a necessary part of the cause of the Big Bang. There appeared also to be consensus, that the existence of consciousness could not be inferred as a necessary part of the cause of the Big Bang. Thus it followed, that worship or obedience cannot be inferred as a necessary part in that model. There could not be found any sufficient explanations as to why there should exist obligations in the second model. In this model consciousness and power existed. But none of these provided different results between the two models, and hence no explanation as to why a necessary relation between attributes and obligations should exist. It would be possible for power in this model to enforce worship and obedience. But this is dissatisfactory. Because is might right? Further, this would also be automatous actions, and thus not obligations.

The primary question of hypothetical gods' demand on worship and obedience, the conjecture of obligations, remain unaddressed in the philosophical debate. Of course, since atheists and agnostics think that gods' do not exist or we cannot know if they exist, then there is no reason for them either to give that kind of arguments any attention. There may also be those that consider it self-contradictory to be an atheist, and yet write articles about the gods'. However, the very discussion of what the whole god-idea is actually based on, is still fruitful. Because what if we for the sake of argument imagined, that gods' actually were shown conclusively to exist tomorrow, then what? Most atheist and agnostics will properly agree that hypothetical gods' still do not have a demand on obligations. Hence, something more is needed. This separation of the question of the gods' existence or nonexistence from the question of the gods' relevancy is important to do, regardless of whether the gods' exist or non-exist, because religions many places around the world still plays a role in the political sphere. The acceptance of obligations to the gods', the very idea of gods' as rulers, equates to dictatorship. The fact that the acceptance of the gods' right to rule is so commonly accepted by democratically minded citizens, and is not meet with objections represents a challenge for democratic thought and philosophy itself.

Heroical apatheism is a fruitful position with great potential. Its views and argumentation stand, regardless of what evidence, proof or faith hypothetically will reach. If the gods' conclusively were shown not to exist, then polytheism/theism would fall. If the gods' conclusively were shown to exist, then atheism would fall. In both cases would agnosticism be dissolved, since a conclusive answer was obtained. But heroical apatheism would stand regardless. If the gods' exist it is a pragmatic response to dictatorship. If they do not exist it is a philosophical thesis.

One of the primary problems regarding the claims of the gods' rights, their worship and obedience is, that their adherents repeatedly tries to maintain and do reinterpretation of such old concepts in light of, or despite,

new knowledge and more sophisticated philosophy. It shows how far reason and ethics can be lead astray in the attempt to maintain old ideas. Thus, many maintain the claims of obligations to the gods' from the simple reason, that this has always been done so. And thereby appears all the long and detailed attempts on providing justifications, that do not lead to any valid or sound conclusions because they continuously presuppose what they try to demonstrate with defunct assumptions.

Concepts such as dictator, tyrant and kings right to rule has not merely been revised since the Enlightenment, they have been removed completely from the discussion. Thus, a proper approach would be to follow the example of Descartes and do as he did with philosophy: throw all gods' and religions away and begin anew. Reboot it all: what do we know? How do we know it? Why introduce this concept? How do we justify that concept? This approach has been extremely powerful in the natural sciences, and likewise highly successful in philosophy. This would be philosophically responsible, this would be honesty.

If the gods' do exist, they surely would be interesting to study, just like it is interesting to study the Big Bang or would be interesting to study an alien civilization. Of course, there is nothing that indicates the existence of the gods'. But if we have to talk about the gods', can this not be done without dragging archaic concepts from the political past of humankind along. Can we not leave these unpleasant aspects with master slave relations behind? If there are gods', can they and us then not coexist peacefully and respectfully without all this commanding and obeying, worship and inferiority. Is it not about time we move away from dictators having a positive sound?

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